

## **The Violence of the Free Market: The Changing Face of Jaffa and the Silent Migration of its Population**

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*“Violence is itself an economic power”*  
--Marx

One of the greatest agonies of the *Nakba* as both a historical and ongoing event, in life, in consciousness, and in reality, is the agony embodied in the city of Jaffa. Following its occupation, parts of the Arab city were destroyed and the public space was closed to its residents, who were effectively imprisoned from 1948 until the new state completed confiscation of their homes and property. Subsequently, in the 1960s, Jaffa was turned into a city for Jewish immigrants, whom the state settled in Palestinian homes, whether empty or occupied, compelling Jews and Palestinians to share the same house and the same space. From the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s, state authorities (the municipality, for example), and government corporations (such as Amidar, Halamish and the Israel Land Administration, which had confiscated the houses in 1948) adopted a targeted policy of neglect, evacuation and home demolitions. The municipality planned beautiful, clean residential neighborhoods (in Ajami and Jabaliya), intending to empty them of their “old” residents in order to allow bulldozers to work at their leisure. The Jews who found other shelter left, while the Arabs refused to be evacuated, despite deliberate neglect of their homes, restrictions placed on even the most basic repairs (such as to windows and exit ways), and a complete ban on legal renovations<sup>1</sup>

### **The violence of development**

The 1990s ushered in fresh “hope” for the Municipality of Tel Aviv as it discovered the potential “treasure” in Jaffa, the ancient city located on the Mediterranean Sea. However, this time, in order for the process of planning new and orderly neighborhoods to succeed, the municipality had to adopt a new method of appropriation, in which the violence of purchasing power was added to the violence of deliberate neglect and oppression. It began to encourage the free market to invest in Jaffa, and made concentrated efforts towards alleviating buyers’ fears about living in “a city with Arabs in it.” Investment was preceded by media promotions and cosmetic advertising of what was in fact, an extremely difficult reality; Jaffa was beautified in an ugly way, beautifully disfigured.

A simple search of the websites of the companies that promote, invest, construct and sell residential apartments and shops in Jaffa sufficiently reveals the vision of investors in Jaffa; the city is no more than an easy-to-sell commodity, and at a high price. On these websites, you will not read about residents who are sidelined in the process of development and investment, and are on their way out of the city. Today Jaffa, in the

eyes of investors, offers “a window on the Mediterranean Sea,” where real estate prices are determined by whether the sea is visible from a window, or reachable in less than five minutes. The residents of Jaffa cannot even enjoy “normal” urban life, which should come as a natural result of the wealth that is being accumulated along the shore. City life in every sense (in terms of schools, universities, cinemas and social outlets) flourishes in Tel Aviv, and there alone. All that Jaffa offers is a warm, protected house on the beach, which can be sold for millions of dollars to Jewish investors from France and the United States.

### **The violence of beauty**

Living securely in a bubble is possible in Jaffa through a modern method of construction called the “gated community”. This construction was previously unknown in the country, except at a very general level, and later on in the settlements. Architects are taking great pains to study and apply this type of building, which began in South America as a form of construction for the wealthy classes, who feared and wanted to flee “attacks” from the poor. This “gated” type of construction has now been reproduced in Jaffa. It exists in a number of cities around the world, but not, for instance, in Europe or in Canada. In Israel this kind of construction means, in short, the possibility of leading one’s life without ever leaving one’s community. There one can find a shopping complex, a parking lot, restaurant, coffee shop, kindergarten, and more, all within a closed security system that prevents anyone from entering without permission, and records the whole area on video around the clock. This style of construction is steadily gaining momentum in Jaffa.

For example, the stunning new Harova building project in Jaffa appears in official documents and plans. It was designed according to the latest techniques, but in fact interrupts the continuity of the public space, and secludes the lives of certain people “behind” beautiful, colorful walls, raised and protected. Meanwhile other lives are left to be encroached upon, “exposed” and filmed beyond these walls. This type of design is associated with “fear” of the lived space and the potential need to disappear, but still without being deprived of “the window overlooking the sea.” In brief, it is not a benign, but a violent presence. As long as the free market continues to provide this opportunity, it will be possible to link the real city of Tel Aviv to a “secure” home in Jaffa.

### **Where is the Arab population in this development?**

The strong relationship between the project of Judaization in all the “mixed cities” and the free market’s investment projects cannot be overlooked. It is indeed a close relationship, and one can argue, a historic one in relation to our country specifically, not just to world politics. It is obvious that Palestinian Arabs do not have the purchasing power of interest to massive companies. Moreover, building and planning projects largely harm Palestinian residents and induce them to leave through sometimes a silent, barely visible migration. On the one hand, development disturbs the continuity of

normal life by offering homes for sale on the global market that a Jaffa native cannot even dream of purchasing. On the other hand, development propels a microscopic search for any parcel of land to appropriate, making the incentive for selling outweigh the one to resist, especially given the worsening economic conditions of the middle and working classes. The rising prices of homes and land lead to increased costs of living, which can more than double within a few years. Consequently, the population of Jaffa prefers, once again, to seek refuge in cities where planning and building is taking place at a slower pace (like Lydd or Ramleh) and protect themselves from the shadow of development. Furthermore, it should be stated that the municipality and other government authorities do all they can to assist this “development.” For example, over the past five years, 500 houses have been threatened with demolition orders in Jaffa.

Thus what was once a nightmare for Israel called the “mixed cities” might, within a few short years, turn into a distant, rosy dream. Is this not what Israel usually does? It teaches us love and hate, and then reconstitutes our feelings with violence! Monterescu argues that the term “mixed cities” has undergone four different stages. The third stage occurred immediately after the occupation of 1948. At that time, Zionist discourse was clearly focused on “the need to establish the cities that it occupied as ‘Hebrew’ or ‘Israeli’ cities.” Israel viewed Jaffa’s status as a mixed city as a temporary state of affairs that would lead to its transformation into a “Hebrew city” in every respect.<sup>2</sup> The planning and building confirm the temporary nature of the situation.

The forces driving the violence of development and housing have a direct impact on violence within society, particularly as local Arab residents are subjected to a fragmentation of the public space. Until a few years ago, people managed to formulate strategies and simple means of reclaiming the public space, of possessing it and acquiring a sense of belonging by virtue of their very presence. They organized it as a space where children can play, and sometimes even held funerals and weddings there. Today, however, construction is relentless both beside and in between existing homes. It disrupts continuity, suffocating children and young people while leaving them with little recourse.

In addition, there is a dearth of social, cultural, and educational activities in Jaffa and a total absence of urban life. For youth, police violence against them has become an experience to emulate among themselves. Young people see how the city is growing, developing, and excluding them in the process, leaving them without means to remain, lacking decent work and a decent life. It leads them to despair, causing a new generation to emerge that uses violence as a means to escape and express rage and hatred. This generation is no longer easy to control. Internal violence manifests itself in the increasing number of cases of abuse of women within families; street theft; a general sense of a lack of safety; growing high school drop-out rates; distortion of language and culture; and the high percentage of young men being sent to prison before the age of thirty.

“Investment,” “development,” “construction,” and “strengthening the population” are terms found in the visual and spoken discourse of the politics of the free market and ongoing Judaization project, which revolves around “aesthetics,” the “luxuries of life,” and “security of the person and the family.” It is an extremely organized process, largely free of noise and emotion, yet even so producing great amounts of dust from razed houses and buried history. The bulldozers comes once the power of the free market has cleared the path and the municipality has cleansed the area of remaining citizens, who until that point, had managed to resist expulsion.

Hannah Arendt reminds us that the hand of violence is its means, not its end. In the year 2020, Jaffa may appear to be the most beautiful coastal city in the region. However, it will be disconnected from its historical 5,000 years of civilization, and indeed from us, the Palestinians, who had lived in the city and been part of its economic and cultural rise.

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<sup>1</sup> Monterescu, D. (2007). *The Palestinian Community in Jaffa: Social Planning Report*. Shatil’s Project on Mixed Cities and the New Israel Fund. (Arabic and Hebrew).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.