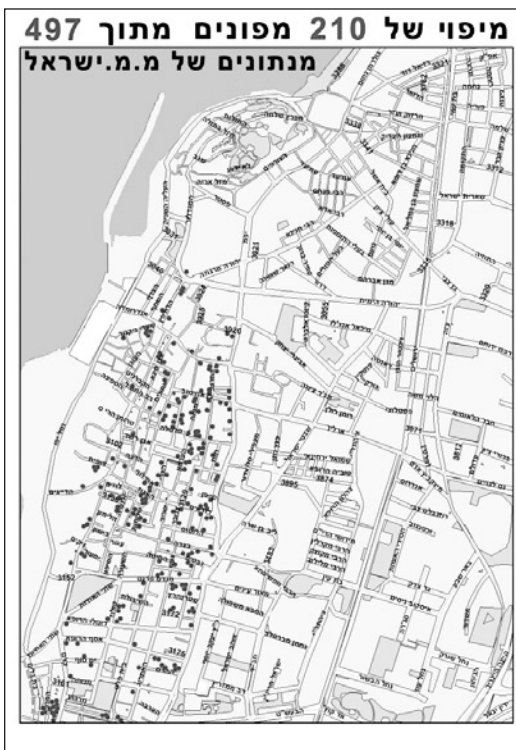


The "Housing Intifada" and Its Aftermath

Ethno-Gentrification and the Politics of Communal Existence in Jaffa



Predatory gentrification in the New-Old Jaffa: The Andromeda Hill gated community next to a soon-to-be-demolished Arab house. Photo courtesy Daniel Monterescu



A map of the Israel Land Administration plan to evacuate 497 Palestinian families from their houses. Map courtesy Popular Committee for Land and Housing in Jaffa

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Jaffa, an ethnically "mixed town" located minutes away from Tel-Aviv's metropolitan center, yet marked as *sui generis* cultural and political alterity, is home to 20,000 Palestinian citizens of Israel. Struggling since 1948 to sustain viable collective existence, the Palestinian community makes up a third of Jaffa's population and about 4% of Tel-Aviv's metropolitan population. For the city and the state, Arab Jaffa has long presented a political "problem" resulting in recurrent strategies of containment, surveillance and control. Arab community members describe themselves as a "double minority" excluded at both national and municipal levels. Bereft of their old political leadership and with no stable middle class to speak of, they struggle for political recognition and affordable housing.

Such moments of collective action mark a shift from a liberal discourse of "coexistence" to an assertive claim for political entitlement and "collective existence" (*Kiyan*). The housing problem thus encapsulates a claim over the historicity of the city as well as a dire need for practical housing solutions for low-income families. Although Palestinian communal mobilization has been increasingly visible since the October 2000 Events and *Al-Aqsa Intifada*, it is no match for market forces that promote the Judaization of the city. The recent emergence of gated communities in Jaffa signals new modes of urban exclusion that reshape previous forms of spatial distinction. Reviving previous traumas of displacement, gentrification reshuffles communal and spatial boundaries, further destabilizing Palestinians' sense of belonging. In 2007, the threat of "urban removal" disguised as "urban renewal" reached a new level when the Israel



Graffiti in the gentrified Ajami neighborhood: "Jaffa Weeps [Arabic] – Housing for the Jaffa Arabs!!! [Hebrew]." Photo courtesy Daniel Monterescu

Land Administration issued 497 evacuation orders to Palestinian families charged with illegal construction. As these families all live in the Ajami neighborhood, a hot spot of Jewish gentrification, it was interpreted as another attempt to "transfer" the Arab population out of Jaffa. Beyond producing a deep sense of alienation, ethno-gentrification and Palestinian resistance to it push new social actors to the fore. Instead of the liberal plea for "equality," a new discourse of urban rights calls to institute an inclusive redefinition of citizenship tailored for the "indigenous national minority," which seeks to combat neoliberal urban restructuring. Increasingly visible NGOs like Shatil's Mixed Cities Project, *Adalah* and the Popular Committee for Housing and Land in Jaffa are beginning to do precisely that. Today the struggle over the Palestinian "right to the city" continues in courts, media and through grassroots activism.

After decades of urban disinvestment, the Jaffa housing crisis reached its peak in the 1990s and became a symbol of Palestinian presence in the city. As Palestinians were faced with creeping gentrification and neoliberal municipal planning that promoted the commodification of lived space, a deep sense of unrest triggered the first signs of community mobilization. In 1995, within what came to be known as the "Housing Intifada" (*Intifadat al-Sakan*), 30 Palestinian families squatted in empty houses formally "owned" by the state, administered by the *Amidar* governmental housing company and designated for future private development. A state-sponsored plan for affordable housing put an end to the Housing Intifada and heralded the start of negotiations between Palestinian community leaders and municipal authorities.

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