
Social Control, Urban Planning and Ethno-Class Relations: Mizrahi Jews in Israel's 'Development Towns'

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Analysts of urban and regional planning often depict the 1950s as the 'golden age' of planning, when the vision of a brave new world offered by planners was adopted by governments world-wide, in an all-encompassing quest to mould prosperous, democratic and modern societies. Planning was seen as a positive, and central, agent of this progressive transformation. Other interpretations exist, of course, but most commentators view the fusion of noble intentions and increasing state power behind planning as having brought the profession to a historical zenith, in the pursuit of a common good (Hall, 1988; Cherry, 1994).

This article critically assesses this position. It evaluates the consequences of a grand project implemented according to the leading planning concepts of the 1950s: Israel's development town programme, which entailed the establishment of 28 new towns during the 1950s, mainly in the country's peripheral regions. The article provides a brief background to the circumstances within which the towns were established, and to the ethnic and class relations evident in their planning. In its main part, it then focuses on documenting and analysing the social, economic and political consequences of this ambitious planning project.

Four and a half decades after the establishment of the towns, it is apparent that planning has had a powerful impact on Israeli society, although this impact has not been noble or progressive. Rather, it is argued, it caused the reproduction of inequality, and the creation of a discernible low-status 'ethno-class' in the towns, comprised mainly of Mizrahi Jews. In parallel, 'positive' policies were launched in the towns, working to slightly improve living conditions, thereby enhancing the legitimacy of the state and its planning system. But such policies did not significantly alter the structural stratifying forces put in place through the planning of the towns. This interpretation runs counter to the conclusions of most planning and geographical research in Israel, which has generally portrayed Israeli planning as an enlightened process facilitating social and communal development.

Before elaborating on these arguments, a few definitions are in order. 'Planning' is defined broadly as the public production and regulation of space, including the formulation, content and consequences of state spatial policies. 'Progressive policies' promote intergroup equality, equity or democratic justice, while 'control' or 'regressive policies' cause the deepening of intergroup disparities, inequalities or undemocratic domination. Ashkenazi Jews (Ashkenazim in plural, also called 'western' Jews) are of European or American origin. Mizrahi Jews (Mizrahim in plural, also known as Oriental, Sepharadi or Arab-Jews) have their origins in Muslim countries.

A theoretical note

Conventional historical and theoretical analyses of urban and regional planning have portrayed the profession as a progressive societal force, aspiring to promote order, development, modernization, amenity and justice in the development of the built environment (see Hall, 1982; Cullingworth, 1994; Healey, 1997). This view has not, of course, been the sole interpretation of planning, with competing and more critical (mainly Marxist, feminist and postmodernist) approaches being also conspicuous in certain periods. Planning thinkers have thus been divided in their approaches, although a discernible theoretical mainstream has underpinned the development of planning thought: planning should, and can, act to improve people's living conditions. Most planning theories have accordingly focused on two key questions: What is a good city/region? What is good planning? (See Hall, 1988; Schaffer, 1988; Yiftachel, 1989; Sandercock, 1998.)

By and large, these theories have assumed *a priori* that planning is a positive agent of societal change, a position also underlying the two main 'waves' of dominant theories in recent times: rational planning during the 1970s and early 1980s (Faludi, 1973; Alexander, 1984); and the most recent surge of communicative-action and pragmatist approaches among planning theorists. These have mainly focused on examining, formulating and prescribing improved processes of policy development, decision-making and planner-client-community communication (see Forester, 1993; Sager, 1994; Harper and Stein, 1996; Hillier, 1996; Healey, 1997).

But the theoretical angles adopted by most planning theorists and historians appear to have been too narrow. Recent empirical and theoretical work has demonstrated that, contrary to conventional wisdom, urban and regional planning is not just a progressive arm of government, but also has the potential for *oppressing* subordinate groups. In recent years, several planning theorists have built on, and broadened, the analytical foundations provided by earlier critical Marxist analysts (Harvey, 1973; Castells, 1978; Marcuse, 1978; Hague, 1984), and begun to re-examine the impact of planning on social inequalities and tensions.

As noted, challenges to conventional planning wisdom have mainly emerged from feminist, postmodern, ethnic, racial and sexuality as well as political-economic perspectives (for examples see Marcuse, 1986; McLoughlin, 1992; Huxley, 1994; Yiftachel, 1994; Fainstein, 1995; Lauria, 1997; Flyvbjerg, 1998; Sandercock, 1998). These studies, and many others, have shown that the very same tools and methods used by policy-makers to effect progressive change, have also been utilized to control, segregate, dispossess and disempower minorities and peripheral groups. Planning, that is, the public regulation and 'production of space', is shown to serve as an instrument of social control. Like most other areas of public policy, it should thus be conceived as '*double-edged*', being capable of both reform and control, emancipation and oppression (Yiftachel, 1998).

But critical observers of planning have also realized that control is rarely exerted openly, and is seldom officially declared as a policy goal. Rather, it is often exerted as part of a hegemonic, unquestioned 'universal' set of societal goals and understandings which nevertheless work in the interests of powerful groups, which themselves usually set the social agenda (see Lefebvre, 1996). Actors involved in the practices of social control often conceal, ignore or are simply unaware of the regressive consequences of their activities. These practices are typically portrayed as part of different, and often socially worthy projects. For example, inner-city developers would rarely promote their proposals as 'causing displacement of immigrants, while opening opportunities for profit-making'. Yet, their projects will often have precisely these controlling and stratifying effects.

In addition, most social systems devise mechanisms of legitimation, which tend to obscure, appease or even partially negate the oppressive and regressive effects of control

policies. In our example of inner-city redevelopment, a discourse of 'urban regeneration', 'renewal', 'efficiency' or 'correcting market failures' is likely to emerge, legitimizing the displacement of low-income residents and the use of public resources for the benefit of narrow property interests (see Brownhill, 1990). This creates 'surface ambiguity' in the policy field, where official representations conflict with the 'actual' processes of spatial and societal change.

Therefore, the study of social control in general, and 'planning as control' in particular, should not rely on officially stated goals and intentions, but, rather, map the main social interests of the period in question and trace their practices in the actual process of spatial change (Foucault, 1991). Such analysis would cut through legitimizing ideologies and narratives, and search below the inevitable, and ever-existing, ambiguities of urban and regional policy. Examining the material, political and identity consequences of spatial policies, as conducted in the pages below, can reveal much of the long-term role of such policies on social relations. Let us turn now to our case study, and examine the role of planning in shaping social relations and ethnic identities.

The development towns: policy, history and past research

Israeli development towns are the urban settlements built or significantly expanded by the Israeli state, mainly during the 1950s, for the settlement of immigrants. The towns were mainly inhabited by Mizrahi Jews of low socioeconomic background, and recently by a wave of Russian and Ethiopian immigrants. Our study includes 28 development towns (according to the definition provided by Lipshitz, 1990), with a 1995 total population of 1.09 million, or 20.9% of Israel's population (Figure 1).

'Ethnocracy', immigration and settlement

The construction and growth of Israel's development towns are intimately bound-up with the establishment of the state and the ensuing goals and practices of Zionism. Prior to Israel gaining independence in 1948, the Zionist movement's main settlement strategy was aimed at securing a safe territorial base for Jewish immigrants, most of whom were refugees escaping persecution in Europe. After 1948, equipped with the power of a fully sovereign state, Israel elevated two projects to a position of utmost importance: the Judaisation of the land, and 'the in-gathering and assimilation of the exiles' (*mizug galuyot*). As elaborated elsewhere (Shohat, 1997), these projects were designed and implemented chiefly by the country's dominant Ashkenazi group, often at the expense of the indigenous Palestinian population and Jewish Mizrahi migrants hailing from the Muslim world.¹ This created a regime described as 'ethnocracy', which was based on the exclusion of Palestinians and the uneven, stratified incorporation of the Mizrahim (Yiftachel, 1999).

The Judaisation project aimed to exert Jewish control on the entire Israeli territory, which still included a Palestinian-Arab population of some 13–14% who remained after the 1948 war. Judaisation also aimed to block the potential return to their homes and villages of the 700–750,000 Palestinians who were driven out in the 1948 war (Morris, 1987). The strategy targeted two main areas as the country's principal frontiers: the Negev in the south, and Galilee in the north (Figure 1). These were typical 'internal frontier' regions, adjacent to Israel's new international borders, and populated mainly by Palestinian-Arabs (Kimmerling, 1983; Yiftachel, 1996).

1 The interpretation of both Palestinian-Arabs and Mizrahi Jews as victims of Israeli policies, does not assume symmetry between the two groups. It is fully acknowledged that the oppression suffered by the Palestinians is far more intense, as elaborated recently in Yiftachel (1997a).

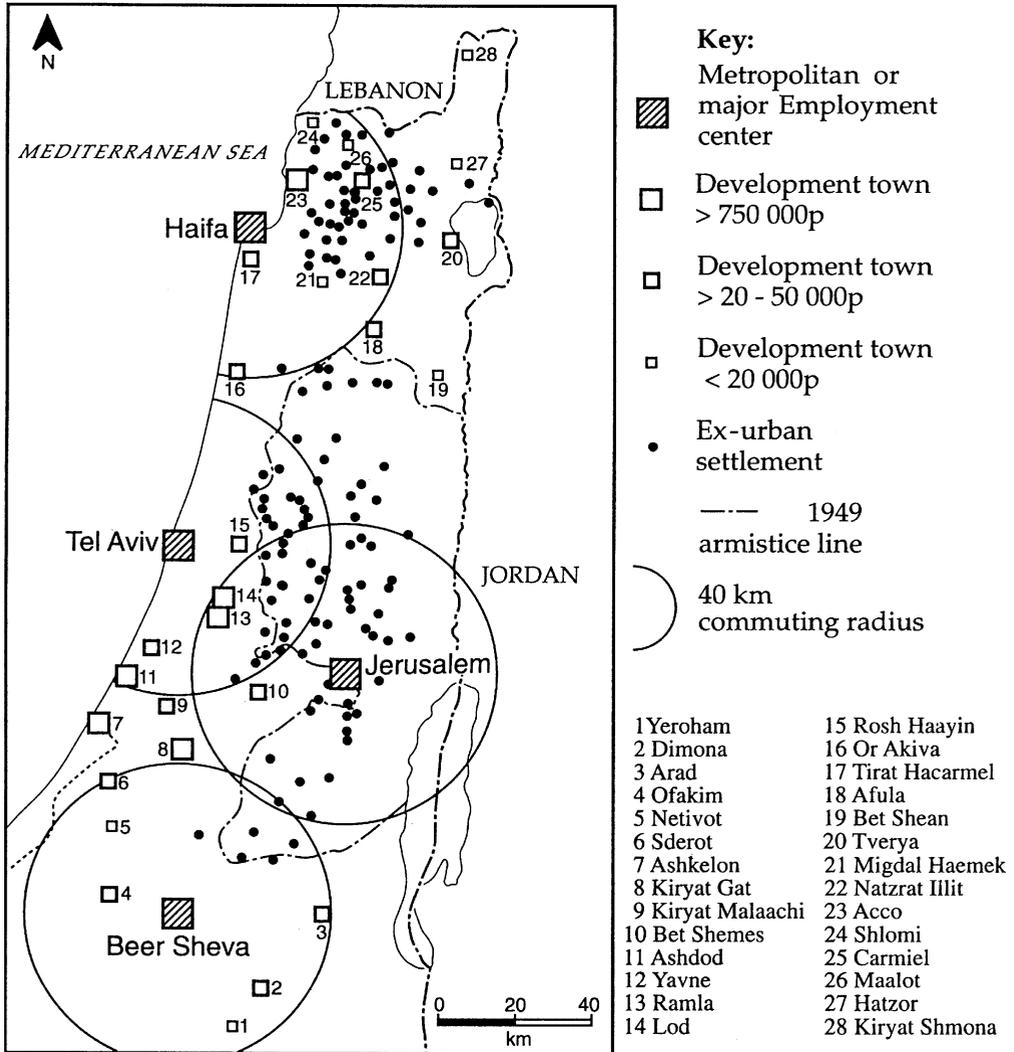


Figure 1 Development towns and ex-urban settlements in Israel and the occupied territories, 1995

The Judaisation-dispersal policy meant that large public resources were invested in order to generate development and attract further Jewish migration to these areas. The incentives awarded for (Jewish) settlers and investors in the periphery included tax breaks, subsidized land and housing, lower interest rates, development of regional infrastructure, direct establishment grants and rent assistance.

Early planning policies

In close association with the Zionist project, the planning and building of Israel's development towns was promoted by the country's professional planning apparatus as the most efficient way to achieve the 'Judaisation' goal. In professional planning terms, the strategy was labelled 'population decentralization' (Shachar, 1971; Troen, 1995). Since

the early 1950s, this goal has enjoyed a near-total consensus in Israeli planning and policy-making circles, and has appeared in the official manifesto of every Israeli government. The lynch-pin of the population dispersal strategy has always been the establishment and strengthening of the development towns, which were supposed to thrive as urban centres in Israel's rural and peripheral regions, and particularly in areas where a Jewish 'presence' had been sparse.

The massive frontier settlement effort was also augmented by Israel's highly centralized planning system, where decisions are often taken in secrecy, where the state owns over 90% of the land, and where planning authorities enjoy enormous powers of implementation (Alexander *et al.*, 1983; Yiftachel, 1992: Chapter 5).

To be sure, professional planners have had their debates about the location, size, number and character of the new towns, but the dissenting voices against the development towns' strategy were few and far between. They rarely challenged the 'need' to disperse the population, and, rather, argued about better methods of attaining this goal (Schechter, 1990; Kark, 1995; Troen, 1995). A number of 'Judaisation-related' legitimizing factors, such as the 'exigencies of national security' and the 'conquering of the frontiers', were adopted wholesale by generations of Israeli professional planners, including architects, urbanists, economists and settlement experts.

Two powerful professional rationales for this urban strategy were also cited, adding considerable weight to the 'national imperative' of Judaising the country: (1) a 'skewed' (Jewish) population pattern existed at the time, with 70% concentrated in a few coastal cities; and (2) services and opportunities were lacking for the hundreds of peripheral villages, and new towns were 'needed' to bring these closer to the rural population. Professional planners at the time found several classical European planning and spatial theories which supported their strategy, chiefly Howard's Garden City model and Christaller's central place theory. Both Howard and Christaller constructed models depicting urban dispersal and an ordered city-size hierarchy, thereby giving added professional and 'scientific' legitimacy to the Israeli new town strategy.

Therefore, the nation-building and state-building interests of the Israeli state and its elites (Judaisation and frontier population), and leading professional planning models of the time were fused to create a widely accepted planning strategy. This strategy called for the dispersal of masses of new immigrants into 28 new ('development') towns in the country's peripheral and border regions.

The most comprehensive embodiment of the Israeli new town strategy appears in the (first) 1951 national plan for Israel, formulated by a large professional team at the Prime Minister Office, and headed by Arye Sharon. The plan outlined the new (development) towns' strategy in relative detail, although several of the proposed locations subsequently changed. Significantly, the plan, published as *Physical Planning in Israel* (and often labelled 'the Sharon Plan'), has since formed the undisputed foundation of Israeli national planning, for subsequent national strategies and for population dispersal policies (Hill, 1980; Schechter, 1990).

Largely absent from the planning discourse of the time, as appearing in documents, plans and books, was an examination of the social consequences of this ambitious project. Population dispersal goals, historical rationales, territorial strategies, design criteria and economic development proposals took centre stage, with only scant reference to the plight of the (mainly Mizrahi) people about to be housed in the new towns, or to their needs and aspirations. This can be partially explained by the social positions of most Israeli planners of the time, being European educated, middle- or upper-class Ashkenazim (Schechter, 1990). This group of highly capable professionals, many of whom worked for the government, fused their own vision and interests with that of the state. Their plans were thus represented as reflecting 'national' or 'state' objectives, although they mirrored the views and interests of specific powerful elites.

History: establishment and population

Within the Judaisation context described above, Israel's development towns were built as the second of three main waves of Jewish settlements in Israel's frontier and peripheral regions. During the first wave, in the 1949–52 period, some 85 *kibbutzim* (communal rural settlements of about 50–300 families) and 158 *moshavim* (cooperative villages of 50–100 families) were built, chiefly along the international borders.

During the second wave, 28 development towns and 56 *moshavim* were built mainly in peripheral regions, from the mid-1950s to the mid-1960s (Figure 1). The development towns were usually built anew, or based on significant additions to existing towns, such as Ramla or Acco. As a result, in 1961 some 273,000 immigrants were housed in the development towns. This massive population relocation was made possible by the provision of state housing and land in development towns and *moshavim*. Planners hoped the development towns would accommodate ethnically mixed populations, but most Ashkenazi residents who were settled there left within a few years, as elaborated below. It was the newly arrived Mizrahi Jews from a low socioeconomic background who were left with little option but to settle in these peripheral and relatively affordable locations (Bernstein, 1984; Hasson, 1981).

Given these circumstances, most of the development towns quickly became dominated by low-income and low-skilled Mizrahi populations, mainly from North Africa. As the 1961 census (CBS, 1966) attests, the extent of Mizrahi concentrations was particularly conspicuous in localities such as Shlomi (98.5%), Ma'alot (97.2%), Hatzor (97.0%), Beit She'an (85.2%) and Kiryat Shmone (78.7%) in the Galilee, and Netivot (99.0%), Ofakim (97.1%), Sderot (95.0%) Kiryat Mala'achi (94.3%), Dimona (84.6%), and Yeroham (81.7%) in the Negev region (see Figure 1). This ethnic concentration, and the low socioeconomic background of most town residents affected a rapid transformation of the towns into conspicuous pockets of deprivation and poverty.

This process demonstrates some of the subtleties and ambiguities typically involved in control policies: nowhere in policy documents or planning discourse would one find goals of Mizrahi marginalization or social stratification. Yet, the practices of planners spawned a clear social geography of deprivation and inequality. Some may claim that these have been unintended consequences of the policy, well beyond the power of planning or policy-makers (see Efrat, 1988; Lipshtiz, 1990). But, as suggested earlier, planning policy cannot only be analysed at face value, but as driven by the societal matrix of powers. The radical transformation of Israel's settlement system, including the isolation and deprivation of the development towns, cannot be merely explained as 'unintended consequences'. Rather, it reflected the hierarchy of values and political group power prevalent at the time, when 'national' goals (as defined by the Ashkenazi elites) took precedence over social justice or civil equality.

The limited length of this paper, and its main aim of examining the consequences (and not the origins) of Israel's development towns project, prevent a thorough analysis of the power relations involved in the making of the policy. However, a brief historical account and a few examples can illustrate the various control elements involved in the project.

The issue of settling new refugees and immigrants, who streamed into the country after 1948, fully surfaced in the Israeli public arena when the available housing stock was filled. This mainly included the emptied dwellings of Arab urban refugees (most Arab villages were destroyed by Israel). As a response to the housing shortage, large immigrant camps (*ma'abarot*) were established, usually near Israel's main urban centres. By 1951, some 250,000 immigrants resided in these camps, most of them poor and lacking contacts in Israeli society. Mizrahim were the majority in the camps, reaching 90% by 1953 (Bernstein, 1984).

Most of the new immigrants wished to settle in Israel's major urban centres, for reasons of employment and mobility. But as public surveys and policy debates at the time

show, the country's veteran population saw a large-scale settlement of these immigrants as potentially threatening and destabilizing the existing cities. A Jewish Agency brochure from 1950 claims, for example, that if the immigrants move to the main cities, they are likely to create 'quarters of poverty, filth, unemployment and crime'. Public opinion was firmly in favour of settling most immigrants on the periphery, and the central Zionist committee also declared in 1950 that 'there needs to be a greater effort to settle the immigrants in the country-side' (quoted in Segev, 1991: 151).

Notably, the treatment of the various ethnic groups among the immigrants was not even-handed, reflecting the preference in public opinion of Ashkenazim over Mizrahim. To be sure, this preference surfaced only rarely in public debate, due to the powerful Zionist ethos of 'in-gathering the exiles', but the tenor of the discourse did occasionally raise the 'fear of the Levant' and the 'danger' of Israel becoming eastern, 'primitive' and underdeveloped. Logically, immigrants from the Arab world bore the brunt of this public attitude. To illustrate, Ben Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister, claimed that only following the holocaust, left without its 'original' people, the Zionist movement turned to bring Jews from Arab countries. He went on to compare the Mizrahim to American blacks (Knesset protocols, 1949: 1302). Arye Gelblum, a journalist in Israel's respected *Ha'aretz* daily, wrote about the Mizrahim:

we face a people whose primitivism is at record level ... they show total inability to learn anything new ... and display chronic laziness ... they are only marginally better than Arabs in the countries from which they came (*Ha'aretz*, 22 April 1949).

During Israel's early years, ethnic tensions often arose between Jewish ethnic groups, as Ashkenazi immigrants enjoyed social contacts and cultural affinities with veteran Israelis, while Mizrahi immigrants lacked such contacts. Segev (1991: 169–74) documents persistent ethnic differences in the debate over housing policies and the decision-making processes which led to the preferential treatment of eastern European (and especially Polish) immigrants. A representative statement at a Jewish Agency's board meeting on immigrant housing in 1949 justified the superior treatment of Polish Jews on grounds of 'being from the same tribe' (quoted by Segev, 1991: 171).

Within this demographic and ethnic context, and against the background of continuing Israeli-Arab conflict, the development towns' strategy appeared well suited. It had the potential to disperse and resettle residents of the impoverished immigrant camps, to Judaize the country's frontier regions, and to distance the hundreds of thousands of Mizrahim from Israel's main cities, where they were portrayed as threatening the social, economic and cultural order. This conformed very well with leading new towns' theories which, as noted, were implemented throughout the world as a panacea for urban problems.

The towns were quickly built in the first half of the 1950s, first as a group of tents and tin shacks, to be later replaced by mass-produced, high-density public housing (Gonen, 1995; Golan, 1997). The reservoir of potential residents (those coming from abroad and from the immigrants' camps) were predominantly low-income, often unemployed Mizrahim. In the towns, street and neighbourhood design attempted to follow European planning ideas of modernist, mid- to high-density housing, commercial and service centres, ample open space and separation of people and cars. Comparisons were often made to the highly acclaimed British and European New Towns' strategy which was in full swing at the time. It gave inspiration and added status to the urbanization plan proposed in Israel (Lichfield, 1976).

But the comparison to Europe (often made by Israeli planning scholars and professionals — see Lichfield, 1976; Efrat, 1988; Troen, 1995) stops there. European countries, which indeed attempted to decentralize their population, did not pursue Israel's two other goals: to expand the land control of a core ethno-national group in order to

dominate an ethno-national minority, and to control large-scale immigration from third-world countries, which doubled the state's population in five years.

While Israeli planners did make some efforts to house Ashkenazim in the development towns, these were frustrated by the higher mobility, cultural acceptability and financial capabilities of Ashkenazim which allowed them to relocate, leaving most of the Mizrahim behind. The very act of planning, building and populating small and peripheral towns thus created a stratifying sociospatial process, which amplified Israel's ethnic and class divisions. During the mid-1950s it was virtually only Mizrahim who were settled in the towns, both as part of the efforts to clear the temporary immigrant camps, and during an operation aptly labelled by the authorities 'from ship to frontier'. Ezra Sadan, later the director general of Israel's Ministry of Finance, who had worked closely with one of Israel's chief regional planners, R. Weitz, recently noted (1998):

our planning and population of the Lachish Region (where a new development town — Kiryat Gat — was built), was a clear example of 'planning by coercion'. We imposed the plan and modernist ideas formulated by European-Jewish planners, on hapless Mizrahi immigrants, unable to resist or escape ... This, of course, was for their benefit in the long-term — we had to do it ... Some of you may cringe to hear my description, but I maintain, we needed to coerce these people in order to implement our plans.

This coercion was plainly evident in the manner the development towns were populated — a process which left long-term scars on the lives and perceptions of local residents. Interviews conducted for this research in the towns revealed time and again a similar story, typified by the account of one of the first residents of the southern town of Ofakim:

I will never forget the night of April 19th, 1955. We were given 'numbers' on the ship, and later loaded onto trucks just outside the Haifa port. Nobody asked us, they just told us what to do ... It was very, very hot. We were told it would take around 'half an hour', but went on for hours and hours on stiff wooden truck benches, with many kids, women and elderly people. Once we got to the town, and saw the desert surrounds and only two small huts, we refused to get off the trucks ... government officials stood and argued with us for a long time and then sent us to 'another place', but the truck actually returned in a circle to the same site ... Only because of the unbearable heat on the crowded truck, and the weak and sick kids we agreed to get off ... since then, we are here.

It should be stressed that not all residents were settled in the towns in this manner, and some came willingly, due to proximity to family, friends and employment, and due to low housing prices. Yet, clear elements of control were evident in the planning of the towns. They did not appear in official documents and surfaced only occasionally in policy debates and in discourse on planning and housing policies. But the hierarchy between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim did become clear, and — most significantly — the social geography created by the new towns' strategy was unmistakable: they became 'islands' of deprivation, isolation and peripherality, from which their mainly Mizrahi population began their attempt to integrate into Israeli Jewish society. Once the residential structure was in place, the state, with its planning apparatus, began the process of developing and industrializing, and thus (partially) legitimizing, the existence of the towns.

Underdevelopment and legitimation

Despite the stigma which quickly became attached to the towns, they were still portrayed in the public discourse as essential for both Israeli security and nation-building. This statement by Moshe Dayan (a notable Jewish general and political leader) in 1963, is illustrative:

Degania, Ein Harod and Nahalal [renowned pioneer veteran settlements] are no longer symbols for essential settlement centres, nor do they answer our problems of national existence. Nowadays the enhancement of these issues is typified by [the development towns of] Beer-Sheva, Ashdod and Dimona (cited in Kellerman, 1987: 49).

However, despite the attempt to glorify the development towns as another stage of heroic Jewish settlement, the social and economic reality reflected deprivation and dependence. Attempts to develop an economic base to the towns often resulted in the establishment of (usually public) labour-intensive laggard industries (typically food and textiles), lured to the towns by the pool of available cheap labour, the inexpensive rent and rates, and the handsome incentives offered by the Israeli government. In the long term, however, this economic structure pulled the towns further down the socioeconomic scale, particularly in times of economic recession and restructuring (Razin, 1990; Shalev, 1992; Grinberg, 1998). As Hasson (1998) observes, the towns rapidly transformed 'from frontiers to peripheries'.

Against this background, the third wave of population dispersal to the 'frontier' took place during the late 1970s and 1980s, and saw the planning and establishment of about 120 'ex-urban' or 'distant suburban' neighbourhoods (often labelled *yishuvim kehilattiyim mitzpim* or 'community localities') on the country's 'frontiers' and peripheries. These 'gated communities' became a popular location for Israeli middle classes, who were subsidized by the government in their pursuit of a 'house and garden dream'. Given rising levels of mobility and improving road infrastructure, these 'frontiers' were now actually located within easy commuting distances to Israel's major metropolitan areas (Figure 1; see also Gonen, 1995; Newman, 1996).²

Critically, the ex-urban and 'community' nature of third-wave settlement came as a response to the social problems and stigmas associated with the development towns, which repelled many middle-class Israelis from settling at the 'frontier'. The government was aware of this stigma, and thus offered the young and affluent the opportunity to move to the frontier, but into small settlements which would *not* share municipal facilities and services with nearby development towns. Today, then, the towns are typically surrounded by rural and ex-urban localities, although relatively high walls of social and institutional segregation remain between these locality types (Yiftachel, 1997b).

Here again we can note how societal power structures produce indirect and subtle measures of planning control. Planning policies at this stage did *not* relate directly to the development towns, but the effect of supporting the new wave of suburban settlement clearly deprived the towns of development resources and of potential new populations. This furthered the inferiority of the towns in the Israeli residential market. As 'planning' denotes the full range of state policies shaping space, the latest wave of communal-suburban settlements must be seen as another regressive policy which deepened the control over the towns and exacerbated the ethno-social segregation in Israeli society.

Still, within this geographical-political setting, planners did attempt to initiate progressive policies in order to close the gap between the towns and the more affluent parts of Israeli society. These have included (some) positive discrimination measures in the allocation of resources for education, industrial development and retraining. The most comprehensive and ambitious initiative was 'Project Renewal' under which virtually all development towns (and other distressed urban neighbourhoods) received special grants, and became the target of physical and communal programmes aimed at enhancing their development (Efrat, 1988; Gonen, 1995).

Later research showed that these programmes had relatively little long-term impact (Carmon, 1988), but the assessment of planners and planning must consider the opposing dimensions of control and reform within the Israeli planning system. In our framework here we can treat these important policy initiatives as state attempts to correct 'market-failures',

2 This figure includes the occupied territories, where about half the ex-urban settlements were built. As shown in Figure 1, even the settlements built in the territories were within easy commuting distance to Israel's major employment centres, and thus detrimental to the growth of the development towns. Put simply, the new ex-urban settlements robbed the towns of potential middle-class suburbanizing populations.

but at the same time buttress an overall uneven system. More concretely to Israel, these were attempts to legitimize a system which produced isolation and deprivation, and prevent mass exodus from the peripheral towns. As elsewhere, planning control has been embedded within the ambiguities and contradictions of the policy-making arena, and within the conflicting agendas of the planners themselves. Nonetheless, the long-term preservation of social stratification attests to the relative weakness of occasional reformist policies.

The last event to greatly influence the towns was the arrival of large numbers of ex-Soviet Jews during the early 1990s (see Alterman, 1995). The government constructed large housing projects which had attracted some 201,000 new immigrants to the towns by 1995. Russian speakers now constitute 19% of the residents of the new towns. Still, the immigrants who settled in the towns were the least educated and had the lowest financial resources among the new wave of migrants. Consequently, Russian-Israeli ethnic tensions have arisen in some towns, and in some cases town mayors campaigned against the construction of further immigrant housing.

At present, then, the towns are still dominated by Mizrahi groups (usually second generation) who comprise 61% of their 1998 population, and a third of all Mizrahim in Israel. The recent Soviet and Ethiopian migrants constitute 19% of the towns' population, 'veteran' (non-Soviet) Ashkenazi Jews 14%, Arabs 2% and the rest are third-generation Israeli born.³

Past research: approaches and deficiencies

Israel's development towns have been the subject of continuous research from a variety of disciplines, dominated by three main approaches: national, developmental and policy studies. The national approach viewed the development towns — first and foremost — as a component of the Israeli-Zionist nation-building and state-building projects. Many of these studies were therefore concerned with the 'success' and 'effectiveness' of the towns from the viewpoint of fulfilling Zionist goals, such as population dispersal (Shachar, 1971; Efrat, 1988; Gonen, 1995), frontier settlement and national security (Kipnis, 1987; Kellerman, 1993), the 'in-gathering and integration of the exiles' (*mizug galuyot*) (Cohen, 1970; Altman and Rosenbaum, 1973), the replacement of rural with an urban development ideology (Cohen, 1970; Troen, 1995), or the construction of an integrated Israeli society (Eisensadt *et al.*, 1993).

The developmental approach viewed the towns as an ongoing 'problem', stemming from their persisting low level of economic development. Here researchers have analysed the towns' industrial structure (Schwartz, 1988; Razin, 1990; Gradus *et al.*, 1993), their occupational bases (Swirski and Shoshani, 1985; Bensky, 1993), their housing standards (Law Yone and Kalus, 1994), and their responsiveness to central-state policies such as Project Renewal and investment incentives, in terms of closing the socioeconomic gaps with the rest of Israeli Jewish society (Smooha, 1978; Gradus, 1984; Carmon, 1988; Lipshitz, 1990).

A third group of scholars attempted to probe the impact of Israeli policies and structural conditions on the lives of town residents. Two main subgroups emerged here: political and cultural. The first explored in detail the political organization, mobilization and conflict emerging in the towns, against a political-economy of social and ethnic stratification, hierarchical division of labour, uneven resources distribution and spatial marginalization (Swirski, 1981; Shalev, 1992; Rabinowitz, 1996; Grinberg, 1998; Herzog, 1998; Peled, 1998). The second group focused on the cultural transformation experienced in the towns, and particularly on the creation of local traditions, sacred sites, or the emergence and assertion of local cultural values (Ben Ari and Bilu, 1987; Weingrod, 1990; Ben Zadok, 1993).

3 Ethnicity, according to the Israeli Bureau of Statistics, is determined by one's place of birth or the place of birth of one's father. A third-generation Israeli born simply appears as 'Israeli'.

These useful studies have indeed established a broad foundation for further analysis of the development towns. However, previous work on the subject also reveals a general lack of critical examination of the activities of the Israeli state. Past research — typically emanating from the Israeli centre and ‘looking out’ — has most often been couched in terms of ‘how can we improve the development towns?’. Or, more theoretically, ‘how can we legitimize an existing (uneven and exploitative) sociospatial system?’. Very few studies have attempted to unpack Israel’s policies and explore the link between state planning and patterns of deprivation or polarization.

Given this deficiency, it is particularly important to highlight the link between planning policy and the uneven structural condition affecting most development towns in Israel. I suggest here that the policies of establishing, resourcing, industrializing and servicing the development towns expressed broad and unquestioned societal understandings and power relations. These were translated into policies which, naturally, furthered the interests of the groups formulating the national cultures and its accepted goals.

Accordingly, during the 1950s, Israeli (mainly Ashkenazi) elites constructed a discourse under which it became ‘necessary’ to settle the country’s periphery in order to fulfil the ‘need’ for population dispersal and ‘enhance national security’ (see Efrat, 1988; Kellerman, 1993). But the implementation of these discursively constructed ‘needs’ also worked quietly to enhance the socioeconomic and political position of the Ashkenazi elites and middle classes vis-à-vis the country’s Palestinian-Arab and Mizrahi groups. The vast majority of Israeli planners were part of the dominant Ashkenazi group, and their policies reflected this social association (see Schechter, 1990).

Further, the settlement of peripheral development towns by Mizrahi Jews drove a wedge between Israel’s Palestinian-Arab minority and low-income Mizrahi migrants, who shared many cultural and economic concerns. As the towns were often built with the explicit goal of ‘Judaising’ the country, and quite often on confiscated Arab lands, hostility between the two sectors developed quite quickly and has remained evident to date. Needless to say, all this served effectively the interests of Israeli Ashkenazim, who managed to maintain the country’s pseudo-European culture, and with it their social dominance over the last five decades, despite forming an ethnic minority of 40–45% since the mid-1950s.

Yet in many circles, including scholarly writings, and despite the evidence of control and deprivation, residents of the development towns have been unproblematically considered pioneers who ‘fulfil Zionist settlement objectives’ (Kellerman, 1987: 74). I argue here that an equally pertinent assertion would consider development town residents as ‘Jewish victims of Zionism’ (Shohat, 1988; 1996), and study the detailed impact, adjustment, struggle and resistance vis-à-vis the omnipotent forces of hegemonic Zionist nationalism, Ashkenazi control and ethno-class relations. Let us now turn to a brief assessment of the socioeconomic, political and identity consequences of Israel’s policies in the towns.

The consequences of planning

Socioeconomic

It is not surprising to note that the combination of peripherality, segregation and dependency has led the development towns to remain — paradoxically — the *least developed* sector in Israeli-Jewish society. Planning had the power, then, to adversely influence the life of large groups of immigrants and create spaces of socioeconomic structural deprivation and inferiority. Of course, not all planning policies were regressive, and the Israeli government has made repeated attempts in later years to improve conditions in the towns. Most notable was the ambitious ‘Project Renewal’ programme,

Table 1 *Socioeconomic indicators: the development towns and Israel (1995)*

Indicator	Development Towns' Mean	Israeli Mean
Mean salaried income (NIS/month)	3,249	4,274
Mobility level (vehicles/000)	156.5	198.3
Unemployment level (% of workforce)	10.5	3.7
Welfare dependency (recipients/000)	101.6	48.5

Sources: Compiled from CBS (1995; 1996).

during which many resources were channelled to the towns (Carmon, 1988), as well as a range of more focused industrial and service-delivery policies where the towns enjoyed preferential treatment (Gradus, 1984). Still, the low socioeconomic status of the towns lingers on, with no discernible change.

In this vein, recent analyses have shown that over the years the towns did improve their absolute socioeconomic standards, but their relative standing has remained significantly inferior to the Israeli mean (Lipshitz, 1990). Table 1 shows the situation in 1995, and illustrates vividly that the development towns still lag behind the rest of society on most socioeconomic criteria. This is reinforced by a recent study which ranked all 118 Israeli Jewish urban localities according to their aggregate quality of life indicators (Ministry of the Interior, 1994). Eighteen of the last 20 ranked localities were development towns, 17 of which are located on the country's northern or southern peripheries.

Analysis of other socioeconomic indicators, such as education and housing reveal a similar picture. For example, only an average of 30.6% of highschool-aged youth in the development towns matriculated in 1989, as compared with an average of 50.5% elsewhere in urban Jewish Israel (Adva Centre, 1991). In 1993 the rate rose to 33.9% in the towns, but the rest of urban Jewish Israel also increased to 58.9% (Ministry of the Interior, 1996). Only an estimated 14% of town residents had a university education in 1995, as compared with 28% among Israeli Jewry. This is partially explained by the fact that the proportion of Mizrahi male students in Israeli universities has continued to comprise only about a quarter of their Ashkenazi counterparts from the 1970s to the present (see Cohen and Haberfeld, 1998).

Housing and unemployment data sketch a similar picture. To illustrate, the mean number of people per room in 1983 was 1.6 in the development towns, as compared with 0.9 in towns with an Ashkenazi majority. In 1991, the available data show that 35.3% of Mizrahi Jews lived in densities of less than one person per room, as opposed to 53.1% among Ashkenazi Jews. Here the Mizrahi data cover the entire country, but are representative of the development towns (Law Yone and Kalus, 1994). Likewise, unemployment rates over the years have been almost twice as high in the country's peripheral development towns as the national average, reaching, for example, 16% in Ofakim, 12% in Yeroham and Shlomi and 11% in Kiryat Gat and Netivot in July 1996, compared with a national average of 6.5% (Hapoalim Bank, 1996).

Political

If we are to fully understand the impact of planning on society, its political consequences should be examined. In the development town project we find a distinct political geography created by planners which spawned, first, political weakness and dependency, and later some anti-establishment mobilization. In many respects, the political repercussions of the development towns project have backfired against the country's traditional (Ashkenazi-secular) elites, and now present a constant challenge to any Israeli government.

Turning back to the 1950s and 1960s, the towns' geographic marginality and isolation, and the clear socioeconomic dependence resulted in obvious political weakness. The development towns were then dominated by the agendas of the country's Ashkenazi elites and the various organs of the all-powerful Labour movement. This was reflected in patterns of party affiliations, voting and general political acquiescence. The electoral successes of the Labour movement in both national and local elections until the mid-1970s is a clear testimony to this domination (Grinberg, 1998).

A major shift occurred during the 1970s, with the growing awareness of second generation Mizrahim of their discrimination and domination by Ashkenazi-state elites, and their subsequent alliance with Israel's main opposition at the time — the Likud national bloc. Massive shifts in the voting of Mizrahim in general, and residents of development towns in particular, has helped the Likud Bloc to maintain power in all but six years since 1977. However, most recently a new trend has emerged, with many voters leaving the Likud (now seen by many as representing the oppressing establishment) and joining religious parties which present a fundamental challenge to both Labour and Likud agendas.

Significantly, despite their socioeconomic and cultural marginality in Israeli society, the development towns have managed to increase their political influence and representation quite dramatically in the last three decades (see Ben Zadok, 1993). The 1996 Netanyahu government, for example, had a third (six) of its ministers of Mizrahi origin, two of whom are from development towns and two others are from poor Mizrahi neighbourhoods.

It is also worth noting that despite the intimate association between the ruling Likud bloc and the development towns, the towns' socioeconomic position has not improved vis-à-vis the rest of the country, and in some categories, such as income and unemployment, it has even fallen further behind. Notably, the Likud bloc, too, has traditionally been led by Ashkenazi elites, and its economic policies have always favoured pro-market strategies, such as welfare cuts, liberalization and privatization — all of which militate against the material interests of most development town residents. Likud remained more popular than Labour in the towns, because it better represented the Mizrahi-Jewish 'spirit' of its residents, and also because it did not implement its liberalization policies with any haste.

Figure 2 illustrates this changing political landscape. Following the early success of Labour, the Likud bloc dominated during the late 1970s and throughout the 1980s, but the recent resurgence in support for orthodox-religious parties has usurped the Likud dominance. This has been explained as a backlash against the Israeli (secular) economic and cultural elites (mainly represented by Labor, but also by Likud), which have marginalized many low-income and religiously traditional voters in development towns (Peled, 1998). The spectacular success of Shas is a case in point: it is an orthodox religious Sepharadi-Mizrahi party which was only established in the mid-1980s, but in the 1996 elections had already reached 18% in the development towns, often ahead of Labour and even Likud. This trend continued in the 1999 elections, with Likud falling further to 21% in the towns, while the religious parties (dominated by Shas) reached 40%. Beyond electoral fortunes, the rise to prominence of religious elements bears clear implications for the prevalent collective identities in the towns, to which we shall return later.

Public protest

An additional consequence of planning policy in the towns is revealed by studying social protest, that is, the collective expression of grievances performed in the public domain (most commonly in events such as demonstrations, rallies, marches, petitions or news' conferences).⁴ The evolution of protest shows a fairly steady, but generally not militant,

4 Our analysis here included 345 protest events registered in Israel's development towns during the 1960–95 period, as reported in three newspapers. The analysis used methods developed by Gurr (1993) to measure protest duration, intensity and policy impact.

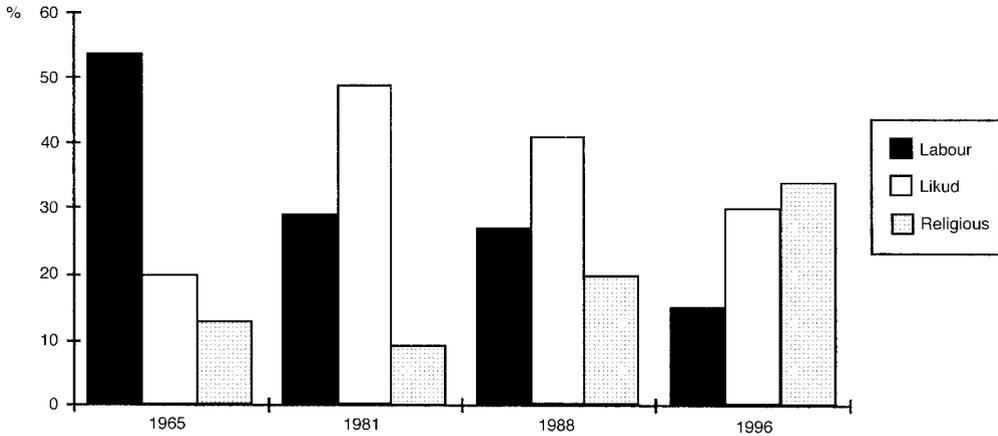


Figure 2 State election results in development towns

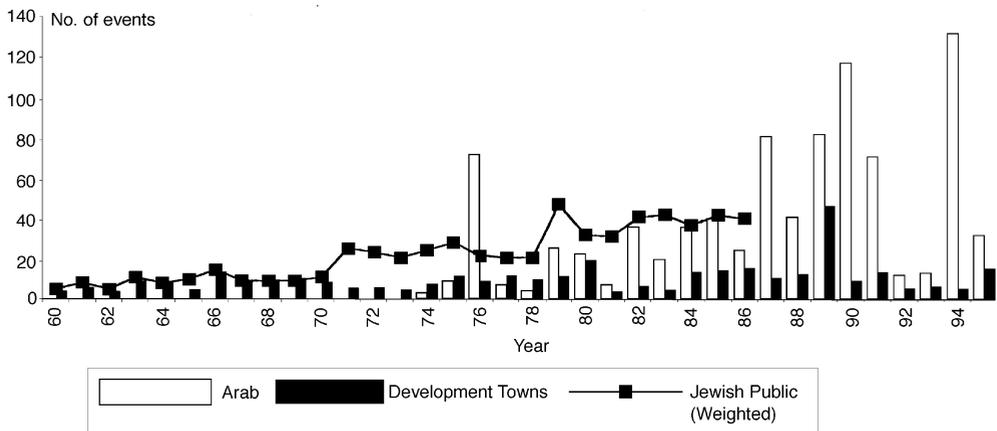


Figure 3 Public protest among Israeli sectors

level of activity (Figure 3). Apart from one exceptionally active year (1989) and a handful of other periods when protest significantly exceeded the annual average (1975, 1984–86, 1995), it has remained below average.

The 'peaks' in levels of protest activity in the towns can generally be attributed to government policies or economic conditions. To illustrate, the 1975 wave of protest was associated with a post-recession policy initiative which saw the towns losing employment and population. The 1984–86 period was characterized by policies aimed at stabilizing a hyperinflation economy, and entailed wide-ranging cuts in public services and allowances to the towns. In 1989, a local government fiscal crisis hit the towns, spawning a prolonged conflict between central and local governments in which the development towns played a key role. Finally, in 1995 the government stepped up its policies of liberalization and deregulation which caused the closures of several key industrial plants in the towns, generating a sharp rise in unemployment.

While the fluctuations in protest are of course important, the level of public protest can be regarded as relatively moderate, especially in comparison to the more intense protest levels in other sectors of Israeli society, such as ultra-orthodox Jews, the settlers in the occupied territories and the Palestinian-Arab minority, or even compared to the

pattern of protest in the entire state of Israel, which has been more volatile and intense (see Wolsfeld, 1988; Lehman-Wilzig, 1990; Herman, 1996).

Figure 3 clearly shows that since 1970, when political protest became a widely used strategy by Israeli political movements, the level of protest in the development towns has fallen behind the national average. Notwithstanding the relatively moderate nature of development town protest, its persistence has established this sector as a significant player in Israeli politics. Yet, the impact and visibility of the sector's demands have been lower than other sectors who adopted more militant extra-parliamentarian strategies.⁵

In this context, it is particularly instructive to compare levels of protest between the development towns and Israel's Palestinian-Arab minority. This comparison is illuminating because both sectors are economically and spatially marginal within Israeli society, and both are of roughly the same population size. Figure 3 shows that the Arab minority has consistently staged more intense (as well as more durable and sizeable) protests than the development towns. Further, levels of Arab protest have ebbed and flowed in a far more dramatic fashion than protest in the development towns, indicating a higher level of passionate mobilization on issues of collective importance.⁶

Another notable difference between the two groups has been the range of protest issues. The Arab minority has consistently demonstrated over three key issues of roughly equal importance: land control, socioeconomic development and Palestinian national rights. In the development towns, on the other hand, issues concerned with socioeconomic deprivation totally dominated public protest. This stands in sharp contrast not only to the Arab minority, but also to other sectors in Israeli society which commonly demonstrate over geopolitical, religious and ideological issues. The narrow focus on socioeconomic issues provides clues to the collective identities emerging in the towns, to which we now turn.

Collective identities

A key long-term consequence of urban and regional planning — rarely explored in planning scholarship — is the shaping and reshaping of collective identities. This identity is constantly affected by the processes of development and sociopolitical division of space. As indicated above, it is claimed here that Israel's planning policies have created a fairly distinct social sector in the towns with notable characteristics of a low-status 'ethno-class'. Such an identity is a newly constructed form of class and ethnicity, created by the fusion of ethnic background, deprivation and a shared national space.

The class dimension of this identity was evident from the socioeconomic data provided earlier, which showed the towns to be the least developed (or poorest) sector within Israeli Jewish society. Fittingly, public protest was shown to focus almost entirely on socioeconomic grievances, which is quite typical of 'old social movements' composed of the working classes and low socioeconomic strata (Melucci, 1989). This phenomenon can be directly related to Israel's planning policies which relocated people to the country's deprived periphery and attempted to keep them there. This sociospatial policy created structural conditions for the reproduction of social dependency and inequality which have persisted up to the present day.

However, the class perspective does not tell the full story. The additional critical factor has been the Arab ethnic origins of most of the towns' residents, as Mizrahi Jews who arrived in Israel from Arab or Muslim countries. During the first three decades of Israel's independence, the state's repressive nation-building agenda sought to homogenize the many groups of Jews assembled in the country. The core culture into which all immigrants were expected to assimilate was the Ashkenazi Hebrew-Zionist

5 The national data was drawn from Lehman-Wilzig (1990), and therefore only reaches 1986.

6 The comparison here begins from the mid 1970s since no earlier data on Arab protest was available (see Yiftachel, 1997a).

version held by Israeli elites at the time. This demanded all new immigrants (from East and West) to rid themselves of previous languages and cultures. The treatment of Mizrahi Jews was particularly harsh, given the on-going Arab-Jewish conflict which caused Arab culture to be stigmatized and ridiculed (Shohat, 1996).

In the context of this oppressive unicultural melting pot, the term 'Mizrahi' appeared as a derogatory label, denoting cultural backwardness and economic underdevelopment. Israel's reconstructed national identity relied almost entirely on Ashkenazi history, culture, images and norms, mainly drawn from the central and eastern European origins of the country's elites (Shohat, 1988). The rich tradition of Mizrahi Jewish culture and heritage became almost invisible in Israel's public life, symbols and ceremonies, school curriculum or national culture, in a process termed by Piterberg (1996) 'internal orientalism'.

In addition, the towns' isolation and the lack of social mobility meant that the path to assimilation into Ashkenazi society was problematic. The combination of deprivation and ethnic origins in the development towns thus created a stigma and a vicious circle of underdevelopment and negative social selection. 'Mizrahi', and 'development town' thus became coded terms for Israel's Jewish 'lower classes', even though the second and third generations in the towns were largely assimilated into Israel's mainstream culture. Yet, the Mizrahi label remained, constituting what Lewis (1985) termed a 'phantom ethnicity'. The fusion of place, ethnic origin and class has therefore created an 'ethno-class' which characterizes the main (but not the only) element of the towns' contemporary identity.

Let us return for a moment to the comparison between Arab and development town collective protest. Given the above, we can explain the difference in protest activity between the two sectors as emanating from their different collective identities: the Arabs constitute a non-assimilating 'homeland' ethnic group, while the population in the towns emerged as an immigrant 'ethno-class'. The protest in the towns derives from a predominantly working-class perspective which aspires to assimilate into the Ashkenazi-dominated society (and therefore not challenge the fundamental tenets of the Zionist state), while the Palestinian-Arab minority is far more concerned with protecting its culture and territory against an expanding state.

The aspiration of residents in the development towns to integrate into mainstream Israel has also caused many to leave the towns, thereby generating a high turnover rate. This resulted in considerable periods of negative growth in almost every development town (Swirski and Shoshani, 1985). Internal migration to Israel's major urban centres became the only means of escaping a transformation into a peripheral ethno-class. Yet only those able to afford emigration could take this step, leaving behind the poor and weakest, thus exacerbating the lowly position of the towns.

The residents left in the towns are thus 'trapped' on two main counts. First, they have little economic or political leverage to influence the government which exploits this dependency (despite the rhetoric of assisting the periphery). Second, the towns are a product of Israeli settlement and frontier development policies, and therefore cannot object to the continuation of these policies with any credibility or force. This means that key Israeli policies, such as settlement of the West Bank and the establishment of middle-class ex-urban neighbourhoods — both of which work against the towns' interests — are rarely addressed by local protest.

The hegemonic discourse and landscape of Israeli-Jewish nationalism has therefore blunted key identity and policy issues in the towns, leaving their residents only the option of inferior integration into mainstream (Ashkenazi and frontier settling) Israeli society. As such, their voice is only heard in the public discourse on socioeconomic matters on which they have little impact. Their core identity as a disgruntled, yet non-militant ethno-class is likely to remain in the near future, without posing any real challenge to the Israeli elites.

However, despite the continuing attempts of most development town residents to integrate fully into Israeli society, a growing element in the towns has chosen an

alternative route. In an apparent reaction to the rejection and stigmatization by the Israeli social (and mainly secular and Ashkenazi) centre, Jewish-religious groups have gradually increased their numbers and have become quite powerful in several peripheral towns. As shown by Peled (1998) the identification with orthodox-religious Jewish movements allows town residents to be fully accepted, without the need to change their culture or imitate the Ashkenazi elites.

The most prominent among these movements, as mentioned, has become Shas (literally meaning '*Sepharadi Tora* observers'). This movement, which was only established in the mid-1980s, relies on a rapidly growing network of kindergartens, community halls, voluntary social services and a spiritual leadership of several notable rabbis. It has quickly gained both social and political power in many towns, eclipsing the Labour party in most towns in the 1996 elections, and even the Likud in several southern towns.

Most recently, several secular Mizrahi groups have begun to organize in the towns, including Kedem (the democratic Mizrahi Rainbow) and Tzakh (Youth for the neighbourhoods). Despite their small numbers, they have gained wide media attention, openly declaring their wish to emulate and rival the success of Shas. Several artists, musicians and authors from the towns have also begun recently to rediscover their Mizrahi (and chiefly North-African) origins, and to air their contempt for the 'systematic destruction of Mizrahi culture by a domineering and heartless Ashkenazi-Zionist agenda' (leader of the band Sfatayim, Radio Darom interview, 24 May 1996). However, the main agenda of these new cultural leaders has been to broaden the definition of 'Israeliness' to include their particular subculture, and not to present a fundamental critique of the Zionist settlement project and its uneven ethnic consequences.

Conclusion: the regressive consequences of planning

What, then, can we learn from Israel's development town programme about the impact and consequences of urban and regional planning? Let us first summarize the empirical evidence: the towns were built according to the 'best' planning rationale of the time and in concert with national (Jewish) goals, although they quickly became isolated, stigmatized and deprived urban areas, whose mainly Mizrahi residents were faced with severe difficulties in their quest to integrate into (the mainly Ashkenazi) Israeli mainstream. The long-term consequences of the project include the ongoing low socioeconomic status of the Mizrahi population in the towns (caused by their peripherality and segregation), their fluctuating (and increasingly religious) political orientation, persistent, but not militant, anti-governmental protest activity, and the emergence of a 'trapped' collective identity of a low- and middle-income Mizrahi 'ethno-class', with a recent resurgence of a more fundamental (Sepharadi) religious movement.

Clearly, then, planning, as part of the Israeli apparatus of public policy, did make a significant impact by influencing the life chances of the residents of the 28 towns and their descendants. It determined the location in which the towns were built, directed much of the flow of people and resources to the towns, and maintained their isolation and segregation from the earlier and later waves of (higher status) settlement built around the towns. The impact of planning has not, however, been unidimensional: several key policies and programmes have attempted to improve the lives of town residents and channel resources to Israel's peripheries. Many in the towns have indeed enjoyed upward mobility, and several successful national figures (especially in entertainment, sports and politics) have hailed from the development towns.

However, judged by the concrete reality of development and underdevelopment, and by the stigmatized Mizrahi ethno-class identity which emerged in the towns, Israel's development towns' project should be seen as part and parcel of the control exerted by the state's elites on its ethnic and geographic peripheries. The planning of the towns assisted

in creating a stratified and segregated national space which reinforced and reproduced social inequalities and polarization. The relatively rigid division of space in Israel's peripheral region between high-status villages and neighbourhoods and the deprived towns meant that education, services and social networks remained segregated, to the detriment of social integration, equality or justice.

As shown in the above analysis, this stratified structure was never declared openly, nor was it ever an official goal of any plan or strategy. It should be seen as a result of the sets of societal powers which shape human spaces through the legitimizing discourses and mechanisms of urban and regional planning. These embody ambiguities and conflicting voices, and harbour emancipatory as well as repressive possibilities. In Israel, the declared goals of 'population dispersal', 'Judaising the frontier', 'modernizing society' or 'industrializing the periphery' obscured the practices of actual spatial and demographic change. These acted to widen social and ethnic differences, strongly assisted by the legitimizing and material power of the state.

In general, then, and contrary to conventional wisdom, planning became an agent of regressive social change, despite the existence of conflicting policy directions and some ambiguity in the treatment of the towns. In the main, planning was an integral part of the Israeli 'ethnocracy', thus acting in the name of Israeli-Jewish nationalism and the interests of the country's ethnic and economic elites. Despite being articulated and implemented during the 1950s — often portrayed as planning's progressive 'golden age' — it did not fulfil the promise of creating a better society, but rather acted as an instrument of social control, contributing to inequality and fragmentation.

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