

Conservation in mixed cities - negotiating between competing narratives: the case study of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv-Jaffa, Israel

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Abstract

This paper intends to examine the use made of conservation as a tool for the construction of perceptions of memory and authenticity in mixed cities in Israel. More specifically, the purpose of this paper will be to understand how the chronological distinction - enforced through legal frameworks - between archaeological sites and historic sites promotes the creation of diverse perceptions of authenticity and memory. I will examine these questions through the case studies of Jerusalem and Tel Aviv-Jaffa, two mixed cities containing historic quarters, which serve as Israel's main urban centers. However, each city is embedded with different symbolic importance. On one hand, Jerusalem is portrayed as the nation's ancient capital, rife with historic and religious importance. Conversely, Tel Aviv-Jaffa is portrayed as a modern global city, embodying the successful foundation of a national home for the Jewish people by the Zionist movement. My contention is that despite these differences, a critical examination of the conservation methods chosen in each city exemplifies the inability to transform mixed cities into spaces which promote an open dialogue between the competing identities comprising Israeli society - namely Jewish and Palestinian. Instead, the conservation of historic urban spaces, many of which include both archaeological and historic strata, is tied into the Zionist aspiration to construct a national Jewish indigenous identity which at the same time portrays the Palestinian population as non-indigenous infiltrators. Thus, through the use of conservation, mixed cities are perpetuated as divided urban spaces that prevent Israeli society's ability to create a dialogue between its different components.