

Hawakir of Nazareth

The Transformation of a Cultural Institution within the Urban Ecology in Nazareth

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Abstract

This research is concerned with environmentalism and ecology in Nazareth. It looks at *hawakir*, traditional domestic gardens, as a cultural and ecological institution, and explores the changes that they have undergone in recent decades. The central research questions are: what are *hawakir*? In what ways are they different from other gardens? What has happened to them? And what can be learned from them about today's Nazareth? This eco-anthropological study hopes to broaden the discussion of the environment and environmentalism in the Palestinian Arab society in Israel. It raises questions concerning urban sustainability in a small city and the possibilities for its realization in Nazareth.

The relevant fields of knowledge for this study are ecological and environmental anthropology, environmentalism and ecology in Palestinian society, urban sustainability, the connections between people, nature, and culture, and the social and economic conditions that mold them. The theoretical bases are political ecology and political economy within anthropology, perspectives that look at the interconnections between cultural and ecological phenomena, and explore symbolism as embedded in history, economics and power.

The study took place in Nazareth, the only city that remained an Arab urban center after 1948. Anthropological fieldwork included participant observations, informal discussions with residents, in-depth interviews, study of memoirs and autobiographies of city residents, and perusal of local media.

Documentation of the *hawakir* of Nazareth, the forces that influenced them, their significance, and their role in the lives of the residents reveal that they are divided into four basic models: The first model is that of the classic *hakura*, which was an essential and integral part of the home; it provided food and was a source of income in times of need. This model no longer exists, due to the crowded building areas, land overuse, rising water prices, and competition over urban space for other uses. The second model is that of the *hakura* as a space for maintaining tradition. This model is found in the provisional use of relatively small slots, which are families wish to keep open until such time as their sons and daughters are ready to build their homes. The third model, and most common today in the city, is that of the hobby garden for

affluent men. The fourth and final model of *hawakir* is that of an ecological experiment, and as such it entails a number of challenges, and faces social, economic and ecological obstacles.

The ethnographic documentation of the *hakura's* various metamorphoses reveals ecological and cultural changes that have occurred in Nazareth over recent decades. These changes were most obvious in two main areas. The first is the type of residences and the distribution of urban space. The disappearance of the *hakura* echoes a larger shift from the older, traditional neighborhoods, which were homogeneous in terms of sects (neighborhoods had distinct clan and religious identities) but heterogeneous in terms of social class, to newer neighborhoods, where neighbors come from diverse family and sectoral backgrounds but share social class.

The second major change is that from a city in which subsistence economy played a major role to one that is entirely reliant on capitalist economy. Here again, the biography of the individual *hakura* broadly echoes the changes that the city itself has undergone. The lack of land, alongside lifestyle changes and increasingly expensive water, has changed the *hakura* from a fertile productive and sustainable place to a consumer good that only affluent men can afford to keep. I assert that the disappearance of the *hawakir* from the socio-economic life of the city has directly influenced the urban ecology and the connections to nature in Nazareth. It has contributed to the deepening social gaps and economic polarization between residents, and to changing gender relations. The disappearance of the *hawakir* has likewise negatively impacted the potential for sustainability in the urban environment, the city's nutritional security, and its political, economic and social strength over time.