

The Social Reaction to the Wadi Salib Riots (1959) as Reflected in Contemporary Israeli Press

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Abstract—Social reactions to deviant groups with political goals follow two central patterns; one that associates personal characteristics with deviant behavior, and the other that claims that society is to be blamed for deviant behavior. The establishment usually tends towards the former notion and thus disclaims any responsibility for the distress of the underprivileged, while it is usually those who oppose government policies who believe that the fault lies with society. The purpose of the present research was to examine social reactions to the Wadi Salib riots that occurred in Haifa in 1959. These riots represented the first ethnic protest within Israeli society with its ideology of the ingathering of the exiles. The central question was whether this ideology contributed to the development of a different reaction when compared to reactions to similar events abroad. This question was examined by means of analyzing articles in the Israeli press of that period. The Israeli press representing the views of the establishment was at pains to point out that the rioters were criminals, their object being to obstruct the development of society. Opposition party leaders claimed that the rioters lived in poor circumstances, which constituted a direct result of government policies. An analysis of press reports on the Wadi Salib riots indicates a correspondence between the reaction to these events and similar events abroad. Nevertheless, the reaction to the Wadi Salib riots did not only express a conflict between different political camps, but also different symbolic universes. Each group exploited the events at Wadi Salib to prove that their ideology was the legitimate one.

Keywords—Riots, media, political deviance, symbolic universe.

I. INTRODUCTION

MANY heterogeneous societies around the world have experienced times in which racism has raised its head, sometimes subtly but sometimes with violent riots. American society is one of these. Between 1964 and 1971, there were about 300 outbreaks of ethnic disturbances in the United States, the most difficult year being 1967, in which more than seventy race riots took place. Examination of various important issues related to riots of this kind includes not only understanding the sources of the disturbances, but also an analysis of social responses to the events. The research literature suggests that the establishment generally chooses to report on the rioters and their activities using terminology taken from the world of crime and deviance [1].

Lipsky and Olson [2] characterized the establishment response to the 1960s riots in the United States as providing exaggerated descriptions of the riots taken out of context; without reference to their background or causes, the protests were presented as events that threatened the basic values of

American society. Relating to the riots as outbreaks of violence with no political significance helped devalue them, such as occurred in response to the riots in Boston and Cleveland during the summer of 1967.

Fogelson [3] claimed that there was no tradition of using violence as a protest mechanism in American society or other western societies. Lacking such a tradition made it difficult to relate to the violence as anything other than insignificant outbursts; this characterization easily led to seeing them as a simple threat to law and order. The common argument, then, was that only a radical minority on the margins of society took part in these riots. The response to protests that occurred in Los Angeles in the mid-1960s is an example of this: the establishment presented the participants as a criminal hooligan minority [4].

British establishment responses to the riots of Brixton in 1981 followed this pattern as well. Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher set the tone for the leadership response, arguing that the riots were an expression of the criminal characteristics of those who participated in them [5]. Criminalizing the demonstrators and the riots led to the adoption of responses taken from the world of law and order, such as, for example, increased policing, training in crowd control methods, changes in arrest directives, establishment of a special unit for fighting terror, and allowing the use of tear gas as means for opposing violent behaviors.

A. Media Reporting on Public Disturbances

Sociologists examining the intersection of deviance theory and the media suggest that reports of deviance in the media are buoyed up by use of dramatization, stereotypic references or disconnecting the actions from all relevant factors that may explain them. Bennett [6] argued that the frenzy around these groups serves the interests of strengthening the normative culture. For example, presenting homosexuals or drug addicts as responsible for the lack of order in British society at the beginning of the 1960s was a message to the British that they must closely protect the bounds of society.

In their analysis of social response to the actions of deviant political groups, Horowitz and Leibowitz [7] argued that the traditional distinction between political activism and conventional deviance is growing more and more blurry. The politicization of deviance occurs when groups defined by society as deviant at any particular time, such as, for example, homosexuals (in the 1960s) or drug addicts, engage in political means in order to "legitimize" their behaviors and way of life.

Political deviance grows, therefore, as a response to the extant political consensus and is expressed such that the groups at the margins of politics or society adopt a deviant style of action. They do so in order to symbolize their

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alienation from the existing political system and from the distribution of power in society. Responding to the activities of such groups, the media generally focuses on the subject of violence. For example, Halloran [8], who analyzed the media response to the large riots in London in 1968, argued that the focus was on violence even though that was an insignificant aspect of the demonstrations.

Hartman and Husband [1] claimed that, in responding to the protests of various ethnic groups, the media raises the topic of the public agenda and afterward reports on it in terms of conflict and threat. Their central argument was that, in all reports on racial topics, the media focuses on the black threat to the white population and neglects – almost systematically – the topic of oppression and discrimination of the blacks by the establishment. Husband [9] also suggested that the media generally acts within the consensus, and for some reason, relates to assumptions regarding race as if they are self-evident. For example, Murdock [10] argued that the British media chose to relate to the riots in Toxteth in July 1981 as if they were criminal acts. That the demonstrators were criminals was emphasized in a number of ways, such as focusing on the riots themselves and on the characteristics of the protestors and their threat to social order, while they ignored any discussion of the background to eruption of the disturbances. The media and the leaders of the protests appear to be competing for control over the way the situation is portrayed and the media will provide sympathetic reporting on the demonstrations only if they are in the consensus [1].

In the young State of Israel, as well, there were outbreaks of ethnic riots. The Wadi Salib protests took place in the 1950s, and they are the subject of this paper.

B. The Wadi Salib Riots

Wadi Salib is a small street in lower Haifa sharing its name with the neighborhood in which 20,000 people, half of them newly arrived North African Jewish immigrants (referred to as part of the Mizrahi population), lived in poverty and crowded conditions. On 8 July 1959, there was an incident that served as grounds for the outburst of a riot: Yaakov Elkarif, a deliveryman in Talpiot Market, known for being chronically drunk, sat in a neighborhood coffee shop. A police car drove past and the policemen stopped and asked Elkarif to come with them. He refused and began to fight back. The policemen shot him and he fell to the ground, bleeding but not fatally injured.

From that moment, residents of the neighborhood began to organize various activities in response to what they called “a murder of one of our own.” The next day, July 9, a flyer was distributed in lower Haifa that constituted the first call to action to the immigrants from North Africa and “all those who seek justice,” saying in part:

“Our blood is not cheap. We will go up to our neighbors in Hadar HaCarmel. We see them at night, from behind their lit-up windows, while we look for somewhere to sleep in dark stairwells and basements. During the day we wake up like hungry wolves trying to get a day’s work – let us go up to them”.

Later a march to the police station was organized; there, they raised two flags: the national flag painted with blood (some believed the blood represented the blood of Elkarif), and a black flag that was fashioned spontaneously from a pole and one of the demonstrator’s shirts. The demonstrators also held up photos of Mohammad II, King of Morocco, and shouted out that they are the sons of the King and not of Ben Gurion.

Throughout the day there were riots that disrupted the flow of traffic. Demonstrators also caused destruction of property, attacking the Mapai headquarters (Mapai was the ruling political party at that time), a restaurant and a kiosk frequented by Ashkenazim (Jewish immigrants from Europe), as well as the meeting place for HaPoel Haifa, the football team associated with Mapai. They continued marching to Hadar Cinema, on the way setting a bank manager’s car on fire and breaking windows in the bank and an adjacent restaurant. The disturbances led shop keepers to shutter their shops and flee in alarm. That same day, dozens of youth joined the march to Hadar; leading the march were the prostitutes of the Wadi followed by the residents of the neighborhood and their children. Protestors continued to break shop windows, destroy kiosks owned by Ashkenazim, and parked cars. The police came in anti-riot gear and arrested 32 protestors. Fifteen police officers were injured during the riots. Protests continued over the next few weeks and even erupted in other cities around the country.

In August, there was more rioting with the purpose of disturbing the orderly running of the Mapai elections being held in Hadar Cinema; a violent outburst between demonstrators and the police ensued. This wave of protests and violent confrontations between demonstrators and police lasted two days and ended with the arrest of the instigators, among them David Ben-Harush, who had, in January 1959, set up an organization called the “North African Likud.” The goal of that organization was to combat the discrimination against North African immigrants to Israel.

The Wadi Salib riots were a protest of the Mizrachim directed against the government of Israel, the city of Haifa and its mayor, Abba Hushi, Ben Gurion, the security forces, Mapai – everyone who represented the establishment which was seen as having control over all the resources (Yediot Aharonot, July-August 1959).

II. METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using content analysis, analyzing language and rhetoric, as opposed to the traditional content analysis method that focuses on frequency of the appearance of ideas and concepts within the text and the overt content [11]. This study regards the text as a structured whole, and while the repetition of topics and details are important, the focus is on their position within the body of the text, the style of expression, the tone, use of extraordinary imagery and more. This approach seeks to capture the messages hidden within the text, the covert content.

Material was gathered from all daily newspapers and one weekly paper that appeared at that time period. The choice of

newspapers was based on the association of the newspapers with the political system in Israel [12]: the Labor camp – *Davar*, *Al Hamishmar*, *Haboker* (journal of the General Zionist party), the right wing sector – *Herut*, the religious sector – *HaZofeh*, the Charedi sector – *Hamodia*, and the nonpolitically aligned *Yediot Aharonot*, *Maariv*, and *Haaretz*. In addition, two other papers were examined; *Kol Haam* and *Haolam Hazeh*. These were defined as non-establishment newspapers because, in addition to presenting positions found in the other newspapers, they also presented anti-Zionist stances.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Ross and Stainess [13] discussed the manner in which explanations for social problems are prioritized by those involved, that is, by policy makers, opposition elements and minority group leaders. These explanations generally fall into two categories: (1) characteristics of the population suffering the problem, such that, for example: unemployment or poverty are presented as related to lack of motivation or inability to change their situations and not attributed to the job market that is managed by the establishment; and (2) systemic factors, including government policies or those of social welfare and education agencies. These are discussed in turn.

A. Individual Level Explanations

In some newspapers, the relationship between the riots and characteristics of the participants or the initiators was emphasized. The argument that the aim of the participants was to disturb the peace and break the law was offered repeatedly.

1. Criminal Backgrounds of the Protesters

Presenting the riots as a criminal act and hooliganism was done systematically and in an organized manner throughout the time the disturbances took place. This trend was quite obvious in the paper, *Davar*, the organ of the contemporary ruling party, Mapai. For example, for a number of days, it was written that after the outbreak of the disturbances, "...the first demonstration was already more than a spontaneous response to the injury caused to the drunk riotous man, and the participants were people who consider the police their eternal enemy" (*Davar*, 12 July 1959).

Theories from the world of crime and deviance successfully explained, not only the outbreak of the riots, but also their persistence. For example, in response to the question what caused the disturbances to continue, Police Commissioner Nachmias responded that there is a general tendency in crime for there to be a series of criminal acts of the same type for varying lengths of times; for example, when there is a suicide, this inspires a series of suicides (*Davar*, 22 July 1959). In *Yediot Aharonot*, a similar attitude was evident and for several days after the outbreak of the riots, reports such as this were repeated: "...without reason of unemployment or purposeful discrimination, many were incited by criminals who consciously protested in the center of the city and created disturbance without precedent..." (12 July 1959).

Halloran [8] noted a similar trend, according to which the

establishment and the establishment media highlight marginal factors. He illustrated this position when examining the media response to large demonstrations that took place in London in 1968, protesting the war in Vietnam. The focus was on the violence in the demonstrations in spite of the fact that that was only a marginal aspect of the protest.

Classifying the Wadi Salib disturbances as a form of violence was accomplished by using expressions taken from the world of crime and deviance: "bullies incited rioting in Haifa" (*Davar*, 12 July 1959) and: "again the mob gathered..." (*Davar*, 12 July 1959). By focusing on the traits of the protesters, the establishment sought to avoid taking responsibility for the causes of the disturbances.

Furthermore, relating to the riots as a clear affront to law and order directs the search for solutions in this same domain; that is, if the riots are a kind of hooliganism then it is necessary to contain such acts by using the resources available to the police and the courts. The establishment did, in fact, adopt law enforcement measures commonly applied to coping with crime and hooliganism. For example: "...at an informal meeting, the government decided yesterday to order the police to prevent the riots from reoccurring using every means available to them..." (*Davar*, 22 July 1959), "the rioters in Wadi Salib have been imprisoned for 15 days as investigations continue" (*Davar*, 13 July 1959), "at five police stations in the north, the Israel Police Force made good on arrest warrants against 55 suspects in the Wadi Salib riots..." (*Davar*, 22 July 1959).

2. Cultural Characteristics of the Protesters

Establishment papers generally concentrated on the threat the disturbances exerted on social order and neglected, almost systematically, the topic of oppression and discrimination. At times, the establishment chose to relate to the difficult life conditions of particular ethnicities without seeing them necessarily as offenders acting illegally, however then they claimed that their distress was due to their own characteristics and the cultural background from which they came. Thus, for example, an opinion piece in *Davar* stated that:

"...for hundreds of years, the entire east, and the Mediterranean within it, has been in a state of weakness, and the behavior of the non-Jews tinged the Jews. The Jewish yearning for wisdom, knowledge and education was seen as a weakness on the part of the immigrants from these weaker regions . . . In order to live and advance in Israel, the country compels its residents to learn and work, and these two things were in opposition to the perspective and beliefs of the man from the east ... The Jewish Agency was wrong in believing it can raise the Jews up; instead it fosters social problems. How many communities in the Mediterranean region with productive foundations sent us all those who stuck like a craw in their throats – all the social cases, those with absorption difficulties and anti-social foundations, so that instead of helping us build our home we were overwhelmed" (*Davar*, 7 October 1959)?"

The establishment recognized the social problems

experienced by the Mizrachim and their difficult conditions in comparison with those who came from Europe and America. However, the source of the problem was not seen to be the functioning of the social system but the nature of the immigrants:

“...their difficulties are the product of the conditions and traits identifying this ethnic group. The assumption that must be remembered is that there is a problem with the North African immigrants and not a problem with those not from North Africa. The source of their problems lies in the special characteristics of this ethnic group and not their oppression by other ethnic groups” (*Davar*, 4 August 1959).”

Publishing these articles in a number of newspapers comprised an effort to present the nature of the immigrants as one that renders them unsuited to the western way of life developing in Israeli society. Bar-Yoseph [14] explained that the immigrants had not yet undergone a process of successful re-socialization, the end of which would be the imprinting of the normative values of the society that absorbed them: “... they produced in their homes patterns of family organization different from that of the West and for that reason, many of them are desolate without support...” (*Haaretz*, 17 July 1959). Their culture was presented as one that created difficulties for them to productively take advantage of the assistance offered to them by the absorbing agencies:

“...equality in their case was, in fact, to discriminate against them. They are unable to enjoy full democratic rights to the same extent as Westerners, because they come from an environment in which such rights have no significance. They do not know the ways of industrial society and therefore the great majority of them do not know how to take advantage of opportunities or how to advance their economic lives” (*Haaretz*, 17 July 1959).”

Presenting the immigrant character as the source of the problem contributes to totally detaching the disturbances from the content of the protest, that is, expressions of rage and violence were not seen to be connected directly with the life conditions under which the immigrants suffered, but with their nature and their inability to cope with the difficulties of absorption into Israeli life.

In this fashion it is possible to understand the responses to the events of Wadi Salib as expression of another aspect of the long ongoing debate regarding the cultural identities comprising Israeli society. Waves of mass immigrations raised difficult dilemmas concerning the choice between two types of absorption: absorption by means of modernizing the immigrants versus the pluralistic approach. According to the former, the gap between the Ashkenazim and Mizrachim was parallel to the gap between modernity and tradition, such that the key to actualizing the vision of integration of the diasporas depended upon a process of socialization to Western modern society. Sociologists supporting this approach believed that Mizrachim must undergo a process of re-socialization in the framework of which they would adopt patterns of the modern culture. Adopting Ashkenazi cultural pattern was viewed as a necessary condition for integrating Mizrahi immigrants in

Israeli society [15].

The pluralistic approach, on the other hand, recognizes the existence of groups distinguishable one from the other on the basis of their cultures, and who fight one another for dominance in fashioning the nature of society. Mass immigration in the 1950s, Samoocha [15] argued, did not threaten Ashkenazi domination because the Mizrachim were less educated and had few connections in the political establishment. The establishment declared that it had a policy of integrating the Diaspora populations, but in fact it acted out of paternalism.

Educators, sociologists and psychologists, among them Ernest Simone, Natan Rotenstreich, Karl Frankenstein and Joseph Ben David, were asked about the issue of the immigrants and their culture. All four agreed that if it was possible to provide the immigrants with European cultural values, only then will the differences between the recent and more veteran immigrants become blurred: “...we must bring the Mizrahi immigrants closer to the concepts of the veteran settlement that is basically Western...” (*Haaretz*, 22 July 1959).

B. Societal Level Explanations

Another trend concerning how the riots and the background to their outburst were analyzed found expression in the attempt to present the problem as a product of failed social and financial policy. However, the focus was not only on material poverty but on spiritual poverty as well. We will look at each of these separately.

1. Material Poverty

Opposition figures were of the opinion that the riots were not criminal acts of a gang of hooligans but a “world war” fought by an oppressed population. For the purposes of presenting it as such, *Haolam Hazeq* compared the Wadi Salib disturbances to battles conducted by various groups around the world that sought to improve their lives:

“Look at the photo on the cover. What does it remind you of? A historic image from the American Revolution or capturing the Bastille or the Hungarian Revolt? No, there is no coincidental resemblance here. The picture has a tongue and it is talking” (*Haolam Hazeq*, 15 July 1959).

Later, a parallel was drawn between the various symbols and means used by the Wadi Salib protesters and those used by protesters and revolutionaries in historic events having to do with status:

“There is nothing stronger in history than the birth of a new flag. It almost always symbolizes a deep revolution ... The classic example is the birth of the red flag 167 years ago. After capturing the Bastille, Paris fell into a series of disturbances. Parliament passed a law declaring military rule when needed and determined that the red flag will be raised by the regime and will signify the periodic application of military rule... In Wadi Salib a new flag was born a month ago...” (*Haolam Hazeq*, 5 August 1959).

The participants in the disturbances were not called rioters or hooligans, but the exploited, oppressed, beaten down, and more: "...the behavior of the police in the entire episode showed once more that they stand on the side of the exploiters and against the exploited" (*Kol Haam*, 21 July 1959).

Leftwing elements that came out against the government took care to talk about active oppression. For example, a journalist for *Haolam Hazeh* wrote:

"In the regime in Israel, mass oppression of the poor is not a phenomenon that can be corrected; it is the basis of the entire regime. Since this regime is founded on distribution of wealth coming into the country from foreign sources and not resulting from local productivity, the means of distribution determine its essence. There is the problem of status that characterizes the Zionist regime only" (*Haolam Hazeh*, 5 July 1959).

Kol Haam criticized what it called the Ben Gurion administration: "...the Ben Gurion administration purposefully sows separation among workers by hierarchical discrimination according to nationality, religion, ethnic group, skin color, and by inciting one group of workers against the other" (*Kol Haam*, 12 July 1959).

While connecting the immigrants' difficulties to their culture, Mapai did not totally ignore their distress and they did associated it with the functioning of the social system. At the same time, they did not admit that the social and economic policies they managed had anything to do with immigrant distress. They viewed this as an almost natural outcome of the situation and of the complexity of the process of absorption. When Moshe Dayan had been asked about integration of the diasporas, he answered, among other things:

"...the problem of integration of the diasporas and the problem of Wadi Salib do not lend themselves to quick solutions, the answer lies in a long process of assimilation, and the resolution of educational and economic issues" (*Davar*, 7 August 1959).

2. Spiritual Poverty

The Wadi Salib disturbances served as another link in the chain of confrontations that frequently arose between the religious and secular populations in Israel. The Wadi events were presented by the religious sector as an expression of the inevitable results of the process of secularization of Israeli society. The secular camp was blamed for abandoning traditional values and direction; the absence of individual values based on tradition that could and should have directed Israeli society created a vacuum that was unable to be filled except by deviant elements, according to the religious.

It is important to remember that this period was the beginning of the second decade of the modern state, when debates about fashioning the face of Israeli society were at their peak and which intensified following the waves of mass immigration.

The religious parties saw themselves as the spiritual patron of the Mizrahi immigrants and rather than relating to the specific issues raised by the residents of Wadi Salib, they pointed to the secular population as the source of impurity. We

can identify two kinds of arguments here, one touching on the secularization of Israeli society, and the second dealing with corruption in the spiritual-cultural domain.

Hamodia, the mouthpiece of Agudat Yisrael, and *Hazofeh*, the organ of Mafdal, argued that Israeli society cannot be properly managed except according to the spirit of Halacha (Jewish Law): "...the rebels inciting did not just break windows, they broke to smithereens the fantasy that it is possible to establish a Jewish state on secular foundations". (*Hamodia*, 22 July 1959). Secularization was not perceived as a passive phenomenon, but rather, as the result of definitive and active promotion directed by the secular establishment.

The problem was not just with secular processes, something that is perceived as part of the processes of modernization occurring in Western societies in general and in Israeli society in particular, but with the intensive activities engaged in by the establishment to catalyze these processes. Therefore:

"Wadi Salim is a product of the secular administration that oppressed in the material sense and in the spiritual sense, and those who attempted to incite religious Jews on an ethnic basis found the plunderers directing their arrows against them" (*HaZofeh*, 7 August 1959).

Hamodia emphasized this point in a way that leaves no room for doubt:

"...the outbreaks that suddenly occurred arose mainly from the spiritual robbery carried out against the Mizrahi immigrants whereby the government set up a regime of anti-religious oppression aimed at undermining the spiritual base from which these Jews drew their strength for generations" (*Hamodia*, 22 July 1959).

In this context, the religious camp hurried to clarify the significance of the term, "Diaspora integration" as they perceived it. For them, the term signified Jewish brotherhood and therefore its implementation required investments in education and youth:

"Consequently, it is imperative not to ignore the reasons behind this atmosphere of bitterness and the sense of oppression among many of our fellow immigrants from Eastern countries... knowledge of the special objective reasons for their immigrating to Israel, understanding that their foundations rest mostly on two generations of pioneers from Western countries and naturally that it is not an easy process for our fellow new immigrants from Eastern countries with a different educational background to penetrate and integrate among us.... The correct approach is, therefore, integration of diasporas via Torah and tradition" (*Hazofeh*, 23 July 1959).

IV. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

Political protest and the social response to it stand at the center of any discussion about the issue of minority rights and freedom of expression. The establishment often feels threatened by the protest of groups with a different ideological orientation, and that is what determines the nature of their response; it generally focuses on the protest itself rather than the content. The current study explored this issue regarding

the nature of the response to the Wadi Salib disturbances in view of the unique traits of Israeli society at that time, mainly regarding the ideology of the ingathering of the exiles and their integration into the veteran society – something that was of major public concern in the 1950s and 1960s.

Interestingly, until then, ethnic disturbances in Israel mainly comprised violent confrontations among immigrant Mizrahi groups that had come from a variety of countries and populated neighboring farming communities or cities, but had not shown any defiance against the establishment and its policies. The Wadi Salib riots were the first protests and rallying against social policies of the Mapai government.

A survey of the responses to the Wadi Salib disturbances, as they were reported in contemporary Israeli newspapers, showed a clear parallel with social responses to ethnic disturbances in other countries. This parallel pertains mainly to the existence of a dichotomous explanation of the nature of social responses to protests as pointed out by Ross and Staines [13]. One category attributes the original act of riots to the criminal nature of the participants and the other sees the riots as an expression of systemic failure.

However, the Israeli case had another side to it that was not evident in other countries. The fact that the riots took place during a period in which Israeli society, and mainly those standing at its head, struggled with questions of cultural identity, caused the establishment to examine the events from a cultural perspective. This element was not identified in the responses to similar events outside of Israel. The debate concerning the events in Wadi Salib did not focus, therefore, only on the professionals and leaders who were supposed to have taken care of societal problems versus the association of the riots to personal or cultural factors related to the protesters; rather, the debate touched on the different symbolic universes of the players involved.

It is important to keep in mind that the protests took place during the first decade after the establishment of the modern state, a period of time that is perceived as critical for the fashioning of the social and cultural nature of the society. Resolution of the conflicting approaches – pluralism versus melting pot – was fateful. In this context, the symbolic universe can also be seen as a tool for reality testing. The symbolic universe includes values, norms, world views, myths, and lifestyles that are perceived as obvious to group members [16].

The symbolic universe is a framework for analyzing social reality. This process of reality testing helps groups holding a particular worldview to reaffirm their worldview each time anew, or in other words, groups use reality in order to repeatedly confirm their own perceptions of the world. Groups maintaining a particular worldview define as deviant other groups living alongside them but with a different culture. The deviance label arises from a definition of reality that differs from their own and from the sense of threat they thereby experience.

The various sectors of Israeli society thus used the Wadi Salib events as a tool for justifying their own worldview and the disturbances were perceived by other groups as clear proof

of the failure of the worldviews of their opponents. For example, the religious camp saw the distancing from tradition and adoption of modern ways of life as the basis for both the distress experienced by the Wadi residents and the behavior patterns they adopted to express this distress.

The idea of national unity did not generate tolerance among the different sectors of the population with unfamiliar cultural and lifestyle patterns, but in fact promoted intolerance. One of the only contributions to the sense of national responsibility was the partial recognition on the part of the authorities to the existence of problems and the relationship of these problems to the functioning of the social system. However, they related to the immigrants' difficult condition as if this phenomenon was separate from nation-building, the slow and ongoing process that would result in the end in a more unified society. For some reason, the situation was presented as the problem and not government policies. The establishment recognized the existence of difficulties within the social system but did not take responsibility for this.

In sum, then, the unique characteristics of Israeli society did not result in an entirely different framework of rhetorical and practical responses to ethnic rioting than that are familiar to us in other countries. In Israel, however, this framework incorporated unique contents, mainly those related to conflicts among the various symbolic worldviews of the different sectors of the population. Practically speaking, the different sectors of Israeli society did not moderate the mutual attacks and did not unify around finding a solution for the benefit of the immigrants. This created the impression that the Wadi Salib disturbances served as a kind of backdrop for the cultural-ideological-political debate in Israeli society, even if in fact they were a definite product of them.

Needless to say, the Wadi Salib riots and similar riots in other parts of the world remain in collective memory in terms of violence, deviance and fighting the consensus, more than in terms of oppression and distress. It is possible that the apparently unique aspect of the response to the ethnic riots seen in early Israeli society – expressions of confrontation among different symbolic worldviews – is true for other countries as well. This question has not yet been explored and perhaps the current analysis can serve as a basis for such study in the future.

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