

City of Oranges - Arabs and Jews in Jaffa by Adam LeBor.
Bloomsbury 2006.

In recent years there has been a steady flow of books about the origins of the State of Israel and their impact on the modern Middle East, especially seen from the perspective of the Palestinians rather than just the Jews.

City of Oranges rates for me as the best of those which I have read, and as fine an exposition of the reasons why the situation in Israel/Palestine is as desperate, and as consuming of so much of the world's diplomatic energies, as it is.

Taking the ancient port city of Jaffa as his microcosm, LeBor traces the story of the city in the 20th century through successive generations of 6 families, 3 Jewish and 3 Palestinian Arab, who lived there. Their changing fates, and that of the city itself, are portrayed through the events that occurred during the period, notably the Arab Revolt of 1936, the Israeli war of independence and the Palestinian *naqba*, the 'judaization of Jaffa as Tel Aviv grew and gradually swallowed the city, and the two intifadas. In the course of the story, LeBor also details the determination of the Jewish families who moved into and restored formerly Arab homes after their original occupants left, and the uneasy relationships that ensued with those who remained.

But what makes the book such a rich read, as well as a deeply depressing one, is the effect of the events on the people; good people, not all of them paragons of virtue, but good people nevertheless, trying to reconcile their lives with much bigger events, some of which changed them irrevocably. In City of Oranges there are tantalizing glimpses of what might have been if things had differently transpired, and what could still be achieved if only the two sides could make a genuine commitment to achieving lasting peace.

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