

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

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