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Edna Gorney, *Exploited and Protected: Ecofeminist Theory of Nature, Culture and Society in Israel*
(Pardes Publishing, Haifa: 2011),
146 pp. (Hebrew).

The ways we understand nature (and the world) prescribe the way we treat it, and these ways of understanding are ideological. Gorney's engrossing account deconstructs some common understandings of nature that were crucial in determining praxis in the first few decades of the Israeli state. She couples them with the dominant Zionist ideology to show how the latter shaped the former. Gorney reads into the dominant national ideology in an effort to bring to the surface marginal and alternative ways of thinking about and behaving toward nature that did not prevail.

The two parts of this book mesh the allegedly conflicting discourses and treatments of nature—exploitation and protection—into a dialectical alignment in two ways. First, exploitation and protection are seen as entangled, as two sides of the same coin—dominating nature. Second, they are seen as political acts, driven from a certain ideological foundation. Examining discourses and treatments of nature in this way allows for different kind of questions to be asked, questions about the conceptual paradigm from which actions and decisions regarding nature are being made. These questions untangle the equating of "scientific" with "objective" in pursuit of ideological underpinnings. Within this structure of argumentation, Gorney also squarely positions her own scientific gaze within the prism of ecofeminism.

In the first part of her book, Gorney insightfully analyzes and compares two narratives

of human interaction with nature as they are presented mainly by the scientific gaze of two Israeli-Jewish geographers who wrote the story of Hachula Lake, located in northern Israel. Gorney searches for their unrecognized political underpinnings. The case of Hachula Lake is uniquely fertile for unmasking rational decisions and actions and revealing their ideological base because it involved a major engineering intervention, which later had to be reverted due to its disastrous ramifications. The dominant story of the “winners”—which not only governs discussions, decisions and actions, but is also reflected in the actual space—is epitomized by the work of the geographer Yehuda Carmon, published in 1956. This was presented as a scientific and objective work and therefore superior to earlier accounts offering a different gaze, which were discredited as unobjective and unscientific. The work of Nathan Shalem published in 1935 represents the second, marginal narrative. It is characterized by sensitivity to the perspective of the “other” and by a capacity to integrate various angles—of the natives, the land and the Jewish settlers—into the Hachula story.

To account for the split that the dominant narrative presents—a split between men and women, mind and body, culture and nature, rational and irrational, settlers and natives—Gorney employs ecofeminist critique. She uncovers the connections that the dominant symbolic system generates between these dichotomies: men–mind–culture–rational–intellect–settler versus women–body–nature–irrational–lust–natives. The former connotes with modernity, the latter with the pre-modern, undeveloped and uncivilized; the former is conqueror and owner, the latter therefore should be conquered and owned.

Gorney poetically captures how actions of the modern Jewish man on nature symbolically resonate with acts of conquering the heart and body of a woman. The dominant Zionist narrative usually captures the new Jewish man as working the fields—strong, healthy and suntanned—and thus contrasting his old diasporic image. But Gorney refines this observation, suggesting that the image of the new Jewish man discloses a more complex relation with the land, as the image is constructed also upon the domestication and subservience of the land: the Jewish man as owner and ruler (indeed, the Hebrew word for “husband” implies such relations). These relations of domination to land, interwoven throughout the scientific discussions (*a la* Yehuda Carmon), led, against all odds and unambiguous warnings, to the drying out of Hachula Lake: it was “clear and solid ideology that constructed and justified the treatment of nature and of the natives and which saw in them obstacles in the way of progress that should (practically and ethically) be removed” (p. 47). This ideology enabled a reversal of the natural–artificial dichotomy: the perceived wilderness (in its negative sense of underdevelopment) of Hachula Lake was the unnatural state, while the settlers’ changing of the landscape and its usage was the natural process. In the same vein, those who objected to the development process were putting artificial

obstacles before a natural course of action. As was the case with colonialism in other parts of the world, bringing progress to the Hachula area, claims Gorney, served as a justification for the violent act of destroying nature and dispossessing the natives, displacing them and replacing them with a new landscape and population.

In the second part of her book, Gorney uses multiple sites to exemplify the political underpinning of the treatment of nature, this time by “undressing” the leading environmental organizations in Israel from their stewardship uniform and exposing their patriarchal Zionist stances. The dominant ideology that shaped historiography and powerfully enlisted scientists into its ranks, also dictated a certain perception of nature to its supposed protectors. The dominant ideology strongly associates (technological) development with progress, modernity and salvation for the Jewish people. Preserving the “underdeveloped” land clashes with national interests and is therefore perceived as no less than a betrayal. As a result, prominent environmental organizations have fully adopted and complied with the notion that controlling and developing nature is the right way of treating it, indeed, a method of saving it (either from itself or from the treatment of pre-modern natives).

Ideology is the organizing concept of Gorney’s book. Zionist ideology is central in explaining much of the maltreatment of the land and its native residents, as well as in constructing the notion of nature in the eyes of its protectors. But how did Zionist ideology work to determine our social and physical landscapes in such harmful ways, as Gorney describes? Gorney does not disclose the conceptualization of ideology that guides her analysis. In this respect, it is worthwhile to recap Marx’s conceptualization of ideology as a camera obscura. The camera is able to capture the world as it is, objectively, with all of its details. Similarly, ideology does not lie about or mask some details of reality or invent new ones. Rather, ideology is an inverted representation of reality, presenting control and oppression as freedom and liberation, exploitation as protection, artificial as natural, and destruction as progress and development. Since ideology is not pure fiction, but a distortion of reality, it is much harder to refute. Gorney does not argue with the different perceptions of nature, but rather points out the social conditions in which these perceptions were formulated, who formulated them, what were their standpoints and what allowed them to stand and look from these points and angles. These social conditions made certain perceptions and treatments of the land and the natives so prevalent that they became reality.

There is a general cross-disciplinary consensus that scientists always choose sides (as Levins and Lewontin, 1985, suggested in their comprehensive discussion of biology science). We all act within a social context and from a philosophical perspective that is inherently political. Moreover, academic and poplar discussions on Zionist historiography are about three decades old. One might then ask what is the importance of Gorney’s argument beyond applying this critique to the treatment of

nature and the fascinating story of Hachula Lake? In our era, rampant post-political claims render this critique as “old news” and a useless exercise. But I would like to suggest that the importance of this book is exactly in insisting on voicing this critique in a more militant and conflictive manner than before. Gorney boldly turns away from consensual terrains and posits conflicting narratives and agonistic notions, fixating the discussion about nature (as well as about women, natives, progress and the like) as inherently political.

Reference

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Teresa Gómez Reus and Aránzazu Usandizaga (eds.), *Inside Out: Women Negotiating, Subverting, Appropriating Public and Private Space* (Rodopi, Amsterdam/New York: 2008), 364 pp.

There is great importance in understanding the various ways in which women negotiate, subvert and appropriate public and private spheres. Grasping these ways from a historical perspective can bring new insights and evaluations on how women experience different spaces in current times. The purpose of the book under review is to challenge the dichotomy between public and private spaces and to shed light on how women, especially women writers, negotiated the boundaries that separated domestic and public spaces in the nineteenth century and up to the middle of the twentieth century.

Drawing from the pioneering work of Janet Wolff's (1985) *The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity* and from Griselda Pollock's (1988) work on impressionist women painters, *Modernity and the Space of Femininity*, this collection of essays attempts to further explore dominant definitions of modernity and gendered spaces and widen the scope of discussion on them. These explorations are crucial for understanding the exclusion of women artists from the canon of modern art, as well as for bringing them to the center of inquiry and examining the unique paths by which they tread public and private spaces. Ironically, the lack of canonical feminine art becomes an advantage when