

Book Reviews

Deborah Bernstein, *Women on the Margins: Gender and Nationalism in Mandate Tel Aviv* (Yad Ben-Zvi, Jerusalem, 2008), 322 pp. (Hebrew).

This book examines the surroundings as it proceeds along the edge, guided by logic declaring that writing on and about the margins can shed light on the emergence of social and normative boundaries—in this case, those of the Jewish nation. The margins, like the boundaries, are gender-oriented, i.e., subject to gender-based encounter for social supervision and definition. As such, the book indeed sheds light on women on the margins, but also proves highly informative about men, institutions and overall culture.

Following an enlightening introduction of the chief topics for discussion, the opening chapter describes the social order adopted (at least de facto) by Jewish society in Palestine, namely, that of the European bourgeoisie. In particular, it focuses on cultural attitudes towards women, femininity and social boundaries. The author demonstrates adoption of European bourgeois conceptions by citing a periodical popular in Tel Aviv at the time (*Nine in the Evening*). The connection between the chapter's concluding discussion of prostitution and social supervision and the preceding text appears somewhat contrived.

Chapters 2–6 focus on everyday stories. Chapter 2 sketches the boundaries of Tel Aviv, particularly those separating it from neighboring Jaffa, as well as the types of margins that characterized them, mentioning the variety of meeting places (cafés, the seaside promenade and the beach) where the social order was challenged and its constraints clarified. The author keeps us abreast of the spirit of the times, using posters and quotations from the press, literature and letters addressed to the municipality by institutions and private citizens. For example, residents of Kalisher Street (near the border with Jaffa) complained of proximity to “Arab” cafés “that embitter our lives and [disturb] our rest” (p. 57). The chapter thus maps out the chief contours of the social borders of Mandate Tel Aviv and their gender-specific, ethnic, national and geographic features.

Chapter 3 tells the story of one woman, Sarah, who filed a paternity suit at the Comrades' Courts of the Histadrut (General Federation of Labor). It details the various stages of the lawsuit, considering the social structuring thereby reflected. Sarah is described as a woman who had a child out of wedlock, with all this implies, while the defendant, Binyamin, is presented as a man who enjoys his urban-style freedom and refuses to accept responsibility. Emphasis is placed on the attitude of the court, as a social institution, to gender boundaries and functions.

While the third chapter considers the margins and their gender structuring from a highly specific point of view, Chapter 4 widens the scope somewhat and deals

with women who were abandoned for a variety of reasons, most of whom apparently suffered consequent economic and social distress and were labeled as marginal to the normative family unit. The attitude of Jewish institutions to these women is described as well. This chapter, one of the book's crowning achievements, explains how women ended up on the margins and how the mainstream exploited their status to structure social boundaries and norms. One unique feature of this chapter is its multilayered treatment of "downfall stories" (two women who were "abandoned" and one who engages in prostitution), as well as its fascinating review of the press at that time. In one instance, the author contrasts a legal description with a journalistic account of the same incident, determining that the press report is structured as a moralizing national melodrama.

The last three chapters primarily concern prostitution and social supervision thereof. Chapter 6 offers an unprecedented review of prostitution in Tel Aviv and how it differed from that of Jaffa. It delves deeply into three stories, primarily derived from legal materials, considering the difficulty of researching the topic empirically. Subsequently, it reviews the various actors in the prostitution arena, the principal venues and the division of proceeds. It also describes how social boundaries were crossed during the practice of prostitution, including meetings between groups that usually kept to themselves (Jews and Arabs, Jews and British soldiers), indicating that once the social boundary concerning prostitution has been crossed, it becomes easier to violate other social norms (p. 214). The two succeeding chapters are empirical in nature and deal with social supervision of prostitution. Chapter 7 addresses the colonial sphere, mentioning relevant legal developments and the normative transition of the British authorities from social supervision to an educational approach. Chapter 8 describes the approach of the Jewish community and its various component sectors (e.g., national-religious, military underground) towards prostitution and its role in violating national boundaries.

Most of the book thus concerns the stories of women on the margins and how they were treated by the Mandate Authorities and the Jewish national "mainstream" (including discussion of the varied groups that comprised it). This empirical mission is not at all a simple one and is approached with great caution by the author. Many women were living on the social margins in pre-state Jewish society in Palestine at that time. The variety embodied by these margins brought different ethnic groups, classes and nationalities together, including those that were "not supposed to meet" with one another. The book demonstrates that there were many factors that drove women to the margins (abandonment by men and bearing the burden of children, economic distress, social isolation). Furthermore, discussion of these margins was provoked and put forth according to the needs of the "mainstream," enabling it to redefine itself as such.

Discussion of the margins is not exhausted by treatment of gender alone. As indicated, the margins have many features—national, ethnic, class and, of course, geographic. For example, the book redraws the physical boundary between Jaffa and Tel Aviv (p. 55), but immediately explains the breadth of its margins on both sides. To the same extent, ethnic boundaries are delimited only to be opened up again, as

are national boundaries. Indeed, the principal claim of the book is that boundaries—withstanding the intentions of those who sketch them—develop in a dynamic and variable process, or, in the book's concluding remarks: "Thus, the unraveling [of the boundary] does not contradict its structuring, but is intertwined with it, with social supervision attesting to the simultaneous existence of both" (p. 299).

The book also sheds new light on Tel Aviv that is sorely lacking in research literature. It describes everyday life in Tel Aviv, comprising an admixture of promenade and sea, cafés and brothels, British officers and conservative-minded Jews. It had everything, but nothing could revoke its status as the first Hebrew city—a place in which the nation's boundaries and the extent of its openness are defined daily. Modernity was welcomed, but for Jews only (some would say for certain Jews only).

I believe that this book's significance and unique asset is its recording of social history in the full sense of the term, an approach that is lacking elsewhere regarding all the book's chief topics, i.e., Tel Aviv, women and the popular press. As such, it provides much new information about Jewish society in Mandate Palestine. The author is aware of contemporary theoretical categories but does not force them on the material. Instead, she posits a well organized but not hermetically sealed claim, addressing it with all due caution, attentiveness and empathy, in stark contrast to the dogmatism that characterizes critical sociology in Israel. For example, consider the concept of "Orientalism," that has been applied extensively in research literature of the past few decades. The term is used several times in this book as well, in the context of social discourse regarding prostitution, for example. Although the author is aware of the concept's social significance, she does not impose it on the text and in fact cites examples of other means of structuring the Jewish discourse. The book thus addresses gender, ethnicity and other categories (nomothetic) by relying entirely on stories that are targeted, local and one-time by definition (idiographic). In this book, as she calls for in several previous articles, the author has apparently succeeded in promoting a new research agenda that rejects negation of the "institutional" (i.e., top-down guidance of discussion towards predetermined categories) and begins from an entirely different point of view—that of human beings, in this case, usually women living in Mandate Palestine and coping with concrete realities. This point of view is "subversive" (p. 299) in that it does not obey top-down dictates. Research literature possesses few examples of this type of approach.

One reason for the dearth of studies involving social history is the Sisyphean difficulty posed by empirical research. This book relies on systematic reading of periodicals, a variety of archive files, legal records of various courts, as well as literature, biographies and the like. The result is the ability to experience a fledgling Tel Aviv for just a few moments—to smell the sea, to see the women in their bathing suits, to sip coffee at cafés. The book thus becomes an experience and not just a collection of knowledge.

Finally, several points still require discussion. First, the status of "class" is unclear. At times, it emerges as a chief generative force (as in the issue of

abandoned women) and at times a detailed discussion of subsistence conditions is presented, but the writer assumes intrinsically that nationalism is the chief generative force and class obviously becomes somewhat externalized in the text. For example, the discussion of abandoned women includes a subchapter concerning their distress and economic situation (p. 115), but no attention is paid to the structuring of the "free worker"—the abandoning husband/boyfriend. This subchapter is also among the first to provide an authentic look at everyday economic life, sources of income and means of subsistence. Class thus appears to be a present-but-absent category, perhaps precisely because it is so obvious to the author.

Second, although the text interweaves several categories—ethnic, geographic and the like—and covers them extensively, the author has selected the gender prism as her point of departure. This strategy leaves a fertile field for research adopting other prisms. Thus, the social history of Tel Aviv during the pre-state period remains a significant focus for future studies.

In conclusion, this book concerns the gender margins of the Jewish nation as reflected in Mandate Tel Aviv, informing us about the shaping of social norms and boundaries, the pre-state Jewish community mainstream and a variety of marginal characters. Despite the high theoretical awareness evident throughout the book, Prof. Bernstein appears to be celebrating her liberation from the fetters of sociology, enabling her to address complex issues and rescue the stories of the excluded women she studied.

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Shirin M. Rai, *Gender and the Political Economy of Development: Essays in Hope and Despair* (Polity Press, Oxford, 2002), 264 pp.

The book largely focuses on areas relating to themes on the gendered politics of development in postcolonial states through an engagement with feminist theory and politics. Rai examines the role of global institutions, nation-states and NGOs by looking at the gender implications of structural mechanisms of change. The author divides the book into two parts. The first part, presented in the first five chapters, focuses on the gendered politics of development in the postcolonial era, while the second part (Chapters 6–8) addresses how the governance of global regimes fundamentally affects the ways in which inequalities are reproduced between north and south, men and women, and among women themselves. In these latter three chapters, Rai emphasizes the gender networks that are creating new solidarities across borders of difference.

In Chapter 1, Rai emphasizes the idea of nationalism and traces the debate on the meanings attributed to development. She addresses the failure of nationalist movements to guarantee women political participation, even though women did participate in the first phase of nationalist struggles against colonialism, allowing

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