

Sandy Sufian and Mark LeVine (eds.), *Reapproaching Borders. New Perspectives on the Study of Israel-Palestine*, New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., Lanham, Boulder, 2007, pp. 324.

by *Marcella Simoni*

This edited volume fulfils the promise of the title, showing that it is possible to conduct research and analysis on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on the basis of innovative theoretical frameworks, methodology and topics of research. Every paper takes as a starting point the category of borders broadly understood: those of space and territory, language and memory, culture and ideology, the body and medicine and so on. The papers not only look at how these have been constructed and adhered to, but also considers how the ideological construction of borders finds an application in the life of individuals, and is resisted, challenged and, at times, overcome. As the editors suggest in the introduction, the word *reapproaching* is not less important than the rest of the title (p. 3): one of the strong points of this book is indeed the idea of bringing to light those ties that have united Israelis and Palestinians, and therefore the permeability and fluidity of borders. Much ink has gone into a historiography that, by looking at conflict from various traditional perspectives (diplomacy, land, nationalism, identity etc.), has in part helped consolidate the image of this conflict as natural, inevitable, self-perpetuating and as such, almost static. This volume shows that a different/new kind of historiography is possible: one that does not ignore the depth of the division(s), but that questions their immutability, and their being taken for granted. In this respect, this volume shows how the oppositional dynamics of the conflict which now permeate almost every sphere of the relations between Israelis, Palestinians and Palestinian Israelis are not inevitable but result from a sum of ideological, cultural and political constructions, whose cumulative effects have led to the present devastating stall. Moreover, most essays in this volume adopt an interdisciplinary approach across history, geography, anthropology, architecture etc., an insightful and fruitful way to open new perspectives and to liberate the analysis of the dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from binary oppositions.

The editors have divided the volume in three parts. The first part is made up of three essays that address three different dimensions of border construction and resistance in the past. Uzi Baram focuses on archaeology, and in particular on how the latest findings in the archaeology of the Ottoman Empire help “re-imagine the development of the Palestinian Arab community and its relationship with the emerging Zionist movement” (p. 5). The fascinating essay by Michelle Campos looks at the construction of borders in collective memory, and in particular at what has been erased by focusing on a narrative of

violence and conflict, and by removing examples of solidarity and sharing that existed in Ottoman and Mandatory Palestine, and later. To address this point, the A. focuses on Hebron 1929, the one place and time generally represented as imbued only with hatred, violence and conflict, from (at least) the Mandate to the present. Here, the analysis of the memoirs of Yosef Eliyahu Chelouche (a Jew resident in Hebron whose family was from Algeria and Iraq) not only reveals the intimate and close relations of an “indigenous Jew” within “the broader Palestinian community” (p. 46); the keywords are here “trust”, “generosity”, “respect” and “brotherhood”, a vocabulary that Campos claims has been purposely forgotten by privileging the language and the theme of violence as the leit motif in the history of the country (p. 50). In the final pages of her essay, Campos further extends this question in the framework of Ashkenazi-Mizrachi relations, arguing that it was indeed the process of erasure of any other narrative than that constructed by the Ashkenazi political leadership and elite that functioned as a “precondition both for collapsing Mizrachim into the broader Israeli-Jewish collective and for solidifying the border between Jews and Arabs” (p. 59). The third essay by Jeremy Forman considers the governmental attempts to redefine territorial borders between Israeli Jews and Israeli Palestinians in the first decades after statehood to “ensure the stability, security and sovereignty of Israel as a Jewish State” (p. 86). As Israeli Palestinians were perceived as a threat, a number of other means beyond the military administration (until 1966) were employed to keep them under strict control: among them, land expropriations, repression, violence and, at a local level, attempts to create municipal coalitions that could be manoeuvred by the government. The case study presented in this essay is that of Nazareth, where the largest part of Israel’s Palestinian citizens lived in 1956, and where such political and electoral manoeuvring failed. It was in this context that the Israeli authorities tried to establish a Jewish majority in the area through the construction of Nazeret Illit (Upper Nazareth). As Forman writes following the work of geographer Oren Yiftachel, the establishment and development of Nazeret Illit showed how Israeli spatial planning in Galilee in this period aimed at controlling the Arab population and at preventing it from threatening Jewish settlement, state sovereignty and territorial integrity (p. 86).

The second part of this volume is made up of five essays. The first three deal with very different aspects of defining and challenging borders through the body, medicine and health. Sandy Sufian writes about the endeavour of creating a Hebrew medical terminology as a way to create a Hebrew national medicine during the British Mandate, about the ways it was helped by the US-based Jewish Diaspora (the Hadassah Medical Organization and various professional associations), the press (health columns in the papers and medical journals in Palestine) and how this

collective effort was challenged by Palestinian Arab physicians who were also striving to create an Arabic medical terminology with the same means (professional associations and specialized literature). The essay by Nadav Davidovich, Rhona Seidelman and Shifra Shvarts on medicine, public health and mass immigration to Israel in the 1950s presents some new evidence of government policies (mass vaccination and ringworm mass irradiation) towards new Jewish immigrants from Arab countries and Holocaust survivors; the piece also discusses the concepts underlying these practices, i.e. how the immigrant body represents one of the sites where the borders of the healthy and unhealthy, of self and other and of citizen and immigrant, are negotiated. While the case studies used to substantiate the claims of this essay are new to the reviewer, large part of its contextualization (Sha'ar Alyia and selective immigration) has been discussed in previous literature, much of it by at least two of the authors themselves. The third essay of this section, by Sarah S. Willen, deals with the immigrant versus citizen dichotomy; rather than focusing on Jewish immigrants, the A. looks at the more recent phenomenon of non-Jewish labour migration in Israel (Filipino, Ghanaian and Nigerian) and their access to health care, and especially reproductive health care. Part of the essay focuses on the work (and on the A.'s own voluntary work) at the "Physicians for Human Rights Israel" clinic in south Tel Aviv, and therefore on the difference that an NGO voluntary clinic can make in contexts where the border between the status of legal and illegal resident is very thin (for example in the case of children of illegal immigrant couples born in Israel); it is important to note that the A.'s analysis is not detached from a contextualization of this problem in the broader Israeli-Palestinian conflict: as she points out, on the one hand the introduction of labour migrants in the Israeli menial job market at end of the 1980s signalled to Palestinians that Israel "could manage just fine" without them (p. 152); on the other, the deportation of many of these illegal migrants and Israel's reduced availability to receive/keep an immigration that could threaten the Jewish character of the State shows the length to which Israel is ready to go to protect what it defines as state security through practices that would be deemed illegal if directed at Israeli Jewish citizens, something to be found also in the realm of the occupation (p. 154). The following essay by Daniel Monterescu discusses the crumbling patriarchy among the Palestinian families of Jaffa, the town where the boundaries between Arabs and Jews are marked and at the same time continuously re-negotiated. To what extent does the customs and laws of the neighbouring Jewish society challenge and change the patriarchy of the Palestinian Jaffan families? To what extent does it erode the male dominance within them, marriage customs, honour killing? Does all this result in an improvement of women's status? And most of all, how is the identity of the Palestinian male from Jaffa shaped by his belonging to - and being - a cultural and a national

minority? The last essay of this section by Samer Alatout discusses the construction of the discourse on water scarcity in Israel, placing its development in post-1948 Israel when it served the purpose of centralizing water agencies by the government, so as to better control resources, their allocation and exploitation. This essay shows how the availability of water was constructed as scarce or abundant in the Zionist political rhetoric according to political needs: for instance the A. analyses how, during the mandatory period, Zionist institutions used the claim of a country abundant with water to convince the British authorities to allow larger number of Jews into the country according to the principle of the country's economic absorptive capacity which regulated immigration quotas at the time.

The third and last section is made up of four essays. Moussa Abou Ramadan looks at the relationship between Sharia courts in Israel and the State and at how the former have constructed a discourse of theological, legal and epistemological separation between religious and secular law (p. 282), in itself a paradox in a country like Israel where the borders between secular and religious law are particularly fluid. The other three essays analyze the relationship between the construction of space and citizenship, and therefore the different borders that include and/or exclude population groups or families and individuals in different urban spaces. Alona Nitzan-Shiftan opens the series with a paper on the role of architecture in shaping Israel's landscape and national perceptions immediately after 1967. In particular, the A. discusses how Israeli architects adopted a style inspired to local (i.e. Palestinian) architecture to construct some of the new areas of post-1967 united, annexed and enlarged Jerusalem; this is the case of the neighbourhood of Gilo for example, in a paradoxical re-appropriation of a Palestinian style meant to familiarize Jews with the newly acquired/occupied territories. Thomas Abowd follows this topic up with a very interesting essay on 1948 memorial sites in Jerusalem, conceptualized here as one of the settings for the exercise of colonial rule. The analysis is conducted through the story of a house, originally designed, built and owned by the Baramki family before 1948, whose members fled for what they believed would be a short time. The history of the Baramki property shows how a landmark in the Palestinian urban space could, in time, be turned into a site for the Israeli narrative of the same events that caused their owner to flee. At the end of the war, the house stood on the edge of the frontier between the Israeli- and Jordanian-ruled parts of the city, and was turned into an Israeli army post (the Turjeman Post) and therefore passed in the hands of the military administration; its former owners were now in the eastern part of the city and corresponded very well to the administrative category of "present absentee" (internally displaced) which allowed thousand of Palestinian properties to be administered (i.e. incorporated) by the "custodian of absentee property" established by the 1950

homonymous law. The city was suddenly re-unified in 1967, and in the 1980s the former Baramki house and former Tourjeman Post was re-shaped to become a museum “dedicated to the theme: Jerusalem – A divided City Reunited” (p. 255). The history of the Baramki property can possibly be compared with the well-known history of another luxurious house in Jerusalem, Villa Salameh, now the Belgian consular residence, but what gives a new perspective to this essay is the possibility to hear the voices of the former owners and to (partially) experience their sense of violation at the transformation of their house, and the appropriation of their memory. Finally, Mark LeVine looks again at the permeability of borders between Jaffa and Tel Aviv, although in a different way than Willen and Monterescu. His focus is on how “architecture and urban planning were reflected in, and had a mutual influence upon, the cultural production and the material relations” between Palestinian and Jewish Israelis on the ground (p. 287). Central to this paper is the construction of the discourse on modernity in the Zionist rhetoric, in which Tel Aviv (as the first Jewish city, and thus as the site of the nation) emerges “out of the sands”, while Jaffa remains the embodiment of the primitive and lawless. While the borders were thus very clear in this representation – taken up and nurtured in the literatures of both national movements – these were continuously re-negotiated in the world of labour.

The internal coherence of this volume is not perfect (as it can hardly ever be with collective books) but the overall impression upon closing this book is that there exists the possibility of analysing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a way that deeply challenges and overcomes much historiography based on ideological approaches, one which uses an interdisciplinary method to address the complexity of factors that converge in what we call “the Israeli-Palestinian conflict”. And while almost each of the contributors has published one or more volumes on his/her own topic of research, the collection of these twelve essays represents a worthy contribution to a new way of writing about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, i.e. one that looks at nuances, highlights encounters, deconstructs enmity and considers identity as a process in the making. In this respect, this book is part of an effort to change the representation of the conflict and thus, in due time, the conflict too.

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