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Marcelo Svirsky, *After Israel: Towards Cultural Transformation*, Zed Books, 2014, xii + 241 pp., \$29.95 US (pbk), ISBN 9781780326122.

After Israel provides a courageous, timely, and critical engagement with Israel's core Zionist tenets and principles at a time when the debates surrounding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the proposed political solutions seem to lack creativity and imagination. The critique takes the form of a feminist exploration of "*how Jewish-Israelis become Zionist subjects*" (xi, author's emphasis). It is formulated explicitly to provide the impetus for a new cultural and political project in Israel that could "mark a new beginning" (x), beyond Zionism and its gendered, military-oriented, "Jewish exclusivist" (ix) project. For the author, *after Israel* is thus a *moment* to come when today's enemies—Israelis and Palestinians—"will be invested in constructing their shared life away from the assumptions that Zionism has forced on the region" (x).

Marcelo Svirsky insists on the importance of the "cultural" aspect. The argument here is that no political and/or institutional solution alone will provide enough momentum to achieve peace. In that sense, *After Israel* also provides a powerful critique of the current debates in International Studies, Political Science, and Middle East Studies, which still revolve around the one-state/two-state solutions, arrangements, and various institutional frameworks of inclusion/exclusion, and partitioning. In short, Svirsky argues that there is simply no point in trying to fix and rescue the current Zionist project that defines Israel as a "Jewish and Democratic State." Peace does not come with sovereignty and border agreements, but with a deep and radical transformation of habits, affects, attitudes, modes of being, identities, and dispositions. The "after Israel" in question also takes the form of a *movement* transcending Zionism and current Jewish-Israeli way of life (xii) and towards radically new sensibilities. *After Israel* is a verb phrase that refers to the disengagement from the practices that blur "the Zionist/Jewish distinction" (8). Svirsky's project, then, is about rescuing Jewishness from the Zionist monopoly and to further open it up to new ways of being Jewish with the Other.

The monograph is the combination of (auto-)ethnographic fieldwork in Israel conducted by Svirsky, a former Israeli high school teacher and now International Studies scholar at the University of Wollongong, and close analysis of official documents, educational policies and textbooks, cultural and political events, and a review of theoretical literature. The ethnographic part encompasses interviews with members of Israeli NGOs—*Breaking the Silence*, the *Freedom Theatre*, *New Profile*, and *Zochrot*—and a significant amount of auto-

ethnographic observations and experiences. It is this latter part of the “fieldwork” that leaves the most appreciable mark in this book. The textual and discursive analyses and the literature review include a significant amount of texts published exclusively in Hebrew and will therefore be of significant interest to the scholars interested in studying Israel but who do not read the language.

In the introduction Svirsky sets out the theoretical framework while also describing some of the major Israeli cultural issues that he intends to address in the book, including: the status of the *Mizrahim* (Jews from Middle Eastern or Arab countries) as second-class citizens, racism (against *Mizrahim*, Ethiopian Jews, and the Palestinians), militarism, the status of the Holocaust in present day Israel, gender issues and feminism, and most importantly, Zionism. The analyses of these phenomena is theoretically informed by the works of philosophers such as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, and Giorgio Agamben among others. As Eyal Weizman has already pointed out, some Israeli military thinkers—such as Shimon Naveh—have used the works and concepts of Deleuze and Guattari for their own (problematic) ends.¹ Indeed, the fact that such critical thinkers’ works could be mobilized for such violent ends only makes the arrival of *After Israel* more urgent, necessary, and timely. Marcelo Svirsky also achieves something difficult: his case studies are neither colonized nor cluttered by the numerous philosophical concepts he employs. As such, the book remains very accessible to the uninitiated and addresses itself to the general public.

Svirsky employs many of Deleuze and Guattari’s key concepts, such as: “lines of flight,” “affect,” “subjectivation,” “existential territories,” “axiomatic,” and “organs.” Most of these concepts clearly serve to establish the theoretical and practical link between everyday life (often thought of as the “cultural”) and the political. In a sense, they are tools to (re)entangle the cultural with the political. Or to put it differently, these concepts are useful to show how the “*macropolitical*”—that is the way the state governs—is vastly conditioned by the “*micropolitical*”—which, in the context of Israel, concerns the way individuals and groups are affected by the Zionist axiomatic “such that they participate in a culture of feelings or sensibilities and subsequently engage in discursive encounters about what”² it means to be Jewish or Israeli. Behind Israeli acts of governance there is a Zionist “governmentality.”³

Another important concept he uses—this one coming from Giorgio Agamben—is “the act of profanation.”⁴ Acts of profanation are for Agamben acts of resistance that call into question and challenge the stability of the socially constructed—yet now commonsensical—difference(s) that mark identity and, ultimately, enmity (such as “Arab vs. Jew,” for instance). For instance, the hyphenated term “Arab-Jew” is considered to be an oxymoron in Israel. Yet, the majority of Jewish-Israelis are from Arab countries (*Mizrahim*). Hence, for a Jewish-Israeli to reaffirm her Arab cultural identity⁵ and heritage so as to destabilize the Zionist Eurocentric construction of Israeli-ness could constitute an act of profanation. Indeed, if the present book aims at questioning how Israeli Jews become Zionist subjects, the concept of profanation mobilized here also serves to illustrate some “lines of flights” available to Jewish-Israelis (27-28); that is, how these Jewish-Israelis may destabilize the dominant

¹ Eyal Weizman, *Hollow Land: Israel’s Architecture of Occupation* (New York: Verso, 2007).

² Michael J. Shapiro, “The Micropolitics of Justice: Language, Sense and Space,” *Law, Culture, and the Humanities*, Vol. 8, No. 3 (2011): 467.

³ Michel Foucault, *Security, Territory, Population: Lectures at the College de France, 1977-1978*, (New York: Picador, 2004), 108.

⁴ Giorgio Agamben, *Profanations* (New York: Zone Books, 2007).

⁵ See for instance Ella Shohat, “Mizrahim in Israel: Zionism from the Standpoint of Its Jewish Victims,” *Social Text*, Fall 1988, 1-35.

Zionist conception of subjectivity. In other words, acts of profanation are actions that disentangle Zionism and Jewishness. Such acts, the author explains, can take the form of *substitution* (24), *simulation* (26), *active refusal* and *excess* (27).

All these concepts are better grasped when one moves to the following chapters. Each of them mobilizes a particular Jewish-Israeli subject position where the Zionist *dispositif*⁶ ventriloquizes itself. Each of the chapters also offers examples of acts of profanation that some Israelis perform.

Chapter 1, “The Hiker,” illustrates how hiking, what seems to most of us a benign apolitical activity, is in fact “shaped as a strategic political practice that converts every encounter with nature [and the land] into an occasion to immerse participants’ bodies in selective” (17) Zionist biblical and nationalist myths and narratives that erase the recent and contemporary presence of “Arab” or Palestinian bodies and villages. The action of hiking the Zionist way is akin to a military practice that serves to train bodies, survey and conquer the land, and create close-knit bounds within a unit or platoon. In a sense, just like the army experience for the Jewish-Israeli teenager entering boot camp, hiking is a central part of the nation-building process, bonding Jewish immigrants and communities from different backgrounds together. As the author explains, hiking holds a quasi-mythological status in the Israel. Hence, it has been part of the mandatory school program since early in the twentieth century—before the creation of the State of Israel—through the discipline of *Yediat ha-Aretz* (knowledge of the land) (50). Having been a high school teacher and professor teaching education at the college level in Haifa, the author’s knowledge is here enriched by his own experiences and time spent on the trails of the country with his pupils. This auto-ethnographic knowledge is combined with the analysis of handbooks distributed for the high school program. What becomes clear by the end of the chapter is that the practice of hiking is part of the state’s pedagogy with the intention of shaping Zionist *bodies* and *minds*. Hiking the trails, as part of the school curriculum, serves to train the teenagers’ bodies and prepare them for their military training to come (mandatory in Israel for both men and women). It establishes a direct link with their presence on the land and the presence of their pioneering ancestors who conquered the land and fought the “Arabs.” In that sense, the experience works not only on the *corporeal* level but also on the mind of the pupils at the *emotional* and *affective* levels (61).

Yet, the author also points to various practices of “profanation” that Jewish-Israelis have enacted in order to counter the Zionist appropriation of *tiyul* (hiking). One example is the alternative guided tours the Israeli NGO Zochrot conducts, taking hikers to destroyed Palestinian villages in order to reinscribe the *Nakba* into the Israeli narrative and imaginary. Zochrot also produced a Hebrew-Arabic guidebook, *Once Upon the Land*, that charts eighteen routes through destroyed Palestinian villages and neighborhoods situated within Israeli national parks and recreational areas.

Chapter 2, “The Teacher,” maps the extensive degree of integration between the Israeli educational and military *dispositif*. Here, the main argument of the chapter is that the teacher in Israel is one of the primary tools of “cultural governance,”⁷ serving “a settler society in

⁶ Here *dispositif* refers to “a thoroughly heterogeneous ensemble consisting of discourses, institutions, architectural forms, regulatory decisions, laws, administrative measures, scientific statements, philosophical, moral and philanthropic propositions.” See Michel Foucault, “The Confession of the Flesh: A Conversation,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings*, ed. C. Gordon (New York: Pantheon, 1980), 194.

⁷ I borrow this concept from Michael J. Shapiro, *Methods and Nations: Cultural Governance and the Indigenous Subject* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

arms” (17). The Israeli teachers’ Zionist pedagogical arm is three-pronged. First, the Zionist discourse is constantly articulated during curricular and extracurricular activities. Second, they work with army personnel and institutions to establish a direct link between the education of the pupils and the formation of good recruits for the IDF. And thirdly, this integration is achieved thanks to teaching methods and materials “that internalises Israeli ethnocracy as democracy” (18).

This is truly a fascinating chapter. Svirsky’s rich experience as an educator and education specialist provides astonishing insights into the micropolitics of everyday life in Israel. One case Svirsky draws from, for instance, is the citizenship education (*Ezrachut*) syllabus and handbook called *To Be Citizens*. A second case he analyzes is the *Gadna*—the “compulsory paramilitary training that serves as part of the preparatory programme for mandatory military service in Israel” (97). It seeks to prepare eleventh graders “for army life by means of a five-day training programme” at IDF specialist military bases (97). This activity is part of a larger program coordinated in conjunction by the Ministry of Education, the IDF, and the Ministry of Defense. The entire operation is outlined in an official document entitled, *Activity Agreement IDF Preparatory Programme* (100). It is in fact teachers who implement the program, incentivized with a package of financial rewards established by the Israeli Ministry of Education; they offer bonuses to teachers “based on the percentage of [their] students who perform military or civilian national service” (91).

Just like the preceding chapter, the author here also offers examples of how Jewish-Israelis profane the Zionist military-educational assemblage. For instance, the NGO Zochrot designed and published a book called, *Study Guide: How do we say Nakba in Hebrew?* It is a tool for teachers who want to integrate lessons about the *Nakba* into their curriculum and how to avoid being reprimanded by the Ministry of Education as mandated by the *Nakba Law* (2011)—which threatens to impose financial sanctions on state-funded institutions that mark “Israeli Independence day in terms of mourning” (122). These first two chapters form the strongest part of the book for they are quite effective at supporting its principal argument.

Chapter 3, “The Parent,” addresses the issue of how *modern* Israeli society “comes to socially reward progenitors for encouraging and demanding their sons and daughters to become soldiers in an army that risks their lives and trains them to actively deprive others of life” (18). Drawing from the Jewish mythology of Abraham—who was ready to sacrifice his son for God—Svirsky calls this practice “Abrahamic parenthood.” Only here the state and Zionism replace God.

What this chapter does best is highlight the complexity of the issue surrounding the decision to join—or refusing to join—the army. It exposes the difficult burden Israeli society and state institutions put on parents who might otherwise be supportive of their children who opt out of mandatory military service. That is, because military experience is a prerequisite in the socialization of young Israelis—to get a decent job in the private or public sector for instance—loving and protective parents rarely support a child’s refusal of military service—a decision that carries a penalty of imprisonment and long-term social and economic marginalization.

One of the most interesting theoretical arguments in this chapter is the Althusserian claim that the distinction between the public and the private is a means by which hegemony (here Zionism) exercises its authority (144). Indeed, in light of this chapter, the “Abrahamic parent” appears as an important cog in the complex Zionist military assemblage. Yet, the author also claims, by the end of the chapter, that as difficult and challenging as it may be, it “*has become possible for Jewish-Israelis not to perform [parenthood] in Zionist ways?*” (172, author’s emphasis).

Chapter 4, “The Voter,” draws from Ariella Azoulay and Adi Ophir’s argument that the state of Israel governs over 15 million individuals divided into four groups with various rights and subject positions. They are the Jewish-Israelis, the Palestinian citizens of Israel, the Palestinians living in the Occupied Territories, and the Palestinian refugees of 1948. Although all of them are being governed in one way or another by the Israeli state, not all of them may claim rights or partake in this governance (176). Hence Svirksy best summarizes his argument here when he writes:

Voters—Jews and Palestinians alike—endorse the Israeli political system by default and by proxy, vitalising the regime that produces the four national projects. Through their participation they reinforce Israel’s democratic image [...] even though such separation [of Israel governed populations] entails the continuation of the Zionist exclusivist project in the region. (187)

The solution proposed here is thus to extend the Popular Committee for Boycotting the Knesset Elections’ call to all members of Israeli society. This joint boycott would kill two birds with one stone in that it would not only delegitimize the current apartheid-like system, but also create a common ground shared by Israeli-Palestinian and Jewish-Israelis (197).

The principal strength of this book is how it maps the complexity of the Israeli-Zionist *dispositif*—an assemblage that encompasses affects, modes of beings, discourse, and institutions—and the *resonance* effects produced by each of its parts. It does so by exploring the political within the cultural—that is, beyond the state’s official institution and apparatuses. Also, the book is openly a bold cultural and political statement that seeks to voice a daring alternative to the debate about the future of Zionism in Israel.

Although *After Israel* is a culturally informed political critique, its author does not draw from various forms of cultural productions such as films, novels, TV shows, or other forms of aesthetic production. For instance, one wonders why he did not discuss David Grossman’s novel *To the End of the Land* in the chapter, “The Hiker,” or Ari Folman’s film *Waltz with Bashir* when the question of memory of the Holocaust surfaces. Encounters with aesthetic forms such as these two examples are often apposite and useful in illustrating the complexity of a subject position (such as left-wing Zionists in the case of Grossman).

Moreover, in Chapter 3, “The Parent,” the author makes no mention of the thousands of non-Israeli Jews (from the US, Canada, UK, Netherlands, Australia, France, and elsewhere) who have accepted that their sons and daughters join the IDF—that is, the army of a foreign country. Adding a discussion of the latter would have enriched the debate about Jewish identity, Zionism, and militarism. Finally, the format of the chapters—composed of “vignettes” or sections that sometimes do not follow each other fluidly leaving the reader to connect the dots—might contribute to making this book a little difficult to read for those who know little about Israel and Zionism. That being said, these are all very minor criticisms, for this is a book that deserves to be read by all those who are interested in Israeli politics and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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