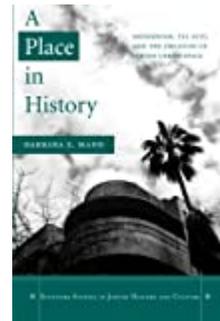




Barbara E. Mann. *A Place in History: Modernism, Tel Aviv, and the Creation of Jewish Urban Space.* Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006. 336 S. \$55.00 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-8047-5018-9; \$22.95 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8047-5019-6.



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Tel Aviv as Contested Space

A Place in History: Modernism, Tel Aviv, and the Creation of Jewish Urban Space is an important contribution to the growing body of knowledge about Israeli public space in general and urban space in particular. The book, which has a strong emphasis on the analysis of representations of the spatial history of Tel Aviv, is structured in a very innovative manner. It is not simply a chronological narrative of the production of such space. Rather, it explores the archeological strata of knowledge production that is the basis for the shaping of Tel Aviv's modern urban landscape. Hence, each chapter employs a diverse body of sources from the realm of cultural production, e.g., painting, photography, and literature, to make linkages between past and present events.

Another significant feature of Mann's book lies in her chosen methodology, an analysis of spaces like the Trumpeldor old cemetery, Rothschild Boulevard, and Rabin Square, to cite but a few, as specific sites through which the city narrates its contested history and constructs, both tangibly and symbolically, its identity. Additionally, *A Place in History*, in contrast with many other studies of urban culture, is beautifully written, thus mak-

ing the author's arguments clear and sharp, as well as avoiding the jargonistic trap that exemplifies postmodern thinking and writing.

Theoretically speaking, Mann relies on the seminal work of Henri Lefebvre as a framework for her analytical focus on "spaces of representations," i.e., cultural representations of art (pp. 2-3) and the necessary contextualization of them within a wider historical, political, and spatial perspective. However, I would suggest an additional reading of Lefebvre that emphasizes the simultaneous production of space (i.e., the representations of space and spaces of representation), an idea that paved the road for a new understanding of the way in which power relations affect the production of space. This approach focuses attention not just on formal mechanisms and institutions that have the power to shape space (such as policymakers, planners, etc.). Rather, it also refers to "bottom-up" initiatives of excluded groups and individuals that have the potential to transform reality—an additional perspective on Tel Aviv's space production that is absent from this book.[1]

But this book's most important theoretical contribu-

tion lies in its critical examination of the western-modern orientation of Tel Aviv, “the first Hebraic city,” vis-À-vis its population and a cultural environment, many aspects of which represent material culture that does not comply with hegemonic Zionist interests. Mann suggests that, in the Israeli context, disavowing the Diaspora past is an element in implementing the regime of modernity that has been manifested in the planning, architecture, and landscaping of the city. Moreover, Mann points to the way in which the formulation of cultural identity through the repudiation of the Diaspora means the repudiation of memory, both Jewish and Palestinian, an idea that appeared previously in the work of Raz-Karkotzkin.[2] This critical idea, which has subversive potential, is present in the final chapter’s analysis of Rabin Square and the remains of the Palestinian village of Summayl; two neighboring sites that embody the tension at the core of the city’s struggle for identity.

To sum up, Barbara Mann’s *A Place in History: Modernism, Tel Aviv, and the Creation of Jewish Urban Space* is highly recommended to those who seek a theoretical per-

spective on Israeli urbanism, or are interested in its ideological roots or its spatial transformations. Though the book focuses on Tel Aviv, in many ways it conveys the broader story of Israeli territorialization. Mann’s book could also serve visitors as an excellent critical guide to the city’s modern geography and history.

Notes

[1]. Such alternative perspectives include Tel Aviv as a “Black City” and Tel Aviv as a “non-Jewish Workers city.” For the former, see Sharon Rotbard, *White City, Black City* (Tel Aviv: Bavel Books, 2005) (Hebrew); for the latter, see Tovi Fenster and Haim Yacobi, “Whose City Is It? On Urban Planning and Local Knowledge in Globalizing Tel Aviv-Jaffa,” *Planning Theory and Practice* 6, no. 2 (2005): 191-211.

[2]. Amnon Raz-Karkotzkin, “Exile within Sovereignty: Towards a Critique of the “Negation of Exile“ in Israeli Culture,” *Theory and Criticism* 4 (1993): 23-56 (Hebrew).

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