

Sharri Plonski, *Palestinian Citizens of Israel: Power, Resistance and the Struggle for Space*, London: I.B.Tauris, 2017. ISBN: 9781784536565 (cloth)

At a moment when Israeli Defense Forces snipers are shooting dozens of Gazans a day at the Gazan separation barrier, it can be easy to forget the pervasive, yet less “spectacular” violence used against Palestinian citizens of Israel, as well as the myriad forms of resistance Palestinian citizens of Israel engage in to continue their struggle for recognition and space in the Israeli state. Indeed, in the scholarly and popular literature on Israel/Palestine, there is significantly less attention to Palestinian citizens of Israel – sometimes making it seem as though power/resistance is limited to the occupied Palestinian territories of the West Bank and Gaza. Sharri Plonski’s book, *Palestinian Citizens of Israel: Power, Resistance and the Struggle for Space*, illuminates Palestinian strategies of resistance within the 1948 Israeli borders. She expertly uses Palestinian struggle to demonstrate how Israeli tactics of closure, administrative discrimination, racialized planning, and memory/forgetting function to squeeze Palestinians and Palestinianess out of Israeli space. In this sense, she takes seriously Foucault’s call to understand the functionings of power by studying responses to power.

The book is divided into three main parts. The first is an introduction to thinking about how to study power and resistance *spatially*. The second (making up the bulk of the book) uses years of ethnographic field work to make a detailed analysis of three regions in Israel where Palestinian resistance is differently deployed to meet the different deployments of Israeli power – the point here is that we should not expect Palestinian resistance to function in the same ways between Jaffa, the Galilee and the Naqab. The final part of the book considers power/resistance in the spatiality of borders and draws the cases together to articulate a theory of how spaces are (re)articulated.

The book draws theory and evidence together deftly to confront the reader with the racialized planning and administration of Palestinian space in Israel through a superbly researched engagement with how Palestinians articulate and enact resistance.

Israeli planning and administration of Palestinian space frequently seeks to render it blank – outside of the governing logic applied to Jewish space, set apart by its absence of service delivery, dis-entangled from history, and, in the cases of Jaffa and the Negev, as free of Palestinians as possible. In turn, the Palestinian response is characterized by strategies of resistance that are engaged to make this “blank” space livable, vibrant, visible (or, in some cases, hidden), Palestinian, and, mostly, a counter to the colonizing logics of the state. To do so, Palestinians engage in tactics that include (but are by no means limited to) replacing “official” Hebrew place names with the Arabic, rebuilding demolished houses, occupying buildings and spaces, withdrawing from Jewish spaces, and taking tourists on “alternative” tours as a way of sharing knowledge of Palestinian presence and struggle.

These are tactics deployed against Israeli strategies of rendering spaces as blank, which include discriminatory planning (such as refusing to grant permits and curtailing natural growth of Palestinian municipalities), erasure from maps, history, and street names, eviction and demolition, exclusion from service provision, and resettlement/containment. In her analysis, Plonski demonstrates how the specificity of state tactics matter for the specificity of resistances against them.

Plonski draws from theories of spatiality and power/resistance (Gramsci, Foucault, Lefebvre) to unpack her rich empirical data, and in doing so she contributes to other research that seeks to understand spatiality and power in Israel/Palestine, including, but not limited to, McGahern (2017), Parsons and Salter (2008), Rijke and Minca (2018), Ryan (2017), Weizman (2007), Yiftachel (2002) and Zureik et al. (2011).

One primary added value of Plonski’s analysis is that her meticulous and rigorous research into three areas where Palestinian citizens of Israel live and struggle gives us a nuanced understanding of the commonalities and differences in the experiences of Palestinians in these places. In Jaffa, the struggle is situated in urban spaces, where gentrification and erasure threaten to displace the few remaining Palestinians while simultaneously denying the Palestinian history of the city. In turn,

Palestinian activists respond with tactics that confront economic exclusion and gentrification by occupying buildings as a means of making demands for more affordable housing and keeping Palestinians living within the city limits. They also respond to tactics to erase Palestinian history by taking tourists on alternative tours of Jaffa neighborhoods and making maps that reclaim and reassert a Palestinian presence in the city. In Jaffa, Plonski argues,

an assemblage of social-spatial relations mediate the production of ‘ordinary resistance’ (that which reproduces the hegemonic order) and ‘extraordinary resistance’ (that which transgresses, disrupts and transforms the hegemonic order). At the same time, resistance is not a single act. It is constituted in a repertoire of actions. (p.85)

In contrast, in the Galilee region, Israeli state tactics are aimed at diminishing Palestinian expansion, and countering Palestinian demographic power through the discriminatory drawing of municipal boundaries, maps and districts. Here, Palestinian resistance must take a different form – and thus resistance in the Galilee frequently takes the form of Palestinian withdrawal from Jewish spaces (shops, restaurants, bars) in favor of creating more vibrant Palestinian economic and cultural spaces. In the spaces of Palestinian resistance in the Galilee, Plonksi reminds us that “resistance is not only counted in extraordinary disruptions, but in its small, incremental moments: part of a structure, not an event” (p.142). Plonksi points out that one of the challenges in organizing resistance in the Galilee is that because it is a space inhabited by so many Palestinians and because it has historically been the center of Palestinian political power in Israel, it becomes more difficult to galvanize people to action. However, activists have increasingly been connecting the Palestinian struggle for space in the Galilee with the more overt and urgent struggles for space in the Naqab.

Since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, Bedouins, particularly those living the Naqab (Negev) have presented a “problem” for the Israeli state. Efforts have been made to assert territorial and demographic control over the Bedouin population, resulting in decades of displacement, disposition and radical changes to traditional Bedouin lifestyle and culture. Since 2011, the Praver Plan has been proposed as a solution to the Bedouin “problem” – proposing a demarcated settlement for Bedouins in exchange for Bedouin renouncement of territorial claims in the rest of the Naqab. The plan is currently being implemented on an *ad hoc* basis, but if fully carried out Praver would result in further large-scale displacement and demolition of existing villages, and while billed as a resolution for ownership claims and compensation, the processes for making compensation claims will exclude many families. Previous iterations of Bedouin resistance have been focused on survival outside of the legibility and capture of state power, reflecting what Yiftachel (2009) has called “gray space”. For Plonksi, the “Bedouins use their position in non-space to engage the internal borders, while the state continues to isolate, delegitimise and remove that which breaches its hegemony over ‘dead’ and ‘living’ spaces” (p.179). While Bedouins in the Naqab have been consistently engaged in resistance to attempts by the Israeli state to remove, relocate and erase them since 1948, the passing of the Praver Plan has done two things to increase Palestinian resistance. Firstly, different Bedouin communities in the Naqab are coordinating their struggles, and secondly, the struggle is being popularized and publicized by Palestinians and Israelis outside of the Naqab.

Plonksi draws the three regional Palestinian spaces together in the conclusion, where she analyses the relevance of the particularity of these spaces for how we can understand the wider Israeli/Palestinian conflict and conflicts in other colonized spaces. There are two points she makes that are worth highlighting. Firstly, she reiterates how the varieties of Israeli power and Palestinian resistance should keep us attuned to how power and resistance never function in the form of binaries, but rather that the

application of power is uneven, and the enactment of resistance sometimes does not undermine hegemonic power. She writes:

Thus, resistance that activates and agitates the seam lines, working at the connections, building fissures, do [*sic*] become “extraordinary” – actions that challenge, disrupt and intervene in the normal circulation of knowledge, ideas, people and power. The power of the Zionist project is its ability to make its vision for Israel/Palestine seem normal, obvious, constant and incontestable; and resistance to it futile. In digging beneath it, in unveiling its ambiguities and unevenness, the walled, protected, permanent Zionist space unravels, offering potential new tools for tearing it down completely. (p.244)

This articulates some of the most radical potential of Plonksi’s book – for it is not only in the “mundane” spaces within its 1948 borders that Israeli power seeks to render itself “normal and obvious” but in more extraordinary and volatile spaces/moments as well, such as in the current violence at the Gazan separation barrier, or in the imprisonment of children in the West Bank. What Plonksi demonstrates is that there are myriad ways in which Palestinians are seeking to render as “abnormal” the more “mundane” practices within Israel’s 1948 borders, and how that can provide the potential to destabilize the wider Zionist project.

A second point worth highlighting is that resistance should not be seen as monolithic. A monolithic view of resistance is easier to counter with power, whereas a view that seeks to understand resistance as multiple, fluctuating, everyday, and even, at times, contradictory, more accurately reflects how resistance occurs. Such a resistance may be harder to “pin down” theoretically, but it’s also much more difficult to counter with power. Further, when the state responds to non-violent, everyday resistances, state power is more clearly exposed for what it is, and the quashing of resistance becomes harder to justify.

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