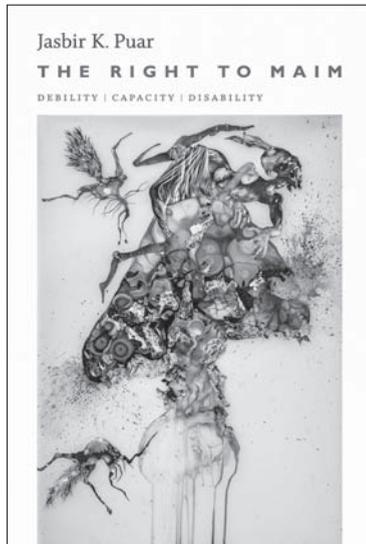




Recent Books



The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability, by Jasbir K. Puar. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017. 296 pages. \$94.95 cloth, \$26.95 paper, e-book available.

REVIEWED BY NIMROD BEN ZEEV

Jasbir K. Puar's *The Right to Maim: Debility, Capacity, Disability* illuminates the conditions that produce disability in the global south and within disenfranchised communities in the global north where four-fifths of the world's people with disabilities reside (p. xvii). At the core of this study is Puar's insistence that disability among the disenfranchised is not merely the product of a disabling event but of "the deliberate conditions of population debilitation" (p. 73), endemic to "poverty, permanent war, racism, imperialism, and colonialism" (p. 69).

Recognizing these debilitating conditions requires a new approach to biopolitics, Puar argues. Scholars, beginning with Foucault, often portray biopolitics as toggling between life and death. In contrast, Puar contends, debilitation and the production of disability can become biopolitical ends aimed at extracting value "from populations that would otherwise be disposable" (p. xviii). Incorporating notions of risk and statistical likelihood, Puar's biopolitics of debilitation challenges the notion that disability is always somehow inevitable or accidental. Rather, it shows how racialized bodies are specifically made available for injury, through labor, war, or both, in ways that are profitable to neoliberal capitalism, a fact unrecognized by dominant disability rights paradigms. This targeting for injury—and, in its most extreme articulation, targeting *to* injure—is what Puar calls the "right to maim." If the "right to kill" is the essence of the sovereign right over life, the right to maim is at the heart of the biopolitics of debilitation.

The Right to Maim covers a vast range of issues. In the introduction and first two chapters, Puar draws connections between race, neoliberalism, U.S. imperialism, queer suicide, trans becoming, and the limits of "disability discourse" exceptionalism, rights, and pride. Chapter 3 proposes a new approach to Israeli "pinkwashing" that incorporates many of the themes of the first two chapters. This means the book appeals to multiple—albeit highly specialized—readerships. However, it also

means that these chapters can be disjointed and difficult to follow without extensive familiarity with the works of the theorists that Puar references or the specialized terminology she employs. Thus, of the many readers who could potentially benefit from Puar's important claims regarding the production of debility, only a frustratingly limited number are likely to find much of the book accessible.

Chapter 4 is the book's centerpiece, from which the titular "right to maim" is derived. Here, Puar focuses on Israeli military and political policies toward Palestinians in the occupied territories, and particularly in Gaza. Since the First Intifada, those policies have been shaped by what Puar describes as an "implicit claim to the 'right to maim' and debilitate Palestinian bodies," rather than kill them—a "shoot-to-injure" policy that she compares with U.S. law enforcement's "shoot-to-kill" policy with regard to black Americans (p. 128). The author states that for Israel, the policy has proven productive both as a form of control and in sustaining claims to "a humanitarian approach to warfare" (p. 129), framed in liberal terms as less violent than shooting to kill. Puar argues that adopting "the vantage of the occupied" (p. 140) reveals how Israeli policy toward Gaza, and to a lesser extent, the West Bank, intentionally uses debilitation as an instrument of control. Importantly for Puar, Israeli use of the right to maim also depends upon the widespread belief "on both sides of the occupation" (p. 108) that death for one's country is noble, and that disability is worse than death (pp. 140–41).

The attempt to adopt "the vantage of the occupied" and to relate Israeli use of the right to maim to Palestinian (and also Israeli, albeit to a lesser extent) attitudes towards death and disability is where the limits of the author's source base are most pronounced. Palestinian NGO reports and the works of Palestinian scholars and journalists Puar utilizes are important sources; however, they offer limited support for the broader cultural claims that her argument hinges upon. To make her claim about Palestinians embracing death over disability credible, a deeper engagement with Palestinians' conceptions and experiences of disability would have been necessary.

Such an engagement could have focused on portrayals of disability and debilitation in Palestinian cultural production, of which there is no shortage, from *Men in the Sun* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1999), through *Wild Thorns* (Interlink Books, 2011), to the 2005 film *Paradise Now*, or on fieldwork of the sort Puar herself engaged in but did not incorporate, as the postscript attests. Missing, too, is a consideration of the centrality of dangerous employment (particularly in construction)—in Israel or on Israeli settlements—among West Bank Palestinians and Palestinian citizens of Israel. A noticeable omission considering Puar's emphasis on debilitating labor elsewhere.

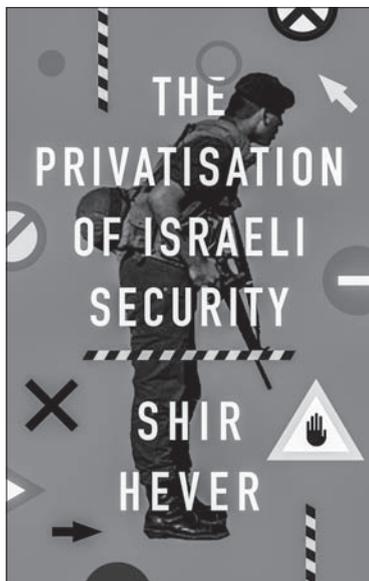
Even applied only to contemporary Gaza, Puar's claim risks obscuring more than it uncovers. Media reports about attitudes towards maiming and death among young Gazans protesting at the Israel-Gaza fence reveal considerably more complexity. Often already regarding life in Gaza as a form of death-in-life, these youth explicitly express their wish to be injured or killed, based on a variety of reasons that have little to do with notions of "noble death."^{*}

* Amira Hass, "Palestinian Protesters in Gaza: Don't Wound Us—Kill Us," *Haaretz*, 13 August 2018, <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/.premium-palestinian-protesters-in-gaza-don-t-wound-us-kill-us-1.6366805>.

These criticisms aside, Puar's larger aim of calling attention to debilitation as an instrument of exploitation and control is a crucial contribution to efforts to understand the relationships between material bodies, the state, and capitalism. This is especially true as scholarly and popular discourses on precarity focus increasingly on its white-collar, Euro-American manifestations, neglecting all the bodies that are on the line due to precarity elsewhere.

After *The Right to Maim*'s initial publication in November 2017, and again after it was granted the National Women's Studies Association Book Prize in September 2018, critics attempted to generate scandal around the book and its publisher, Duke University Press, with accusations of anti-Semitism or even blood libel. These accusations—likely promoted by those who have not read it, let alone carefully—should not be allowed to reduce it to polemic. Readers able to make their way through *The Right to Maim*'s arduous language and somewhat disjointed structure will be rewarded with new ways to think about crucial questions.

Nimrod Ben Zeev is a PhD candidate in the Department of History at the University of Pennsylvania.



The Privatisation of Israeli Security, by Shir Hever. London: Pluto Press, 2017. 256 pages. \$99.00 cloth, \$25.00 paper, \$25.00 e-book.

REVIEWED BY LYNDALL HERMAN

In *The Privatisation of Israeli Security*, Hever presents a timely and captivating argument that the Israeli government has gradually privatized significant components of state security. Over the two decades spanning 1994–2014, privatization occurred both through sale and outsourcing, as well as “by default” (p. 11), with outsourcing of various security responsibilities claiming the largest portion of the activities. Much as in his first book, *The Political Economy of Israel's Occupation* (Pluto Press, 2010), Hever draws on Max Weber and Pierre Bourdieu for most of his theoretical analysis to address the transition of military elites, from active service to the private sector, as well as their leadership

role in much of the privatization drive.

This book fits into the sub-genre of literature that addresses the Israeli occupation through the lens of political economy, continuing to build on the groundbreaking research of Sarah Roy's *The Gaza Strip: The Political Economy of De-development* (Institute for Palestine Studies, 1995) that arguably launched this approach to studying the occupation. Hever's unique contribution comes from his focus on the Israeli security establishment; here, he builds on work by Neve Gordon, Shira Havkin, and Tariq Dana, as well as Jonathan Nitzan and Shimshon Bichler's *The Global Political Economy of Israel* (Pluto Press, 2002).

The book is divided into two sections. The first, which includes chapters 1 and 2, shows the depth of Hever's research into the topic and presents an intriguing theoretical approach: differential accumulation theory, developed by Nitzan and Bichler, as a means to study the conflict within Israeli elite groups on the privatization of the Israeli security sector. In particular, while the focus is on promoting one's own elite group, "the point is not to accumulate as much capital as possible, but rather to accumulate faster than the others" (p. 4).

Hever hypothesizes that the privatization of the Israeli security sector is a by-product of a neoliberal agenda, which in his application stands for more than just "massive privatization of government assets" and is an effort to "restructure" the relations between the state and the private sectors (p. 5). The close educational, professional, and economic ties between Israel and the United States, particularly those within the security sector, are the drivers of this agenda. Hever supports this argument by elucidating how former mid- and high-ranking officers transition from government service to the private sector and then "sell back" their training as contractors and consultants with private sector companies, ostensibly to promote greater efficiency in the public sector (p. 49).

The second section of the book covers chapters 4, 5, and 6, each of which offers a series of case studies. The studies are of varying relevance, at times serving to confuse the reader more than to support the overarching arguments. In large part, this is because of the breadth of examples proffered rather than their depth. In each of the later three chapters, there are four or five case studies presented, and these examples occasionally feel rushed, leaving the reader with questions rather than clarity.

This was particularly true in chapter 5, which felt hastily written and disjointed as it attempted to lump together case studies discussing the outsourcing of Israeli security to the South Lebanese Army, the Palestinian Authority, and Israeli private security companies, as well as the privatization of checkpoints and a recent Israeli court case that afforded private citizens the right to "wield deadly force" (p. 94). Dedicating an entire chapter to the strongest case studies would have provided a more fulfilling and edifying read. Likewise, the absence of contemporary Palestinian voices on the controversial claim that the Palestinian Authority is an example of the outsourcing of security by the Israeli government is truly a missing element within this argument.

In the instance of chapter 4, the four case studies are well connected and offer the reader an opportunity to see elements of the theories presented put into practice. The case studies of Bahad City, a giant military base in southern Israel (pp. 63–66), and Israeli Military Industries (pp. 71–75) are especially strong and valuable examples. However, even the informed reader would have benefited from more substantial details and histories; in particular, interviews with individuals involved in or impacted by the agreements governing these privatization projects would have been particularly useful. I acknowledge an endnote in chapter 6 where Hever says that "interviews are impractical as a means to obtain research information" from the security establishment, owing to secrecy concerns (p. 195). But inviting alternative voices would only have strengthened the arguments presented.

The Privatisation of Israeli Security lays out some unique arguments and approaches regarding the evolving role of Israeli security agencies. However, it is not for the casual reader,

but more appropriate for those with a substantial background in Israeli domestic politics, Israeli government (and security) structure, and for readers well read in settler-colonial theory, which is obliquely referenced but not discussed. While Hever makes a unique contribution by introducing differential accumulation theory to this audience, more in-depth case studies are needed to truly explore this theory in the Israeli security context.

Lyndall Herman is an affiliated researcher and instructor at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies and the School of Middle Eastern and North African Studies at the University of Arizona. She received her PhD in the history and politics of the Middle East, with a focus on the Gaza Strip.



Mapping Israel, Mapping Palestine: How Occupied Landscapes Shape Scientific Knowledge, by Jess Bier.

Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2017. 336 pages. \$35.00 cloth, e-book available.

REVIEWED BY ANNA KENSICKI

In her insightful ethnography of cartography, *Mapping Israel, Mapping Palestine: How Occupied Landscapes Shape Scientific Knowledge*, Jess Bier embarks on an exploration of the history, practice, and implications of conducting geographic research in Jerusalem and the West Bank. Bier's main thesis challenges the notion of impartiality in geography, outlining the consequences of conducting geographic research when the researcher herself is part of the very landscape she studies. Using the locations of various historic and present-day researchers, NGOs, and governmental authorities in the landscape, Bier problematizes

our continued reliance on technology and the limitations of objectivity in the practice of mapping, now commonly referred to as GIS (geographic information sciences).

In each of her analyses, Bier applies the notion of symmetry. This is not predicated on the assumption that Palestinian and Israeli accessibility or experiences are equal; rather, Bier juxtaposes Palestinian and Israeli observations and productions of knowledge to highlight the *asymmetrical* conditions leading to their development. These analyses are also guided by Edward Said's traveling theory, which explores how a theory or idea is shaped over time as it is applied in various landscapes and contexts. In this way, she focuses on the differential conclusions of Palestinian and Israeli cartographers as they both help to shape the landscape and are themselves, as researchers, shaped by it.

For example, in her comparison of Palestinian and Israeli state population maps, Bier finds that Israel's bureaucratic and political need for the census, combined with its methodological incorporation of the Palestinian presence, produced the region's geography and dominant narrative for *both* parties. Specifically, she illustrates how Palestinians' reliance upon these maps in producing their own necessarily involves the use of British colonial maps as their foundations. Those maps, hailed as empirical triumphs of their time, employed definitive boundaries (often

where they were intended to be set, as opposed to actual, final locations) and sometimes entirely different and incompatible scales, causing Palestinians and Israelis, alike, to incorporate such inaccuracies or distortions long after their initial drafting. Therefore, even with modern GIS technology, many of today's maps of Palestine/Israel employ empirical, "scientific" productions of knowledge and space that replicate the very colonial practices and subjectivities each side has sought to overcome. The seamless integration of highly contested spaces in digital form thus memorializes these distortions, leading to their continued use as both parties build upon this framework today (p. 45, pp. 78–79).

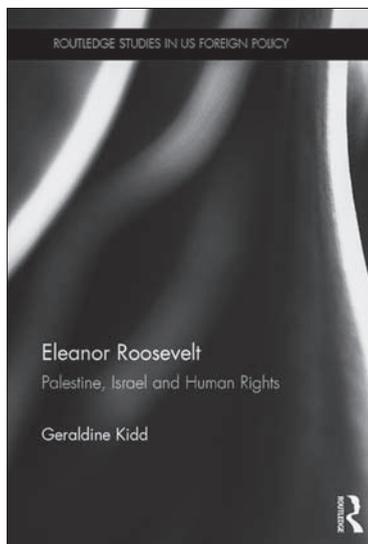
Of great interest to readers with a background in GIS is the problematizing of Palestinian and Israeli geographers' uses of certain mapping tools. Here, Bier argues the development of GIS technology has inadvertently shaped disparate productions of knowledge in Palestine/Israel. For example, in tracing the works of Israeli geographer Roberto Bachi, she examines the evolution of computerized mapping and how it has shaped the trajectory of the conflict via purported empirical and objective measurement. Bachi's marriage to international scientific standards and reliance upon direct counts (as opposed to statistical sampling) was an expression of his devotion to impartiality and empiricism (pp. 31, 90). Therefore, early in his career, in an effort to reduce inaccuracies, he relied upon map points (as opposed to shapes with borders) to represent Israeli and Palestinian census counts. Later, however, he turned to shape features called convex hulls, whose borders were generated by complex statistical equations, to illustrate populations. These mathematically generated borders served to carve out space in which settlements could expand, rather than to report where these were already present. In this case, GIS proved to be less a tool to ensure accuracy and validity, and more a method by which Bachi legitimized his own political views.

In another case study, Bier examines how the conflict differentially limits parties' access to space according to their locations in the conflict. She points out that knowledge production is distorted on both sides as cartographers' identities and perspectives greatly impact their objective observations and depictions of space, even within a single set of coordinates. In her exploration of Palestinian and Israeli land use and land cover maps of the West Bank, Bier compares the data collection methods of—and restrictions faced by—two NGOs: the Applied Research Institute–Jerusalem and the Israeli advocacy group Peace Now. She shows how the effects of mobility and accessibility restrict each group's knowledge production, both its own and that of the other. Although each party relies at least in part on the data collection of the other, their data sets are based on inconsistent methods of collection, categories (that may or may not fully reflect all scenarios), levels of detail, and scale. Therefore, either party's integration of the other's data can result in warped and poorly drawn conclusions as to population counts, contiguity, and many other data points. Where local knowledge is needed to interpret the findings of others' data, especially that of Palestinians, whose access to Area A and practical uses of space are seldom reflected in Israeli state maps, this can be especially problematic.

Bier's deeply researched and thoughtful work thus illustrates that geographic research is far from a value-free endeavor. Her engaging, historical, and technological analysis of GIS and the

production of knowledge in Palestine/Israel makes this conundrum accessible to lay readers and GIS specialists alike. Through her deft storytelling, readers are given the opportunity, themselves, to become a part of this highly contested landscape.

Anna Kensicki is a PhD candidate at the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London, and a Palestinian American Research Center fellow. Her research focuses on critical political geography and comparative politics in Palestine/Israel and the Levant.



Eleanor Roosevelt: Palestine, Israel and Human Rights, by Geraldine Kidd. Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2018. 252 pages. \$149.95 cloth, \$27.48 e-book.

REVIEWED BY MICHELLE MART

Geraldine Kidd's contribution to the complex topic of U.S.-Israeli-Palestinian relations focuses on the unique role of Eleanor Roosevelt in influencing the region's politics in the 1940s and 1950s. Kidd offers insights into the relationship between Roosevelt's actions and her beliefs, as well as into her embrace of widely held cultural prejudices. In the end, though, rather than highlighting the nuances and contradictions of historical actors, and transcending existing polarizations in the historiography, this portrait of Roosevelt reinforces them.

The central goal of Kidd's book is to provide a less idealized view of Eleanor Roosevelt's political outlook and of her reputation as a humanitarian in American political culture. Like most individuals who are celebrated as paragons of virtue, Roosevelt fell short of the rarefied depiction, especially as regards her attitudes toward Zionism and the Palestinians. As Kidd argues throughout the book, Zionists, and later Israelis, enjoyed her sympathy and support, while she found Palestinians to be less deserving of political rights and respect. Her prejudice toward Palestinians and other Arabs clearly affected her views of Zionism.

Kidd traces Roosevelt's worldview and political actions back to her childhood as well as to the relationships of her later years. Although the narrative spans Roosevelt's life, most of the book covers the post-World War II period when the debate about creating a Jewish state grew more immediate and Roosevelt embarked on an independent, international role following her husband's death. The strongest parts of the book are the last three chapters, which address Roosevelt's actions after Israel was founded in 1948.

Early on, Kidd lays out her central thesis that Roosevelt was motivated by "pragmatism," rather than by the "principle" of human rights for which she is celebrated. The seemingly inherent contradiction between pragmatism and principle makes sense as a rhetorical device and as a method to argue for Roosevelt's inconsistency (p. 240). But the formulation is problematic for two reasons. First, Kidd details several factors that shaped Roosevelt's political

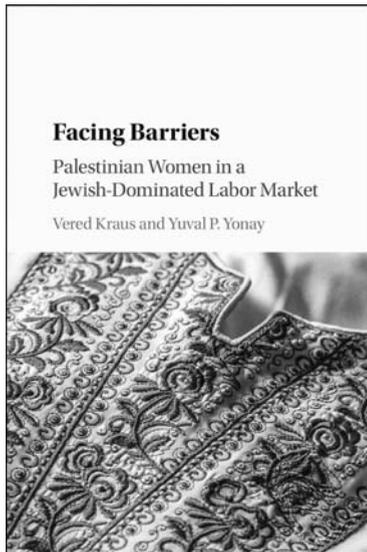
worldview, including feelings of being unloved as a child, the embrace of an Orientalist framework, and personal friendships with Jews. None of these factors can be described as “pragmatic,” even if they might lead one to go against apparently abstract principles.

Second, placing pragmatism and principle in opposition to each other creates an unrealistic expectation for understanding international relations, which can seldom be divided into such neat categories. It would be hard to find many political leaders who are guided solely by principle, divorced from political paradigms, economic interests, personality, and so forth. Certainly, historical figures should be judged by the extent to which they live up to principles that they espouse, but it is seldom fruitful to make such an evaluation absolute. Eleanor Roosevelt, after all, was in life, and remains in historical accounts, an important figure, precisely because of her contradictions and complexities, rather than for characteristics such as her lack of diplomatic experience, which Kidd highlights.

Another aspect of Roosevelt’s life that bears nuanced consideration is the extent to which she was an important political leader, and not simply Franklin Roosevelt’s wife or a dilettante in Middle East politics. Roosevelt was a lifelong Democratic Party leader at home and a liberal internationalist abroad whose worldview was shaped by a pro-Western political and cultural bias, and by the intensifying Cold War. She was an establishment figure who helped to shape mainstream political assumptions and reflected the growing American embrace of Zionism. Yet, Kidd frames Roosevelt differently. For example, she argues that Roosevelt’s refusal while serving as a U.S. representative on the United Nations Commission on Human Rights to allow UN consideration of W.E.B. DuBois’ indictment of American racism or her failure to reconsider her support for Zionism (as did journalist Dorothy Thompson) were shocking betrayals of political principle. Kidd rightly points out that Roosevelt’s political judgment was clouded by her prejudices and preconceived ideas, but these examples reflect a misunderstanding of Roosevelt, who was neither an independent journalist (even if she published a newspaper column) nor someone who would support the political indictment of her country on the world stage.

Structurally, there are several repetitious sections in the book, and places where the major focus of the argument becomes confused: is Roosevelt most at fault for her lack of principle, her lack of diplomatic experience, her intellectual laziness, her adherence to Orientalist tropes, or her expectation of deference? While it is important to investigate the political inconsistencies and mistakes of powerful figures whose impact has been far-reaching, it is most illuminating to wrestle with the complexities of such figures rather than to simplify their role and construct a blunt indictment of their beliefs and actions. Moreover, in the case of the United States, Palestine, and Israel, one of the most interesting aspects of Eleanor Roosevelt is that she may have been in a position of exceptional influence even though her stances were increasingly *unexceptional* in American political culture.

Michelle Mart is the author of *Eye on Israel: How America Came to View Israel as an Ally* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2006) and “Eleanor Roosevelt, Liberalism, and Israel,” *Shofar* 24, no. 3 (2006). She is an associate professor of history at Penn State Berks.



Facing Barriers: Palestinian Women in a Jewish-Dominated Labor Market, by Vered Kraus and Yuval P. Yonay.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018. 298 pages.

\$99.99 cloth, \$80.00 e-book.

REVIEWED BY AMANDA FURIASSE

In *Facing Barriers: Palestinian Women in a Jewish-Dominated Labor Market*, Vered Kraus and Yuval P. Yonay evaluate the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the lens of gender and labor. Their chief contribution to the field stems from their critical analysis of the dynamic and intersecting barriers that hinder Palestinian women's capacity to participate in Israel's Jewish-dominated labor market. Until now, scholarship has tended to reduce these barriers to religion/culture, arguing that religious expectations about women's status in society are the main reason why Muslim

women's labor force participation rates in Middle Eastern countries and the Arab countries of North Africa are lower than women's employment rates in other geopolitical regions. Kraus and Yonay argue that this hypothesis cannot address the unique set of obstacles that prevent Palestinian women from participating in Israel's labor market. They assess these unique obstacles by making statistical comparisons of Israeli and Palestinian women's experiences in the labor market, a method that enables them to evaluate economic and political factors neglected by earlier studies. Their findings point to the prevalence of discrimination, prejudice, and the inequitable distribution of resources and social services.

Their argument unfolds across ten chapters. The first section of the monograph (chap. 1–3) examines the basic infrastructure of the Jewish state and how it buttresses racism, prejudice, and intergroup tensions with Palestinian laborers given few opportunities for employment, professional development, or education. From land development policies to residential segregation and industrial and agricultural investment, the authors argue that “development efforts have been concentrated in Jewish communities, leaving Palestinians with lacking infrastructure for modern industrialization and relatively few opportunities for employment” (p. 38). Israel's creation of a separate education system and curricula for Palestinian students remains among the chief barriers. While the Israeli government has expanded educational opportunities for higher education and the educational attainment rate for Palestinian women has increased, the analysis reveals that Palestinian students still face hurdles in higher education that continue to hinder their capacity to enter the workforce, including a lack of available scholarships and funding opportunities.

The remaining chapters (chap. 4–10) focus on Palestinian women's experiences when entering Israel's labor market, with specific attention devoted to the ways in which women are trying to address these barriers. Rather than universalize women's experiences, Kraus and Yonay analyze the varied experiences of Bedouin, Druze, Christian, and Muslim women living in different geopolitical regions throughout Israel. Their statistical analysis suggests that Palestinian women

remain poorly integrated in the economy, with core industries and public services limited to Jewish women, leaving Palestinian women with few occupational choices besides teaching and nursing. This pattern is perhaps nowhere more apparent than in Jerusalem. While on paper Jerusalemites may have the right to live and work in Israel and are entitled to the social services that citizens receive, Palestinian women who live within the city fare little better than their Bedouin counterparts. As Kraus and Yonay explain, “While the Bedouins live in isolated distant communities, in Jerusalem isolation and distance were artificially created” (p. 171). Their analysis also reveals that both Druze and Christian women face similar struggles to those of their Muslim counterparts. In the case of Palestinian Christians, who have similar education attainment rates and fewer children, on average, than Jewish women, employment rates are much lower than for their Jewish counterparts. In the end, these parallels suggest that Israeli state policy or structural discrimination, and not religion or culture, is the biggest obstacle hindering Palestinian women’s capacity to work outside the home.

Kraus and Yonay’s monograph serves as an important resource for understanding how the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is demarcated through gender and labor. Their dynamic statistical analysis reveals the ways in which the conflict is reproduced through the imposition of barriers that obstruct Palestinian women’s capacity to access labor markets. While their methods will be most familiar to researchers trained in the fields of sociology and political science, the monograph’s interdisciplinary focus on gender, labor, and religion makes it a valuable resource for anyone interested in understanding the historical, political, and economic conditions that contribute to what is facilely portrayed as a sectarian conflict. Future studies on the prevalence of discrimination and Islamophobia in Europe and the United States could build upon this theoretical model and examine the impact of stereotyping and prejudice on Muslim women’s access to both local and global labor markets. Moreover, the monograph’s focused analysis of Palestinian women’s choices to pursue careers in medicine and education indicates that schools and hospitals are increasingly emerging as important sites for Palestinian women’s agency and activism, constituting avenues for professional development and career advancement in a system that overall denies Palestinian women such opportunities.

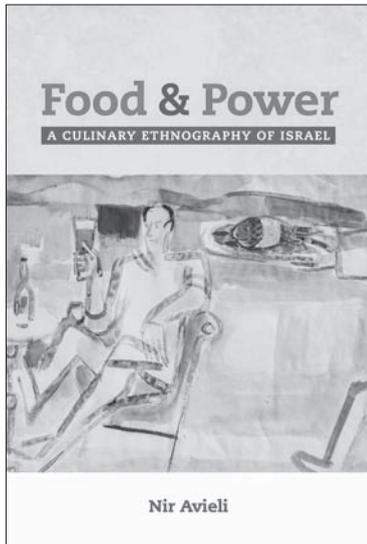
Amanda Furiasse received her PhD in religion and graduate certificate in museum studies from Florida State University. She currently teaches at Florida A & M University where she researches and teaches courses on the intersection of religion, gender, migration, and material culture with a specific focus on Jewish identity and Israeli national politics.

Food & Power: A Culinary Ethnography of Israel, by Nir Avieli. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2017. 296 pages. \$85.00 cloth, \$29.95 paper, \$29.95 e-book.

REVIEWED BY ANNY GAUL

Nir Avieli’s ethnography joins the growing literature of food anthropology about Israel and Palestine. While previous work in this vein has concentrated largely on Palestinian foodways in Israel or under the occupation, *Food & Power: A Culinary Ethnography of Israel* focuses on settler culinary spaces, including military prisons and kibbutz dining rooms, and the cultural logics that

underpin the occupation and Israel's migrant labor system. Apart from a brief discussion of the "hummus wars" in the introduction, the book swiftly moves on to a very different set of questions about food in Israel. Avieli, who has also published a culinary ethnography of Vietnam,



approaches food as a way to examine multiple facets of power, including “antidemocratic, xenophobic, and racist tendencies, as well as misuse and abuse of power” in Israeli society (p. 24). The book's six chapters are based on ongoing, multi-sited fieldwork conducted since the late 1990s.

The chapters can be grouped into two broad sections: the first three chapters analyze dominant or mainstream Israeli culinary spaces and practices in order to draw conclusions about aspects of Israeli identity and its fraught relationship with power. The final three chapters depict situations in which food makes plain various contradictions and paradoxes within contemporary Israeli society: the privatization of the communal kibbutz, the simultaneous narrative of victimization and occupation of Palestinian land, and an exploitative migrant labor system.

Breaking from prevailing popular and scholarly discussions on the subject, Avieli argues that what most distinguishes Israeli cuisine from other national cuisines is not the fusion of foods from Israel's diverse populations, but rather an emphasis on large portions of cheap and often mediocre food. Chapter 3 illustrates this argument in detail through a discussion of the popularity of Italian food throughout Israel. The chapter explains a number of factors that make pizza and pasta attractive to Israelis: the availability of cheap local ingredients, for example, and the easiness of adapting Italian food to kosher requirements. Perhaps the most compelling aspect of the chapter, however, and most relevant to his arguments about power, is Avieli's analysis that “Italian food allows Israeli Jews to construct an alternative spatial *and cultural* imagination of Israel, one that is associated with the Southern European–Mediterranean region rather than the Arab Middle East” (p. 100; emphasis in original). In other words, a reinvented Italian cuisine offers Israelis a way to access some semblance of Mediterranean locality that is neither Arab nor Levantine. Avieli also shows that Italian food was brought to Israel not by Italians, but by Israelis, and by way of the United States.

The connections and parallels between Israel and the United States (and, to a lesser extent, other settler-colonial societies) constitute one of the book's ongoing motifs. It surfaces in nearly every chapter, through the Israeli adoption of various American culinary preferences, the McDonaldization of the kibbutz dining room, and American and Israeli taboos on eating dog meat. The U.S.-Israeli connection is most salient in two chapters that address the interconnectedness of meat consumption, masculinity, and the occupation of indigenous spaces. Chapter 2 describes Independence Day barbecues in Israel as an amalgamation of Mizrahi culinary practices, the American barbecue, and a uniquely Israeli orientation to land whereby families vie for the best spots to grill meat in public parks according to what Avieli calls the “Israeli mode of grasping space” (p. 21).

Chapter 5 is the only chapter that directly addresses the occupation. Avieli collected the data for this chapter while his army battalion was on a tour of reserve duty guarding Palestinian detainees in a military prison. He describes how his fellow soldiers—prison guards armed with assault rifles—saw themselves as the victims of the situation, claiming that they were receiving inferior-quality meat and less than both the military police and the Palestinian prisoners. Highlighting the ways in which a militarized society like Israel “forces a connection between meat consumption and hegemonic masculinity,” Avieli presents this account as an illustration of how the logic of the occupation materializes and is justified in practice (p. 150). He uses the extreme power imbalance of the prison to argue that Israelis can “redefine any engagement with the Palestinians as an expression of Israeli weakness and victimization,” in this case through grievances about meat rations (p. 177). Avieli is transparent about his own positionality and misgivings concerning his involvement in the occupation. Yet the chapter might also have engaged the broader ethics of knowledge production in military contexts, especially because as a doctoral candidate in anthropology, Avieli was working in the prison as a “behavioral science officer.” This assignment could have been a starting point for addressing recent conversations and debates in the field of anthropology about scholarly engagement with military institutions, which have emerged both through the work of individual scholars as well as within institutions like the American Association of Anthropology.

Avieli frames the book as a “stern critique of contemporary Israeli society,” and the richly documented chapters amount to a sharp diagnostic of a range of injustices (p. 24). The book’s conclusion ends on a somewhat discordantly optimistic note about the transformative potential of Israelis’ ambivalence toward power as demonstrated through the culinary sphere. The complex relationship between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi food cultures could also have been developed earlier and expanded. Overall, the book will be of great interest to scholars working on food studies in Israel and/or Palestine, and valuable to anyone interested in the quotidian and culinary dimensions of settler colonialism.

Anny Gaul, a PhD candidate at Georgetown University, is a scholar of culinary history and culture in the Middle East and North Africa.
