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Tours that Bind: diaspora, pilgrimage, and Israeli birthright tourism

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were tricked into bogus marriages and then exploited as prostitutes, or whose families were seduced by the false promises of Jewish procurers (of both sexes) remains true, other equally disturbing narratives also emerge. For example, some women worked as prostitutes before emigrating; others, weighed down by conditions, chose this lucrative profession unbeknown to their families, openly, or in defiance of their husbands' wishes. While the picture of male intimidation and physical violence does not disappear, women, too, acted as pimps and brothel keepers, their numbers increasing after 1913, when male traffickers began to be more seriously targeted for prosecution. The rest of the Jewish population, anxious not to be associated with this sector of society, closed their institutional support to those involved in it. One of the indirect consequences of Jewish prostitution was the anxiety it created among the rest of the Jewish population, with increased restrictions on unmarried women and arranged marriages.

A large number of mainly left-wing and Yiddish-speaking Jewish women were political activists. They fought against all forms of male discrimination, in the home, workplace, or in the political hierarchy. Relegated to the fringes of political organizations, they contested this gender discrimination and fought for justice for all. Some did so within their community boundaries while others crossed these barriers and joined other Jewish and non-Jewish groups. This chapter shows how "through public speaking, writing, demonstrating, lobbying, striking and going to prison, many women defied passivity, domesticity and fear" (170).

The next chapter looks at the years of growing extreme right-wing nationalism in Argentina, which culminated in the advent of the military regime in 1943 and the ensuing persecution of cultural minorities and closing down of non-mainline institutions, such as Yiddish-speaking schools and theatres. Briefly, Catholicism became the official religion in schools. Jewish women campaigned vigorously against the increased authoritarianism and regressive policies of fascist ideologies and fought to strengthen the democratic project and work for a pluralistic society. With Peronism, many of their socialist aims were being addressed, but the women continued to pursue their larger aims not only at home but also by strengthening transnational ties. Thanks to the inclusionist policies of the Peron regime, the work of women in support of the state of Israel received government recognition.

The last chapter examines the role of women through their activities in charitable organizations, though mainly this is perceived as "filling in the cracks rather than advocating broader socio-economic change" (206). A point made is that women's charities "mimicked the Argentine milieu" in a tendency to exclude poorer women from their largely middle-class organizations (235). A side aim of these high profile charitable activities was to divert attention from Jewish prostitution.

The composite picture that emerges shows the variety of the areas of Jewish women's participation and the rich diversity of their experiences. The author's bold claim that this investigation re-shapes the existing narrative of Argentine history is convincingly argued.

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Tours that Bind: diaspora, pilgrimage, and Israeli birthright tourism

SHAUL KELNER

New York University Press, 2010

304 pp., \$35.00, ISBN 9-780-8147-4816-9

Since its founding in 1999, Taglit-Birthright Israel has spent nearly \$600 million to send more than 260,000 Jewish youth, mostly American, between the ages 18 to 26 on 10-day pilgrimage

tours of Israel. Shaul Kelner, in an analytically astute and case-rich study of more than 10 years of Birthright Israel tours, investigates the experience as a mechanism of political socialization that instills in young American Jews a feeling of belonging to a diaspora that looks to the State of Israel as its symbolic homeland.

Kelner's important study could not come at a more critical moment. With the Obama Administration's advocacy of a two-state solution, American Jews appear more openly divided than ever about support for the Israeli establishment. Birthright Israel has become a flashpoint for sounding these divisions, with different Jewish constituencies seeking to expand the programme, revise it or counter it with alternative tours to the West Bank. It is ironic that Birthright Israel has become a bone of contention among American Jews because, as Kelner recounts, Israel experience programmes were designed expressly to strengthen the group identity of American Jews in the face of increasing assimilation, intermarriage, and the attenuation of bonds formed in response to crises such as the Holocaust, Israel's founding, and the persecution of Soviet Jews. Co-founded by conservative Jewish philanthropists, Charles Bronfman and Michael Steinhardt with generous financing from the Israeli government, Birthright Israel seeks to win the hearts and minds of young American Jews, to transform them into advocates for Israel in the face of increasing condemnation of Israel's policies towards Palestinians. According to J Street, a political movement positioning itself as an alternative Jewish establishment, this puts the cart before the horse: it is precisely Israel's antidemocratic behaviour and American Zionism's persistent rationalizing of Palestinian suffering that alienates young American Jews from Israel. Seeking to establish a pro-Peace, pro-Israel constituency, J Street recently sponsored its own alternative Birthright tour, which balanced the goal of instilling a love for Israel with that of building solidarity between young American Jews and progressive Israeli civil society groups. To the left of J Street, Jewish Voices for Peace and other BDS (Boycott, Divest, Sanction) campaigns have recourse to tours such as Birthright Unplugged, which seeks to educate tourists and potential activists for BDS involvement by arranging visits to Palestinian cities, villages and refugee camps, and dialogues with Palestinian peace and equality activists.

To this debate and division, *Tours that Bind* brings a clarifying analysis of how the set of practices that Birthright Israel tour operators use to create diasporic identities are complex, contradictory, and without guarantees. In Kelner's words,

[homeland] tourism integrates an array of "knowledge practices"—semiotic, narrative, dialogic, ludic, embodied, aesthetic, emotional, and more. These work in concert and exist in tension. Although they serve organizers as "tools of the trade" through which diasporic identity and connections to place and community are forged, they are a fickle set of tools. (17–18)

The greatest strength of the study is its impressive breadth and depth of research; it harmonizes extensive data from programme evaluations with remarkably deep ethnographic analysis featuring telling anecdotes from tour groups the author himself accompanied. Kelner uses this rich data to analyse how homeland tours work as political socialization: how and why Birthright succeeds in tying American Jews to the State of Israel; how and why it misfires; and what this means for scholarship on political agency, meaning-making, tourism, diaspora, and for contemporary American Jewish life in general.

Most of the chapters begin with an ethnographic description of a key moment from a specific Birthright tour, which then forms the spine of Kelner's analyses of a particular practice of homeland tourism. Chapter 3 brings the reader along on a bus tour to view the separation wall from the neighbourhood of Gilo above the West Bank. As tour participants amuse themselves by throwing stones and jokingly refer to the second Intifada as "the enchilada," Ra'anana, the tour guide, patiently narrates "both sides" of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict. Describing how the

guide's voicing of a Palestinian point of view is actually compatible with Birthright's goal of binding diaspora Jews to Israel, Kelner emphasizes that homeland tourism's real power comes from being an embodied, emotional, and interactional experience. Discursive representation cannot compete with the immersive experiences that encourage tourists to internalize an Israeli frame of reference, as they befriend Israeli soldiers who accompany the bus tours, experience heightened emotions and sensations hiking to Masada or visiting the Yad Vashem Holocaust memorial, and learn from tour guides to view themselves as part of Israeli cultural narratives of collective redemption.

Chapter 4 describes the techniques another tour guide used to encourage visitors to consume the city of Safed as a unique Jewish spiritual space where even the graffiti on the walls has sacred meaning. Such practices territorialize the State of Israel by suffusing place with mystical meaning, yet they also train tourists to participate in Jewish spirituality merely as consumers, not as co-religionists or transnational political agents. Chapter 5 examines a central dilemma of homeland tourism—the feeling of alienation tourists actually experience in a place in which they do not reside—and the strategies Birthright tour operators use to overcome distance, including site-specific rituals, discourses of home, and peer-to-peer encounters with locals, especially soldiers with whom youthful visitors often form erotic attachments. Chapter 6 stays inside the bus, focusing on the interpersonal and social dynamics of the tour group itself and how these create normative environments. Pleasure-seeking, divided into cliques, and loosely unified by ethnic self-identification, the tour group itself is a socializing agent that largely works in favour of sponsors' goals by channelling dissent into withdrawal from the group. Chapter 7 illuminates how Birthright deploys tours as a technology for knowing the self by encouraging tourists to apply the same Zionist interpretative lens to themselves that they are learning to apply to the land around them. Guides endeavour to help visitors connect to their Jewish heritage by interpreting the meaning of their surnames and conduct group dialogues asking for personal reflection on topics such as "What about being Jewish makes you feel special?" Kelner theorizes that although such tour practices yield testimonies of life-changing experiences, these are based on radically simplified conceptions of the self and are ultimately fragile and provisional.

The rigour and comprehensiveness of Kelner's book enables us to use its own methodology to place it within current debates about Birthright Israel. In particular, *Tours that Bind* narrows questions of political socialization and places limits on critical thinking which do not necessarily reinforce Birthright's positions, which tend to cohere most with J Street's pro-Peace, pro-Israel stance, but which definitively bracket out the rationale for BDS activism and its use of tourism. Appropriately concerned about bias, Kelner shares with the reader his own politicization and socialization through participation in Israel experience tours in the 1980s. He describes how he "caught the Israel bug," became a speechwriter for the Israeli mission at the United Nations during Rabin's premiership, and worked as a Birthright programme evaluator at Brandeis's Cohen Center for Modern Jewish Studies. Naming his political formation as "lonely left Zionist" detached from the mainstream of American Zionism, Kelner's research nonetheless centres the chief concern of mainstream American Zionism: whether Birthright really succeeds in shoring up American Zionism's base of Jewish support. Neither Kelner's data nor his investigative subject position allow him to consider the effects of Zionist socialization on non-Jewish Israelis, Palestinians, non-Zionist American Jews, and US society. By deploying its case study of Birthright Israel to theorize homeland tourism in general, *Tours that Bind* uses seemingly neutral practices of comparison and generalization to turn its purview away from difficult questions singularly relevant to Israel. Unlike Kelner's comparison cases of homeland tourism to China, Ghana, and Italy, Israel is a settler-colonial state. Its diaspora is mostly not one of descent in modern times but of symbolic affiliation. According to Kelner, many states use homeland tourism to expand state influence beyond their territories. While this is certainly the case with Birthright Israel, Zionism—the return of the Jewish people—is the singular and founding

nationalist ideology of the State of Israel and thus fundamental to processes that internalize and externalize demographics and social power within the state and the Occupied Territories. Finally, despite his analysis of how Birthright tours reduce Palestinians to objects of Israeli discourse, Kelner does not entertain the inclusion of dialogue with Palestinians or visits to the Occupied Territories on tours, nor the possibility of politically socializing diaspora Jews as a constituency for peace and equality for Israelis and Palestinians alike.

Winner of the 2010 Jewish Studies' Jordan Schnitzer Book Award, *Tours that Bind* is a truly exceptional work of scholarship. For its capacity, ultimately, to recognize its own limits, for the richness of its ethnographic research, and for its sophisticated analysis of urgent issues that impact the very meaning and constitution of Jewish diaspora, it is highly recommended.

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Three Jewish Journeys through an Anthropologist's Lens: from Morocco to the Negev, Zion to the Big Apple, the closet to the Bimah

MOSHE SHOKEID

Academic Studies Press, 2009

400pp., \$59.00, ISBN: 9-781-9348-4336-9

Three Jewish Journeys is a collection of Moshe Shokeid's thoughts and articles, spanning a half-century of the Israeli anthropologist's work researching contemporary Jewish life in its many forms, sites and expressions. The 17 chapters of short academic and personal essays describe both the findings and methods of Shokeid's research in three primary ethnographic fields, including a village in Israel populated by Moroccan Jewish immigrants, a loosely connected landscape of Israeli emigrants in urban America, and Gay Jewish congregants at a synagogue in New York City.

In the book's introduction, Shokeid lays out plainly his interpretation of anthropology as "the disciplined observation and honest report of human behaviour based on a serious attempt to get close to the 'victims' of the ethnographer's descriptions and theories" (27). To be such a victim is, in my opinion, to be the recipient of Shokeid's obvious love and engagement, of his careful representations and his intentions to be a lifelong dialogue partner. The intimate and sensitive relationships between Shokeid and his "victims" recur throughout the collection, as evident in his long-lasting friendships with those he studied as a graduate student, his emotional discussions and debates with Israelis in America and, especially, the range of responses of gay synagogue members to his writing about them. If his sensitivity to those he studies is any measure of his professional ethics, the subjects of other scholars and disciplines should be such lucky "victims" of his kind of scholarship.

While those familiar with Shokeid's work will perhaps find that the compendium offers little new information, the collection serves two other important purposes: the chronicling of an academic life and also of a discipline. This book records, perhaps unintentionally, an intellectual history of its author, who must be regarded as one of the leading champions of Israeli anthropology. In this sense, it is analogous to the recently released collection of essays by prominent American anthropologist Clifford Geertz in that both works are what has been called a kind of "time capsule" of their discipline and the role these scholars played in shaping it, challenging it and mentoring today's academics.

The book also offers a clear map of how anthropology in general, and Israeli anthropology in particular, have changed over the 50 years in which Shokeid has been active. The book's historical