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Book Review: Kaplan, Danny. (2006). The Men We Loved: Male Friendships and Nationalism in Israeli Culture. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books

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Men and Masculinities 2008; 10; 368 originally published online May 18, 2007;
DOI: 10.1177/1097184X06294615

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for students in film and gender studies. It is the most rigorous book in English on Marcello Mastroianni. Her timely research will be useful for students investigating cultural studies, film studies, and representation of gender.

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Kaplan, Danny. (2006). *The Men We Loved: Male Friendships and Nationalism in Israeli Culture*. New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books.

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The study of male friendships has long been of interest to sociologists, anthropologists, and historians of gender and intimate relationships. The concept of friendship in modernity was shaped by two opposing processes. First, the highly celebrated rise of individualism shaped a liberal ideology of friendship, seeing friendship as a private realm of intimacy and emotion, detached from the political public sphere. The second major process is the rise of national ideology, emphasizing the collective framing of friendship under the context of the nation state.

Danny Kaplan's book *The Men We Loved: Male Friendships and Nationalism in Israeli Culture* seeks to explore the interplay between these two perceptions. It argues that the distinction between the liberal and the national ideologies of friendship is in fact far less stringent than what is commonly thought and offers a "study of how men negotiate national identity through the specific prism of fraternal friendship." (p. 12) Kaplan recognizes a discrepancy between the ideal perception of friendship in Israeli-Jewish culture and the way Israeli men perceive their actual friendships, which does not fulfill this phantasmic ideal. This leads him to his main argument: many of the emotions associated with male friendship can only be experienced through a sense of loss. In what he terms "collective necrophilia," the ideal friendship can only be achieved through the (actual or imagined) death of the friend and the passionate commemoration that follows. These commemoration rituals provide a crucial link between individual friendship and national solidarity through the eroticization of homosocial friendships.

To support this provocative argument, Kaplan conducted in-depth interviews with thirty heterosexual Israeli men aged twenty-four to fifty-three. He further performed participant observations in military cemeteries, analyzed the content of popular Israeli songs and poems that refer to friendship, and examined the media coverage of national events and commemoration rituals. The structure of the book follows the distinction between the private and the national. Following a short and efficient introduction of theoretical and historical background, comes a long second part that focuses on friendship in everyday life. This part is well written and presents some

interesting narratives and interpretations. However, it is too detailed and slow paced, and the reader might find it difficult to recognize the move toward the crux of the argument. It is only in its third and closing part that the book really takes off, when Kaplan reaches the revealing analysis of friendship in a set of “sacred” national spaces (the military, commemoration rituals). It is this part that actually produces most of the support for the main argument.

Although it takes some time to warm up, the book offers a clear and well written account of present-day Israeli male friendships. Kaplan uses a cultural narrative approach, seeking to go beyond the obvious and sometimes banal accounts of his informants. Following Derrida, he tries to deconstruct the self-narratives and expose the culturally available building blocks on which these narratives are based. Emotions, he claims, are largely constituted through public discourse and cultural representations. Focusing on the spaces that suggest ambivalence in the management of homosocial emotions allows the writer to provide an insightful account of the way cultural and national conventions dictate the manifestations of private feelings.

The chief strength of the book lies in Kaplan’s deep and expansive knowledge of Israeli culture. The author delivers a perceptive and provocative account of Israeli culture’s obsession with death and commemoration. He does it through an intimate familiarity with Israeli songs and poems, folklore, tradition, cultural heroes, and most of all the Hebrew language. The book presents a rich and erudite analysis of linguistic patterns and concepts. It penetrates the deep meanings behind the words and explores the ambivalence and ambiguity of worn-out daily terms. Kaplan dives into the interpretation of language equipped with a sharp perception of linguistic structures, together with an astute command of biblical origins of words and traditions. These allow him to extricate surprising, often counterintuitive understandings of the meanings that lie within expressions and keywords. Through that, the book offers an insight into the processes of coding and deciphering of meanings inside the language of a given culture.

While deconstructive techniques and narrative analysis reveal hidden meanings and produce bold arguments, they also lead to one of the main weaknesses of the book. At times I found Kaplan’s interpretations of the acts and words of his informants questionable. I was especially hesitant to accept his claim that different bodily and linguistic practices are manifestations of repressed desire, despite the overboard denial of such desire from the interviewees. As a rule, the few occasions where the author uses psychoanalytical rather than sociological interpretations constitute the weaker and less substantiated parts of the book.

The problem of questionable interpretations may also result, at least in part, from some methodological shortcomings. The book relies mainly on interviews, but the selection of these interviews does not represent the entirety of Jewish-Israeli masculinity. The voices of the lower strata, the unemployed, the periphery, and of religious Israelis, to name just a few Israeli subgroups, are missing or underrepresented.

This makes the final conclusions too encompassing. In addition, the criteria for presenting particular quotes are not always clear. How representative are these quotes? How many interviewees expressed similar views? Were there any counterexamples? The answers to these questions are often not explicit enough.

Despite these drawbacks, *The Men We Loved* is an enticing composition. The book is well written, concise, and aptly organized, presenting a clear and consistent logic and line of thought. It touches the reader by deconstructing the seemingly trivial issue of male friendships and permeating the deep meanings of this daily practice. Kaplan offers an original way to look at these relationships, bypassing, at least for the most part, traditional psychological individualistic analyses of friendships. He manages to introduce a well thought and coherent sociological account, and even when the arguments are not entirely convincing, they are still challenging and mind opening. Finally, while the book is deeply grounded in Israeli culture, language, and practices, it carries a universal dimension. It manages to touch praxes and meanings which readers from different and diverse cultures may find relevant and revealing.

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Grasmuck, S., & Goldwater, J. (2005). *Protecting Home: Class, Race and Masculinity in Boys' Baseball*. Piscataway, NJ: Rutgers University Press.

DOI: 10.1177/1097184X06298452

Between 1987 and 2002, Sherri Grasmuck assumed the roles of "baseball mom," coach's wife, neighbor, historian, urban sociologist, social psychologist, interviewer, qualitative analyst, and author to provide a fascinating narrative in which one inner-city youth baseball organization, the Fairmount Sports Association (FSA) in Philadelphia, is used to provide a window into a diverse set of political, cultural, sociological, and psychological phenomena. *Protecting Home* is a captivating piece of work. Its title and subtitle, however, reveal only a fraction of the sociological insight this book genuinely provides.

Early in reading the first few chapters of *Protecting Home*, I was confused as to why the journal *Men and Masculinities* wanted a review of this book. Grasmuck seemed, from the beginning, to be more interested in exploring how race, ethnicity, culture, and social class influence the gentrification process. Grasmuck introduces her ethnographic research methods usefully in the first chapter but without much detail, as the extensive details of her methodological considerations are provided in an appendix. Some reference to this appendix in the first chapter would have been very helpful because there is a richness to Grasmuck's method that the reader could benefit from much later in the book. Nonetheless, for someone interested in teaching