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Richard C. Parks, *Medical Imperialism in French North Africa: Regenerating the Jewish Community in Colonial Tunis*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2017. xvi + 196 pp. Maps, notes, bibliography, and index. \$55.00 U.S. (hb). ISBN 978-0-8032-6845-6.

Review by Margaret Andersen, University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

In nineteenth- and early twentieth-century France and empire, fears of degeneration loomed large. Despite being scientifically advanced and modern, evidence of decline and degeneration were everywhere evident in the French population: the alcoholic, the unmarried new woman, the homosexual, the syphilitic husband, the one-child family, the hysterical patient, the nervous man. As varying iterations of the same crisis, these symptoms of degeneration were not only revealing of larger gendered anxieties, but also an expression of the era's scientific racial thought. As the population seemed to weaken from within, the possibility of outside contamination through immigration and colonization threatened to add to the crisis. As Richard Parks notes, the Jewish population in both France and the empire represented a distinct threat in this larger discourse of degeneration. These fears of degeneration nevertheless gave birth to efforts to uplift populations deemed capable of regeneration. This monograph explores the efforts of first the metropolitan Jewish organization, the Alliance Israélite Universelle (AIU), and then colonial authorities, to transform Tunisia into a kind of "colonial laboratory," one that would regenerate the colonized Jewish population through a combination of education, urban renewal, and medicine.

Parks explores the ways in which Tunisia's Jewish communities responded to these metropolitan efforts and the alternative vision of regeneration offered by local Zionists. In so doing he contributes to a larger body of work arguing that French modernization projects were not simply transmitted and imposed on the colonies; they were, by contrast, a fluid process shaped by negotiation on the ground. Parks posits that the concept of regeneration, distinct from the idea of a civilizing mission, is essential to understanding the place of Jewish populations within both France and Tunisia. While the precise distinctions between regeneration and the oft-cited concept of a civilizing mission remain somewhat unclear in this monograph, this element of the overall argument is interesting. With the term regeneration, Parks offers an alternative model for understanding colonial policies and reforms purportedly aimed at helping or improving colonized peoples.

Parks makes clear throughout this work that efforts at colonial regeneration were focused first and foremost on Tunisia's Jewish population; the protectorate's large Muslim population, by contrast, remained largely outside these reforms. Parks first explores this distinction in his second and third chapters examining efforts to redesign and modernize urban space. In late nineteenth-century Tunis, colonial authorities, like their counterparts elsewhere in the empire, considered indigenous sectors of the city to be unhygienic and disease-ridden. Poor sanitary conditions held the potential for epidemics that could spread to European quarters. What followed were efforts at constructing modern sewer systems and introducing regulations on the emptying and disinfection of the remaining cesspits. Concerned about air-born epidemics, the authorities introduced guidelines for new constructions mandating more spacious buildings and larger windows to promote better air flow. Green spaces were constructed to improve air

quality and make urban areas more attractive. The old Jewish quarter was demolished and replaced with modern, healthier constructions. Whereas urban planners viewed the Jewish population as receptive to these developments, they depicted the Muslim population as impervious to modernization projects. The Medina, where many Muslims lived, was judged to be antiquated and unhygienic, but nevertheless an exotic tourist attraction worthy of preservation. Parks shows that Tunisia's Jewish population played an important role in shaping these modernization projects. They negotiated the preservation of certain key structures and pushed successfully for additional land. Corresponding efforts by Muslim leaders to push for additional land and services met with less success. The ultimate effect of these modernizing projects was the "Balkanization" of the population. Whereas the Jewish and Muslim communities had once mixed more freely, the urban reforms had the effect of rehousing them into separate zones divided along ethnic, religious, and class lines.

The interest in modernizing Jewish neighborhoods in Tunis stands in stark contrast to similar such plans reformers contemplated for the Jewish Saint-Gervais neighborhood of Paris. Like their colonial counterparts, city planners in Paris feared the possibility that unhygienic conditions in the quarter could have public health consequences for surrounding quarters. Discussions of moving the population and rebuilding unsanitary structures floundered as the private property interests of landlords proved more powerful. During the Occupation, mass deportations of the city's Jewish population removed the neighborhood's inhabitants and paved the way for rebuilding. Unlike in Tunis where urban redesign was carried out to benefit the Jewish population, in Paris such projects only advanced under tragic circumstances without any corresponding ideal of "regenerating" the Jewish population.

Parks presents multiple reasons why there was more political willpower to redesign Tunis's Jewish quarters in the interwar years than was the case in Saint-Gervais in the same period. One reason was that the AIU and the residency were interested in uplifting Tunisian Jews as part of the civilizing mission and were concerned about projecting the right image of France as a colonial power. Moreover, as was the case all over the empire, Tunis was conceived of as a "colonial laboratory". Officials viewed it as something of a tabula rasa where modernization experiments could be more easily carried out than in the metropole where entrenched interests and private property considerations represented a formidable obstacle. Finally, the distinction was rooted in the position of Tunis's Jewish population in larger goals of extending French influence in the protectorate. From the beginning, the protectorate had a large Italian population that outnumbered that of the French. These types of demographic concerns intensified in the interwar years, following Mussolini's accession to power. A series of naturalization laws worked to improve these numbers, ultimately making significant portions of the Jewish population French. As the Jewish population was now positioned as a demographic resource and integral part of extending French influence in the protectorate, the state had more of an interest in uplifting and regenerating this population.

In the fourth chapter, Parks shows that education played an important part in efforts at regenerating the Jewish population. As was the case with urban planning, educational initiatives were also a site of negotiation and tension. On the one side was the AIU, which brought students to Paris to be educated as teachers. In Tunis, the AIU founded schools where students learned the French language and history. Like the process Eugen Weber describes in the French provinces, AIU schools aimed to make the population more culturally French, refined, and secular.^[1] While the AIU could claim some success in this area, they faced considerable competition from multiple branches of the Zionist movement. Zionists also established Jewish schools, but had a very different vision of how to regenerate this population. French authorities, who saw AIU education in the protectorate as a valuable means of extending French influence, were uncomfortable with the growing influence of Zionism in the population. Not only did it threaten to turn the Jewish population from secular, bourgeois French influences, it also, as they saw it, threatened the delicate peace between Jewish and Muslim communities.

The final chapter of this book focuses on women, whose reproductive powers were central to the process of regeneration. Concerns about high rates of infant mortality led to goals of medicalizing maternity.

Reformers hoped to convince women to go to French doctors for prenatal care, give birth in French hospitals, and follow the latest scientific recommendations about childcare. Like the other projects Parks describes, these efforts were focused on Jewish women, and not their Muslim counterparts. Once again, this distinction was due to larger visions of modernizing, assimilating, and uplifting the Jewish population. These goals of improving maternal and infant health ultimately failed in part because of a lack of resources. Relatively little funding was directed to these clinics that were in any case oriented more to indigent or unmarried mothers. Most married women continued to give birth at home, assisted by the very midwives whose influence reformers sought to curtail. In addition to a shortage of hospital beds, the city suffered from a shortage of doctors. Parks notes that the residency could have partly alleviated this shortage by welcoming German-Jewish physicians fleeing Nazi Germany who applied for residency in Tunisia. These applications were denied on the erroneous grounds that the protectorate already had enough doctors. Ultimately, Jewish infant mortality rates did decline in Tunis at a much faster rate than the more modest drop recorded for Muslim infant mortality. In this section Parks joins other scholars of colonial medicine, such as Kamal Kateb, in casting doubt on French officials' claims that French doctors were responsible for the improving health of the population.^[2] Parks cites a relative lack of access to medicine in the city and suggests that the sharp reduction in infant mortality rates was more likely due to the efforts of mothers.

Parks shows convincingly that the Jewish population of Tunis occupied a unique position within colonial plans to modernize the city, educate its population, and improve public health. While he contends that the Muslim population remained outside the ideology of regeneration and was not the focus of AIU initiatives, one nevertheless wonders to what extent this population experienced similar types of transformations. For instance, his description of medicalizing childbirth, and maternalist goals of teaching women to be good mothers, recalls programs introduced by governments and private organizations elsewhere in the empire, including in Madagascar and neighboring Algeria. To understand more fully the Jewish population's unique position in Tunis, it would be useful to see how the Muslim population experienced similar types of transformations, even if the vision behind them was distinct from ideas of Jewish regeneration. Such criticisms aside, this book provides a useful way of looking at racial constructions of the Jewish community within Tunisian society and how this differed markedly from metropolitan reformers' visions of the Jewish population of Paris. Where the book is at its strongest is in the snapshots it provides of transformations underway in this city and individual Jewish responses to it, whether that is community members protesting the demolition of their synagogue, Zionists asserting an alternative vision of Jewish identity, or women choosing midwives to deliver their babies.

NOTES

[1] Eugen Weber, *Peasants into Frenchmen: The Modernization of Rural France, 1870-1914*. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1976).

[2] Kamal Kateb, *Européens, "indigènes" et juifs en Algérie (1830-1962): représentations, et réalités des populations*. (Paris: Editions de l'Institut National D'Etudes Démographiques, 2001).

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