

Arenas of Anger, Fear and Shame: History, Law and Rape in Mandate Palestine

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This article explores the mobilization of the emotions associated with sexual offences to construct the national Jewish identity in Mandate Palestine. It focuses on three prevalent emotions: shame, fear and anger. The article examines three arenas in which the Jewish Mandate community expressed and constructed these emotions: the legal arena, the public arena of the Hebrew press, and the semi-military arena. Utilizing contemporary Hebrew press, legal and archival materials, it investigates the social construction of emotion, and its adherence to ethno-national patterns.

The article demonstrates the collective emotional patterns that existed amidst the Jewish community in Mandate Palestine. The patterns of shame include the shame the victims felt vis-à-vis other members of their community, the informal sanctions that preserved that shame, and the shame of the community in exposing intra-community sexual offences to the eyes of strangers. Another pattern involves the construction of the fear of Arab sex offenders among community members, a practice that preserved ethnic and gendered distinctions. Additional emotional patterns pertain to anger, expressed through acts of revenge committed on behalf of the Jewish collective against Arab or British rapists. The expression of anger served the political goal of self-definition and perpetuated gendered patterns.

Furthermore, the arenas differed in their emotional emphases and the relationship between emotional expression and constraint. Shame was prevalent in the legal arena, which typically mandated emotional restraint. In the semi-military arena one can find extreme expressions of anger, in the form of revenge operations. Fear figured in the arena of the Hebrew press, which struck a balance between fomenting fear of Arab sex offenders and deliberately constrained coverage, designed to prevent escalation. This article demonstrates that emotion is not merely an individual sensation, but also part of a complex social system of meaning, embedded within a wider national, ethnic and gendered context.