

The Formation of Invisible Prostitution in Tel Aviv: Police, Law and the Ordering of Space

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This study focuses on the spatial history of prostitution in the city of Tel Aviv during the years 1965-1995, a period during which the spatial organization of prostitution in the city was reshaped. Visible street prostitution in the city center was replaced by prostitution in the city margins, making the phenomenon invisible. The 'cleansing' of the inner city included three acts of displacement: street prostitution was relocated to the northern beaches of Tel Aviv, to indoor sites in industrial areas and 'discreet' apartments, and in addition prostitution was centralized in the old central bus station in the south of the city. The paper sheds light on the central role of the police in managing the geography of prostitution. For the police, who are required to maneuver between the law that allows prostitution and the society which denounces it, much of the solution lies in space. The configuration of prostitution in the city is determined by the struggle between law enforcement authorities, people involved in prostitution, customers and residents. Drawing on archival materials and newspaper articles, the research reveals the practices, means and discourses, through which the moral-gendered order of the city was reshaped.