

Kimmerling, B. (2012). *Marginal at the Center: The life story of a public sociologist*. Translated by Diana Aidan Kimmerling. Berghahn Books: New York/ Oxford. pp. 239. ISBN 978-0-85745-720-2 Pb \$39.95/£24.95

In *Marginal at the Center* Jewish-Israeli sociology professor Baruch Kimmerling (born 16 October 1939, Turda, Transylvania - died 20 May 2007, Israel) provides an account of: his personal life as a son, husband and father; his academic life as a sociologist specialized in Israeli-Palestinian relations, and his public life as a self-proclaimed guerilla fighter for ideas. One striking element of the book is that Kimmerling does not present his personal, academic and public life stories strictly in chronological order. Instead Kimmerling tends to jump back and forth through time in the parts that alternately focus on his personal life, professional life and public life. The latter makes the book more difficult to follow but also more interesting; one never knows what may come next. The flashes back- and forward also integrate and connect the different life spheres stories.

The autobiography is loosely divided in four parts. *Part One* relates how the boy Baruch and his family dealt with: Baruch's congenital physical neuromotor condition Cerebral Palsy (CP), World War II in Transylvania, anti-Semitism under communist rule in the late 1940s and early 1950s, and immigration to Israel in 1952. *Part Two* relates important personal life events – Baruch's marriage to Diana and his bodily decline due to acquired spinal cord troubles– and Baruch's first academic career steps. When Baruch and Diana meet they are both promising doctoral students. However, when they become parents and Baruch becomes increasingly care-dependent, Diana terminates her budding doctoral career to take care of Baruch and their children.

In *Part Three* Kimmerling reflects on his career in sociology; how he progresses from a young lecturer who starts to develop his own ideas to a senior lecturer and professor who refines and rejects some of his own early ideas and counters dominant narratives about the Israeli-Arab conflict. Finally,

Part Four deals with Kimmerling's public life as a prolific writer of newspaper articles on the Arab-Jewish and Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

The interrelationships between Kimmerling's personal, academic and public life are not straightforward. Kimmerling himself maintains that his self-identification as an immigrant in an immigrant society may have helped him to develop a critical view on founding discourses of the State Israel but mostly Kimmerling refuses to link various events and circumstances in his life with his academic and public career. Moreover, Kimmerling states that his physical condition 'is not to be "blamed" for any specific choices I made or for having a substantial influence on who I became' (p. 225).

I do not agree with Kimmerling's assessment on the impact of his physical condition. Kimmerling has written a book that does NOT focus on the lived experience of disability. Despite this, readers may learn as much about how chronic conditions affect careers and life trajectories from Kimmerling's book as from autobiographies or autoethnographies that do focus on the lived experience of disability. If anything, Kimmerling seems not fully aware that for better and for worse his physical condition did affect his career and that of his spouse Diana.

Kimmerling describes different instances of discrimination he experienced in and outside academia and how his condition both enabled and disabled him in the activities he could undertake. For instance, the fact that overseas travel became harder for him when his physical fitness declined simultaneously enabled Kimmerling to devote more time and energy to writing. And arguably, his wife Diana's career was very much affected by his physical conditions because in part she terminated her doctorate to take care of him. Put differently, disabled men's careers may be enabled more by traditional gender norms than that they are hindered by their physical conditions. The latter Kimmerling does not address in his book.

The strength of Kimmerling's well-written autobiography mainly lies in that it pays equal attention to different life spheres. The latter ensures that Kimmerling's physical condition does not dominate the book, that is, his disability does not become a so-called master identity. Also Kimmerling's balanced treatment of different life spheres may enamor different readerships: readers interested in disability or the careers of (disabled) public scholars and readers who are interested in how Kimmerling worked and developed his ideas about the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

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