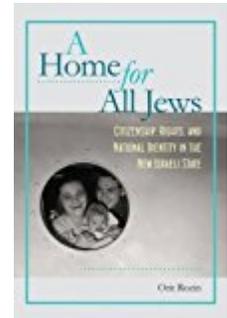


Orit Rozin. *A Home for All Jews: Citizenship, Rights, and National Identity in the New Israeli State.* Trans. Haim Watzman.: Lebanon, 2016. 248 pp. \$40.00, paper, ISBN 978-1-61168-950-1.



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Orit Rozin's lean yet authoritative study of three seminal realms in which citizenship and its attending rights, obligations, and privileges were defined, negotiated, and fought over in Israel's first decade is enlivened by piquant anecdotes, newspaper clippings, correspondence, and other rich archival evidence. These and other sources inform the author's rigorously balanced analytic judgment. The heavily contested campaigns she vividly explores include establishing the right of immigrant children to the kind of protected childhood common to the Western democracies; freedom of movement of citizens, especially the right to travel abroad; and the right of immigrants to protest and present their grievances to the country's elite establishment. These norms are largely taken for granted today—and yet a surprising number of controversies and complexities arose from each of these battles. Opening up fresh areas of investigation, *A Home for All Jews* should be especially valued by those who enjoyed Anat Helman's *Becoming Israeli: National Ideals and Everyday Life in the 1950s* (2014).

From the outset, Rozin candidly acknowledges that in the period she addresses, Israel's Arab minority was essentially excluded as partners to the formation of civic identity. Noting that very few words in Israel's Declaration of Independence even acknowledged the indigenous Arabs who were to become future citizens, she stresses how the novice state emerged with two forms of citizenship: the full citizenship and belonging enjoyed by Jews, and the “incomplete Arab citizenship” of the country's largest minority. Presumably, there is an as yet untold story to tell about the struggle of the latter to gain equal citizenship (clearly still being waged today), but Rozin leaves that for a future study, obviously a crucial gap which one is left hoping she or others will undertake to fill. Instead she tells a fascinating story about the clashes between Israel's swelling Jewish immigrant population and the elite establishment. Given that the 1948 War for Independence still raged and the nascent economy was in tatters, the conditions for smooth absorption were far less than optimum. Even in later years, acute employ-

ment and housing shortages continually exacerbated tensions. As if those pressures were not enough, strikingly different ideologies and political traditions simmered and sometimes threatened to destabilize the political culture of the Yishuv and the early state: Western liberalism, central and eastern European ethnocentric nationalism, Soviet statist authoritarianism, Jewish law, and the especially salient influence of the British Mandate.

Rozin characterizes her first investigatory sphere of civic and legislative struggle, “the right to childhood,” as an urgent legislative intervention that redressed the growing plight of a largely voiceless minority, Mizrahi girls—whose families had emigrated from the Islamic world and who were often married off at a very young age (some as young as ten or eleven), especially those from Yemen. Rozin delineates how this traditional practice went sharply against the grain of Israel’s “utopian horizon, according to which Jewish children are the children of the entire society,” which strove to clearly demarcate childhood and parenthood and “clearly marked those groups and individuals who conducted themselves properly and those who did not” (p. 13). To her credit, she sympathetically outlines the underlying factors that led to a schism between the Yemenite Jews, unfamiliar with the degree to which childhood had been elevated in the West, and the Zionist establishment. For the former, elders enjoyed the highest level of social prestige whereas the young state was focused on “the present and the future,” thus ascribing “special importance to young people” (p. 60). Complicating this struggle, then as today, the Chief Rabbinate sought to bolster its own authority at the expense of the government’s social program. Just how all this was eventually resolved, the resultant debates in the Knesset, and the painstaking fashioning of “active female citizenship” (p. 66) that eventually encompassed immigrant women is one of the more fascinating stories Rozin recounts.

Though her next case (“The Right to Travel Abroad”) would not seem to have quite the high stakes as the skirmishes over child marriage and polygamy, here, too, Rozin uncovers compelling contradictions and tensions that shed remarkable light on a distant era, a time that has largely receded from collective memory. From 1948 through the early 1960s, citizens hoping to travel abroad were required to secure an exit permit. Extremely difficult to acquire, they were typically limited to very short periods. Rozin cites a variety of reasons for this draconian measure, including the country’s desperate shortage of foreign reserves, fears that massive emigration from the young country might cripple its economic development, military readiness, and public morale. In a time when emigration from the young country was seen as traitorous or “deviant behavior” (p. 91), even travel agencies attracted police suspicion. Especially popular in the dominant labor movement, the pejorative term “travelitis” was applied to those deemed the antithesis of Israel’s self-confident and rooted New Jew, a discourse that seemed to borrow heavily from Christian tropes about the “Wandering Jew” and so on. In classical Zionist ideology, their condition was “a contagious disease. It was thus subversive and destructive, on the symbolic as well as the functional level, because it was seen as undoing prior achievements and calling the entire Zionist revolution into question” (p. 95). For their part, members of Israel’s beleaguered middle class, many of whom fully intended to return after their travel to see family members (including Holocaust survivors too ill to join them in Israel), protested vociferously against what they considered a policy that came frighteningly close to totalitarianism.

In some of her study’s most poignant passages, Rozin sensitively discusses letters of appeal by citizens to the authorities that are brimming with harrowing references to the individual’s suffering in the Holocaust or 1948 war. There was talk of an “Israeli iron curtain.” Perhaps most memorably, Rozin quotes the words of a journal-

ist in *Davar* who paraphrased his recent encounter with two citizens whose plaintive concern was that “we know how to do things on a large scale: how to build a cooperative, how to establish a moshav, how to bring in hundreds of thousands of Jews. But we know nothing about taking care of a person, how to reach the individual, how to share his grief, how to lend a hand in bad times” (p. 110). In this realm too, the debate waged in the public sphere soon carried over to the Knesset, and the matter was eventually largely resolved by Israel’s Supreme Court, which determined in its 1953 ruling that “a citizen’s freedom of movement ... is a natural right, obvious to every country ruled by democracy—and our country is one of these” (p. 82).

The final section (“Craving Recognition”) tells a far more familiar story, that of the daunting challenges posed to the country’s fledgling infrastructure by tremendous numbers of immigrants in the postwar year, severe housing shortages, the misery and malaise of the crowded settlement camps. Yet even here, Rozin manages to find new ways of revisiting forgotten moments from the past, vividly capturing the heightened degree of civic unrest and the authorities’ sometimes violent responses to protests, writing with justifiable admiration for the significant achievement of those who struggled against government authority and labyrinthine bureaucracies: “The waves of protests and the most common responses to them show that many of the immigrants acted fearlessly. Consequently, even though many of them had no past experience of democracy, their modes of action display ... an understanding of the nature of a multiparty democratic polity... [R]aising their voices in protest, the experience of liberation exemplified by the removal of obstacles to speech, was of great import” and this “rapid internalization of democratic life may provide some explanation of the wave of protests that broke out in the months that followed the 1948 war” (p. 157).

Whether Rozin is describing conflicts over what she calls “positive rights” or “negative rights” (such as “freedom from state interference”), exacting research is evident on every page; this is a scholar who knows how to craft penetrating cultural narratives out of dry legislative language and statistics. And at just 169 pages (with 30 pages of notes), *A Home for All Jews* is a model of concise exposition and balanced argument. The latter is especially evident in this representative passage: “Israeli democracy, like other contemporary ones, did not in its early years live up to the promises of equality, freedom, and fraternity on which it was founded. At the time, many Israelis sensed that an intolerable gap yawned between the hopes that accompanied the founding of the state and the reality they lived in. Yet this gap did not paralyze the new society. On the contrary, the force of the vision and the enormity of the distress motivated them to act for change. The test of a new democracy is not merely the extent of the equality that it grants its citizens, but rather the political, socioeconomic, legal, and public infrastructure that it establishes and that allows weak and excluded groups to fight to gain equal rights and freedoms. Whatever its injustices and flaws, Israeli democracy in its early years offered its citizens a worthy dream and tools for making it a reality” (p. 169).

Throughout, Rozin’s well-informed study, lucidly translated by Haim Watzman, more than justifies such measured optimism. Without ever diminishing the suffering and neglect of immigrants and others, she builds an altogether cogent case for Israel as a vibrant, self-correcting society in its early years. That said, though Rozin never pauses to examine the disparate but equally daunting challenges faced by the contemporary multicultural Jewish state, one is left inevitably wondering whether the current society is as up to the task as the founding generation. As she rather bleakly observes in her acknowledgements: “Some of my compatriots have forgotten the true value of democracy to humanity at large and to Israelis in

particular. I hope that this book will remind them that the freedoms and rights, recognition, and sense of belonging that are so hard to achieve should never be compromised” (p. xiii). May it be so in all the world’s increasingly fragile democracies.

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