



City Research Online

City, University of London Institutional Repository

Citation: Fleischmann, L. (2017). Smadar Levie. Wrapped in the Flag of Israel: Mizrahi Single Mothers and Bureaucratic Torture. New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014. *Peace and Change*, 42(1), pp. 162-164. doi: 10.1111/pech.12223

This is the accepted version of the paper.

This version of the publication may differ from the final published version.

Permanent repository link: <https://openaccess.city.ac.uk/id/eprint/19477/>

Link to published version: <https://doi.org/10.1111/pech.12223>

Copyright: City Research Online aims to make research outputs of City, University of London available to a wider audience. Copyright and Moral Rights remain with the author(s) and/or copyright holders. URLs from City Research Online may be freely distributed and linked to.

Reuse: Copies of full items can be used for personal research or study, educational, or not-for-profit purposes without prior permission or charge. Provided that the authors, title and full bibliographic details are credited, a hyperlink and/or URL is given for the original metadata page and the content is not changed in any way.

City Research Online:

<http://openaccess.city.ac.uk/>

publications@city.ac.uk

Smadar Levie. *Wrapped in the Flag of Israel: Mizrahi Single Mothers and Bureaucratic Torture.*

New York; Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2014.

Smadar Levie's book paints a vivid picture of the predicament of Mizrahi (Jews of Arab origin) single mothers on welfare, including a personal account of her own experiences as one such woman. She provides an account of the emerging Mizrahi feminist movement and protests that arose in an attempt to advocate for these women. She clearly explicates the marginalisation and disenfranchisement of these women, as well as providing an insightful history into Mizrahi Israelis and their particular position within Israeli society. In doing so she presents a significant internal rift within Israel society that is not often discussed outside of the country, where the focus is most commonly on the binary dynamics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

The scholarship on social movements and conflict resolution tend to focus on cases where mobilisation and change has been achieved or where they have the potential to be achieved. This study, however, begins with the proposition that Mizrahi single mothers on welfare are unable to create change. This is a case where there is minimal possibility of agency, theorised under the concept of 'bureaucratic torture'. Mizrahi women traditionally have an absolute love for the Jewish nation-state yet, it is the state bureaucracy that causes them so much pain in terms of access to welfare. This book explores the puzzle of protesting against the state, which the women are deeply attached to. Yet, it is the gendered and racialized logic of Israel's state bureaucracy that "denies agency of identity politics" for these women. The bureaucratic structure discriminates on the basis of both gender and race in a way that she argues amounts to torture. It is the combination of their love for Israel and the bureaucratic discrimination that restricts any potential for change. There is some clear lessons to be drawn from cases of attempts at social change that are not deemed successful and from identifying situations where agency is hampered to such a degree that change cannot be achieved. It remains open whether other citizens have the same 'totalistic love' for their country that some Israelis have for theirs, that would enable the transfer of Levie's theoretical lens.

The most important aspect of Levie's work goes beyond the Israeli case through her challenging of traditional methods of ethnographic research and emphasising the importance of subaltern auto-ethnography, particularly in the study of marginalised groups. Drawing from the Manchester Extended Case Study method she draws a clear and emphatic picture of the dire situation in which Mizrahi single mothers on welfare face themselves; a situation, she too was once in. She analyses her case through three different approaches: a model of the interrelationships between bureaucracy and torture; the "scientific objective gaze"; and a subaltern auto-ethnography of a welfare mother. Whilst the first two analyses provide interesting insights into the case of Mizrahi welfare mothers, it is when her voice is prioritised, and through her personal accounts of being a single Mizrahi mother on welfare, that truly help the reader understand the predicament of these women and the structural constraints on their ability to create change. It is through her explicit 'freedom from the academic corporation' that enables her to produce such an account.

Whilst we should not disregard studies that emphasise the positive potential of mobilisation, Levie makes an important step in explaining a case where such mobilisation was not only unsuccessful but, due the nature of bureaucracy, combined with loyalty to the state, never had the possibility of creating change. Furthermore, for those engaged in anthropological and ethnographical research methods, this book provides an excellent justification for appealing to subaltern auto-ethnographies of marginalised groups to truly understand their predicament. As Levie says herself, 'as luck would have it, I was a welfare mother in the lines when I conducted my research,' (23).