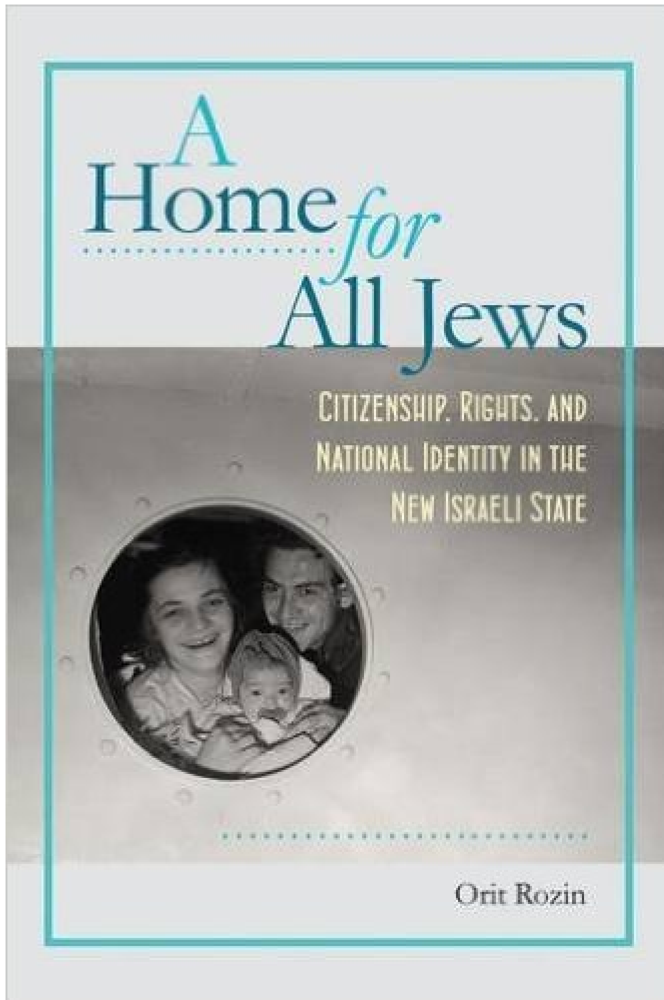

Orit Rozin, A Home for All Jews: Citizenship, Rights, and National Identity in the New Israeli State, translated by Haim Watzman, Waltham: Brandeis University Press, 2016, 169 Pages, Notes to Page 201, Bibliography to Page 221, Index to Page 231.

When Israel proclaimed its independence on May 14, 1948, it generated two implausible legends. One told and retold by most Israelis invokes a Jewish prophetic message of justice as the model for Zionism's humanistic vision. The other narrative firmly embedded in discussions of Israel's founding is its connection to colonialism. Both narratives are repeated so often because what is at stake is not just the question of how Israel was created but rather of what it means to be an Israeli--what special

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characteristics define the people; what resources Israelis can draw on from their past and how all they say and do is imprinted on their public life.

It is impossible to bring either foundation story into full alignment with history. [1] Israel was no more an outpost of colonialism than it was a template for radically pure ideas of social justice. But with scholars frequently more disposed to repeating myths about Israel's founding than to questioning them, it is reasonable to ask who will do the painstaking research to provide an understanding of how the Jewish state was set up and how it actually functioned in what was an indelible chapter in the country's political history. The answer, it seems, is Israelis who have published a variety of books and articles that have delved beneath the legends to tell the country's story accurately and comprehensively. Thus far more of this work appears in Hebrew than in English, but Brandeis University Press has taken the initiative to underwrite translations in order for this scholarship to find readers across the globe. For these Israeli academicians, objective scholarship matters, wherever it takes them in their judgments on the past.

And across the range of people doing this work, Orit Rozin is distinguished both for her focus on individualism in a country proclaiming a hegemonic discourse of collectivism and for her methodological commitment to history rather than philosophy as a means of deconstructing how a citizenship was formed that gave political agency to people and instilled in them a belief that what individuals said or did could make a difference. Rozin is uniquely well-placed to reflect on how citizenship and rights were defined in the new Jewish state. Her first prize-winning book--*The Rise of the Individual in 1950s Israel: A Challenge to Collectivism*--showed that the view of Israel as

[1] Because the miiltary administration imposed restrictions on the country's Arab population, Orit Rozin's book focusses attention largely on the country's Jews.

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possessing a uniform dominant culture was misleading and that conflicting discourses of individual and collective interests were repeatedly realigned and reconfigured.

Orit Rozin is one of a new generation of scholars building their careers around an exploration of Israel's social, cultural and political history. She gives both subtlety and depth to what became Israel's distinctive notion of citizenship in a political system made exclusively in Israel and entirely by its people--young and old, male and female, elites and masses, immigrants from every decade and part of the globe--all living on what some named holy ground even as others felt the undertow of the country's shifting sands.

Although Israel's war for independence was ended with a series of temporary armistices and not with peace, it was more than a symbolic stamp of power and control over the lands claimed on the official map. The country's first decade configured many of its institutions while it defined the basic principles of citizenship. Orit Rozin reconstructs how this took place in the most unlikely of circumstances when the country confronted profound economic disruptions and a massive immigration that threatened social upheaval. The stirring tales of an heroic war that were so important for the imagination could not hide from view the discontent that absorbed the daily tasks of dealing with shortages and restrictions.

Although Israelis would not be able to put their titanic struggle for safety and security behind them for many years, they also had to spend much of their time on ordinary activities. By telling the story of how the norms of citizenship emerged during years when widespread poverty and suffering could easily have overwhelmed if not buried discussions of issues that came to define both the obligations and rights of Israelis, Orit Rozin is offering on record what is often left unsaid: that not only what ordinary

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people say and do means something but also that words and deeds matter for a later generation and a later time . To be sure, Rozin is writing about ordinary people many of whom came to the country when it was still threatened from without and who were thrown into the cauldron they helped brew from within by joining the waves of immigrants who arrived without the resources necessary to sustain themselves and their households and who deepened the cleavages between class, religion and ethnicity.

People who lived their lives in one or another democracy could take their freedoms and rights for granted. But many of the Jewish immigrants came from societies without traditions of freedom or of rights that might offer protection. There may never have been such a vast variety of Jews brought together in one place before. All of this frightened politicians and officials haunted as much by the prospect of social dislocation as by the abuse of women and children they witnessed among so many immigrant families. Female children often married off by fathers before they were sexually mature, girls not sent to school--customs that were as much a betrayal of Zionism's ambition for Jewish liberation as an assault on what were then widely accepted notions of modernity. Tempted to move swiftly against what appeared archaic and uncivilized, Israeli officials were halted sometimes by fears that weakening the patriarchal family might deepen the ruptures in a society with so many fault lines already under assault. At other times, they were blocked by the thicket of competing interests that had a stake in holding back such social change until they were assigned the task of managing it. The caution is surprising given Zionism's ambition to create a new kind of social order without hierarchy, without exploitation, and with justice and equality for all.

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Such hesitation also seemed to contradict the mission of a network of institutions inherited by the state whose duties included transforming a people by exorcising the old habits of passivity supposedly bred into them by the distorted environment of their exile. Zionism was intended to remake the Jewish people by turning their religious traditions into a national culture. Leaders dedicated to the idea of transforming a people and changing the direction of history could be expected to see the possibility for progress even in the chaos following the war of independence and to imagine this a propitious time to expand on past success.

Thus while 1948 gave Israelis occasions to celebrate, it also brought them many reasons to fear. The transition of power from mandatory institutions to sovereign state may have appeared smooth with many of the institutions carrying the same names as their pre-independence predecessors, but they could not operate with the same authority. Israel may have accepted a political system bequeathed by the Jewish national home but the complicated interrelationships among established institutions changed with independence.

It is less a revelation than a reminder to say that no democracy emerged fully formed in 1948. Although governments were established--elections held and laws passed--the process of creating democratic procedures and norms was reworked many times particularly during the state's first years. Israelis could take some of their bearings from past practices, but the challenges confronting the Jewish state strained the resources and capacities of the venerable institutions developed during British rule. There was a framework of order, but it lacked the capacity to meet the needs of the country's growing population: an economy broken by war and overwhelmed by masses arriving without

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even the language to explain their problems; epidemics killing young and old and running through the tents or huts hastily constructed to provide some protection from the weather that could be as brutal in the summer as in the winter. By acknowledging the contradictory nature of this period--widespread despair mingled with a strong belief in the future--Rozin offers an explanation for why these years hold such importance for Israel's political development. How the government met the needs of its people would set the course not only for Israel's distribution of power, but also and more importantly, for whether new immigrants would feel bound to the country's common national enterprise.

Rozin starts her analysis with the challenges of setting a legal age for marriage, an issue that positioned itself in daily life as well as at a fulcrum for social change. It threatened the patriarchal family structure of Jews particularly from Yemen and other Middle Eastern countries and challenged the authority of Rabbis whose rulings had sanctified the power of males over their female relatives including children. Not surprisingly, claiming that a law must fix the minimal age for marriage did not take the cause very far partly because the vast differences between European and Middle Eastern Jews were often tossed around as emblematic of the superiority of one religious practice over another. Reframing the issue as guaranteeing a right to a childhood seemed an expression of values all could share even though producing the legislation to establish a legal age for marriage and for sexual relations threatened a complex set of political alliances. It also cast civil and religious authorities as adversaries and European and Middle Eastern Jews as possessing nothing less than different understandings of family and society. Into this maelstrom stepped Labor Zionist women's leader, Ada Maimon, with an urgency to make the issue her own. In the parliamentary debates echoes of labor

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Zionism's ambitions for national transformation could be heard overlapping with claims of individual rights. All had to contend with arguments about where the authority to change family and tradition lay. But while change threatened to destabilize a system already on the edge of social dislocation, it eventually worked its way through competing interests and contrasting political positions to claim a prominent position on the country's list of priorities.

In years when the divide between Jews seemed so wide another serious point of contention arose over whether traveling abroad undermined solidarity by allowing those with wealth to undertake journeys beyond the economic means of most Israelis struggling to meet basic needs. Would foreign travel undermine solidarity by reminding people of the gaps between rich and poor? Public practice commemorated communal solidarity as sacred inventing metaphors integral to the definition of national identity. But it could not extinguish the strong pull of individualism nor silence demands for personal freedoms. Eventually solidarity had to find a place to accommodate demands for the exercise of individual rights.

Finally, the question emerged of who ought to represent immigrant interests--officials or the newly arrived who were still struggling to assimilate into a society that appeared so different from their romantic expectations and whose rules were transmitted to them through an increasingly unpopular bureaucracy. Immigrants often pressed for accommodations that seemed corrosive of traditional standard Zionist visions and of established political and cultural values. But despite concerns, the political system opened a path for immigrants to speak for themselves leading to a more diverse and

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dynamic culture than classical Zionism ever imagined. Thus regardless of the stigma, immigrants were never totally marginalized from the mainstream polity and because of their numbers, they wielded considerable power.

1948 cast a powerful image of hope that may have set off an intense struggle for power and resources but also importantly transformed a population of needy subjects into citizens who pressed for their rights and interests despite the possibility of social dislocation. By helping people come to understand their own needs and envision ways to meet them, citizenship in Israel became not only an act of empowerment, it also became an exercise of the imagination that ultimately reminded people of what they shared as much as what divided them from one another

Rozin's analysis of citizenship goes beyond conventional versions typically offered by political scientists and legal specialists, but it does not lessen her achievements to note that her emphasis on interpreting action rather than on deconstructing language pays very little attention to the impact of Zionist ideologies on notions of citizenship. Drawn around ideas that placed a value on concrete action, the Zionist project focused on work and labor rather than on natural rights. Ironically, immigrants seeking to speak for themselves discovered in the language of natural rights a way to insist that their voices be heard and their demands considered. Officials initially tended to repress or dismiss the complaints of immigrants accusing them of draining Israeli political culture of its communal energies and humanistic ideals. In fact, immigrants who became politically engaged set off chain reactions that despite the risks multiplied the possibilities for politics and social acceptance. Rozin's narrative shows that freedom could not have been expanded without introducing ideas associated with a rights doctrine. The struggle over

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individual and collective needs became not only an enduring symbol of what it meant to be a citizen; it also turned out to be a means for increasing numbers of Israelis of finding a place they could truly claim as their own-- home and homeland.

According to Rozin, the power of the Israeli citizen--even those newly arrived on the country's shores--to define and alter the idea of the Jewish state has been substantial. One of the remarkable aspects of Rozin's book is how it accommodates both the brute realities of the period--including the loss of dignity and control suffered by immigrants totally dependent on officials who often ramped up prejudice against newcomers who did not seem prepared for the hardships they encountered--and the positive political developments that actually emerged from the upheaval. Political engagement expanded public discourse--pitted a discourse of human and individual rights against the claims of communal needs and produced enough of a correspondence between the two to give collective action agency. Here is her summary:

> The process of shaping Israeli citizenship was directed by policymakers and public activists to whom the state gave tools to shape it. But that process was also significantly affected by the state's weakness and the cracks that appeared in the governing apparatus. The looseness of the government's efforts and the multiplicity of opinions within it enabled certain groups to behave in ways that were not consistent with the position of the governing majority, while others were able to act even in violation of the letter of the law....The very demand of different groups to take part in shaping the social agenda and their activities in a variety of public sectors shaped their identities and their consciousness of themselves as citizens. (Page 14)

Israel brought a multitude of people together, many of whom viewed one another as foreign and alien--who lived side by side and encountered one another in ways that changed everyone and shaped the nation's society and culture. Rozin brings this world to life. She enables us to see how new forms of thought and action could evolve out of rupture and how they could imprint a set of norms that would form the basis for the range

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of power citizens hold in the Jewish state. Even as Rozin' study is focused on Israel's past, it helps explain what the country has become in the present.

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