recognizes the importance of race, class, and history in the making of gender politics is particularly interesting. Finally, I find the author’s positionality—sympathetic to oppressed and racialized women, namely Palestinian victims of the state of Israel and Mizrahi women—especially necessary in the face of current Israeli aggression and international silence around the repeated violations of Palestinian human and political rights.

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REVIEWED BY SIMONA SHARONI

The experiences of Israeli Jews whose families originated from the Arab and Muslim world, including the Middle East, North Africa, and the margins of Ottoman Europe, have been written out of dominant accounts of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Commonly referred to as Sephardim, Mizrahim, or Arab Jews, this population has suffered systemic discrimination and disenfranchisement. Sexism and gender inequalities have added a layer of oppression to the social and economic hardship experienced by Mizrahi women. In her book, Smadar Lavie, Mizrahi activist and author, details the daily struggles of Mizrahi single mothers with multiple bureaucratic institutions in Israel, filling an important void in the literature.

Defying conventional academic styles, Wrapped in the Flag of Israel comprises fragments of memoir and auto-ethnography fused with political analysis and cultural critique. Informed by critical race feminist theorizing, Lavie skillfully weaves her moving personal story as a single mother fighting to regain legal custody of her son with a thought-provoking analysis of social protest movements in Israel. Covering mobilizations focused primarily on gender and race inequalities within Israel, the book begins with an insider’s perspective on the 2003 Single Mothers’ March and ends with the Israeli mass protests in Tel Aviv in summer 2011, often referred to in the media as “Tahrir is Here.”

In analyzing the Single Mothers’ March as the culmination of the multiple struggles of poor Mizrahi women in Israel, Lavie uses the term GendeRace to call attention to “bureaucratic logic’s main classificatory criterion . . . a calcified amalgamation of gender and race.” She concludes that Israel’s bureaucracy is an “inflictor of pain” on welfare mothers (p. 80). Lavie examines the social
protest of 2003 and its aftermath by detailing how, following media coverage of the march, which was led by forty-three-year-old mother of three Vicky Knafo, “dozens of poverty-stricken single mothers from Israel’s Mizrachi ghettos and barrios started their own marches on Jerusalem” (p. 5).

One of the more provocative arguments in the book is about agency. Lavie’s analysis of “how Israel’s bureaucracy denies Mizrahi single mothers their agency,” serves as the basis for her conclusion that “there are situations where agency is impossible” (p. 80). The book documents how the Israeli state’s failure to address the plight of Mizrahi single mothers gave rise to several nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), like Ahoti (Hebrew for “my sister”), that work to support, represent, and advocate for this underserved community. Far from romanticizing the grassroots campaigns led by NGOs, the book examines critically the politics of funding as well as conflicts of power and privilege between academics and activists, and within the feminist movement in Israel. Throughout the book, Lavie also provides original discussions of such questions as why Mizrahim support the right wing in Israel. Most insightful is Lavie’s analysis of the dilemmas facing Mizrahi feminists, who are discriminated against both as women and as a racial minority but often feel alienated in the Israeli feminist movement and academy where racism is overlooked.

Wrapped in the Flag of Israel underscores the dynamic interplay between Israel’s socioeconomic divisions and the politics of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Both examples of social protests described in the book end abruptly as the political conflict escalates and the Israeli-Palestinian divide returns to dominate the news. In the aftermath of a suicide bombing in Jerusalem in August 2003, “the plight of the single mothers was completely off the public agenda in favor of the Palestine-Israel conflict. Most mothers left the encampment within a few days of the bombing” (p. 146). An almost identical phenomenon ensued in the summer of 2011. Inspired by the Tahrir Square demonstrations in Cairo, Egypt, “tens of thousands of young Israelis, priced out of their rental leases or foreclosed upon, protested the state’s slashing of public services, echoing the Single Mothers’ Protest of 2003, but on a larger scale” (p. 148). A suicide attack on an Israeli bus near Eilat, which provided an excuse for a “retaliatory” Israeli military operation, once again shifted the media and public attention in Israel away from socioeconomic disparities.

Lavie’s book ends with a rhetorical question: “How long can the regime depend on Mizrahi docile loyalty to the Jewish state?” (p. 153). Like the other poignant questions raised in the book, this question has no easy answer. However, Lavie illustrates how asking difficult, troubling questions that disturb taken-for-granted silences can be an important strategy of resistance. In doing so, Wrapped in the Flag of Israel offers theoretical and political insights that extend beyond Israel’s undeclared borders.

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