• • • *Rethinking the Family in Israel*

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In post-industrial societies, the individualization of the family process, which puts the individual at the center of the family, is changing this institution beyond recognition. As part of this evolution, individuals and their human rights, together with their obligations and responsibilities, become the basis for the family institution and for its legitimization. Consequently, family frameworks, whose roles and legitimate boundaries were established in the past in ways that served the interests of society and ensured its biological and cultural continuity, are becoming frameworks in which the individual is at the center. At the same time, thanks to ethical and political changes and the achievements of medical technology, for the first time in human history an individual can separate marriage, fertility, parenthood, and the establishment of a household to the extent that the socio-cultural climate allows.

Consequently, the phenomenon of singleness is taking hold, and new family frameworks are forming. These include, *inter alia*, single-parent families, same-sex families, cohabiting families, and transnational families. Such families, known in the literature as ‘new families’, exist alongside nuclear families (the normative modern families) and more traditional family frameworks, such as extended families—multi-generational, monogamous, or polygamous families—whose members live under one roof.

At the individual level, these processes generate many possibilities and broaden the autonomy of the individual, but at the same time they also may create lack of clarity, instability, and confusion. Moreover new and unresolved issues in the areas of education, social policy, and the welfare state, as well as in the juridical sphere, are raised. These issues stand at the heart of public debates and at the center of 'the battle over the family' in

state institutions (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim 1995; Chambers 2012; Giddens 1992; Illouz 1997; Roopnarine and Gielen 2005; Thorne and Yalom 1992; Trost and Levin 2005).

As a post-industrial society, Israel is experiencing, to a certain extent, the same processes of individualization that usually accompany this 'postmodern revolution' in a democratic society: the family is becoming more of a private concern, while it is more and more normative for adults, both men and women, to be entitled as autonomous individuals to shape their own destinies in both the private and public spheres. These developments have enabled various innovative family structures to come into being. They are also reflected in education, in legislation, in court rulings, and, of course, in the vocal debate about the nature of the relationships between children, parents, grandparents, and the state as the future Israeli welfare state takes shape.

However, a more thorough examination of these processes highlights the fact that despite the far-reaching changes described above, familism remains the identifying mark of Israeli society. Familism can be defined as the centrality of the normative family for the individual and the society. In this context, marriage is perceived as the legitimate framework for bringing children into the world, so that the children, and not the individual, are the foundation of marriage. The woman is constructed first of all in terms of wife and mother: her primary obligations are to give birth to children and to care for her home and family members, implying a gendered division of roles and authority.

Several factors explain the centrality of the family and of familism in Israeli society, despite the processes of individualization. Central among them is certainly the fact that marriage and divorce are subject to religious law for all the religions recognized in Israel—Judaism, Islam, Christianity, and Druze—and that there is no civil law governing personal status for all the citizens of the state, unlike the situation in Western countries. Consequently, the family codes anchored in each religion, which are institutionalized by the family status laws, are the main basis for the discourse on the institution of the family and familist practices. The reason for this is not religious coercion—which, if anything, plays a secondary role—but, rather, that most of Israel's citizens, both Jewish and Arab, see the personal status law as a crucial mechanism in the maintenance of their collective national group identities and the transmission of collective memory to future generations. These are of critical importance to both groups, Arabs and Jews, in a society in which the conflict between them remains unresolved. As a consequence, issues such as gender, nationalism, religion, culture, and human rights have to be discussed and included if we want to map the individualization process among the mosaic of cultures and

religions that are the fabric of the Israeli society (Abu-Baker 2002; Al-Hadj 1995; Al-Krenawi and Graham 1998; Bystrov 2012; Fogiel-Bijaoui 2005; Hacker 2009; Halperin-Kaddari and Yadgar 2010; Herzog et al. 2009; Lavee and Katz 2003; Raday 2008; Triger 2012).

This collection of articles aims to rethink the concepts of family and familism in Israel today and analyze the changes that are taking place. It is a culmination of academic research encompassing many different fields and using different research methods. Many of the articles are based on qualitative research, and thus readers have the opportunity to 'hear' a wide range of voices of those people involved in the changes in family life in Israel.

The collection is divided into four sections representing different vantage points of research. We begin with articles addressing "The Transformation of Intimacies," echoing Giddens's famous work, which analyzes how late modernity and the individualization process, inextricably bound, have transformed intimacy. In this section, we point out how the individualization process has transformed the intimacy of men and women belonging to different groups in Israel. The first article, by Ari Engelberg, is about singles in the Religious Zionist community who are inching closer to the independent lifestyles of Western young adults but are still maintaining religious boundaries. The next article, by Tal Meler, discusses Israeli-Palestinian women who are seeking autonomy and coping with their status as single parents. In the last article of this section, Ofra Or examines the unique characteristics of midlife women in living-apart-together (LAT) partnerships, comparing them to similar arrangements in Western societies.

The second section, "Families in Transition," echoes Skolnick and Skolnick's (2011) research, which deals with changes in attitudes, beliefs, and conduct in American family life. This section explores transitions taking place among families in the more traditional communities in Israel, pointing to the impact that individualization is having on family life. The first article, by Sima Zalcberg Block, characterizes matchmaking in an extreme Hasidic community in Israel as a 'barter' system that allows a kind of 'freedom of choice' for the future bride. The second article, by Reina Rutlinger-Reiner, details how theater is used as a facilitating tool in religious Zionist communities in order to create open discourse on family life crises. In the last article, Dafna Halperin describes the elderly in Arab and Jewish communities and the types of care they freely choose.

The third section, "The Boundaries of Family Life," examines how ethnic and religious boundaries are challenged or preserved within Israeli families and Israeli society at large due to, or in spite of, the process of individualization. The first article in this section, by Guy Abutbul Selinger,

discusses how the blurred boundaries that Mizrahi adolescents from middle-class families share with their middle-class Ashkenazi friends actually maintain their subordinate categorization. The next article, by Sibylle Lustenberger, analyzes the strategies that same-sex families employ in order to gain legitimacy and recognition, if only *de facto*, while challenging the concept of the normative family. The third article, by Gadi BenEzer, examines the reactions of Israelis to 'mixed' couples, one member of whom is Ethiopian. It gives voice to encounters of acceptance alongside reactions of rejection of the expansion of normative Israeli couplehood, which is conceived as 'white'. Nuzha Allasad Alhuzail's article deals with efforts by Bedouin women, empowered by a micro-finance program, to gain a better social and economic status, while still accepting the boundaries of Bedouin family life. The last article, by Hila Shamir, addresses migrant care workers belonging to transnational families, who are shaping a new familial reality for elderly Israelis.

The fourth and final section, entitled "Legal Discourse, Private Life," deals with the challenges that individualization poses to the Israeli judicial system that, in turn, influences familial relationships. The first article, by Sylvie Fogiel-Bijaoui, deals with a law passed in 2010 (Brit Hazugiut), which was meant to enable Israelis who lack religious affiliation, that is, former Soviet Union (FSU) immigrants, to (inter)marry in Israel. The article shows how, in fact, this law marginalizes this group from the Jewish national collective and is bypassed by the newcomers. Anat Herbst then examines the correlation between images, legitimacy, and policy during three decades of extensive legislation pertaining to single-parent mothers. The third article, by Yoav Mazeh, echoes contentions of Israeli fathers' rights associations and their growing influence, and presents what Mazeh considers the 'anomaly' of female custody in Israeli family law. The next two articles are connected to Israeli legislation and children's welfare: Zvi Triger demonstrates the reluctant recognition of same-sex parenthood by Israeli law and social services, while Tamar Morag traces the development of the recognition of children as rights bearers in Israeli law. We found it appropriate to conclude this section with Shelly Krecizer-Levy's article about how familial relations are defined and shaped by legislation and courts dealing with the 1965 Succession Law.

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In this collection, different points of view have been brought together in order to allow readers to learn from, and listen to, the voices of children, parents, lovers, the elderly, testamentary beneficiaries, and migrant workers. We hope that by publishing this collection in this special edition of ISR, we have contributed to the public discourse on pressing social issues that are changing contemporary Israeli society.

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