

Abstract

Between 1948 and 1956, an estimated thousands of babies and young children were kidnapped through the state medical system, in the newly established State of Israel. They were offered for adoption to barren parents (often Holocaust survivors), sold to international adoptive families (often in the United States), and in the most disturbing cases used in medical experiments. Parents were often told that their children had died during routine medical care, but were provided with neither death certificate nor body. The majority of the victims of these kidnappings were *Mizrahi* - Jewish immigrant families from Arab and Muslim countries. Most families were of Yemenite origin. Despite the large scale of this affair it has gone unrecognized by state systems, the legal system, the media, and the Israeli society at large. Thousands of families affected by this affair have to this date received no state recognition of this crime nor any closure as to where their loved ones might be.

The purpose of this dissertation is to explore how these families and individuals experienced this loss. How did they continue to raise their families in the shadow of extreme unresolved trauma and loss? How did they contend with the denial of official state systems? How did they reconcile the betrayal of medical professionals and the medical institution? These questions will be answered by examining images (home movies and photographs) and narratives of the families who had children kidnapped from them. Such images are often used to document joyous events, with the intent of preserving a glimpse of our best selves and best moments. But they also contain traces of pain and conflict inherent to family life. I will also argue that these images are also a type of unconscious expression similar to a dream or reverie and that because of this, these images will reveal painful and still unexpressed aspects of the trauma of the Kidnapped Children Affair.