

INSTITUTIONAL ABDUCTION

IDIT AVRAHAMI

08:20 min, 2019

The short film *Institutional Abduction* tells the story of three Mizrahi mothers whose babies were abducted from them shortly after birth. These stories would later become known as "The Yemenite, Mizrahi and Balkan Children Affair," depicting the institutional kidnapping and forced disappearance of thousands of babies and toddlers from migrant families in Israel, mainly in the 1950s. To this day, these mothers do not know what happened to their children, and their claims against the state are still ignored and silenced.

Idit Avrahami graduated from the Sam Spiegel Film and Television School in Jerusalem, where she currently teaches documentary film. She is the director and co-creator of a documentary series about the murders at a gay youth bar in Israel (2018, 3 episodes, Keshet TV). Her previous works also include *Fabric Stories* (2016, 6 episodes, Yes Docu); *Selfies* (2014, series, Channel 8, Israel); *The Journalists* (2012, series, Yes Docu. Premiered at DocAviv Festival), and more.

The film was produced with the support of:
Makor Foundation for Israeli Films



Director: **Idit Avrahami**
 Editor: **Boaz Lion**
 Produced by **Field Hospital X**
 Director of Photography: **Uri Ackerman**
 Executive Producer: **Shelly Levy**
 Participants:
Tammar maatuf, Salma Uzeri, Guliette Itshak
 Content Advisor: **Shlomo Hatuka**
 Sound Design: **Yoss Appelbaum**
 Online Editor: **Iddo Lahman**
 Research: **Idit Avrahami, Shlomo Hatuka**
 Assistant Camera: **Arkady Ostrovsky**
 Make Up: **Sagit Reiss**
 Camera Rental & Amp:
Studio Azoulay Galya, AG Production Solutions
 Editing Assistant: **Ella Lion**

CHILD ABDUCTION

Text by Avi Lubin

The Yemenite, Mizrahi and Balkan Children Affair is a severe case of racism in the history of Israel, and remains an open wound to this day. It depicts the forced disappearance of thousands of children from migrant families in Israel, mainly in the 1950s, soon after the founding of the state. There is still no official recognition of this injustice, and the state does not take responsibility for it.

Thousands of testimonies indicate a similar scenario: a baby was taken from the parents' care to a nursery or hospital, under the pretense that she or he need treatment. In some cases, this happened despite parental assertions that the child was healthy. The parents were not allowed to stay with the child. After a few days, they were told by hospital staff that their child had died and was buried. They never saw the body or burial spot. In many cases, the parents did not receive a death certificate, or received it much later, retroactively. A few dozen children were returned to their parents after fierce protests.

Over the years, nurses have admitted that in some cases children were given to wealthy Ashkenazi Jews in Israel or abroad. The nurses believed they were doing the family a favor by finding a more well-off family to adopt their child. After strong public criticism, three separate official committees were set up over the years to investigate this affair. They concluded that most of the babies had died, and that the fate of the remaining infants is still unknown. The committees dismissed the parents' arguments, claiming that the lack of documentation and overall disarray was due to a bureaucratic deficiency, which was characteristic at the time.

And yet, the committees did not seriously consider the fact that relevant and important archives were destroyed. Furthermore, they relied on lists of infants' deaths that were composed retroactively, as if this was a credible and reliable source of information. While the committees determined that there was no direct instruction or expressed intention by the establishment to kidnap, they did not consider the possibility that the establishment preferred to look the other way, and ignore this phenomenon, which systematically took place in various institutions during the same period of time.

Other instances of established kidnappings are known throughout the world. For example, the case of the indigenous children in Canada, or the Aboriginal children in Australia. Again, these examples demonstrate a methodical, racist action against certain communities, in which children were taken from their families under the pretense that they will be better off.

SECOND OPINIONS

Shai Lavi

Shai Lavi is a professor of law at Tel Aviv University and the Director of the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute. Prof. Lavi received his Ph.D. from the Jurisprudence and Social Policy Program, University of California, Berkeley. He is currently working on the regulation of authority over the body in Israel, Turkey and Germany, and tensions between religion and secularism.



Amalia Sa'ar

Amalia Sa'ar is a cultural anthropologist and associate professor at the University of Haifa, where, until recently, she acted as chair of anthropology and director of the Center for the Research of Peace Education. She is also a long-time peace and social activist, and a member of Isha-l-Isha - the Haifa Feminist Center.