

Bridge over troubled waters - A story of treatment in a search for hope.

Treatment of asylum seekers at the Gesher ("Bridge") Clinic

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Abstract

In February 2014, at the joint initiative of the Ministry of Health and the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, the Gesher Clinic was established at the Jaffa Community Center for Mental Health. The core of Gesher's clinical work is the delivery of diagnostic and psychiatric-psychosocial care to asylum seekers and victims of human trafficking, mainly from Eritrea and Sudan.

In a case-study-based article, several subjects are discussed: making treatment accessible and appropriate for a population in which Western psychiatric and psychotropic discourse is foreign, threatening, and fraught with stigma; the creation of a language of therapy that bridges linguistic and cultural differences in the treatment room; the treatment, which consists in part of giving meaning and validity to the experience of otherness, foreignness, and statelessness; treatment that acknowledges the power dynamics between white-resident-citizen-therapist and black-alien-statusless-patient; care that acknowledges and engages in the connection between the personal and political, between treatment and politics; post-trauma treatment under conditions of insecurity and retraumatization; the attempt, in the framework of the treatment, to create a space of security, purpose, and meaning.

The intercultural treatment at Gesher is conducted almost exclusively through translators and cultural mediators. This kind of therapeutic work requires adjusting and re-learning from all parties, especially the therapists. Through this case study the article discusses some of the ideological, ethical, theoretical and technical questions that arise in treatment constantly shifting among the personal, dyadic, triadic, public and political.