African Asylum-Seekers in Israel: Illegalization, Incorporation and Race Relations

Lisa Anteby-Yemini

ABSTRACT

Masses of African asylum-seekers from Eritrea and Sudan began arriving in Israel in 2007, clandestinely crossing the Egyptian-Israeli border. In response to this non-Jewish migration, the State of Israel has been adhering to a policy of exclusion through processes of criminalization, illegalization, economic exploitation, and social and urban marginalization. At the same time the asylum-seekers have become increasingly involved in Israeli economic and social spheres and are also challenging issues of racialization, belonging and migrant categorizations. This article has three objectives: a) to examine how the State of Israel is tightening its geographical and legal-political borders in an attempt to contain African migration and discourage settlement; b) to explore asylum seekers' growing participation in Israel's economy and society as well as the dynamics of agency, mobility and Israelization at play among this population; c) to attempt to map the complex relations developing between these new African migrants and the Ethiopian-Israeli population, which bring to the fore questions of identity, citizenship and color. The material presented in this article is based on fieldwork and interviews carried out in Israel between 2008-2012 with asylum seekers from Eritrea and Sudan, as well as with Israeli residents of South Tel Aviv, Ethiopian-Israelis and Israeli employers.

Keywords: Asylum-seekers. Illegalization. Incorporation. Ethiopian-Israelis. Israel.

"Information is Like Your Daily Bread": The Role of Media and Telecommunications in the Life of Refugees in Israel

Noam Tirosh and Amit Schejter

Abstract

Interviews, site visits and observations are used in this study to describe the information needs of the asylum seeker and refugee community in Israel, utilizing Taylor's (1991) concept of identifying "information use environments" (IUE), whose elements are people, their settings, their problems, and the solutions they find for their problems. A detailed analysis of the findings and framing them within the components of Taylor's model allow the creation of a framework for improving the refugees' situation in terms of their information needs. The study identified that asylum seekers and refugees in Israel have constructed a media environment based on their self-identification as "others". They created personal and technological circles to address their information needs, broadly divided into three types: personal, institutional, and spatial. Within the public sphere, they erected Internet cafés, their own "post office", and their own media. Within the private sphere, they acquired electronic media that address many of their needs. We conclude that since refugees are situated in society's least advantaged position, attending to their information needs should be a policy priority of their host society.

Perceived threat, Social Distance and Exclusion of Asylum Seekers from Sudan and Eritrea in Israel

Oshrat Hochman

Abstract

In recent years policy makers in Israel have established an exclusionist policy on asylum seekers, which includes, among other things, their detention at a detention center and their being deprived of their right to work, health and welfare. In this context, the current study investigates what the attitudes of the public are to asylum seekers, and to what extent these attitudes reflect the current policy: specifically whether the Israeli public supports the exclusionist policy on asylum seekers, and the role played by perceptions of socio-economic threat and social distance in acceptance or rejection of this policy. To measure the latter construct respondents were asked how far they agreed or disagreed with the need to grant asylum seekers rights and humanitarian support. In addition to perceptions of threat and social distance I controlled for the respondents' ethno-national origin, socio-economic status, levels of religiosity, their political identification, and whether or not they came in contact with asylum seekers from Sudan and Eritrea in their everyday lives. The findings indicate that as levels of perceived threat and social distance rise, so do respondents' levels of disagreement with the provision of rights and humanitarian support to asylum seekers. The findings additionally demonstrate that net of perceptions of threat and social distance, respondents of the Israeli-Arab minority are less exclusionist than respondents of the Jewish majority. Finally, the correlation between perceived socio-economic threat and rejection of the provision of rights and humanitarian support to asylum seekers is partially mediated by perceived social distance.

Where Time Stands Still: Holot Detention Facility and the Israeli Anti-Infiltration Law

Hadas Yaron Mesgena and Oran Ramati

Abstract

This article discusses the anti-infiltration law and detention of African asylum seekers in Holot in the Negev desert in Israel. The detention facility was built following an amendment to the 1954 anti-infiltration law legislated in the wake of the 1948 war. While the original ordinance was directed against Palestinian and other Arab nationals, the amendment was intended to imprison the Eritrean and Sudanese nationals who began entering Israel in 2006 in search of protection. Seeking to identify how Israeli policy, the judicial system, activists, and detainees are affected by the Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict and/or global factors, the article explores the Holot detention facility as a type of "camp" and township. On the basis of archival records from the 1950s, petitions, legal decisions, reports, and the voices of the detainees in Holot, it analyzes the facility and the policies governing detention therein in the larger context of Israeli politics.

Keywords: Holot, African asylum seekers, anti-infiltration law, detention, refugee camps, townships

Situational humanitarianism:

Israeli soldiers and asylum seekers on the Egyptian-Israeli Border

Efrat Ben-Zeev & Nir Gazit

Abstract

This article examines three logics -- securitization, humanitarianism and criminality -- that guide soldiers' perceptions and practices on the Egyptian-Israeli border. To describe how these logics come into play, we dwell on soldiers' experiences during their service along this border. Our fieldwork was conducted between 2012 and 2014. In this article we focus on off-site interviews with soldiers who completed their service, and analyze media reports and court affidavits. Through this data we wish to demonstrate the easy transition from one logic to the other. Our argument, which is based both on fieldwork and previous literature, points to the fact that such easy transitions are inherent to border zones. By focusing on the interactions between Israeli soldiers and asylum seekers, as well as between the former and Egyptian police and smugglers, we describe how these logics operate on the border simultaneously, creating a form of situational humanitarianism.

ملخص

بحث هذا المقال ثلاثة أدوار التي توّجه تفكير ونشاط الجنود على الحدود الإسرائيليّة المصريّة- أمنيًا، إنسانيًا، وجنائيًا. لوصف هذه الأدوار نتعقّب التجارب التي يمرّ بها الجنود أثناء فترة الخدمة العسكريّة في الحدود. نودّ توضيح فكرة إختلاط الأدوار الثلاثة. نعتمد على العمل الميداني الانتوغرافي الذي يدور بين السنوات 2012-2014، خاصّة عن طريق مقابلات أُجريت مع الجنود خارج النطاق الميداني، وأيضًا مصادر إعلاميّة وشهادات خطّيّة. بحسب رأينا، وبحسب أبحاث أخرى، هذا يميّز المناطق الحدوديّة بشكل عام. نصِف كيف تخلق المناطق الحدوديّة تداخلاً بين الأدوار المختلفة، خاصّة المواقف الإنسانيّة العابرة، المرتبطة باختلاف الأوضاع، عن طريق التفاعل بين الجنود الإسرائيليّين والمهاجرين طالبي اللجوء، أيضًا العلاقات بين الجنود من جهة والمهرّبين ورجال الشرطة المصريّين من جهة أخرى.

Bridge over troubled waters - A story of treatment in a search for hope.
Treatment of asylum seekers at the Gesher ("Bridge") Clinic

Shlomit Ben Shmuel

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.

"I Never Told What Happened to Me in Sinai"
On the Difficulties of Identifying Survivors of the Torture Camps and the Conduct of the Immigration Authority toward Them

Sigal Rozen

Abstract

The article focuses on the conduct of the Israeli Immigration Authority regarding the 5,000 survivors of the torture camps in Sinai, most of whom had fled Eritrea. The essay reviews the changes in policy and legislation from 2009 to the present.

The essay is based on information and data collected by the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants through thousands of interviews with asylum-seekers in detention facilities between 2009 and 2015, reports published on the matter by the Hotline for Refugees and Migrants and by Physicians for Human Rights – Israel, and protocols of Knesset hearings as well as hearings of asylum-seekers before Border Control Officers of the Immigration Authority and the Detention Review Tribunal.

The essay clarifies the scope of the torture camps, examines the difference between a torture victim and a human-trafficking victim held in conditions of slavery, explains the difficulties in identifying slavery victims, reviews the mechanisms of identifying slavery survivors in Israel, and analyzes why many of these testimonies do not appear in protocols of hearings before Israeli authorities. The article reviews the changes in legislation, which allows incarceration and prevents release of survivors of torture from Saharonim prison and the Holot detention facility.