AFRICAN ASYLUM SEEKERS IN ISRAELI POLITICAL DISCOURSE AND THE CONTESTATION OVER ZIONIST IDEOLOGY

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ABSTRACT

Since the time of their arrival beginning around 2005, there remain approximately 46,000 African asylum seekers in Israel. The following paper reviews the foundations and implications of Israel's political discourse in reference to the presence of this community. I situate the treatment of the asylum seekers in their relationship to the Jewish State, Zionist ideology, international refugee law, and Israel's human rights community. I argue: 1) that the discourse surrounding the asylum seekers reflects larger changes within the ethos of the Jewish State and models of Israeli personhood; 2) that notions of "security" and "threat" in relation to the asylum seekers take on new meanings shaped by Israel's ongoing demographic concerns; and 3) that the political response to the African asylum seekers sheds light on irreconcilable goals of the Zionist nation-building project seeking to both maintain a Jewish majority and liberate world Jewry from life segregated and isolated in the Diaspora.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Impetus for the following paper stems from a three-month volunteer experience in the summer of 2012 and a month-long stay in 2013 working for a non-governmental organization based in South Tel Aviv. During my time there, the organization provided myriad social services to the African asylum-seeking[1] community in Israel, had a research wing which published papers outlining their predicament, and assisted individuals in their asylum applications. Although this project is not ethnographically based on that period, through my work both registering walk-ins and providing individuals with updated policy information, it was there that I became intimately aware of Israel's asylum system and the impact it had on the African asylum-seeking community. For these reasons, those months undoubtedly informed and helped shape this project.

While I acquired first-hand knowledge of impacts the asylum system was having on the lives of members within the asylum-seeking community, I was mystified, however naïvely, regarding the extent to which asylum seekers were understood as a grave threat to the Israeli Jewish community. In an effort to discover the foundations behind such fears and the nature of such threats, the purpose of the following essay will be to systematically examine causes, effects, and implications of political discourse surrounding the presence of African asylum seekers in Israel.

[1] The following paper will use the term "asylum seeker" to refer to the African migrant community in Israel, as they have "crossed international borders in search of protection under the Refugee Convention of 1951, but their request for recognition of refugee status has not yet been granted" (Shamai & Amir 2015:2).

Central to my analysis will be placing such discourse within contexts embedded in important historical trajectories that proved monumental in establishing pre-state Zionist ideologies and later ideologies of the State of Israel. Towards this end, I gathered quotations of contemporary Israeli politicians from a range of newspaper articles dating from 2009 to the present, a time marked by increasing African migration into Israel, widely publicized anti-migrant demonstrations, and important changes in Israel's asylum policy. Scholarly literature published by historians and social scientists is employed in citing former Israeli politicians. Lastly, I analyze two *Haggadot* reviewed in chapter five which are publicly available on the web.[2]

While much debate has focused on the meanings (Geertz 1973), purposes (Althusser 1971), and intellectual conceptualizations (Asad 1979; Mannheim 1960) of ideologies, this paper does not attempt to challenge or problematize notions of ideology. Rather, I work with a simple definition of political ideology by Kalekin-Fishman, who argues that an ideology is as "a collection of statements that supports struggles for what is perceived of as right" (2004:41) to question the ramifications of a particular "collection of statements" made by Israeli politicians. As I argue, Israeli political discourse relies on the strength of particular ideologies of the state, enabling politicians to employ security tropes in ad hoc ways that rationalize their conduct; the asylum seekers are mobilized as yet another common enemy to the Jewish people *despite* their vulnerability and weakness.

To begin understanding Israeli political discourse in relation to the asylum seekers necessitates a contemplation of the principles upon which much of it is rooted. As such, a

[2] This paper is a library-based account following the most recent citation guidelines outlined by the American Anthropological Association.

good deal of energy will be devoted throughout the text towards offering the key ideological foundations of the Zionist movement which are mobilized in rationalizing asylum policy. As I ask what role the rapidly shifting Israeli society has had on shaping this political rhetoric, chapter two will offer an overview of what Israeli sociologist Baruch Kimmerling (2001) has identified as the "decline of Israeliness." Eroding the hegemonic, European ("*Ashkenazi*") form of personhood germinating from the pre-state period are mounting costs of living, the ongoing implementation of neoliberal programs, and the rise of myriad disgruntled ethnic and social groups, a combination which has worked to reveal the Jewish community in Israel as one marked by increasing disparity and plurality.

As Kimmerling argues, the rapid decline of collective Israeli modes of identity is tempered by two lasting sociopolitical institutions within Israel which work to maintain national identity: the military and the Jewish collectivity. This understanding will prove imperative in proceeding chapters linking tropes commonly invoking demographic and security concerns in reference to the asylum seekers, the discursive effects of which bolster and help delineate the representation of these aforementioned vestiges of "Israeliness." As we will see, these concerns often culminate in "worst-case" (Kimmerling 2001:225) doomsday scenarios whereby the supposed demographic threat the migrant poses to the Jewish State is the focus of much rage and political provocation.

The first section of the chapter will assess the origins of this monolithic, *Ashkenazi* form of secular "Israeliness" within the Zionist nation-building project and examine how the icon of the tough, self-determined "New Jew" helped construct an idealized national character. Emerging within the budding *kibbutz* movement, so

important was this national persona that it was mobilized to justify the Zionist nation-building project itself. As I will show, one factor contributing to the decline of this idealized character has been increasing social unrest and discontent among newly forming social and ethnic communities. Section two covers this development by reviewing several influential periods of Jewish migration into Israel which expose the dubiousness of generalized notions of homogenous Jewish Israel based upon the aforementioned social construction of a particular model of Zionist personhood and the hegemonic *Ashkenazi* political establishment upon which it was based.

A second factor contributing to the dissolution of the monolithic Israeli body politic has been the onset of neoliberal economic policies coinciding with the demise of the welfare state, an ongoing development precipitating since the late 1970's and the rise of the right-wing Likud party. Here, the rupture of the social contract between the Jewish State and the Jewish people which served as both a justification and realization of early Zionism continues to cause tremendous unrest. Not surprisingly, it has been during these post-state economic and ethnic transformations that the *kibbutz* as an influential social institution rapidly declined amid privatization and reduced financial support from the state. In turn, the prestige of the *kibbutz*, and more specifically members of the *kibbutz* ("*kibbutznikim*") as lionized Zionists, largely deteriorated. As I outline, that esteem which does remain comes from the disproportionately large role members of *kibbutzim* continue to play in influential positions within the Israeli military, symbolizing the more general continuity of this value across generations during the dissolution of other social ideals.

Evaluating the role of the asylum seekers within this context helps direct questions posed throughout the paper in relation to where the asylum seekers stand

legally, economically, and socially inside Israeli Jewish society (chapter 3), what they represent and how these representations are mobilized by state actors to fulfill political interests (chapter 4), and in turn, how the asylum seekers themselves deploy tropes tied to Jewish history for their own causes (chapter 5).

The third chapter reviews of the legal, political, and social environment facing the African asylum-seeking communities. I start by focusing on Israel's changing contemporary secondary labor market and argue the continuous replenishment of cheap manual labor assembled under ad hoc migration systems following the First Intifada beginning in 1987 helps denote Israel's long-standing and convoluted immigration policy, providing a harbinger to the current state of affairs. Next, I briefly cover Israel's legal obligations as a signatory to the 1951 Refugee Convention and Protocol in 1967, with a focus on how political categorizations of African asylum seekers in Israel strategically highlight their unsubstantiated "illegality." The use of terms such as "economic migrant" by Israeli politicians coincides with the lack of recognition given to economically motivated migration under the Convention, lending authority to the justification of Israeli asylum policy.

While in chapter three I offer the ways in which pseudo-legal explanations become a rallying cry for Israel's current asylum policy, chapter four presents the ways in which asylum seekers are mobilized within the cognitive paradigm of what Israeli political psychologist Daniel Bar-Tal (1986) calls the "Masada Syndrome," the highly socialized worldview among Israeli Jews that "the rest of the world has highly negative behavioral intentions towards them [that] reflects a state of siege mentality" (Bar-Tal &

Antebi 1992:251). Given the historical perception of the existential threat[3] the outside world poses to world Jewry, I argue that the asylum seekers are themselves understood as yet another common enemy facing Israel.

Importantly, I argue that while the "threat" remains, the nature of the threat changes meaning from the traditional, apocalyptic sense. That is, implied in much of the political discourse reviewed is the assumption that the de-stabilization of society brought by asylum seekers will not itself harm Jewish existence, but the political apparatus which supposedly protects the Jewish people against the sadistic outside world. Nevertheless, such sentiments are largely informed by the Jewish past and the Zionist rationalization for a Jewish State.

I review the Zionist narrative of the Roman siege of Masada itself, while subsequently offering examples of how the influence of this analytical framework has informed post-state Zionist discourse in reference to the non-Jewish world in general. Understood within this context, I advance that the patina of statements made by Israeli politicians position asylum seekers along a historical continuum of enemies to the Jewish people. Yet, as the political discourse linking the asylum seekers as security threats to the state relies on historically rooted understandings of the outside world, the very notion of "threat" and "security" appears to be quite ambiguous, blurring the line between demographic and bodily danger. Given the objective of Israel to provide safety for world Jewry, changing demographics can be interpreted itself as endangering the very political apparatus understood as the last lifeline ensuring physical Jewish survival. While the

[3] The term "existential threat" to categorize the Israeli conceptualization of the asylum seekers has recently been used in a publication by Kalir (2015). While I similarly analyze the perceived threat posed as very much informed by Jewish history, my analysis intends to uncover how notions like "security" and "threat" take on new meanings in this context, meanings largely shaped by Israel's demographic concerns.

underlying assumption of the threat posed by the non-Jewish world remains a fixture linking current political discourse with the early Zionist ideologies of the first "waves" of migrants into Palestine, the nature of that threat inherently takes on more nuances given the changing geopolitical and military strength of Israel.

In correspondence with chapter two, it is suggested here that the new iconicization of the asylum seekers serves the purpose of unifying and organizing a disjointed body politic, what Herzfeld calls those "awkward, complicated, messy truths about ethnic and other kinds of internal diversity that undergird its [the state's] bland assertions of homogeneity" (2005:110). While it has been suggested elsewhere (Kalir 2015) that political attempts at "othering" the asylum seekers work to reify the boundaries between citizen and non-citizen, I believe a much more rudimentary lesson manifests. Given the myriad experiences of citizenship and access to resources *among* different Jewish groups in Israel, what is reiterated is likely the importance of a Jewish demographic majority and the Jewish collectivity more than an affiliation with a more complicated association like citizenship. Secondly, we see in the political rhetoric the continuity between that which rationalized the establishment of the state with a persistent ideological emphasis on security, safety, sovereignty, and the threat posed to the Jewish people by the Gentile world. That is, the second lasting vestige of "Israeliness," the centrality of Israel's military-security apparatus, is at play here.

Chapter five explores how the current asylum seekers, in collaboration with the Israeli human rights community, continue to work towards reappropriating the story of the Exodus to justify their presence in Israel and express solidarity with a misinformed Israeli public. Beginning in 2007, public "Refugee *Seders*" have been organized during

the Passover season, with the ritual holiday meal juxtaposing asylum seekers' personal stories of persecution with those of the ancient Israelites and other events marking Jewish suffering. In so doing, the community openly challenges Zionist historical narratives which create binaries between the Jewish and the non-Jewish world by emphasizing universalities traversing the histories of similarly oppressed communities.

It is the goal of chapter five to examine the ways in which such narratives are counter-hegemonic to the exclusivist narratives of the Exodus, which traditionally details a particular Jewish story *in vacuo* of comparable accounts of human suffering. Towards this end, I review two *Haggadot*, or ceremonial texts, used during several of these "alternative" Passover meals.

Michael Herzfeld (2005) refers to "structural nostalgia" as a ubiquitous representation advanced by nation-states of a "formerly perfect social order," a veritable "time before time in which the balanced perfection of social relations had not yet suffered the decay that affects everything human" (147). While the state certainly legitimizes its Zionist-inspired reclamation of Jewish nationhood, the paper concludes with an analysis of how the employment of asylum seekers within political discourse and the subsequent enactment of asylum policies undergirding such rhetoric also complicates Herzfeld's notion.

Treatment of the asylum seekers in Israel reflects perceptions of the very existential and naturalized animosity posed against the Jewish people, consequently justifying the state's behavior, and ultimately, its existence. Indeed, no "edenic" order exists, and none is envisioned because of the professed constant enmity and danger the Gentile world poses to Israel, as exemplified in the Masada Syndrome. The paper ends

with questioning the implications of this worldview in practice, and its reinforcing effect of isolating and enclosing Israel into environs replicating the ancient fortification of Masada or the very shtetls from which early Zionists hoped to escape.

CHAPTER 2

ISRAELI HETEROGENEITY AMID INCREASING JEWISH PLURALITY AND NEOLIBERALISM

In April 2015, a video went viral showing an IDF soldier of Ethiopian descent being beaten by an Israeli policeman; an event which sparked massive demonstrations throughout Israel by the neglected and disenfranchised Ethiopian Jewish community (Maltz 2015). The affair brought international attention to an issue many outside of the country were likely unaware of; namely, the tremendous internal conflict and social disparity among Israel's various ethnic Jewish communities. Alongside neoliberal reforms and escalating costs of living, as myriad disgruntled social groups continue to emerge following the establishment of the state in 1948, not only has the Jewish community in Israel become increasingly plural, but one marked by growing economic inequality.[4]

This chapter will review the popularized characteristics delineating the hegemonic Eastern European form of personhood germinating within pre-state Zionist ideology. In turn, I offer explanations as to why this particular form of "Israeli" identity has weakened amid pressures pulling the body politic in multiple and often contradictory directions. The implications of such a changing Israeli landscape will prove crucial for proceeding arguments in the thesis because characteristics of Israeli political discourse pull from the lasting remnants of such ideological foundations. While both terms are used throughout the paper and hold similar meanings, I differentiate "identity" from "model of personhood" in that in the latter I reference a particular package of qualities (i.e. mental,

[4] Inspiration for this analysis comes from the work of Israeli sociologist Baruch Kimmerling (2001), whose influential book explains how these pressures which expose the arbitrariness of a collective Israeli identity are resisted by two lasting social entities which help contain national identity: "Jewishness" and the Israeli military-security apparatus.

spiritual, physical, etc.) which constitute a roughly "complete" character upon which one may model one's life after. The term "identity," particularly in relation to national or collective contexts, is used more generally to situate one's affiliation to a particular social group.

Broadly speaking, I identify the origins of "Israeliness" coming from the pre-state period and developing from influential periods of Jewish migration into Palestine. As such, and given that the major societal transformations I mention occurred after the establishment of the state, my analysis will be temporally divided into these two periods. Yet, such a division is largely constructed for the convenience of our analysis and it is not argued that this period marked one dramatic societal upheaval. Rather, these periods provide rough time frames during which such changes occurred.

The first section of the chapter will assess the origins of this pre-state, monolithic form of personhood within the Zionist nation-building project and examine how this icon helped construct a national character. Central to my analysis will be that of the collective agricultural settlements, *kibbutzim*, whose members would represent the most extolled of characteristics arising from the Zionist nation-building project.

The next two sections offer post-state processes which worked to disrupt this model of personhood. In section two, I review several influential periods of Jewish migration into Israel which expose generalized notions of monolithic Jewish Israel based upon the aforementioned social construction of a particular model of Zionist personhood and the hegemonic *Ashkenazi* political establishment. In section three I present a brief overview of the demise of the welfare state and the social contract between the Jewish State and the Jewish people which served as both a justification and realization of early

Zionism. A conclusion summarizes these phenomena while arguing this analysis crucial for our understanding of the ways asylum seekers are represented in Israel. As I will argue, the lasting values remaining from the pre-state European model of personhood reviewed in the beginning of the chapter are projected in the Israel political discourse reviewed later in the paper.

The Origins of Zionist Nationalism

The 1858 Ottoman Land Code (Shafir 1996:35) fostered the legal conditions enabling Jewish patrons like Baron Rothschild and Zionist organizations like the Jewish Colonization Association (JCA) the opportunity to acquire land in Palestine (41-46). Soon after, Jewish immigrants from Russia and Romania (49) began arriving into Palestine to settle on newly purchased lands (land acquired predominately from wealthy, absentee Ottoman landowners). The first new Jewish settlements were built in 1860, and by 1878 the first agricultural settlements were launched (Near 1992:8).

Jewish migration into Palestine (and later Israel) is commonly divided into different periods, called *Aliya* (Hebrew for "ascent"). The first "wave" of Jewish immigration to Palestine, or *Aliyah*, is recognized as beginning in 1881 and ending in 1903. This was a period marked by an inherent conflict between Jewish workers and Jewish planters and developers, the former unable to compete in an open market with Palestinian labor, nor live the European lifestyle they were accustomed to (Shafir 1996).

It was not until the Second (1904-1914) and Third *Aliyot* (1919-1923)[5] that a centralizing ideological and political backbone of the Zionist movement developed. Shafir (1996) notes:

> The critical step in Israeli state building and nation formation took place… in 1905 when the productivization drive of the Eastern European Jewish Enlightenment (*Haskala*) was transformed, in Palestine, into "conquest of labor"- an aspiration to monopolize at first all manual labor, subsequently at least skilled jobs, by Jewish workers…Yemenite, as well as other *Mizrachi* Jews, were incorporated into Israeli society but placed in an inferior position in the labor market and social structure, while Palestinian Arabs were definitely excluded even as a labor force. (188)

Central to this ideological development was the materialization of Zionist pioneers, *chalutzim*.[6] These "new" secular Jews were to become the antithesis of those living the life of the exilic trader and middleman; the young Zionist immigrants were to symbolize the restoration of the psyche and the body of an independent and resourceful "Hebrew" (Stern 1965).[7] Zerubavel explains the "repudiation of exile" as a dominant psychological current:

> The highly negative perception of Exile often turned from *shelilat hagalut* (the repudiation of the state of living in exile) to *shelilat ha-gola* (the condemnation of the people who live in exile), the product of its demeaning and repressive lifestyle. According to this view, life in exile turned the Jews into oppressed, submissive, weak, and fearful people who passively accept their fate, hoping to be saved either by God or by Gentiles' help. (19)

Indeed, "agricultural workers occupied the top ranks in the prestige hierarchy" in pre-state Israel (Kimmerling 2001:91), exemplified in ideologue A.D. Gordon's notion of

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[5] Plural for *Aliyah*.

[6] Preceding the modern Zionist movement, Jews in Europe had been prohibited land ownership and restricted from manual work by legislative action.

[7] With the onset of Jewish migration to Palestine, the word "Hebrew" was used in reference to secular Zionists returning spiritually to their biblical, heroic past (Zerubavel 1995:20-22).

a "religion of labor," which proposed physical toil of the soil as a spiritual calling and a basic human function. By deliberately choosing to be laborers, these settlers destroyed previous social, economic, and gender hierarchies within which they previously participated (Spiro 1956:11-14). There was also a type of exceptionalism at play, for as Sternhell (1998) notes, "among the masses of Jews who left Eastern Europe in the thirty or forty years prior to the passing of the American immigration laws in 1922, only about 1 percent or slightly fewer came to Palestine" (13). For Sternhell, "this explains a sense of chosenness among the people of the Second Aliyah" (79).

The inconicity of the settling pioneers became co-opted by native born "Israelis" under the term "*tzabar*," or "sabra," the pear cactus introduced to Palestine in the 18th century from Central America. The "sabra" symbolized "the native Israeli, whose rough, masculine manner was said to hide a delicate and sensitive soul" (Almog 2000:4), and what developed was what Israeli historian Oz Almog calls the emergence of the "Sabra as a cultural archetype":

> The burgeoning popularity of the term "Sabra" in the 1930s and the beginning of the 1940s reflected the rising prestige of the second generation of the labor movement, which in those years was achieving political and cultural hegemony in the *Yishuv*.[8] (5)

A prominent institution which helped foster these principles was the Israeli agricultural collective, the *kibbutz*. Because the effect of early settlements unquestionably had less than benign impacts on the indigenous peoples of Palestine, the notion of their embodying socialism has been rightly criticized (Khalidi 1997; Segev 2001). Yet, the inner workings of the *kibbutz* reflected democratic and egalitarian principles. The practice of public ownership of property symbolized the movement's adherence to the importance

[8] The pre-state Jewish settlement in Palestine.

of worker-managed enterprises. As long as members met the needs of the community through collective work, everyone's economic requirements could be satisfied. Because private property had been eliminated, lodging, food, and other essentials such as medical attention were provided by the community (Near 1992).

Certainly, some members' work carried more prestige than others (i.e. hard physical labor valued more than administrative duties), but overall the absence of stratified classes, prompted by a lack of differential reward systems and job rotation, facilitated social equality. Anthropologist Melford Spiro (1956) illustrated this principle in his ethnography of a *kibbutz* he researched:

> …a recently arrived European physician, not a member of the kibbutz, asked one of the women for the name of the "maid" in the clinic. She did not understand to whom he was referring until he explained that he meant the women who regularly cleaned the clinic. The woman then explained to him that there were no "maids"… that this woman would probably be sitting next to him at dinner that evening, and moreover, that this "maid" was an important official of the kibbutz. (24-25)

Along with these commitments to egalitarianism, physical work, and productive labor, another dominant ideological and structural characteristic of these communities stemmed from their providing the military and security might needed to ensure the settlement goals of the *Yishuv* and define the borders of the future Jewish State. *Kibbutzim* housed burgeoning Israeli militias, and during the Israeli War of Independence served important functions as *de facto* military bases. As *kibbutz* historian Henry Near (1992) explains, "in much of the kibbutz movement the concern with defence matters was not only a matter of self-interest, but of basic ideology" (310). Through the pre-state settlement days leading into the breakout of the war in 1947, members of the *kibbutz* were recognized as tremendously disciplined, superior fighters, embodying the idealized characteristics of the "New Jew." Indeed, "The dual symbols of the sickle and the sword

have been intertwined since the founders' generation, and for many years thereafter" (Drory 2014:186).

While critical to Zionist settlement, members of the *kibbutz*, *kibbutznikim*, (and agricultural workers in general) never accounted for more than a small portion of the total *Yishuv* (Gavron 2000). During its height between the mid-1930's until 1948, the population hovered between 4-7% of the total Jewish population (Near 1992:344-345; Pauker 2014:21). Yet, while these workers epitomized an iconic Zionist personhood, the social realities within their communities served to foreshadow future relations between Jewish communities in Israel. For instance, the early *kibbutz* movement beginning in 1910 had a particularly segregated constituency consisting of "Ashkenazi workers… [who] preferred by and large to exclude Yemenite Jews from membership in their settlements. In consequence, the kibbutz became an exclusively Eastern European Jewish form of settlement" (Shafir 1996:193). Thus, new immigrants who did not represent the ethnically sanitized worker were excluded from embodying the social ideal projected by the actions of *chalutzim*. Such exclusion would come to dominant post-state social and political organizations, a phenomenon exposing the fallacy of flowery Zionist discourses praising the absorption of Jewish immigration to Israel.

While the remainder of the chapter intends to examine how post-independence factors have contributed to the increasing disparities within Israeli society, I find it relevant here to quickly mention a period of Jewish migration starting more than two decades prior to Israel's Declaration of Independence. In so doing, I emphasize the extent to which Zionist ideology was already conceptualized and projected into political discourse by the mid 1920's. Migration largely by Polish Jews into Palestine between

1924-1928, known as the Fourth *Aliyah*, "gave the Zionist enterprise a new upsurge of previously unequaled proportions" (Sternhell 1998:218). Yet, the sitting Zionist establishment "feared that their monopoly of conquering the country, absorbing immigration, and building the economy might slip out of their hands" (218). In a speech during the fourteenth Zionist Congress in 1925, future first speaker of the Knesset, Yosef Sprinzak, warned of the threat the new immigrants posed to the incumbent *Yishuv*:

> With the coming of the Fourth Aliyah, Menachem Mendel has risen again and expects to take over the redemption of our nation!... When Menachem Mendel smelled the possibility of doing business in Eretz Israel, he sought impatiently to advance his interests and believe he could do business securely on the paths laid so painfully by the idealistic efforts of the pioneers. (219)

Menachem Mendel carries important weight in this context as a famous character in Yiddish literature, symbolizing the highly stigmatized Jew from the Diaspora. As this new immigrant group consisted mainly of middle class bourgeoisies, the incumbent political elites could evoke images of the "Old Jew" to de-legitimate them as antithetical to Zionist values. Here, even *Ashkenazi* migration was demonized, showing the extent to which political maneuverings dating back to the 1920's employed Zionist ideology to gain or maintain political hegemony. While it is difficult to gauge the impact these early quarrellings have had on the social landscape of Israel today, the extent to which members of the Fourth *Aliyah* were vilified by the pre-state political establishment established by the Second and Third *Aliyot* serves as a harbinger to the degree to which social hierarchies later developed among non-European members of Israeli society.

Israel's Ethnic Jewish Plurality

While the Zionist slogan of Palestine as "a land without a people for a people without a land" has been proven false on strictly demographic grounds (Finkelstein 2003; Khalidi 1997), beginning in the 1980's, Israel's "new historians" have shed light over the internal power struggles *within* the Jewish communities immigrating to Palestine and later Israel; such migration never culminated in one happy, monolithic community of Zionists, Jews, or citizens. Critically, the struggles for political power, economic opportunities, and basic human rights have been waged *between* and *across* various Jewish communities (Segev 1991; Sternhell 1998) historically pitted against and subject to the hegemonic *Ashkenazi* establishment originating from the Second and Third *Aliyot* that dominated governance and cultural institutions well into the 1970s.

The following section will review two such periods of Jewish migration to Israel which highlight the tensions between various multiethnic communities. While Jewish migration patterns within the pre-state period are clearly defined temporally, subsequent Jewish migration to Israel is understood as a continual process. However, roughly speaking, the early state migration to which I refer is commonly understood as beginning in 1948 spanning until the end of the 1950's. Similarly, while the immigration of Ethiopian Jews to Israel continues, I identify key moments which led to their present demographic position in Israel.

Early State Migration

Following Ben-Gurion's declaration of the State of Israel on May 14, 1948, restrictions on immigration of Jews to "Israel" were lifted. Within the first 6 months,

100,000 immigrants had come, and in 1949 alone 250,000 immigrants had arrived, making one out of every three Israelis a recently arrived immigrant (Segev 1998:95). Organized and funded in large part by the Jewish Agency, the migrants formed an eclectic group of largely Eastern European, North African, and Middle Eastern Jews (96). As Israeli historian Tom Segev argues:

> Upon arrival the new immigrants were often looked down as an uprooted mass of refugees with no pride and no dignity. They were commonly described as "human debris"-Avak Adam in Hebrew. Many of them, however, were grounded into debris only after their arrival, as part of the process of migration and the hardship of resettlement. That happened both to Oriental immigrants from Arab countries and to Ashkenazi newcomers from Europe. (116)

The stance of the Israelis towards these newcomers was "charged with emotions and infused with prejudices, reflecting their self-images as Jews and Israelis. The key to their attitudes towards the immigrants lies in their contemptuous attitude toward the Diaspora" (117).

Most notorious were the conditions at the absorption camps, called *ma'abarot,* for the newly arrived Oriental Jewish immigrants in the 1950s. These unsanitary and grossly underfunded tent cities would epitomize the experience of Middle Eastern and North African immigrants during the decade (Yiftachel & Tzfadia 2004). Ironically, the new *Mizrachim* would also replace the *Ashkenazim* as the backbone to the labor force behind "the government-propelled Israeli drive for industrialization in the 1950's and 1960's," (Shafir 1996:195) exemplifying changing national ethos in regard to the previously extolled "moral value of labor."

While recent advances have been made by the *Mizrachim* into mainstream Israeli economic, political, and social life, they still experience disparities in access to employment, education, and politics. Geographically, many still live on the "peripheries"

of mainstream Israeli society, exemplified by their continued residence in Israel's "development towns" originally built for Middle Eastern Jewish immigration following the Israeli War of Independence (Peled 1990; Yiftachel & Tzfadia 2004). Moreover, as *Mizrachim* inch closer in status towards *Ashkenazim*, their position as a stigmatized subgroup in Israeli Jewish society has not disappeared but been replaced by other Jewish communities.

Ethiopian Migration

Known as the "Beta Israel" ("House of Israel") or "Falashas" ("Wanderers") but colloquially called *Yehuday Ethiopia* (Jews of Ethiopia) and *Ethiop'im* (Ethiopians) by Israeli Jewish society, there are currently about 125,000 Ethiopian Jews living in Israel (IRIN 2012). Since 1977, individuals from this community have been steadily entering Israel with approval of Israel's chief rabbis under Israel's Law of Return (Schwarz 2001:35), a migration advanced through two large-scale "secret operations"; Operation Moses (1984-1985) and Operation Solomon (1991) brought a total of about 22,000 Ethiopians to Israel (150).

The Ethiopian Jewish community believe their arrival after years enduring religious persecution in Ethiopia deserving recognition as a monumental part of Zionist history (Kimmerling 2001:153-156). Much like pre-state Zionist rhetoric which legitimated settlement to Palestine as a return to the historic homeland of the Jewish people, Beta Israel too consider themselves descendants of Israelites; their very presence in Israel is seen as the manifestation of God's will. And despite the two celebrated

halakhic[9] religious verdicts issued by the Chief Rabbinate of Israel in the late 1970's that recognized their Judaism as a group and permitted their immigration, their individual "Jewishness" has always been interrogated. Israeli sociologist Baruch Kimmerling (2001) notes that such discrimination proved particularly hurtful because unlike their Russian Jewish immigrant counterparts, the "Ethiopians initially wanted to be completely absorbed into a homogeneous Jewish ethnicity and undergo a fast process of acculturation and assimilation" (163). Yet, the community has always been marred by high unemployment, social exclusion, police abuse, and lack of social mobility.

Anteby-Yemini argues that new immigrant groups like the Ethiopian and Russian Jewish communities "represent a form of counter-hegemony that challenges the dominant model of a single Jewish Israeli national identity as well as the traditional idea of nation-bounded identity constructs" (2004:158). Importantly, these and other Jewish communities compete with varying success for social services, status, and political control, including the largely segregated religious *Haredim* and nationalist settler communities, who form part of the over 600,000 Jewish settlers in the West Bank. Of course, there are also the over 1.5 million Palestinians living within Israel's "green line"[10] and several hundred thousand Negev Bedouins with long-standing grievances against the state. All of this results in a fragmented, dysfunctional, and segmented body politic.

[9] The *Halakha* outlines Jewish Religious Law.

[10] Identified as Israel's border prior to the Six-Day War in 1967.

Economic Reform and Its Impact on Collective Identity

The early 1920's witnessed the establishment of the dominant Zionist trade union, the *Histadrut*, headed by future Prime Minister David Ben-Gurion. As owner of key industry and the largest employer among the Jewish labor force in Palestine, it would become one of most influential political institutions of the *Yishuv*. This pre-state economy provided elementary forms of social benefits, job security, and welfare.[11] The decline of the *Histadrut* coincided with that of the traditional Labor Party amid the emergence of the right-wing Likud party in 1977, spurring the privatization of industry throughout the country (Bichler & Nitzan 2001). As neoliberal economic policies would come to dominate the Israeli economy, that institutional pillar which had long exemplified the spirit of the Zionist mission, the *kibbutz* movement, was similarly forced in many instances to privatize under the auspices of the Ministry of Finance (Shapira 2010).

Anger over rising costs of living, weakening public services, deepening income inequality, and a general lack of economic security have culminated in a series of boycotts and protests, such as the 2011 and 2012 "social justice protests" initiated by Israel's disgruntled middle class. While the youth protestors "studiously avoided a mention of the occupation," (Blumenthal 2013:400-401) their pleas did reflect a growing sense of economic futility even within the traditionally hegemonic *Ashkenazi* social class. According to journalist Iris Leal:

> As a society that talks so much about "the national home," about returning "home" and about protecting our "home," as a society that justified the expulsion of the country's previous residents by citing its historical right to "the home," I

[11] The extent to which the mainstream Zionist Labor Party enacted "socialist" economic reforms has been convincingly challenged by Sternhell (1998).

> think we really screwed up when it came to handling real estate, to judge by the State Comptroller's report.
>
> The report reveals that since 2005 the index of real wages of a salaried worker in Israel has remained more or less unchanged. On the other hand, during the same period the index of real housing prices increased by 50 percent. In other words, the burden of housing expenses increased and sometimes totaled half our income. Since the price index also skyrocketed, available money disappeared, and the public is surviving on credit, which is popularly known as "a minus in the bank." (2015)

Indeed, reports commissioned and published by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) over the last few years testify to these gaps in social safety nets:

> The cutting of child allowances and income-support benefits in the early 2000s contributed to an increase of relative poverty among the working-age population of 4 percentage points over its 2000 level by 2005, whilst child poverty increased by 11 percentage points. The social spending cuts and the recent reduction of top income tax rates have both reduced the redistributive power of the tax/benefit system. (2010:18)

Perhaps nowhere are these impacts more paradoxical to the Zionist creed than in a recent report released by the Foundation for the Benefit of the Holocaust Victims in Israel, which estimates that 45,000 of the 189,000 survivors in Israel living below the poverty line, with 47,000 reducing medication purchases, and about 57,000 reducing food purchases because of financial worries (Haaretz 2015). As 74% of Israelis "believe the government has not treated survivors well," political analyst Mazal Mualem notes, the "Social Security payments they receive are absorbed by the steep cost of living and cuts to pensions, implemented by none other than Netanyahu, as part of the economic decrees he devised as finance minister in 2003" (Burston 2015).

Conclusion

In 1959, the Knesset passed legislation establishing a two-minute moment of silence on *Yom Ha'Shoah*, Israel's Holocaust Memorial Day, marking one of two days each year in which Israelis stand collectively in commemorative silence. As sirens erupt at 10:00 AM sharp, drivers exit their cars and beachgoers stand in solemnity. Yet, we are reminded that not quite everyone follows this protocol in a recent episode of the Israeli television series "Zagouri Empire," a program which examines the difficulties of life for *Mizrachim* in an Israeli society which still privileges their *Ashkenazi* neighbors. In one particular episode, Beber, a man of Moroccan ancestry, refuses to stand until the state also declares a "*Ma'aborot* Day" in remembrance of the use of horrid absorption camps for Middle Eastern and North African Jews upon arriving to Israel in the 1950's. Here, the dominant *Ashkenazim* are re-imagined as the new persecutors: "when we came to Israel they took out on us their rage at everything the Germans did to them," Beber recalls (Glazer 2015).

And as the social justice protests reveal, there exists widespread unrest within the historically privileged *Ashkenazim*. As Blumenthal explains, "Israel's Ashkenazi middle and upper classes have escaped the claustrophobic atmosphere of the country of their birth in droves":

> According to current Israeli government estimates, as many as one million Israelis- a full 13 percent of the population- now live outside Israel, an increase of almost seven hundred thousand since 1980…The exodus of Israelis is the greatest and most immediate demographic threat the Jewish state faces. (Blumenthal 2013:408)

As I have attempted to argue, the notion of a homogenous "Jewish State" is contradicted by historical processes placing certain groups in scaling political, cultural, and economic hierarchies. So we see that along with the conflicts between the Zionist

enterprise and the outside world, contradictions manifest *within* Jewish populations, exposing the commonly phrased adage, *kodem nidag layehudim ve acharkach nidag lagoyim* (first we will worry about the Jews, and afterwards everyone else), to be an ideal rather far from reality.

I have argued that many principles which were dominant in the pre-state Zionist movement have included a concept of personhood that was mostly exclusive rather than inclusive. That concept has been either replaced or exposed amid changing political, demographic, and economic developments in Israel. Gone are the days where "from each according to his ability, to each according to his need" is a prevailing societal rationale. Moreover, in a very real way, the transformation occurring within the beleaguered *kibbutz* movement has become a microcosm of Israel as a whole. Emerging from the rubble are not the social commitments which challenged the nuclear family or oppression brought on by private property, but loyalty among *kibbutzim* to serving Israel's military-security apparatus.

As Segev (2007) notes, the years leading up to the Six-Day War in 1967 saw increasing societal condemnation regarding the importance of *kibbutzim*. Many were adopting bourgeois values, blamed for their failure in absorbing new immigrants, and generally criticized in the press as a drag on the state rather than a point of pride. Yet, Segev contends that the "last remaining justification for their unique image" had been their contribution to the military:

> In the Winter of 1966 Yehuda Amir, a psychologist at Bar-Ilan University and in the IDF's psychological research unit, published an article in a professional journal, *Megamot*, in which he concluded that kibbutz members were more intelligent and better educated, with a better command of Hebrew; they were notable for having the range of personal qualities that the army sough in its officer material. According to Amir, these qualities explained the fact that kibbutz

> members frequently volunteered for command positions: they represented 22 percent of officers in compulsory service, more than five times their proportion in the population. Most of them had been born in Israel, and most were Ashkenazi, Amir noted. (83)

Indeed, in light of Israel's victory during the Six-Day War, the heroism of *kibbutznikim* was "once again acclaimed as an ideal that defined the values and image of the state" (442). Despite the decline in the *kibbutz* movement exacerbated with the onset of the right-wing to power in 1977, privatization, declining populations, and the accompanying "rise in egocentricity, careerism, and the 'death of ideology,'" Drory notes:

> …the contribution that its young people make to the IDF continues to be dominant- and is out of all proportion to its numbers in the country's population. The kibbutzim continue to educate their young people on the fundamental values on which they were founded and thrived. (2014:186)

This context will prove essential as I present an overview of the arrival of asylum seekers in chapter three and show in chapter four how the very presence of the asylum seekers has been mobilized as a new opportunity for Israeli political elite to solidify an increasingly attenuated form of "Israeli" collective identity. Following Kimmerling (2001), I will show how this new social group has been used in the provocation of concerns centered on security under commonly mobilized "worst-case" (226) doomsday scenarios and the demographic threat the "migrant" poses to the Jewish State. That is, I argue that the lasting ideological pillars of the Zionist movement which maintain common notions of "Israeliness" are very much projected by Israeli politicians vis-à-vis the African asylum seekers.

CHAPTER 3

NON-JEWISH AFRICAN MIGRATION IN THE JEWISH STATE

> A number of subtle points are involved, in which the court loses its way. But then in the end it pulls out some profound guilt from somewhere where there was originally none at all.
> *Kafka, The Trial (1925:149)*

The goal of this chapter is to offer a background of the legal, political, and social environment facing the African asylum-seeking communities in Israel. First, I will review Israel's contemporary secondary labor market and its connection to Israel's asylum policy. Next, I examine the legal obligations Israel is bound to as a signatory of the 1951 Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol. Here, I consider how categorizations of African asylum seekers in Israel strategically focus on their supposed illegality; the use of terms such as "economic migrant" coincide with the Refugee Convention's disregard for economically motivated migration, lending credence to the naturalization and rationalization of harsh Israeli policy.

The First Intifada and Israel's Secondary Labor Market

With the outbreak of First Intifada in 1987 and the imposition of restrictions on the movement of Palestinian labor from the Occupied Territories, a shortage of cheap workers facilitated Israel's new reliance on overseas foreign labor; the immigration of a migrant workforce was soon successfully lobbied for by leaders of the agricultural, construction, and industrial sectors (Raijman & Kemp 2007:41-45). Initially, Knesset

members attempted to solve the high unemployment[12] among Israeli Jews by adding them to the then depleted secondary labor market. But the ultimate failure of both the capacity and desire of the Jewish community to engage in such employment epitomized a changed Israeli economy long removed from the idealized days of the laboring *tsabar*. In a clear reference to the foregone days of the romanticized agricultural toiler, Minister of Agriculture Arye Nehemkin declared, "Pity the state that can't assemble from its own ranks workers for the fruit harvest" (40-41).

Indeed, both Israeli Jewish workers' unwillingness to accept low-wage employment "that for twenty years had carried the epithet 'Arab labor'" (36) and employers' persistent demands for cheap and experienced work proved the need to look for workers elsewhere. Beginning in 1993, tens of thousands of documented and undocumented Africans, along with a few hundred thousand unskilled migrants[13] primarily from Thailand, Romania and the Philippines, came to Israel to fill the labor gap left open after Israel's refusal of entry to most Palestinians, the inability of Israeli Jews to fill the gap, and the expansion of Israel's new neoliberal economy (Raijman & Kemp 2007:45).[14] While clearly filling that gap in the secondary labor market, increasing unemployment by the turn of the decade spurred a large-scale government program to deport unauthorized overstayers; by 2005, Israel "distanced" about 140,000 individuals through the program, costing about US $100 million in the process (Yaron et al. 2013:146). The initiative serves as a microcosm of Israel's long-running lack of a clear and coordinated immigration system, which according to Yaron et al. (2013), manifests

[12] Which reached almost 10% in 1990 (Raijman & Kemp 2007:36).

[13] About half of whom were also unauthorized (Willen 2010:507).

[14] Which relied increasingly on new services, such as geriatric care (Mundlak 2007:51)

in its asylum policy and relationship with the current African migrant communities (146). Expensive and unilateral programs are undertaken to "solve" the current "crisis."

The Refugee Convention, Israeli Asylum Policy and the African Migrants

> The arrival of thousands of Muslim infiltrators to Israeli territory is a clear threat to the state's Jewish identity… The refugees' place is not among us.
> *Likud Party Member, Danny Danon (Harkov 2011)*

By 1949, the United Nations Economic and Social Council established an ad hoc committee which ultimately drafted the text to a convention that standardized the granting of legal status to international asylum seekers and stateless persons. Rooted in the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights which acknowledges the right of persons to seek asylum from persecution, the *Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees* was adopted in 1951 as a multilateral treaty and became the applied framework for international refugee law by 1954 (Goodwin-Gill 2008:2-3). Under the Convention, a refugee is defined as one whom:

> Owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it. (UNHCR 2010:14)

A "refugee" as outlined in the 1951 Refugee Convention only delineated one persecuted as "a result of events occurring *before* 1 January 1951" from "events occurring *in* Europe," (my emphasis). Given the obvious restrictions on these exclusive spatial and temporal categorizations, the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees

was drafted to enforce the universal application of the law (Lauterpacht & Bethlehem 2003:101-114). With 144 signatories to the Convention and 145 to the subsequent Protocol, these treaties currently serve as the legal code recognizing and legitimizing global protection of refugees (Goodwin-Gill 2008; Türk & Nicholson 2003:3; UNHCR 2010:2; UNHCR 2011).

Since signing the 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol, Israel is legally obligated to adhere to the principles of these pieces of legislation. Prior to 2008, recommendations on individual asylum claims were made by a UNHCR delegation and sent to Israel's Minister of Interior for final approval. 2008 marked a transfer of responsibility for the examination of the asylum claims from the UNHCR to the Ministry of Interior (MOI). From there, Israel launched a Refugee Status Determination unit, and by July 2009 all stages of handling asylum applications were under the auspices of the Ministry of Interior. Several units within the MOI work to receive and register asylum claims, interview claimants, and make final recommendations (Berman 2011:12-15).

Currently, out of the 136,000 foreign migrants residing in Israeli, 46,000 are asylum seekers (Lior 2015_c). According to Israel's Population and Immigration Authority, there were about 34,000 Eritreans and 8,800 Sudanese in Israel in 2014 (Lior 2015) (the rest arriving predominantly from Sub-Saharan countries). Following their arrival beginning in 2005, Sudanese migrants[15] arriving primarily from Darfur were treated as citizens of an "enemy state" to be "arrested, detained, and deported" under the auspices of the 1954 "Prevention of Infiltration Law" (Yaron et al. 2013:148). This group

[15] Stemming from the war in the Darfur region of Western Sudan that began in 2003, a small group of asylum seekers started crossing Sinai Desert in 2004 and entered into Israel via the border with Egypt. After the infamous reprisal in December 2005 in Mostafa Mahmoud Square in Cairo where more than 30 Sudanese refugees protesting their conditions in Egypt were brutally killed, migration into Israel increased (Shamai & Amir 2015:2).

was subsequently released into the hands of *kibbutzim* and *moshavim* after a contentious legal battle fought by the human rights community and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) (Willen 2010). Steady migration continued until the construction of a fence along Israel's border with Egypt (soon reviewed).

A central component in assessing the legitimacy of Sudanese claims to asylum is Sudan's Criminal Act, which allows for any Sudanese national who enters an enemy state (i.e. Israel) to be given a prison sentence for up to 10 years. In 2007, the Sudanese Refugees Commissioner stated that Sudanese asylum seekers in Israel sought to "implement Zionism agendas against Sudan," urging Egypt to "firmly penalize any Sudanese refugees if they were found trying to infiltrate through Egypt into Israel" (HRW 2014:19-20).

The second major group (and largest) to arrive at around this time consisted of Eritreans escaping military conscription and the repressive regime of President Isaias Afewerki. Since 2004, at least 200,000 Eritreans have fled to refugee camps in Ethiopia and Sudan. These Eritrean nationals fled from "mass long-term or indefinite forced conscription and forced labor, extrajudicial killings, disappearances, torture and inhuman and degrading treatment, arbitrary arrest and detention, and restrictions on freedom of expression, conscience, and movement." UNHCR's Eligibility Guidelines for Assessing the International Protection Needs of Asylum-Seekers from Eritrea argue that "the punishment for desertion or draft evasion is so severe and disproportionate that it constitutes persecution" (HRW 2014:18).

From 2004 to late 2012, Eritrean and Sudanese nationals were unable to register asylum claims because of their being granted group protection (HRW 2014:7). Since July

2009, Israel has not granted refugee status to one of the 3,165 asylum seekers from Sudan who requested for the status. Of the 2,408 Eritreans who have submitted a request, only four (.16%) received the status. Yet within the international community, on average 84 % of Eritreans and 56 % of Sudanese asylum seekers were either granted official refugee status or given an extended protection during the first half of 2014. Indeed, since that time, out of the 17,778 total applications for asylum, 45 people (0.25%) were recognized as refugees, 12,175 (68.48%) had their application either denied or withdrawn and 5,558 (31.25%) were simply unanswered (Lior 2015).

The political restructuring of Israel's asylum policy has dramatically limited the African community's juridical rights and mobility. Since Israel took control of the Refugee Status Determination (RSD) process in 2009, it has been administering "conditional release visas" to citizens of Eritrea and Sudan. Individuals of these nationalities are granted a sort of "automatic" group protection which enables them limited protection of the law and, at least in theory, immunity from deportation. The logic behind the granting of such protection is based on two considerations. First, Article 33(1) of the Convention states that "No contracting State shall expel or return ('*refouler*') a refugee in any manner whatsoever to the frontier of territories where his life or freedom would be threatened on account of his race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion" (Lauterpacht & Bethlehem 2003:87). Second, the cost and potential outcomes of sensible (RSD) examinations would likely be quite burdensome bureaucratically.

All other asylum seekers not recognized under this group protection must go through a refugee status determination (RSD) process in order to obtain visas and thus

basic rights from the state. However, applying for refugee status is a practice in futility; since signing the 1951 Refugee Convention Israel has rarely accepted any refugee application. Given the miniscule acceptance rate, the only option for an asylum seeker is to attempt to extend the RSD process by successfully advancing past the first interview, through the filing of appeals, or simply attempting to overstay one's visa and thus avoid deportation through luck and surreptitiousness.

Since late 2013, it has become increasingly difficult to renew visas given closings in Interior Ministry offices and reductions in hours of operations (HRW 2014:55-60). Other difficulties have emerged. For instance, despite a ruling from the High Court in 2014, the Interior Ministry began refusing the renewal of these conditional release visas from asylum seekers who could not prove they had family in Israel (Lior 2014_b). Moreover, access to basic social services and the right to work are limited and convoluted. For example, the conditional release visas are not work permits (as specified on the card), and despite the High Court ruling immunizing employers from fines, these ambiguities are used by employers as leverage which facilitates mistreatment and employer abuse. Given their status, affordable housing is not available, and the asylum seekers are unable to receive national health insurance, rendering open clinics in Jaffa and South Tel Aviv their only steady sources of care (Gross 2014). Day-care centers for children of asylum seekers are reported as terribly overcrowded, resulting in the recent deaths of five infants over the course of several weeks early in 2015 (Vilnai 2015).

Children of asylum seekers born in Israel are "not entitled to birth certificates or ID numbers," excluding them from the purview of public health laws in Israel. According to Dr. Adiya Barkai of Physicians for Human Rights, despite receiving infant care from

the Health Ministry, children do not receive "regular medical care in their communities, meaning children with chronic diseases, or asthmatic children are not monitored" (Efrati 2015).

Perhaps most troubling has been the recent "voluntary" deportations of some of these nationals, in strict violation of the principle of *non-refoulement* highlighted in Article 33 of the Refugee Convention. Former Interior Minister Gideon Sa'ar's deportation program has returned some 9,000 asylum seekers back to Sudan, Eritrea, and "third countries" (Uganda and Rwanda). A recent report published by two prominent human rights organizations in Israel based on 47 interviews with asylum seekers sent to Sudan, Rwanda, and Uganda finds individuals who "voluntarily" accepted deportation to these countries face jailing and uncertain legal status. In the case of Sudan, asylum seekers report cases of torture (Lior 2015_b). As one *Haaretz* editorial put it:

> Much of the testimony shows that the asylum-seekers decided to leave after finding themselves torn between two terrible choices – one, detention at the Holot or Saharonim facilities without trial for prolonged periods, or two, a life of persecution in their fractured homelands or in countries to which they come without rights or refugee status. (2015_b)

The two most significant measures defining Israel's asylum policy towards the asylum seekers has been: 1) the completion of a 220 kilometer steel fence along the Egyptian border which has reduced migration from Africa to a standstill (Cohen & Lior 2013); and 2) the Knesset's passing of three similar amendments to the 1954 Prevention of Infiltration Law authorizing Israeli authorities to detain all "irregular border-crossers" without judicial review (HRW 2012; HRW 2014).

By July 2012, Israel had enclosed most of its border with Egypt with a five-meter high steel fence, a policy resulting in a dramatic decrease in migration. The last 20

kilometers were built by the end of 2013, a year which saw only 43 asylum seekers cross the border. During the first half of 2014, 21 crossed over from Egypt to Israel (HRW 2014:22).

In both 2013 and 2014, the High Court of Justice struck down the Anti-Infiltration Law as unconstitutional and contravening Israel's Basic Law regarding one's freedom and dignity. A new similar amendment passed in 2015 testifies the mockery for the rule of law by many members of the Knesset (Haaretz 2015). Most notoriously, these amendments allow for the prolonged detention of African asylum seekers who enter Israel, the ability to coerce detainees to accept "voluntary deportations," and serve as a deterrent to future migration.

The arbitrary nature of Israel's policy has resulted in numerous violations in regards to its obligations according to the Refugee Convention. At the heart of Israel's immigration regime is "an uneasy juxtaposition and contradictory relationship between Israel's policies aimed at establishing a Jewish majority state and Israel's international legal obligations as a signatory of The Refugee Convention" (Yaron et al. 2013:144).

In many cases, however, Israel stands in clear violation of the law *regardless* of the legitimacy of individual asylum requests. For instance, the very granting of temporary visas to entire designated groups, such as Eritrean and Sudanese nationals "contravenes Israel's obligation to put into place procedures to assess individual applications." In another example, Israel is in violation of Article 17 of the Refugee Convention because the Africans asylum seekers are subject to detention and deportation for working "illegally" "despite not having had their individual asylum applications examined." In violation of Articles 8 and 24 of the Convention, asylum seekers are denied social

benefits, adequate health care, and job opportunities (Yaron et al. 2013:148-151). And as previously mentioned, Israel has been in violation of the principle of *non-refoulement* brought on by the recent deportation program.

Paz (2011) refers to the Israeli "policy" as one of "ordered disorder," in which there exists an intentional failure in organizing a clear and coherent program. Complicating the matter is the relationship between Israel's recognition of asylum seekers and the claims made by Palestinian refugees:

> The state fears that recognizing African asylum seekers as refugees will open the Pandora's Box of Palestinian refugees' claims for territory, compensation and most importantly, right of return. Combined, these demands are perceived as a threat for the country's ethnonational character and its very existence as a Jewish and democratic state.
>
> Although article 1D of the 1951 Convention excludes the Palestinian refugees, the resolution concerning their fate has remained amongst the key intricate issues in the negotiations between the sides (e.g. Peters and Gal 2009). Although the two refugee issues' are not legally or practically related, the primordial/contemporary presence of the Palestinian refugees shapes immigration debate in Israel. As one interviewee claimed, the issue of Palestinian refugees accompanies any discussion about African refugees. (9)

Yaron et al. (2013) note, "Israel's failure to incorporate the Refugee Convention into domestic law appears to have arisen from an over-riding political concern to ensure that Israel remains a Jewish State" (153).

Given that the majority of asylum seekers are denied interviews, claims of their illegality are rendered unsubstantiated. However, Israeli politicians continue to invoke legalistic discursive frameworks to justify the treatment of the asylum community. By continuing to describe the asylum seekers as *Mistaneney haavoda habilti chukiim* (illegal economic migrants), they rationalize their treatment by employing pseudo-legal considerations based on the generally accepted notion of the "refugee" rooted in

international refugee law. Indeed, the continued use of the adjective "economic" by the most powerful members of the Knesset in identifying all African migrants assumes the illegality of all African migration to Israel.

Former Minister of Interior Eli Yishai categorically dismissed the legality that Africans arriving in Israel have a right to asylum, stating that "These are not refugees, these are economic migrants who want to come to Israel for work" (Hartman 2011). Yishai's successor, Gideon Sa'ar, barred the legal transfer of remittances to Africa in an alleged attempt to prevent "the economic incentive for infiltration" (Arutz Sheva 2013; Ynet 2013_b). Similarly, Prime Minister Netanyahu invokes the phrase "illegal economic infiltrators" (*Mistaneney haavoda habilti chukiim*), continuing the well-established trend.[16]

As legal scholar Michelle Foster argues, economic factors are excluded from protection under the 1951 Refugee Convention and serve to reject individual asylum claims on *a priori* grounds. Here we have a classic catch-22; many economic claims for asylum actually *do* fall under one or more of the five associations that grant asylum seekers protection under Article 1(2A) of the 1951 Refugee Convention (race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion). For instance, one's affiliation with a particular social group, such as a class, caste or occupation often facilitates socioeconomic dispossession which can justify asylum claims (2007:238-246, ch. 6).

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[16] Labeling of the asylum-seeking community by politicians as a homogenous group of "infiltrators" of the state draws on a specific historic meaning. As reviewed further in chapter 4, the Hebrew word for "infiltrators," *Mistanenim,* was used to identify Palestinians who were attempting to re-enter the country after the War of Independence (for the Palestinians, the catastrophe, the *Nakba*) (Handelzalts 2012).

In practice, categorizations of African asylum seekers in Israel strategically focusing on their supposed monetary intentions lend credence to the naturalization and rationalization of harsh Israeli asylum policy. This is an example of what Comaroff & Comaroff (2006) call "lawfare," whereby states use legal codes to legitimize "acts of political coercion" under the veil of the inherent legal objectivity "to launder brute power in a wash of legitimacy, ethics, and propriety" (2006:30-31).[17] One inconspicuous way in which the community has been constructed as constituting a homogenous group of economic migrants is in the manner proposals for their deportation often include some modest form of financial compensation. Such offerings imply both the monetary motivation for migration while dismissing the safety concerns of deported communities.

Conclusion

In his introduction to *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (2012), anthropologist David Graeber recites a conversation that he had during a garden party at Westminster Abbey in which he explains to an attorney that the Global Justice Movement (which he had been involved with) wishes to abolish Third World debt. The attorney's retort that "they'd [the Third World] borrowed the money" and that "surely one has to pay one's debts" speaks to the self-evident manner in which we view historically ingrained notions of moral and legal obligations of citizens, states, corporations, and banks (Graeber 2012:2-4).

[17] Law professor Michelle Alexander (2010) has similarly argued that racial caste in America has been "redesigned" by legislation which criminalizes African Americans disproportionally. That is, a particular legality renders us "colorblind." Likewise, historian Aviva Chomsky (2014) has argued that contemporary migration concepts in American political discourse code Mexican and Central American "illegality" to criminalize these groups based on race.

Similarly, Western discourse surrounding immigration policy has so naturalized the illegality of the "economic migrant" that we now assume this person to be a nameless wonderer whose desire to earn money excludes him or her from refugee status consideration. Like the attorney's comment on the irreversibility of debt payments, the categorization of "economic migrant" rather than "economic refugee" is so deeply rooted in international law that it has become axiomatic (Haas 2008).

As Israel quite openly violates international law, the projection of legality in justifying their actions is also omnipresent. This fragmented, convoluted manner of blending international law with state law, and legal with illegal, speaks to the limitations of international treaties. For in a scenario where self-interested nations interpret international legal constructs to regulate migration, it only makes sense that it would be limited in scope, weak in implementation, and subject to exploitation. Regardless, it is also clear that a particular moral stance is adopted within this paradigm in association with the security state. Israel claims to be simultaneously adhering to their legal requirements as delineated by international law (which is mitigated given their unsubstantiated labeling of asylum seekers as illegal job seekers) while maintaining supposed security concerns and the Jewish demographic majority of Israel. The employment of these concerns is a main focus of the next chapter, which will tie these developments to the ways in which asylum seekers are linked to historic demographic and security considerations to reformulate and reify a particular notion of Israeliness and proper governance.

CHAPTER 4

THE PROJECTION OF ASYLUM SEEKERS WITHIN ISRAEL'S MASADA SYNDROME

Never again shall Masada fall!
Yitzhak Lamdan, Masada, 1927

By 1923, Flavius Josephus' book which chronicled the Roman siege of Masada in 73 CE, *The Wars of the Jews,* was translated into Hebrew. Yet, as Schwartz et al. (1986) note, it was not until Yitzhak Lamdan's 1927 poem, "Masada," that led to the "recovery of Masada" from the depths of historical obscurity into the limelight of a burgeoning Zionist ideology lionizing and extolling the bravery of the early Zionist movement as a return of the Jewish people to their Hebraic past. Indeed, the poem became tremendously popular at the time of its release and is recognized as serving impetus for the creation of Masada into a "state-sponsored cult" (148). An emerging national narrative based on the events would also reify perceptions of an existentially hostile world towards the Jewish people wherever and whenever they lived.[18]

In this chapter I review the manifestation in Israeli political discourse of what political psychologist Daniel Bar-Tal (1986) has famously called the "Masada Syndrome," the socialized worldview among Israeli Jews that "the rest of the world has highly negative behavioral intentions towards them [that] reflects a state of siege mentality" (Bar-Tal & Antebi 1992:251). My objective is to demonstrate how such discourse serves the functional purpose of justifying asylum policy in violation of international law while strengthening national cohesion amid the increasing breakdown

[18] The powerful iconicity of Lamdan's famous line was exemplified during U.S. president Bush's visit to Israel in 2008. In front of the Knesset following a visit to the mountain, he reassured the "Citizens of Israel" that "Masada shall never fall again, and America will always stand with you" (Keinon & Stoil 2008).

of the Israeli body politic as reviewed in the previous chapter. I begin by analyzing what Israeli anthropologist Nachman Ben-Yehuda (1995) has called the "Masada mythical narrative" and its functional purpose in the Zionist nation-building project. I examine evidence of the ways in which Israeli political discourse has reified these notions of the outside world by projecting the history of the Jewish people into posterity, consequently naturalizing the perception of the existential enemy. This, in turn, will help explain the efficacy with which the African asylum seekers have been grafted onto this continuum of the existential threat, with discourse often invoking (either wittingly or unwittingly) a national psyche tied to the Masada Syndrome.

Moreover, I intend to complicate the category of "threat" under which asylum seekers are identified. Rather than Israeli perceptions of previous geopolitical conflicts like the Israeli War of Independence, the Six-Day War in 1967, and the 1973 Yom Kippur War, the threat the migrant communities ostensibly pose is not rooted in the physical survival of the constituents of Israel. Instead, the security threat they represent refers to their very presence in Israel, whereby the potential impacts of demographic shifts threaten the sovereignty of the state to serve its supposed function of protecting Israeli Jews.

The Siege on Masada and the Creation of a Zionist Narrative

About 100 kilometers south-east of Jerusalem and 2 kilometers west of the Dead Sea in Southern Israel's Judean Desert is a mountain whose presence dominates the surrounding, vacuous landscape. Originally developed between 37-31 BCE by the Jewish King Herod the Great as both a vacation getaway and place of refuge in the case of a

Jewish rebellion, Masada would be the site of the last Jewish stronghold of the First Jewish-Roman War. Historian Flavius Josephus provides the only known account of the Roman siege of Masada in 73 A.D., a version likely based on the accounts provided to him by Roman officers involved in the siege, accounts themselves supposedly influenced by the retellings of several of the lone survivors (Ben-Yehuda 1995:8-9).

Ben-Yehuda identifies as the modern consensus of what Israeli Jews believe to have happened what he calls the "Masada mythical narrative" (1995:13). The following description provides the basic outline:

> Most modern Israelis would describe Masada as a fortress on a remote mountain near the Dead Sea. They would then state that at this site, a small group of Jewish warriors (or freedom fighters or, more typically, "Zealots") fought to the bitter end against overwhelming odds and a *much* larger Roman army. When those "Zealots" realized that there was no hope, they committed collective suicide so as not to lose their freedom to the Romans. (9-10)

As problematic as Josephus' account might be, the stark discrepancies between the lone historian's description and that of this narrative reveals that regardless of the credibility of Josephus' account, "it is obvious that the Masada mythical narrative, a clear heroic narrative, was a construction" (9). Josephus' version tells of groups of radical Jewish extremists, *Sicarii,* who escaped from Jerusalem to Masada not because of the Romans, "but by Jews a long time before the Roman army put the city under siege and destroyed it" (9). He writes that the group was composed of dagger-wielding assassins who raided nearby villages, culminating in the gruesome massacre at *Ein Gedi* of over 700 Jews, including women and children. Moreover, according to Josephus, the approximately 960 people stationed atop the mountain did not, nor wanted to, actually fight the surrounding Roman army (Zerubavel 1995).

Along with Lamdan, another Zionist ideologue instrumental in perpetuating the Masada mythical narrative, was activist Shmaria Guttman. Guttman, who had been a tour guide in Palestine, was very influential in the Zionist youth movements and starting in 1942, began organizing seminars for other guides in local youth movements that disseminated the Masada mythical narrative. Deeply influenced by Lamdan's 1927 poem, Ben-Yehuda (1995) writes:

> …it was Shmaria Guttman who created much of the mythical narrative. How was this done? Simply, by emphasizing some aspects of the original Masada narrative, by repressing others, and by giving the whole new mythical construction an interpretation of heroism…The messages of rebellion, a proud stand, and a fight to the end for one's country are the main lessons of Shmaria's interpretation. (76)

Guttman has written that despite Josephus not documenting fighting between the Romans and Sicarii on Masada, "it is clear to us that they did not sit with arms folded in their laps and wait for the Romans to advance their siege work" (Zerubavel 1995:69).

Our understanding of the Masada mythical narrative must include the efforts with which the Zionist nation-building project worked to link Jewish antiquity with national revival, a process helping construct the "Zionist binary model of Jewish history" (Zerubavel 1995:17). This binary justified the cause of the Zionist project by extolling the virtues and benefits of the transformation of the exilic Jew to the robust, agentive Hebrew, a model of personhood which, as mentioned in chapter two, subsequently served as a symbol of collective Zionist identity.

But the story of Masada does not simply lay a path of exemplary Jewish bravery on which Jews are mandated to walk. The story is a microcosm of a broader Jewish history as defined by hostile enemies wishing to enslave or destroy world Jewry. Embedded in the tale are apocalyptic concerns deeply rooted in Jewish ethos, with fears

over the annihilation of the Jewish people, a central justification of the Zionist initiative, envisioned in the retelling of the narrative and serving as a reminder of a hostile and ruthless Gentile world.

Israel's Masada Syndrome

The whole world is against us,
This is an ancient tale
Which was taught to us by our forefathers
To sing and also to dance
…
The whole world is against us
Don't worry, we'll overcome it
They don't care about us
Don't worry, we'll manage
The whole world is against us
Don't worry we'll overcome it
We also, about them
Don't give a damn anymore…
Yoram Taharlev, 1969, Haolam Kulo Negedeinu
(The Whole World is Against Us)

Central to both Israeli Jewish collective identity and worldview of the "other" are what Daniel Bar-Tal (1986) has identified as historically emphasized notions of the ill-intentions of "outgroups" that renders the group "standing alone against the hostile world" whereby there is a "threat to the group's existence and that it cannot expect help from anyone in time of need" (Bar-Tal & Antebi 1992:251). In turn, contemporary enemies of the Jewish State are simply the current burdens facing a Jewish nation indiscriminately attacked by a *naturally* hostile outside world. As Bar-Tal & Antebi (1992) note, "from the Jewish point of view, the Holocaust does not stand alone as one grim event, but is a metaphor for Jewish history itself" (253).

The origins of the Masada Syndrome are firmly rooted in Jewish tradition. Indeed, biblical representations of the brutal hostility of the Gentile towards the Jews are reflected in the enslavement of the Jews in Egypt and the Babylonian siege and conquest of Jerusalem. As Bar-Tal & Antebi (1992) identify, Israeli Jewish society is socialized to internalize this mentality at an early age through the Israeli education system, a process reiterated throughout literature, film, and the press. A popular read among high school students is a short story by famed Israeli author S.Y. Agnon entitled "The Lady and the Peddler," which, as Blumenthal remarks:

> …portrays a hapless Jewish man welcomed into the home of a generous gentile who turns out to be a cannibalistic vampire. The fairytale's lesson was clear: don't trust the *goyim*. (367)

Similarly, the ceremonial text used during the Jewish holiday of Passover, the *Haggadah*, reminds participants that in "each and every generation they rise up against us to destroy us." Not only does such an admonition demark the story with a focused moral calling on a specific group, but it reinforces this siege mentality. As Cohen (2014) notes:

> It is a passage that reinforces the sense of the Jews under perennial siege all the way from biblical mythology to modern history. From the tribe of Amalek trying to thwart the slaves' escape from Egypt, to Haman's planned genocide of the Jews of Persia in the story of Esther, to Adolf Hitler's near success in making the European continent 'Judenrein.' In every generation there is always another Pharaoh who is out to get the Jews. It's not difficult to understand how this idea repeated each year, at what is still the most widely observed Jewish festival, has profound emotional consequences for the Jewish imagination. And the resonance of the message does not end with the singing of the final verse of 'Hud Gadyah.'

Importantly, Jewish political leaders have historically situated the state within this discourse as the lasting defense against both the machinations of outgroups and a collective psychological recidivism back to a submissive exilic personhood which threatens the existence of Jews. During a 1953 speech "the total and constant hostility of

the world towards Israel" was declared by Israel's first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion:

> We took upon ourselves a mighty struggle with 3 focal points: A struggle with ourselves, with our Diaspora mentality . . . , a struggle with the nature of the land . . . a struggle against forces of evil and hatred in the world, far and near, that did not understand and did not want to understand the uniqueness and the wondrous mission of our nation since we stepped onto the stage of history in ancient times until this very day. (Bar-Tal & Antebi 1992:263)

Garnering support for Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982, the Prime Minister Menachem Begin warned:

> The alternative [to war] is Treblinka, and we have decided there will be no more Treblinkas. (Blumenthal 2013:194)

Similarly, the prime minister succeeding Begin, Yitzhak Shamir, frequently employed such tropes:

> We have plenty of . . . "friends" in the world who would like to see us dead, wounded, trampled, suppressed. And then it is possible to pity the wretched Jew, to commiserate with him. (Bar-Tal & Antebi 1992:264)

Indeed, its legacy carries into the present; Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has been quite explicit in invoking sentiments tied to the Masada Syndrome. While praising the United States for condemning the "Iranian regime for its genocidal aims" in his address to Congress in 2011, he declared that:

> In much of the international community, the calls for our destruction are met with utter silence. It is even worse because there are so many who rush to condemn Israel for defending itself against Iran's terror proxies. (J Post 2011)

In his 2013 speech to the UN General Assembly, Netanyahu warned:

> I want there to be no confusion on this point. Israel will not allow Iran to get nuclear weapons. If Israel is forced to stand alone, Israel will stand alone. (Haaretz 2013)

The pattern continued in his most recent address to Congress in March 2015:

> My friend, standing up to Iran is not easy. Standing up to dark and murderous regimes never is. With us today is Holocaust survivor and Nobel Prize winner Elie Wiesel. Elie, your life and work inspires to give meaning to the words, "never again." And I wish I could promise you, Elie, that the lessons of history have been learned. I can only urge the leaders of the world not to repeat the mistakes of the past. Not to sacrifice the future for the present; not to ignore aggression in the hopes of gaining an illusory peace.
>
> But I can guarantee you this, the days when the Jewish people remained passive in the face of genocidal enemies, those days are over. We are no longer scattered among the nations, powerless to defend ourselves. We restored our sovereignty in our ancient home. And the soldiers who defend our home have boundless courage. For the first time in 100 generations, we, the Jewish people, can defend ourselves. This is why -- this is why, as a prime minister of Israel, I can promise you one more thing: Even if Israel has to stand alone, Israel will stand. But I know that Israel does not stand alone. I know that America stands with Israel. (Washington Post 2015)

Former Israeli Finance Minister Pinchas Sapir's statement in the Knesset perhaps sums up the political philosophy best:

> We have a Warsaw Ghetto complex, a complex of the hatred of the Jewish people, just as we are filled with a Masada complex… We inherited the justified feeling of our backs to the wall. This feeling guided us in our various struggles and wars. (Bar-Tal & Antebi 1992:264)

Importantly, the preceding review is of a discourse which clearly focuses on the annihilation of the Jewish people. As we will see, there is a clear distinction between these calls for security and that in reference to the security crisis posed by the asylum seekers. Yet, what is also clear is the symbiotic relationship between the two. That is, that which informs the demographic hysteria is the weight of the invocation of a past which calls on the need for a powerful and sovereign state.

Asylum Seekers within the Masada Syndrome

On one hand, the asylum seekers fit neatly into this discursive framework, and are mobilized as yet another outside threat, confirming the characteristic of Israel's siege

mentality that "the group generalizes the negative attribution to all of the outgroups and often equalizes among all of them" (Bar-Tal & Antebi 1992:251). Yet, Israeli politicians frame the threat as largely different from that posed, for instance, by neighbors like Iran. Along with the use of racialized terms under the veil of legalistic rhetoric (see chapter 3), that asylum seekers are also unequivocally represented as a different type of danger and a different type of security risk also appears upon a thorough examination.

Common among the representation of migrants is their being massive, needy, dependent, and voiceless "seas of humanity" (Harrell-Bond & Voutira 1992; Malkki 1996:235), and as we will see below, Israeli politicians perpetuate that image of the African asylum seekers. Consequently, that which the asylum seekers desire is not understood as the *intentional* destruction of Israel. Indeed, what is implied is that their threat is only serious because of those very nefarious intentions of other enemies, and so the threat of the asylum seekers is largely informed because of how they might disturb the deterrent to other, larger existential threats. Rooted in the slander have been attempts to situate these individuals within a historical context embedded in Israel's concern with demographic security and protecting the dominance of Jewish majority in Israel.

The common identification of the asylum-seeking community by politicians as a homogenous group of "infiltrators" of the state draws on a specific historic meaning. The Hebrew word for "infiltrators," *Mistanenim*, was a term used after the Israeli War of Independence to identify Palestinians conducting attacks from Egypt and Jordan. Yet, it was also used to classify the majority of Palestinians who were simply attempting to re-enter the country after they were either expelled or fled from their homes during the Israeli War of Independence (for the Palestinians, the catastrophe, the *Nakba*);

Palestinians were banned from returning to their homes following the war (Morris 1988). In fact, the subsequent Anti-Infiltration Law passed in 1954 meant to stymie the movement of all such "infiltrators" extended to those Palestinians who stayed within the post-war border which was established. It is this very 1954 Prevention of Infiltration Act which is now used to regulate the movement and legality of the asylum seekers (Handelzalts 2012).

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu continues to publicly identify the asylum seekers as *Mistanenim* (Ravid et. al 2013), a trend highlighting several years of venomous rhetoric germinating from his admonition that the asylum seekers serve as "a concrete threat to the Jewish and democratic character of the country" (Ravid 2010). In 2011 he stated that they "cause great damage to the Jewish population and the Zionist enterprise." During a weekly Cabinet meeting in 2011, Netanyahu again invoked demographic concerns:

> I see the phenomenon of being flooded by illegal, job-seeking *mistenanim* (sic) as a threat to the economy, to society, to security and to the delicate demographic fabric upon which the State of Israel is based. (ARDC 2012:14)

During a cabinet meeting in 2012, Netanyahu declared that "if we do not stop the problem, the 60,000 Mistanenim could worsen to 600,000, and that threatens our existence as a Jewish and democratic state" (Kobovich & Nesher 2012). Netanyahu has even spread the word on social media, calling the African migrants "*Mistaneney haavoda habilti chukiim*" (illegal economic infiltrators) on his well-read Facebook page, continuing a well-established trend (Netanyahu 2013).

In Israel, along with the prime minister, the interior minister is in the most powerful of political positions shaping policy and public opinion vis-à-vis the asylum

seekers. Importantly, hateful rhetoric began to intensify during Interior Minister Eli Yishai's reign between 2009-2013, a time coinciding with rising immigration rates. In 2011, he spoke publicly about the hypothetical demographic threat of the *Mistanenim* and warned of more than one million people waiting to invade Israeli:

> I will safeguard the Jewish majority and the state, and I ensure that the last of the Sudanese, and the Eritreans, and all of the *Mistanenim*, to the last of them, will return to their countries. I have pity on the people of Israel. (ARDC 2012:14)

In 2012, he warned that the "*Mistanenim*, along with the Palestinians, will bring a quick end to the Zionist dream" (Vayler-Pollack 2012). That same year, on Army Radio, Yishai disagreed with the Israeli Chief of Police's plea to give the asylum seekers workers permits, saying:

> Working places will root them here, they'll have offspring and this suggestion will only cause hundreds of thousands more to come here… We should imprison them or deport them with financial incentive. The minute they will go to jail, they won't have the desire to come here any longer… I am not responsible for what's happening in Eritrea and Sudan, but the UN is… There will be offspring of hundreds of thousands, and the Zionist dream will be shelved. (Kobovich & Nesher 2012)

Yishai's successor, Gideon Sa'ar, was notorious for his disregard for both the rights of the asylum seekers and the rule of Israel's High Court. As interior minister, Sa'ar pushed hard for "Amendment 4" to the Anti-Infiltration Law, which was passed in December 2013 on international Human Rights Day. A similar amendment which also permitted the indefinite detention without trial of asylum seekers had previously been struck down by the High Court only three months earlier. Debating the amendment during a session in the Knesset, Sa'ar lashed out at his opponents with a focus on demographic "stability" of Israel:

> You aspire to a state of all its infiltrators... This law serves the interests of the state and its citizens. You said the law is embarrassing; not only aren't we

> embarrassed by it, we would have been embarrassed and ashamed had we demonstrated weakness in preserving the only state we have. (Kashti 2014)

Certainly, not all rhetoric has focused on the demographic threat the asylum seekers pose. However, even the most vitriolic of statements do not attempt to situate the asylum seekers as physical threats to the existence of the state's constituents. Even the potential physical harm Israeli society is confronted with is conceptualized as unorganized and piecemeal, affecting individuals rather than large groups. That is, the asylum seekers are most often branded as petty criminals or carriers of disease. During an anti-migrant rally in May 2012 which escalated into physical assaults against Africans and the destruction of local businesses, Likud Member Danny Danon stated that "The infiltrators have to be expelled. We shouldn't be afraid to say the world- expulsion now!" (Blumenthal 2013:343) The most invidious statement made by a member of the Knesset was from Likud Member Miri Regev, now the Minister of Culture and Sport, who infamously shouted to the hungry crowd that "the Sudanese are a cancer in our body" (Azulay & Efraim 2012).

In October 2009, Yishai told a local news channel that asylum seekers and other migrants from the "developing" world should be refused entry into Israel, as they will inevitably infect Israelis with diseases upon arrival:

> If hundreds of thousands of foreign workers come here now, they will bring with them a profusion of diseases: hepatitis, measles, tuberculosis, AIDS, drugs. Will any of Israel's citizens by willing for migrants to enter at this rate? (ARDC 2012:13)

Two years later, he made the unfounded claim on Israel's "Army Radio" that most of the African migrants are criminals and demanded the imprisonment and deportation of the

entire asylum-seeking community, advocating for the Ministry of Interior to "put everyone without exception into prison or detention camps" (J Post 2012).[19]

Performativity and the Masada Syndrome

Important to our analysis of constructs of Israeli national identity, the Zionist movement advocated narratives which attacked and attempted to dissociate the "New Jew" from his oppressed ancestry. Clearly, much of the discursive rhetoric reviewed above reflects these sensitivities. They work to both clearly delineate the heroic past of ancient Hebrews as opposed to the Jew of the Diaspora (Zerubavel 1995) and reiterate the continual threat posed by the outside world as evidenced through Jewish history.

I argue that the reviewed political rhetoric is lush with performativity. Indeed, Austin famously noted that in "doing speech" our utterances create meaning simply from the action of speaking itself (1962:350-351). By emphasizing that Israel "will stand alone" if it must, politicians not only invoke ethos embedded in the Masada Syndrome, but embody the characteristics that have been glorified in Zionist ideology. Just as Judith Butler famously said that one "becomes a woman" by successfully performing acts "in accordance with cultural norms," (Cameron 1997:329) so too do Israeli politicians become brave, gallant, and agentive Zionists by verbally testifying to their firm commitment to a particular ideology tied to the Masada Syndrome.

Here, the two lasting vestiges of "Israeliness" which Kimmerling mentions clearly emerge in the discourse. The emphasis on security, self-determination, and bravery manifests in the consensus to deport and rid the state of the migration threat regardless of

[19] Indeed, the crime rate among African asylum seekers is far lower than that of native Israelis (ARDC 2012:8).

obligations under international law. The materialization of a "siege mentality" (Bar-Tal & Antebi 1992) in this discourse projects historic Jewish suffering onto the present. A monolithic Jewish history is implied, littered with events such as the Roman siege of Masada. What is confirmed is the potential consequence of Israel losing the demographic war it continues to fight; the weight of Jewish history works to validate the importance of maintaining a Jewish majority which the asylum seekers are portrayed as crippling.

Conclusion

I have attempted to situate the impact of Israel's siege mentality on the political discourse vis-à-vis the asylum seekers. While the weight of such discourse is informed by this worldview, I argue that the implications of the potential actions of the asylum seekers are understood very differently than other groups identified as existential threats to Israel. Certainly, a "fearism" and provocation of "national security" linked to Jewish history works to stigmatize the asylum seekers (Kalir 2015). Yet, these are also *specific* fears and *specific* threats to national security. Their threat is informed by the expectation that a Jewish State weakened demographically would impair the sovereignty of that apparatus designed to avert threats from those whose intentions aim to cause physical harm to the body politic. Under these implications, that which defines "threat" widens in scope, and as moves to preemptively avoid demographic imbalances are deemed as justified, the authority of the state to defy legal obligations is also broadened. Lastly, that which links the more apocalyptic narratives with those regarding the asylum seekers is the employment of worst-case scenarios as a guiding assumption in geopolitical analysis.

What is imagined within the political discourse is not the possibility of improved policy but of the most destructive and frightening of all possible outcomes.

Yet, there exists a conspicuous contradiction between Israel's policy towards the asylum seekers and the history of Jews themselves as refugees (Paz 2011). The next chapter will further examine this contradiction by reviewing how another story central to the Zionist movement, the Jewish exodus from Egypt, has been reappropriated by myriad social groups as a universal story of the legitimacy of the fight for freedom from the injustice of enslavement. Specifically, I review how a particular counter-narrative has been established by both the asylum-seeking and human rights community within Israel to advocate for the improved living conditions of the African migrants and an asylum policy in line with international law. One enactment of this commitment is through a now annual event called the "Refugee *Seder*" whereby Jews and African asylum seekers convene in celebration of the story of Passover and the link between the asylum seekers' current displacement with Jewish history.

CHAPTER 5

LET MY PEOPLE GO: THE REAPPROPRIATION OF THE EXODUS FROM THE EXCLUSIVE TO THE UNIVERSAL

When Israel was in Egypt's
land, Let my people go,
Oppress'd so hard they could not
stand, Let my People go.
Go down, Moses,
Way down in Egypt's land,
Tell old Pharaoh,
Let my people go.
Paul Robeson

The foreigners residing
among you must be treated as your
native-born. Love them as yourself,
for you were foreigners in Egypt.
Leviticus 19:34

Much like the Masada mythical narrative, the biblical account of the Exodus serves as an impetus and justification for the Zionist project. As Moses led the Israelites from enslavement out of Egypt, not only were foundations of historical and religious claims to the land of Palestine established, but the supposed moral right of the Jewish people to collectively establish a homeland there was as well. Yet unlike the story of Masada and other such myths central to the ideological prowess of Zionism, the Exodus has often been used in more universalist arguments condemning human bondage and extolling the worthiness of the collective struggle for liberation (Waskow 1990). Thomas Paine's (1776) argument supporting the colonists' independence from British rule refers to the "sullen-tempered Pharaoh of England" (25) in the widely read pamphlet, *Common Sense*. The story was iconicized in the spiritual, "Go Down Moses," and later became a rallying cry for the Civil Rights Movement in several of Dr. Martin Luther King's speeches.

Similarly, the Exodus would become incorporated into Liberation Theology developed in Latin America which opposed poverty, social injustice, and oppressive political institutions (Andrew 1979; Berryman 1987:49-50).[20]

The current asylum seekers in Israel have similarly reappropriated the Exodus to elucidate *their* life histories to a misinformed Israeli public; by overlapping personal stories with that of the ancient Israelites and other historical events resulting in Jewish suffering, the community openly challenges Zionist ideology by proffering commonalities running across histories of similarly oppressed peoples. Since 2007 and in collaboration with Israel's human rights community, public "Refugee *Seders*" have been organized in recognition of these commonalities in an effort to increase solidarity and awareness within Jewish Israel. This chapter examines the ways in which such narratives are counter-hegemonic to exclusivist retellings of the Exodus which reflect a particular history of a particular people *in vacuo* of analogous human oppression. In so doing, I will examine the *Haggadot*, or ceremonial texts, used during several "alternative" Passover *Seders*.

Whether Darfurians escaping military conflict, or Eritreans evading an oppressive military state, contemporary asylum seekers in Israel have arrived in Israel seeking freedom. The logistical parallels between Moses' Exodus and the journey taken by most asylum seekers are so striking that they beg comparison. Much like the biblical tale, many asylum seekers similarly crossed Egypt's Sinai in brutal conditions preceding their arrival to the "Land of Canaan." It is thus no surprise that an emphasis on the commonalities between the history of Jewish suffering and that of the current asylum

[20] For critiques on the application of the Exodus in such political movements, see Said (1986) and Patterson (2013).

seekers has been enacted to effect change in relation to thought and policy among Israeli Jews.

A Counter-Narrative

April 4, 1969, marked the first anniversary of the death of Dr. Martin Luther King and the third night of Passover. The moment was commemorated in the basement of Lincoln Temple in Washington, D.C. by some 800 people of various religious and social affiliations gathered to celebrate an alternative *Seder* (Prichep 2015). Indeed, long before contemporary Refugee *Seders* (which will be discussed shortly), Arthur Waskow wrote the Passover *Haggadah*[21] entitled *Freedom Seder* (1969) used that evening. By quoting the likes of George Orwell (24), John Brown (16), and Nat Turner (15) along with Martin Buber and Hannah Arendt (22), Waskow interwove the narrative of the Israelite freedom from enslavement in Egypt with contemporary liberation movements such as the Civil Rights Movement. As he writes in its introduction:

> …this Haggadah is deeply Jewish, but not only Jewish. In our world we all live under Pharaohs who could exterminate us any moment, and so enslave us all the time. Passover therefore fuses, for an instant, with the history and future of all mankind. (vi)

Undeniably, Waskow's *Haggadah* follows the tradition of Jewish study which focuses not on simple absorption of material, but on analyzing, debating, and contesting religious texts in the form of open conversation. Central to this is the offering of temporal spaces within such ritual for this analysis, exemplified by the design of many religious texts, such as the Talmud or Midrash, which contain multiple points of commentary and interpretation. In this vein, Waskow's account leaves space for participants to conduct

[21] The *Haggadah* is the text used during the ceremonial Seder which tells the story of Jewish liberation out of Egypt as based on the Book of Exodus.

general discussions (33) where one can "read passages, make statements, or ask questions. They might put on a brief play or film, play a phonograph record, etc.- whatever best expresses their own feelings about freedom" (11).

Unlike mainstream Zionist discourse which pins the outside world against the Jewish people, Waskow's narrative links world Jewry to the overall destiny of mankind and its struggle for human liberation. In the tradition of Jewish scholars, his interpretation seeks to challenge the story and contemporize it. Towards this end, the last section of the *Haggadah* features statements by organizations and individuals which might shed further light on the evening's discussion, such as one from Jewish feminist Marilyn Lowen's own *Haggadah*, which warns that the "poison of the MASTER has now infected our people" and asks whether the Jewish people were "more righteous in bondage" while condemning the false prophet Dayan (Israeli general Moshe Dayan) (1969:44).

Willen (2010) emphasizes that alternative interpretations of Jewish history can either serve as the impetus for one's sense of obligation towards fellow sufferers or justification for exclusionist and distrustful sensibilities. Here, unlike mainstream Zionist discourse which, as articulated through the lens of the Masada Syndrome, pins the Jewish people against the "outside" world, these counter-narratives link Jews to the overall destiny of mankind. These "alternative" interpretations of the *Haggadah* confirm Jackson's (2005) recognition of the past providing multiple frameworks for storytellers as a means of "creatively comprehending their present situation and making informed choices about how it is to be addressed and lived" (358). In Jackson's study, oral traditions of Sierra Leoneans often involved binaries and contradictions, such as violence and reconciliation; his work concludes that lessons derived from the past prove malleable

to human choice in their interpretations. Consequently, the past "offers itself up so to speak, to the living as a basis for creatively comprehending their present situation and making informed choices about how it is to be addressed and lived" (357-358).

Refugee Seders

> But the ETERNAL has ennobled us
> to wield power with compassion. In every
> generation a person must see him/herself as
> if s/he had personally gone out of Egypt. In
> past generations, Jews fled from oppression
> and persecution. Now we all draw courage
> from our pasts to extend a hand of aid and
> friendship to those in need.
> *T'ruah Haggadah*
> *2014:6*

> Freedom, Freedom
> Freedom is more than the wealth
> Freedom, Freedom
> Freedom is more than the money
> Freedom, Freedom
> Freedom is more than everything.
> *Tosh, Congolese Refugee, ARDC Haggadah*
> *2010:7*

The *Seder* is the ritual meal that begins the Jewish holiday of *Pesach*, Passover, telling how under the guidance of the Prophet Moses, the ancient Israelites escaped their enslavement in Egypt. The ceremonial text which guides the meal and accompanying rituals is called the *Haggadah* ("the telling"). Along with blessings given throughout the feast, food is consumed symbolizing the struggles of the ancient Israelites following the drought in Canaan which forced many to relocate to Goshen in Northern Egypt, a move which resulted in their ultimate enslavement.

I next review *Haggadot* used during two Refugee *Seders* which disrupt existential projections of the Jewish past onto the present. One was written by members of the African Refugee Development Center in 2010, a NGO in South Tel Aviv that in coordination with the African community and partnering organizations runs the Refugee Seder Project in Levinsky Park, Tel Aviv. According to their website, the project was:

> …borne out of important parallels between the accounts of African refugees who had recently crossed the Egyptian border to seek asylum in Israel, and the story of the ancient Jewish exodus from the land of Egypt. Further, it was noted that the testimonies of African asylum seekers resonate with the modern Jewish narrative, whereby many European Jews found themselves displaced after World War II.
>
> The Refugee Seder seeks to create connections between Israelis and refugees by building on their shared experiences of persecution and freedom. We believe that highlighting this common narrative is an important tool for bridging the differences, and creating better understanding between the two communities. The 2010 and 2011 events were attended by over 300 people.
>
> The event comprises an alternative *seder* which is led by both Jews and African refugees, communal and religious leaders. They focus not only on sharing the story of their community, but also on the need for a fair and just policy in relation to asylum seekers in Israel. A meal is served to all participants and is accompanied by live music performed by a collection of Israeli and refugee artists. (ARDC 2015)

The other *Haggadah* which we will review was written in 2014 and sponsored by *T'ruah*, a nonprofit rabbinical organization based in North America dedicated to advancing human rights in Israel and Occupied Palestine. The T'ruah *Haggadah* was used in a solidarity *Seder* last year located in Washington, D.C. The two *Haggadot* under review reinterpret these struggles as they reflect current crises facing Israel's African asylum seekers. I will review several sections of these alternative *Haggadot* which link stories of asylum seekers with the traditional Jewish morals explicated during specific parts of the dinner.

Yachatz

The unleavened bread which is consumed during the *Seder*, *matzah*, offers a reminder of the harshness of enslavement and impoverishment in Egypt. Unable to allow the bread to rise as the Israelites fled Egypt, this flatbread is called the "bread of affliction." *Yachatz* is the ceremonial breaking of the middle *matzah* during the *Seder*, an act symbolizing the separation of loved ones during the enslavement in Egypt. In line with the commemoration of this message, the T'ruah (2014) *Haggadah* accompanies this step with the following testimony from a Sudanese asylum seeker:

> I am 38 years old, married and a father of two children. I was born in Niala, South Darfur. My father was murdered during an attack on our village in 2003. We had to run away and seek refuge in the "Kalma" refugee camp. My mother, wife and children still live there until today. I miss them very much and I don't know what their situation is. I came to Israel to seek protection but I was imprisoned. I have been in prison for almost two years. I don't want to be in prison any more. (3)

The ARDC version (Shaked et al. 2010) provides a similar, if more general, connection:

> We break the middle matzah in two, wrapping one portion in a napkin and hiding it. This division reminds us of the forced splitting of communities and families due to disappearances, detentions, and deportations of immigrants that are carried out in the name of public safety. Families divided in their homelands or at the border. The visible half becomes our bread of affliction, *lekhem oni*, the suffering of those who do not know where their loved ones have been taken. The hidden half, the afikoman, represents the horrors hidden from our sight: humiliating treatment of those detained and prevented from speaking with their families and friends. The disappeared are blocked from our sight twice, physically separated in jails, but also wrapped in a blanket of fear of further deportations and legal attacks, intended to silence their communities. Until these parts become one whole again, our seder cannot truly end. Only when families and communities are reunited, can we claim our own freedom. (5-6)

Arba Kosot

The *Arba Kosot* are the four cups of wine consumed throughout the *Seder* ceremony traditionally in honor of God's delivering the Jews from Egypt. In our

alternative *Haggadot*, the consumption of the four cups is undergirded with contemporary meanings dedicated to the present continuum of suffering experienced by the African asylum seekers:

> Tonight we dedicate these four cups of wine to four personal stories of exodus from Egypt: of the Jewish People, of Darfur and South Sudan Refugees, of refugees from Congo and refugees from Eritrea and the Ivory Coast. (Shaked et al. 2010:4)

> A central symbol of the Passover seder—literally an "order"— is four cups of wine or grape juice, representing different stages of the seder. We move from gathering to hearing other people's stories, then to sharing our own exodus narratives, and finally to song. Let us fill the first cup, the cup of gathering, and consider why we are here. (T'ruah 2014:2)

Nirtzah

The *Nirtzah* concludes the *Seder*, and here songs are sung followed by the declaration *beshanah habaah biYerushalaim* ("Next year in Jerusalem"), a call for the return of the Jews to their historic homeland. In turn, underlying the two *Haggadot* are conclusions with the phrase that symbolizes the destinies of Jews connected with those of the asylum seekers. This is most evident in the *Nirtzah* portion of the *Seder*:

> At the end of the seder, we pour—but do not drink—a fifth cup for Elijah the prophet, who symbolizes the coming of salvation. Jointly we can bring salvation; change is coming, but it is not yet here. We come together at Passover to connect our separate stories into the story of new freedom. We must cross the wilderness of change before we can enter a promised land of greater justice, greater freedom, greater peace, and deeper healing. Next year in a Jerusalem rebuilt with justice! (T'ruah 2014)

> When the Seder is drawing to a close, this is the time to express hope for redemption and freedom – to reach Jerusalem. This is the time to dream…each one of us of our personal "Jerusalem"… (Shaked et al. 2010:14)

Here, the Exodus continues not just because of a mandate from God or a deeply ingrained tradition in Jewish life to tell the story of the Exodus from Egypt from "generation to

generation." Rather, given the universality of the interpretation, the actual story of the Exodus is not over, because the liberation of all of humanity is not over and suffering continues. The trope "next year in Jerusalem," traditionally used by Jewish Diaspora, now is reappropriated to reflect the struggle and hope of all peoples. Jerusalem here stands for more than a place, but an ideal, a concept rooted in a site harboring a certain brotherhood of humanity.

Conclusion

Kalir (2015) is critical of the argument among NGOs working on behalf of asylum seekers that Jews in Israel have a "moral obligation" towards the disenfranchised; an argument used as a strategy to change Israeli policy and public opinion. He explains:

> While there have been some strategic gains in pressing the moral obligation of Jews, and by extension of the Jewish state, towards those who escape persecution, there can be little doubt about the overall failure of a human rights discourse and humanitarian compassion to resolve the crisis of asylum seekers in Israel. In fact, I argue that references to the Holocaust have unintentionally implied a comparison, even a competition, between the victimhood of Jews throughout history and that of contemporary asylum seekers from Africa. (583)

As Kalir contends:

> Ticktin rightly alerts us to the sinister logic of humanitarianism with its appeal for compassion on the basis of exceptional circumstances. This type of humanitarianism depoliticises migrants and their legal claims, falls short of questioning the existing logic of states' regime of rights and reproduces and even augments the structural violence against marginalised subjects. (584)

While Kalir argues that such humanitarian calls for justice work to further delineate the citizen vs. non-citizen binary in Israel, given the very demographic emphasis of the Jewish State, would not the provocation of international law offer a more threatening rationalization for asylum rights? As Paz (2011) states, hovering over the

asylum seekers is the "Pandora's Box" that is the Palestinian refugee crisis, a brooding political red herring which helps explain the very "ordered disorder" that is Israel's asylum system. In constructing their own exclusionist narratives, the NGOs and asylum seekers avoid linking their cause with that of the Palestinians. So while Kalir argues the current public campaign works to enflame more negative sentiment and contributes to increasing the effect of "othering" the community, a more universalist argument embedded in international law would likely have much graver consequences in alienating the Jewish public.

Kalir's analysis also overlooks the very role of asylum seekers as narrative agents themselves. As Sabar (2010) notes, following their arrival in the 1990's, African migrant communities in Israel attempted to tie their own accounts of struggle and oppression with Jewish history as a justification for their presence. That is, this strategy has been used long before the current asylum-seeking communities even arrived. Thus, the employment of such discourse among the collective group of NGOs to which Kalir refers should be recognized as a continuation of that legacy and not as some wholly new strategy; a legacy whereby asylum seekers and migrants are cognizant of Jewish history and strategically attempt to mobilize it towards their benefit.

Lastly, Kalir argues that because Israeli asylum policy has not been reformed, the human rights community's public relations campaign has largely been a failure. However, this argument is based on the assumption that such large-scale policy changes are actually possible simply through the public relations efforts of asylum seekers and the human rights community. Moreover, not only is it hard to measure the importance of the social services offered to the asylum seekers by these NGOs, but the sense of trust and

camaraderie between and amongst the human rights community and asylum seekers may indeed serve to galvanize and unite these groups in ways immeasurable. For while dispatching the concept of "moral obligation" or "Jewish obligation" as a means in which to change public opinion, these strategies may simultaneously be a discursive tool spurring trust and cohesion among the asylum-seeking community and the groups of NGOs upon which their very survival relies. In this way, the "Refugee *Seders*" reviewed should also be understood as an act of solidarity between these two groups. If nothing else, building bridges where they are possible and in ways which connect them personally and historically may serve equally important in the ongoing, frontline, daily struggles these groups are facing. Such solidarity is difficult if not impossible to put an absolute value on, but their effect should be a topic of attention to anthropologists committed to truly gauging their overall efficacy in making life more livable for the asylum-seeking community.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

> Human madness is oftentimes a
> cunning and most feline thing. When you
> think it fled, it may have but become
> transfigured into some still subtler form.
> *Melville, Moby Dick*
> *(1851:162)*

I have attempted to unveil how a focused interpretation of Jewish history, influenced by long-standing goals and ideologies within the Zionist nation-building project, works to shape Israel's political discourse in relation to the African asylum-seeking community. It would be naïve to contend that such discourse is somehow unique in its invocation of fears surrounding the "threats" migrants pose to the country. However, what *is* unique is how the weight of Jewish history has become mobilized to effect shifting meanings and categories within the dialogue surrounding national security itself. If, as Zionist ideology assumes, Israel is to be the last refuge of the Jewish people, the state's conflation of physical and demographic conflicts becomes logical. Likewise, the physical distinction between citizen and state under such a proposal is rendered indistinguishable.

Anthropologist Michael Herzfeld (2005) contends that nation-states often justify their actions pursuant to the restoration of that "time before time- in which the balanced perfection of social relations had not yet suffered the decay that affects everything human." He calls this portrayal of the past *structural nostalgia*, the "collective representation of an edenic order" which "legitimizes deeds of the moment by investing them with the moral authority of eternal truth" (147). As it relates to the current crisis with the African asylum seekers, Israel's demographic objectives and security concerns

seek to ensure that which advances its goal of providing a safe haven for the Jewish people and harboring the environment which returns them to their gloried and heroic past.

Here, the purpose of Israeli politicians is not the restoration of society back to some "perfect form," for the mere possibility of such a setting is contrary to the necessity and purpose of the state in the first place. Rather, with the perceived natural hostility of the Gentile towards the Jew, the alleged goal of the state is the continuation of a political apparatus necessary towards providing protection in a forever combative and aggressive world; foul play conducted on its part in response to these concerns is, accordingly, an acceptable byproduct.

As Israeli political discourse is informed by Jewish history and the Masada Syndrome, we see the culmination of what Kimmerling identifies as the two lasting characteristics which define contemporary "Israeliness." Politicians project their valor by emphasizing "security" concerns and maintenance of a Jewish majority at any and all costs. In an important microcosm of changing norms and values within Israeli society, that which remains of the national character which was once lionized, the *kibbutznik*, is the fighting warrior. Indeed, if the security promised by the state is taken as fulfilled, it is nevertheless the security for a life with less social benefits, increasing economic disparity, and rising ethnic tensions.

Much like the ways in which the *kibbutz* movement mirrored other crucial processes unfolding within the new state, the handling of the African asylum seekers serves as an important reflection on other currents developing in Israel. Not only does Israeli policy violate international law, but there is the growing pattern of the seeming disregard the Knesset has for the decisions made by the Israeli High Court, exemplified

in the Knesset's latest amendment to the Anti-Infiltration Law which replicates two early amendments which were struck down by the Court in 2013 and 2014. Perhaps most symbolic, little reconciliation or moderation in policy is imagined or contemplated among Israel's most influential political leaders. On the other hand, that which is imagined and anticipated with great clairvoyance is the doomsday scenario of asylum seekers quickly crippling the autonomy of the Jewish people to run, organize, and ultimately protect Israel.

Yet, such nearsighted hawkishness is clearly not a given; the alternative *Haggadot* used during the Refugee *Seders* offered logical, humanist connections with historical victimization between Jews and the African asylum seekers. If nothing else, the rationality of the argument reveals the dominant Zionist metanarrative as applied to the asylum seekers to be socially constructed and not the byproduct of a political inevitability, testifying to Herzfeld's conclusion that "the nation-state's claims to affixed, eternal identity grounded in universal truths are themselves, like the moves of all social actors, strategic adjustments to the demands of the historical moment" (2005:5).

Similarly, while the current political discourse surrounding the asylum seekers fits neatly within the paradigm of Bar-Tal's notion of the "Masada Syndrome," that the meanings of seemingly commonsensical concepts like "security threat," "demographic threat," and "national threat" shift over time testifies to the ways the asylum seekers must be shaped as a danger. As Kalir (2015) identifies, "Asylum seekers have neither been involved in terrorism nor do they pose a risk to the health and personal security of Israeli citizens more than any other subgroup in Israel" (594). With the implementation of such words within the historically embedded goals and sensitivities of national movements, we

see how a "security threat" may hold meanings outside of simply an exposure to bodily harm while still carrying the weight of such connotations. In the Israeli context, these categories seem to blur and become one and the same, for the Jewish State is only such with a Jewish majority, which in turn purportedly ensures the physical well-being of its constituents from the existentially dangerous Gentile world.

In turn, one phenomenon not yet studied is the manner in which the "Masada Syndrome" as it relates to the asylum seekers works to reinforce a collective siege mentality and a general sense of claustrophobia in Israel. While the societal costs may be difficult to measure, the implications are worth considering. Indeed, the aforementioned construction of the fence along the border with Egypt continues a strategy which has already nearly completely enclosed the state's perimeter (Ynet 2015).[22]

As Israel's policy towards the myriad "infiltrators" to which it is opposed results in the further tightening of its borders, the social consequences of such actions should be the subject of analysis. The manifestation of Israeli policy seems to reproduce the very confining environment which the Zionist nation-building project intended to escape. Yet, as we see, the ideological pull which envisioned and implemented a Jewish State has also required the very ghettoization from which the Zionist movement was designed to free world Jewry, revealing the irreconcilability of deep-rooted ideologies upon which Israel has grown.

[22] For Israeli geographer and political adviser to Netanyahu, Arnon Soffer, Israel is an "island" that must protect itself from migration, specifically from "climate refugees" from neighboring countries. He consequently advocates for the full enclosure "all around Israeli borders," together with "sea fences" Moreover, he warns that without systematic reductions within Bedouin populations, "Tel Aviv will become Masada" (Blumenthal 2013:337).

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