Beta Israel (Ethiopian Jews) and African Asylum Seekers in Israel

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Abstract

The focus of news and media analyses on discriminatory practices in Israel has centred on its relationship with its Palestinian nationals and those living under occupation in the West Bank and Gaza. This emphasis has diverted critical attention from Israel's attitude towards Jews of African descent and African asylum seekers who have been racially labelled Falasha (immigrants) and Infiltrators (asylum seekers) respectively. This essay reveals the material manifestations of racism directed at both these groups. Discriminatory practices within Israel towards Beta Israel (Ethiopian Jews) are detected in the "absorption process", educational, employment and housing. The xenophobic rhetoric regarding asylum seekers is further echoed in the words of Israeli politicians from the Prime Minister who has referred to them as "illegal infiltrators flooding the country" to Regev an MP stating they are "a cancer in our body". Furthermore, the legal instruments of legislations, courts, police and immigration officers used to implement expulsion policies targeting asylum seekers, contradict Israel's historically stated commitment to the UN and Geneva Convention on refugee rights. Goldberg's account of racial states (Goldberg 2002) - naturalism and racial historicism - are contrasted and I would like to contribute to the debate by proposing that the uniqueness of Jewish suffering in the Holocaust (*Shoah*), necessitates the introduction of a further category of racial Shoahcentrism.

Introduction

Jews have suffered several millennia of persecution, stretching back to Nebuchadnezzar in the Axial Age, the Romans before and after Christ, the Spanish inquisition in the late Medieval Age, through to the *Shoah* under the Nazis in the twentieth century. Accordingly, on Holocaust Memorial Day in 2014 Israeli President Shimon Peres, citing the historical suffering of Jewish people in Europe, proclaimed, "I will do everything in my power to ensure that the Nazis will not rise again. As a human being, I will do everything in my power to bring peace between peoples; between races; between religions; between nations." (Jerusalem Post, 27 April 2014). The idea of Israel as a racist state remains an anathema to its supporters, because the '*Jewish*' people have been historical victims of racism and some are the progeny of *Shoah* survivors. The contemporary plight of Beta Israel and African asylums seekers, however, contradicts this notion.

Zionism, as a means of emancipating Jews of Europe, manifested itself through a colonialist project to establish a Jewish dominant territorial entity that could help bring to an end the Jewish Diaspora. It sought to atomise identity and culture through assimilation, and extricate Jews from the dangers of anti-Semitism, that had culminated in the *Shoah*. The aim of early Zionists to create a Jewish State based on gathering in Jews required the revival of an imagined or real historical past between those who identified as Jews, and a connectedness to a particular territory (Smith 2003). Initially the 'Uganda Plan' offered by European colonial

powers and supported by Herzl created a controversy within the Jewish community which saw the emergence of the opposition wing of the Jewish Territorial Organization to Zionism. After two years of acrimonious debate at the Seventh Zionist Congress (Aloey 2011) the Zionist founding fathers succumbed to the option of mandate Palestine, over the alternative 'Uganda Plan' (Shindler 2008) due to its biblical and historical connectedness to the Jewish people. However, to overwhelm the indigenous population of Palestine, a demographic superiority had to be established, maintained and imperatively policed, thus ushering race and racist policies (Appiah 1990). The Declaration of Independence in 1948 consecrated the Zionist narrative of the Jewish people's connection to the land of Israel, the Jewish right of return and the 'natural and historic right' to establish a Jewish state (Shapira 2012). The idea of a Jewish state imbibes within it the claim that Israel is a state "established *by* and *for* the Jews" (Zreik 2011 p.24). The enshrining of these aspirations reveal the emergence of an ethnocratic[1] (Yiftachel 2006; Cook 2006) and racist state.

For a successful Zionist project the supplementary marriage between secular Zionist nationalistic aspirations and the religious inclined was critical, something that was lacking until the late 1930s (Adelman 2008) but whose differences withered in the urgency of the *Shoah.* Eventually, rabbis and activists (Eliezer Don-Yehiya 2014) not only acquiesced but supplemented Zionism with religious fervour, establishing a state that reflects Durkhem's idea of society being the source of religion (Alund 1997). The solidification of the exclusive identity has been facilitated by the gathering in of Jews from around the globe, a process which promotes homogeneity and consequently undermines heterogeneity. The ethnocracy lends towards ethnocentrism which causes the emergence of "we feeling as against the others" (Cox 2000 p.71) and the undermining of minorities (Ghanem 2007) with a potential of slippage to racialist doctrine (Smith 1999). In the case of Israel the racialist doctrine ties in with Todorov's five propositions: The existence of races; continuity between physical type and character; the action of the group on the individual; unique hierarchy of values; and knowledge-based politics (Todorov 2000 p.64-67), thereby exposing its racist nature.

Israel as a racial state

The introduction of non-white Jews and African asylum seekers in Israel has strained the intra-Jewish allegiance and a concurrent emergence of overt racism in countering the asylum seekers' plea for naturalisation. Racism in this instance is reserved to being institutional, although a contested concept (Coretta 2011), according to Goldberg provides valuable insights into the racial formation of modern states "through definition, regulation, management, economic controls and the mediation of social relations. Ethnic monitoring, the surveillance and criminalisation of racially identified populations, their limited access to economic resources and the extent to which such groups interacted…" (quoted by Coretta 2011 p 178) (See also Bhavnani, Mirza and Meetoo 2005 p.15-16 and Rattansi and Skellington 1992 p.165).

The inclusion of the state is primary in understanding racial formation and the undermining of the other, and it will be the contention of this essay to evaluate if Israel goes beyond the concepts of the critical race theorist, Goldberg, as outlined in his book *Racial State*. Goldberg highlights how the state plays "a centrally important, if changing, role in creating and policing racial categories over time" (Kurtz 2009 p.685). Goldberg argues that for modern nation states race is "integral to their emergence, development and transformations

(conceptually, philosophically, material) and predicates the inherent preponderance towards homogeneity inherently undermining heterogeneity" (Goldberg 2002 p.4). These characteristic are evident in the Zionist ideological manifestation of a Jewish ethnocratic state in Israel.

It is through the Israeli political establishment that the rhetoric augmenting racist discourse emanates by labelling asylum seekers as infiltrators and Ethiopian Jews whose preference for the term Beta Israel (House of Israel) is replaced by Falasha (immigrants), thereby controlling, regulating and shaping consciousness (Smith 1992) and instigating restrictive constraints (Hammer p.108). The xenophobic rhetoric regarding asylum seekers is further echoed in the words of the Israeli Interior Minister Eli Yishal who is reported by the *Times of Israel* to have called for African refugees to be rounded up into prisons or holding facilities and then deported (Fisher 2012). Even Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu has stated that asylum seekers posed a threat to the "democratic and Jewish character" of Israel (Hetfield 2014). Earlier in May 2012, he had referred to African refugees as "illegal infiltrators flooding the country" (Sherwood 2012). Miri Regev, an Israeli parliamentarian, discarded all pretence of racial parity and called asylum seekers from Africa "a cancer in our body" while publicly demanding more non-Black workers in Israel's construction industry (Berman 2014). The phenotypically commensurate pigmented Beta Israel while not facing direct calls for their expulsion, fared little better encountering a schizophrenic approach. On the one hand they had their language, name and culture undermined and faith questioned by the 'white' establishment. While on other side they underwent aggressive assimilation ordeals particularly in education against the will and at the detriment to their culture and family structure. It is pertinent to note that the Beta Israel do not form part of the 'collective' historical experience of anti-Semitism narrative of the 'white' Jews and remain in 'collective memory conscious' a group apart.

It is the drip-feed of racially charged discourse emanating from political, religious and public figures and through state regulation, management, governance and definition that undermines minority communities and denies the heterogeneity required to accommodate refugees and other ethnic minorities, creating exclusion and a racist milieu. For Goldberg there are two prevailing traditions of racial states: naturalism, where the "state of being and state of governance meet" (Goldberg 2002 p.98) thereby eliding personal and state violence. With regard to Africans, both Jews and asylum seekers, naturalism emerges from the European history of colonialism to which Zionism draws inspiration and places the phenotype on a civilisational scale in which white skin is superior to inferior black. Racial historicism, by contrast, justifies racism as the consequence of a disconnected past and hence "contemporary racial inequities must be due to individual or even group, inadequacies" (Goldberg 2002 p.99). However, in Israel we have the emergence of a third salient category, which is specific to the Jewish experience, in particular the European Jews, in the *Shoah*. Without any reductionist intent I would like to add racial Shoahcentrism in which the historical suffering of the Jewish people, in particular the *Shoah*, rationalises the occupation, discrimination, exclusion and expulsion of 'others'—non-Jews—under the all-encompassing idea of a *security* threat (Chomsky 2003 p.146) (See: Shindler 2008 p.10 and Tilley 2005 p.159), justify the gathering in of Jews through the rubric of the *Law of Return* and further silences critics of Israel's racist practices, particular in Europe, where the guilt for failing to prevent the *Shoah* is paramount.

It is argued their suffering led to their self-identification in "positively evaluated 'racial' terms" (Jenkins 2003 p.67) however such ethnic legitimation unchecked descends towards racism. Hence, Burg, a former speaker of the Knesset, astutely makes the observation that Israel has "turned it (*Shoah*) into a plea and generator for every deed. All is compared to the *Shoah*, dwarfed by the *Shoah* and therefore all is allowed—be it fences, sieges ... curfews, food and water deprivation or unexplained killings. All is permitted because we have been through the *Shoah* and you will not tell us how to behave" (Burg 2008 p.78) (See Shlaim 2009 p.124 and Jones and Murphy 2002 p.124). Thus the racial state in Israel takes an added dimension to Goldberg's concepts by conjoining naturalism and historicism with racial Shoahcentrism.

We witness in Israel Goldberg's, racial governmentalities which oversee a range of institutional, definitive and disciplinary practices discussed above of definition, regulation, governance, management, and mediation of racial matters. These concepts manifest in Israel by exercising power of enforcing regimented assimilation policies, discrimination, exclusion by controlling entry and expelling those deemed undesirable. The Israeli legislative language, such as 'infiltrators', directly contradicts the internationally accepted alternative 'asylum seekers'. Use of such lexicon garners public resentment and attempts to rationalise the idea of an existential demographic threat. Israel's discrimination and expulsion of asylum seekers without internationally-recognised due process reinforces its ethnic makeup—homogeneity—and undermines the potential of a heterogeneous state. However, it is the *Shoah* which is weaved into the moral conscious of Israelis that elicits racial Shoahcentrism providing the *raison d'être* for legitimating the marginalisation, discrimination and exclusion in effect exercising racist policies.

Beta Israel

The Judaism of the Beta Israel remained disputed until 1973 when Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef declared that they were indeed Jews (Shapira 2012) which entitled them to benefit from the *Law of Return*. However, the filtering process to validate them and uproot them from their ancient homeland and make *aliyah* ("ascension" immigration to Israel) would take another decade. Enveloped in biblical language, 'Operation Moses' and 'Operation Solomon' brought approximately 56,000, Beta Israel to Israel in 1984-85 and 1991. The two airlift operations have raised Israel's Jewish population by around 135,000 today. Unlike other Jews making *aliyah*, Beta Israel were phenotypically marked as a distinct group by virtue of their black skin. While socio-economic, language and sectarian division were also present, these distinctions were in part shared with respect to the Jews arriving from Russia, Asia and some Arab countries.

On making *aliyah* Beta Israel were confronted with specific processes alien to all other Jews migrating to Israel. On their arrival, a full nomenclature process took place where they were stripped of their names for one assigned to them by an Israeli Agency. The Hebrew language was forced upon them over Amharic, severing ties to their historical heritage, brining death to "cultural originality" (Fanon 1986 p.18) and making them illiterate and dependent overnight. Fifteen years after arriving in Israel, a BBC report found 75 % could not read or write Hebrew (BBC 17 November 1999). The community's preferred historic name 'Beta Israel (House of Israel)' was transposed for the more derogatory 'Falasha' (immigrants) or occasionally *cushim* (Black) analogous to the racist use of the word 'niggers'.

Such descriptions were anathema to the Beta Israel who traditionally considered themselves as having 'reddish-brown' skin (Kaplan 1999).

After being stripped of what many argue was their personal identity, further demeaning racist processes awaited the Ethiopians. Their faith came under scrutiny and Beta Israel who considered themselves direct descendents of King Solomon (Ben-Rafael and Peres 2005) were now forced by the Israeli rabbinical authority to undergo elaborate conversion rituals (Mendelson-Maoz 2013), which included a ritual bath (Chehata 2012). The contemptuous process evoked severe ire, culminating in a 32 day vigil outside the rabbinical office in 1985, (Jo Land 1989). Besides ending what the Beta Israelis considered an unwarranted and demeaning demand, the demonstrations also reflected "their feelings of powerlessness, dependence, confusion and depression" (Kaplan 1988 p.358) through regulation, management and definition.

While globally Israel basked in adulation for having *rescued* their brethren in faith for the consolidation of the Jewish national state (Yakobson and Rubinstein 2009), the reality for Beta Israel was more nuanced. The filtration process resulted in anything between 8,000 to 20,000 Ethiopians (Kretzmer 1989) failing to meet the selection criteria for being Jewish and therefore denied *aliyah*. This separation of families and friends added to the emotional and psychological trauma of migration. Despite the Beta Israel undergoing conversion rituals, many 'white' orthodox rabbis questioned their conversion and queried their marriages (Johnson 2001) which Rachamin Elazer, secretary of the National Council for Ethiopian Jews, mourned was "a real cruelty" (Fisher 1985). The chief municipal rabbi of Petah Tikva in 2014 rejected Ethiopian conversions, something that is routine according to one advocacy group which has also "filed a petition with the High Court of Justice several years ago against the phenomenon" (Jerusalem Post, September 8, 2014).

Housing

Unlike the Russian Jews who arrived in the nineties and emphasised their national identity over religious (Enloe 1996), the religiously affiliated Ethiopians were not included in the Israeli 'absorption basket' (Ben-Eliezer 2004) policy, which provided financial grants. The Ethiopians, in contrast, were state managed and taken to holding centres which Ben-eliezer suggests was to normalise and assimilate the community. He goes on to describe the process as "the first sign of impeding racism" (Ben-Eliezer 2004 p.248) conducted to avoid the dangers of ethnic division in the racial state (Wicker 1997). Assimilation, as quoted by Law (2010 p.66), is "a process of interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons and groups, and by sharing their experience and history are incorporated with them in a common cultural life." The aggressive assimilation process stripped the independence of the Ethiopian enjoyed by other *aliyah* groups thereby compounding discrimination.

The temporary holding centres for many became semi-permanent residences, with some Ethiopians squatting in them for over ten years. The resentment led to demonstrations in 1992 (Gazette 18 August 1992). Beta Israel's attempts to overcome state micro management and religious validation exposed the state's racial segregation policies. On 18 January 2012, hundreds of Ethiopian Israelis demonstrated against moves by landlords in the southern city of Kiryat Malakhi to prevent the sale or letting of properties to Ethiopians.

According to Yasmin Keshet, an attorney for the Israeli NGO Tebeka, "this is not an isolated case. The scale of racist offences and discrimination against Ethiopian Jews … is reflected in the many legal cases Tebeka has dealt with in recent years" (IRIN February 2012).

Education

The Israeli authorities placed "no fewer than 90 percent" (Ben-Eliezer 2004 p.251) of Beta Israel children in religious boarding schools. Educational approaches to assimilating Ethiopians who had a different language, rituals and practices were, according to Gellner's theory, an attempt to bolster nationalism, cultural homogeneity (Gutierrez 1997), reinforce ethnocentrism (Wieviorka 2004) and superiority over other ethnic groups (Bhavnani, Mirza and Meetoo 2005). However, the aggressive assimilation process by separation children from their parents augmented cultural and religious ritual differences between Beta Israel parents and their children as attested by Kess Eyasu Barhane, an 81 year old Beta Israeli, who stated, "I left my authority as a parent and an educator at the airport" (Kershner 2012). Secondly, the linguistic substitution of their mother tongue fractured communication between parents and their children and facilitated the cultural cleansing of the Beta Israel's ties to Ethiopia. Finally, besides adding to the trauma of family and community fragmentation, it led to some educational centres being dominated by Ethiopians and engineered a state initiated policy of segregation in education. The increased number of black students led to some white Jewish parents removing their children from schools, while some schools denied admission to Ethiopians. Ben-Eliezer writes that private kindergarten teachers in a number of towns refused to accept toddlers from Ethiopia because they were "different" (Ben-Eliezer 2008 p.255). The psychological trauma on the students in part caused under achievement in education. Offer (2004 p.39) noted that from as early as 1995 "Ethiopian Israeli men report on average only 5.12 years of formal education, while Ethiopian Israeli women report as low as 3.3 years". According to an Ethiopian Jewish NGO, Beta Israel fare no better in higher education where Ethiopians represent 9.0% of students, compared to 24.7% for 'white' Jews (Brookdale 2012). For the Beta Israel after over twenty years in Israel the education gap has become entrenched and results show achievement in fifth grade is lower than the national average for all Hebrew speaking students. Children from Beta Israel backgrounds are behind by over 60 points in English, maths and science (Mola 2014) compared to 'white' Jews.

A report by Kashti (2013) exposed that in at least one of the schools, 'Darchei Noam,' Ethiopian children were requested not to take exams and were later given 'fake grades'. The state's attempts to siphon Ethiopians off to religious educational centres ended up causing segregation. While the private and partially state funded institutes obstructing entry exposed cultural racism through a policy of state regulation and management. The state's strategy to cleanse Beta Israel of their language, culture, social norms and at the same time aggressively assimilate them has resulted handicapping their progress in literacy and numeracy.

Employment

The language and educational gap has contributed in lower employment rates for the Beta Israelis. According to a study conducted by Kop in 2003 "only 66 percent of labour force age men, and 23 percent of labour force age women, report being employed." The consequences of a lack of education and unemployment feeds into the stereotypical racist

depiction of lazy black people, something that a young Beta Israel Yalma encapsulates, "That blackness was imposed on him and his fellow ethnics as a more important identity feature than Jewishness" (Ben-Rafael and Peres 2005 p.163). This is further collaborated by a mother of three, Makurya, "Here, everything is determined by the colour of my skin" (Kershner 2012). Even those fortunate to secure employment, their salaries are 45% lower than the general population and average household earnings are 41% lower (including government allowances). 41.9% live under the poverty line in comparison with 14.4% of the general Jewish population and 57% are registered at social service agencies (Mola 2014).

Beta Israel witnessed direct management, regulation, control and definition. They have had to endure the ordeal of having their language stripped and culture withered while continuing to face widespread discrimination. Further, the recent acceptance by the Israeli government to investigate if the contraceptive injection Depo-Provea was administered to Beta Israel women without consent has raised concerns of controlling the 'black' population (Knell 2013). Israeli Health Ministry Director-General Roni Gamzu said that "the sweeping use of Depo-Provera among Ethiopian women raises heavy suspicions that we are talking about a deliberate policy to control and monitor fertility among this community" (Abraham and Hussein 2014) which if proven opens accusations of eugenic policies.

According to Ethiopian-Israeli activist Asher Elias, for many Beta Israel, Israel is a "world of poverty, marginalization and discrimination" (Landver 2014). The state of Israel exhibits naturalism, racial governmentalities and reflects Foucault's idea of modern racism as a state designing the management of a population. Further, the plight of the Beta Israel exposes the difficulty in constructing peoplehood (race and ethnicity) (See Balibar and Wallerstein 1991 pp 71-85). It is thus not surprising to discover 40% of Beta Israel do not feel integrated (Ben-Rafael and Peres 2005). While *aliyah*, justified through racial Shoahcentrism, has demographically strengthened Israel, Beta Israelis have not enjoyed impartially the largess of Israel's social, educational, welfare benefits and suffered from being accepted as equals. The racism they have experienced in education, employment, religious parity and through aggressive assimilation or to paraphrase Fanon (1986) in the cultural cleansing process are due to the phenotypic markings and an absence of a common historical memory of the collective suffering in the *Shoah*.

African Asylum Seekers

With high levels of deprivation, persecution and wars ravaging parts of Sudan, Eritrea and the Ivory Cost, many Africans have made perilous journeys out of their countries in search of security and safety from around 2006 (Yaron, Hashimshony-Yaffe and Campbell 2013). Those arriving in Israel faced a number of unique challenges and dangers. Asylum seekers (refugees and migrants)[2], termed 'infiltrators' in Israel, number 48,212 according to the Israeli Immigration Authority[3] dated July 2014. Asylum seekers who manage to enter Israel are normally picked up and taken without trial to detention centres or prisons. Most are issued with 'conditional release' visas, a euphemism for the Israel state the right to deport them at a time of their choosing. The visa, therefore, *only* provides for a temporary stay. However, even in this period it denies them gainful employment, full medical and welfare services. The only hope out of this 'conditional release' status is at the mercy of the state, which can grant refugee status. However, up until 2013 there was no process to file such a claim and only after pressure from the UNHCR, did Israel set in place a system for doing so.

However, with the exception of two Eritrean nationals, all those who have applied have had their application to seek asylum being declined and the decision is virtually final as there is no appeal process in place.

The plight of African refugees came to the attention of the UN Committee of Refugees, to which Israel is signatory, which complained that the "increase in racist and xenophobic acts" (UNCERD 13 Feb – 9 March 2012) was of grave concern. Such xenophobia is a consequence of the *Law of Return* which presupposes Israel as a land uniquely theirs (Goldberg 2009 p.112), facilitating space only for Jews. The diametrically opposite to the *Law of Return* was the enactment of the 'Prevention of Infiltration Law' (in 1954) and the 'Anti Infiltration Law' which were initially intended to imprison people coming from countries Israel deemed hostile, mainly countries Palestinians had escaped into. The legislation was amended in early 2012 to include asylum seekers. In December 2013, a fourth amendment to the Anti infiltration Law sanctioned Israel to imprison asylum-seekers arriving from Egypt for a period of one year, which originally was for three years, and indefinite for those deemed to be coming from an 'enemy state'. At the end of that period, detainees would be transferred to an 'open prison' until they are "willing to return to their home country" (HRM June 2014). Israel's actions renege its commitment and undermine international norms regarding asylum seekers and yet implement's its own *domestic* laws to justify the denial of refugee status, imprisonment and expulsions.

Detention Centres and Imprisonment

The exclusion policies were preceded by stringent border controls, including the building of a physical wall along the border with Egypt deterring African asylum seekers arriving via Sinai. Additional to these was the opening of immigration detention centres in 2012 with a capacity to hold 12,400 people. By late 2013, Israel had opened the controversial Holot (sands) open detention in the Negev desert centre housing a further 3,300 migrants. The regimented routine in Holot resembles more of a prison than a detention centre with roll calls at 6am, 1pm and 8.30pm. Failure to report could result in the asylum seeker being deprived of being allowed to go out of Holot between calls, deprived of allowances for up to 10 days or even confined to a prison. While three basic meals are served there are no fridges, stoves or cooking facilities. Holot in the desert has its nearest shop 10km away but even if the asylum seekers could get there they have no funds to buy anything nor are they allowed to bring cooked food into Holot (HRM 2014). Amnesty International denounced the Israeli measures saying that "detaining refugees, asylum-seekers and migrants indefinitely in what is essentially a prison in the desert is a flagrant violation of international human rights law" (AI 3 December 2013).

The moving of asylum seekers away from centres of potential integration to marginal, enclosed enclaves ushers 'ethnoracial purging' which juxtaposes between ethnic cleansing and bantustanization (Goldbeerg 2009 p.119). This in Israel further nourishes Jewish ethnocracy character and manifest racialist doctrine outlined by Todorov and Smith discussed earlier. While being restricted to 'open' detention centres, asylum seekers are also restricted access to assistance from the outside. The Hotline for Refugees and Migrants Workers (HRM), the only NGO in Israel with access to the detention facilities, claim authorities only allow access in exceptional circumstances, at times requiring "power of

attorney to represent the detainee" (HRM February 2014). On May 29, 2014, Israel announced that it would send Eritreans and Sudanese 'infiltrators' who entered before May 31, 2011 to detention centres if they were involved in criminal activities or had finished serving a criminal sentence (HRW 9 September 2014). However according to HRM, there is "routine and random transfer" of asylum seekers into criminal prisons and reveal that this is common practice for HIV positive and those with acute psychiatric disorders. The callous neglect and the plight of the asylum seekers are reflected in an Israeli NGO statement that once in prison "detainees are simply forgotten there" (HRM February 2014).

Public Disorder

The successful amendments of the Anti Infiltration Law have garnered widespread public support, successfully establishing the 'infiltrators' as a threat in popular societal opinion. In mid-2012, thousands of Israeli accompanied by prominent Israeli politicians took to the district of Hatikva in Tel Aviv, which is mostly inhabited by asylum seekers, with many shouting "Blacks out!" (Greenwood 2012). The article further reported that "the mob set cans of rubbish on fire, smashed the windows of shops owned by Eritrean migrants and beat up Africans walking through the streets", all this while the Israeli police stood on the side watching (Blumenthal 2013). When one 'black' woman called the police to report vandalism to her property, the police interrogated her regarding her visa and walked away without addressing her concerns (The Economist 2 June 2012). Researchers indicate that the state apparatus' inaction "constitute an important, if not decisive, factor with respect to (future) appearances of, and developments in, this violence" (Witte 1996 p.3).

Peace Now quoted the speeches of Israeli public and political figures, including National Union MK Michael Ben-Ari who suggested that African children should not be allowed to sit in the same classes as Israelis because of the "diseases they are carrying". An Israeli Minister of Interior Eli Yishal said, "Most of those people arriving here are Muslims who think the country doesn't belong to us, the white man" (Peace Now 6 June 2012). The attacks were not reserved to asylum seekers but also included Beta Israel who were mistaken for Africans (Lee, Zarchin and Kubovic 2012). Vanda, an Ethiopian Jew who the protesters attacked, said "that Ethiopians in Israel are often the subject of discrimination …Sudanese are treated just like Ethiopians, the black presence is intimidating" (Lee, Zarchin, and Kubovic 2012). The anti-miscegenation movement also target Israelis like Blumenthal who are of the opinion that African refugees in Israel occupy a similar role to the criminal "nigra" in the Jim Crow South (Blumenthal 2013) and not far from the Russian depiction of Jews pre twentieth century (Law 2012 p.12).

Animosity towards African asylum seekers transcends all levels of Israeli society, from members of public and politicians to religious leaders. According to Cox the latter are accused of "facilitating a definite purpose" (Cox 2001 p.71) propaganda with rabbis issuing edicts pronouncing the prohibition of renting property to asylum seekers (Guarnieri 2010). According to Sheen (2014) "some even issued verdicts of 'rodef' – death sentence - on those Jews who dare to do so". The religious rulings in Israel as an ethnocratic Jewish state evoke the concept of a vicarious religion which is defined as "the notion of religion performed by an active minority but on behalf of a much larger number, who (implicitly at least) not only understand, but, quite clearly, approve of what the minority is doing" (Davie 2006 p.277). This was reflected in the funeral of Rabbi Yosef, who had made many overtly racist

statements including "Goyim (non-Jew) were born only to serve us. Without that, they have no place in the world – only to serve the People of Israel" (Berman 2013) yet where around 700,000 mourners (BBC 7 October 2013) gathered.

The xenophobic cadence formed by right wing religious and political leaders has spiralled down to the general public, promoting what Hodge (1990) terms a dualism of good and evil to justify oppression which is reflected in a national poll finding of 52% of Israeli Jews agreeing with racist remarks made by Regev that asylum seekers were a "cancer in the body of the nation?" (The Peace Index: May 2012). Such attitudes are not contained to thoughts alone, sporadic hate crimes against African asylum seekers remain largely uncurbed (HRM 19 September 2014). When in March 2014, Jewish students dressed up as members of the Ku Klux Klan, the principal of the school defended their actions, saying "the costume was designed to create interesting and important discussions" (Frantzman 2014).

Employment

While the Refugee Convention guarantees the right to 'engage in wage-earning employment' in Israel, because of the absence of state recognition, asylum seekers have become susceptible to exploitation in the labour market. Both underpayment and withholding of wages is common, while security of an employment contract with taxation and National Insurance are absent. Such conditions further disadvantage refugees from accessing social provisions (http://www.kavlaoved.org.il/en/areasofactivity/refugeesandasylum/). Even for those provided with conditional release permits since November 2012, the authorities have added the words "this document is not a work permit" (HRW 9 September 2014). However, as of late Israel has noticed a potential revenue of approximately US $27 million by taxing employers of refugees and in October 2014 proposed to table a motion in parliament that would impose a special tax on those who employ asylum seekers. Kav LaOved, an organization that assists foreign workers, said that such taxes were usually passed down to employees (Lior 2014) who would end up carrying the financial burden.

Deportation

The predicament for asylum seekers is further exasperated as the only potential avenue out of the detention centres is agreeing to return 'voluntarily' to their country of origin (ASSAF April 2014). After South Sudan attained independence in 2011, Israel classified it as an 'enemy state' and in June 2012 began transferring South Sudanese nationals. Israel maintains these expulsions were conducted voluntarily, but the claim belies the reality that an ultimatum of 31 March 2012 was issued after which they would be arrested and forcedly deported. One month after June 2012, a total of 1,038 'infiltrators' were evicted (FM September 2013), despite many of them being registered with the UNHCR as refugees. Israel did not recognise their refugee status and their need for protection under the Convention was never officially acknowledged (FM September 2013). FM further reports a spree of arrests of South Sudanese people, with families being split up, and men, women and children detained in different centres (FM September 2013). The prejudice against the phenotypically marked is emphasised noting that "only two Eritrean asylum seekers have been recognised as official refugees...in comparison, there are approximately 93,000 'over-stayers' in Israel, 51,000 of whom are Russian" (Smith and Sheen 2014). By the end of June 2014, at least "6,400 Sudanese and at least 367 Eritreans had officially left Israel"

(HRW 10 September 2014). This undermines the UN principle of non-refoulement (the forcible return of refugees or asylum seekers to places where they face a threat to life or freedom) and since Sudanese law makes it a crime, punishable by up to ten years in prison, for Sudanese citizens to visit Israel this becomes pertinent.

NGOs campaigning and lobbying Israel's High Court of Justice resulted on 20 September 2014 in a ruling that the Holot centre be shut down within 90 days and the repealing of a section that permits the automatic year-long detention of newcomers (Fisher-Ilan 2014). However, there is a well founded scepticism about whether the state will comply or simply marshal alternative avenues to continue the practice of detention and expulsion. As was the case in September 2013 when the Supreme Court found the Anti-Infiltration Law to be unconstitutional, the government "made no effort to implement it and just brought into place a new law that incarcerates people" (Smith and Sheen 2014). While some NGOs welcomed the court ruling, right-wing elements in Israeli society took to the streets waving black flags, replicating ISIS, with 'bagatz' meaning 'High Court' across them (Deger 2014). The situation at the end of 2014 was no different for asylum seekers, as the State Comptroller Report published on May 14, 2014, pointed to the lack of planning and a number of deficiencies regarding the provision of healthcare, welfare, employment, law enforcement and infrastructure (State Comptroller 19 June 2014). The arrest, detention and exclusion of asylum seekers undermine the UN principle on asylum seekers and refugees. The plight of African asylum seekers resonate to a significant degree with almost all of the six core indicators of racism outlined by Law (2010 p.134): collective identity; attribution of biological or cultural characteristics; designation of boundaries; loose assembly of images and explanations; practical adequacy; and facile cementing of group identity.

Israel as a signatory to the Geneva Refugee Convention and the 1967 Protocol which states that "every person who claims that he/she has been persecuted in his/her country of origin for reason of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular group or political opinion has the right to seek asylum in a third country" (Law 2010 p.109) has failed to comply with the convention. The UNHCR noting Israeli actions has accused her of rejecting the accommodation of refugees to preserve its ethnonational identity (Paz 2011 UNHCR). Despite this, Israel does not have, as yet, any established system or law for receiving or protecting refugees (FM June 2008). With a very weak anti-racist movement and an absence of racial equality laws, the prospects for asylum seekers remain bleak.

Conclusion

This essay has highlighted Israel's contradictory approach to the Beta Israel. However both the aggressive assimilation and discriminatory experiences have resulted in the manifestation of material racism. The ethnic schism within Israel, of Beta Israel, is detected in the unique manner of the state's definition, regulation and management of this pheonotypically marked group and which remains outside Israel's historical paradigm of 'collective suffering'. The consequences are evident in the 'absorption process', educational, housing, employment and potential birth control measures.

The xenophobic rhetoric regarding asylum seekers, their detention and expulsion contravenes the UN charter on refugees. The surveillance, criminalisation, restriction to economic, health and educational resources and an absence of due legal processes exhibit

discrimination and overt racism. Israel's state practices regarding both these groups with the thread of African descent marked in their phenotypes go beyond Goldberg's modern racial state theories and can be comprehended when racial Shoahcentrism is applied. Urgent work is required to further explore and investigate the socio-political genesis for this and investigate if being phenotypically marked in Israel is a major contributing cause of racism.

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[1] Defined "as a political system in which political and social organizations are founded on ethnic belonging rather than individual choice (Howard, L. M 2012)."

[2] http://www.amnesty.org/en/refugees-and-migrants/rights-of-refugees-and-migrants

A refugee is a person who has fled from their own country due to human rights abuses they have suffered there because of who they are or what they believe in, and whose own government cannot or will not protect them. As a result, they have been forced to seek international protection. Refugee rights include:

- protection from being forcibly returned to a country where they would be at risk of persecution.
- protection from discrimination
- protection from penalties for illegal entry
- the right to work, housing and education
- the right to freedom of movement
- the right to identity and travel documents

An asylum-seeker is someone who has left their country in search of international protection, but is yet to be recognized as a refugee. According to Article 14 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights everyone has "the right to seek and to enjoy in other countries asylum from persecution".

- are not prohibited from entering a country to seek asylum
- are not returned to a country where they would be at risk of serious human rights abuses
- have access to fair and effective asylum procedures
- have access to the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) for assistance, where applicable
- are not unlawfully or arbitrarily detained

Migrants move from one country to another usually to find work, although there may be other reasons for migrating such as to join family members. Some move voluntarily, while others are forced to leave because of economic hardship or other problems. People can migrate 'regularly', with legal permission to work and live in a country, or 'irregularly', without permission from the country they wish to live and work in.

Regardless of their status in a country, both regular and irregular migrants have human rights, including the right to freedom from slavery and servitude, freedom from arbitrary detention, freedom from exploitation and forced labour, the right to freedom of assembly, the right to education for their children, equal access to courts and rights at work. These rights are laid out in the Migrant Workers' Convention (1990) as well as other human rights treaties.

[3] According to the Israeli Immigration Authority last statistic publication, dated July 2014, at the end of June 2014, there were 34,993 Eritreans and 9,264 Sudanese in Israel as well as 3,253 other Africans and 702 "infiltrators" who are non Africans (48,212 all together). The statistics are available in Hebrew at: http://www.piba.gov.il/PublicationAndTender/ForeignWorkersStat/Documents/%D 7%A8%D7%91%D7%A2%D7%95%D7%9F%202%202014.pdf