ABSTRACT

Title of Thesis: Living in Liminality: An Analysis of the Role of NGOs Aiding Eritrean Asylum-Seekers in Israel from 2007 - 2018

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State repression in Eritrea has caused many people to flee, and many Eritrean asylum-seekers have landed in Israel because it is geographically accessible by foot. Eritrean asylum-seekers who arrive in Israel experience a policy of non-deportation; the state of Israel allows asylum-seekers to stay in the country under visas that must be renewed every few months. These visas limit the lives that Eritrean asylum-seekers lead in Israel, denying them refugee status and rights. The lack of government intervention has led to an increase in the number of NGOs working with Eritrean asylum-seekers. This paper uses interviews with past and present NGO employees and volunteers as case studies to argue that NGOs work to build Eritrean asylum-seekers' sense of agency, while NGOs themselves have limited agency because they cannot change the policies that limit the lives of Eritrean asylum-seekers. If NGOs themselves do not have agency in Israel, it is difficult for NGOs to build the agency of Eritrean asylum-seekers. NGOs see themselves as helping Eritrean asylum-seekers gain equal footing in Israeli society; however, Eritrean asylum-seekers often do not understand that the powers of NGOs are limited and have different expectations for how NGOs should support them. This misalignment of expectations creates a barrier for NGOs in building relationships with their clients. This paper finds that both NGOs and Eritrean asylum-seekers live in a constant state of liminality in Israel; both parties are stuck in an eternal period of waiting until the state of Israel changes its domestic policies.

Living in Liminality:

An Analysis of the Role of NGOs Aiding Eritrean Asylum-Seekers in Israel from 2007 - 2018

By

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Go blue!

Chapter 1: Introduction

Preface

This honors thesis was inspired by my summer internship from June to August of 2022 at ALEF, a civil society organization serving the local Eritrean asylum-seeking community in Haifa, Israel. I led the Environment and Sustainability Language-Learning program for 8-10-year-old students in the community with the purpose of furthering the English proficiency of students, building intercultural relationships, and incorporating climate-focused and social-emotional learning pedagogy through community garden projects and mindfulness activities. I worked closely with Kei Ishii, Director of ALEF, who graciously agreed to be interviewed for this thesis project. From conversations with Kei and asylum-seekers, I discovered that learning English was important to the community because many Eritrean asylum-seekers viewed Israel as a stepping stone to an English-speaking country, including the U.S. and Canada. Additionally, many of the parents that ALEF worked with struggled to look after their children due to difficult work hours, trauma, and so on. Therefore, I wanted my summer program to provide a space for children to gather, smile, laugh, play, and be active outside to support their emotional well-being.

Every new day interning at ALEF sparked new questions about the political situation for Eritrean asylum-seekers. Most of my days were filled with rich discussions about the situation between me, my co-intern, and my supervisor, Kei. We discussed the state of Israel's policy of non-deportation and the motivations behind this policy over hummus in the streets of Hadar, the neighborhood of Haifa where ALEF's office is located. My conversations with Kei revealed that, for some, fear of multiculturalism is rooted in fear of losing a Jewish homeland. Kei expressed concern for the future of ALEF as children in the community become old enough to graduate

high school. Children born to stateless persons in Israel do not receive Israeli citizenship, and Kei expressed concerns about how ALEF would support these children in the future.

I left ALEF feeling more knowledgeable, more frustrated, and with many more questions. I was frustrated that after taking many classes about Israel and despite following Israeli politics in the news, I had never learned about Eritrean asylum-seekers living in the country. Kei had mentioned that there were several other non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working with Eritrean asylum-seekers, and I was left wondering about those NGOs and how their experiences compared to ALEF's. I began curiously reading previous writings about Eritrean asylum-seekers in Israel to better understand the situation. Many of the previous authors focused on the lived experiences of Eritrean asylum-seekers, including interviews in their research; however, I could not find many pieces that focused on the lived experiences of those working at NGOs. After witnessing day-to-day life at ALEF, I wanted to learn more about how those working at NGOs feel about their work and relationships with Eritrean asylum-seekers. With those thoughts in mind, this thesis will explore the experiences of those working at NGOs in Israel to better understand their relationships with Eritrean asylum-seekers and how these relationships shape Eritrean asylum-seekers' sense of agency.

Research Question

This paper seeks to answer the following questions: How have NGOs shaped the experiences of Eritrean asylum-seekers living in Israel from 2007-2018? How do employees and volunteers working at NGOs perceive their role in aiding the Eritrean asylum-seeking community? How do NGOs impact Eritrean asylum-seekers' sense of agency and belonging?

Argument

In this paper, I will argue that the relationships between Eritrean asylum-seekers and NGOs in Israel are facilitated by those working at the NGOs and the political contexts of both Eritrea and Israel. Eritrean asylum-seekers are forced to maintain a connection to a homeland that represses its citizens through torture, disappearances, arbitrary arrests, and politically motivated killings (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Eritrea requires citizens who leave to pay a tax, forcing asylum-seekers to visit the Eritrean embassy in Israel, constantly reminding them of the home they left behind (Hashimshony-Yaffe & Mesghenna, 2015, p. 129). Eritrean asylum-seekers are forced to maintain this connection while living in a state that refuses to be a new homeland. Israel implements a policy of non-deportation for Eritrean asylum-seekers, allowing asylum-seekers to stay in the country without any rights or recognition as refugees. The state of Israel actively denies Eritrean asylum-seekers of their experiences that qualify them as refugees in the eyes of the international community. Although Israel signed the 1951 Refugee Convention developed by the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees, the state does not grant asylum to most Eritrean asylum-seekers, denying them of their rights and experiences (Hamishmony & Mesghenna, 2015, p. 124). In doing so, the state of Israel forces Eritrean asylum-seekers to live in a state of liminality, living in between two countries who do not accept them, creating an eternal state of waiting.

Living in liminality creates a challenging environment for NGOs. I argue that the state of Israel's lack of involvement with Eritrean asylum-seekers has opened the door for NGOs and civil society to take on responsibilities of the government, assisting asylum-seekers with visa processes, navigating employment and education systems, and understanding Israeli culture. While NGOs can provide a variety of services to support asylum-seekers, they are unable to

change the situation for asylum-seekers because they cannot change the policies that deny asylum-seekers of their rights. Therefore, it is difficult for those working at NGOs to feel as though they are making a positive contribution because the situation continues to worsen as the population continues to grow. When an Eritrean asylum-seeker has a child in Israel, the child is born stateless, lacking citizenship in both Eritrea and Israel; therefore, as Eritrean asylum-seekers live their lives and have children, the situation for the community worsens. The growth of the Eritrean asylum-seeking population creates new problems for NGOs who already have limited access to resources, causing NGOs to constantly operate in a state of emergency.

My research will argue that the relationships between NGOs and Eritrean asylum-seekers is complex because a disconnect exists between NGOs and their clients. The liminal state of living that Eritrean asylum-seekers experience in Israel creates a sense of hopelessness and desire for relocation within the community. I find that many Eritrean asylum-seekers view Israel as a stepping stone to an English-speaking country; therefore, many Eritrean asylum-seekers expect NGOs to help them prepare for life outside of Israel. I find that many Eritrean asylum-seekers also often misunderstand the powers that NGOs hold with the powers of the state because NGOs are often the only institutions of authority that asylum-seekers engage with directly and frequently. I find that this has led some Eritrean asylum-seekers to perceive NGOs as gatekeepers, withholding access to information and rights. Eritrean asylum-seekers find themselves in a country that actively prohibits them from building a life and cannot return to the country they left behind. Eritrean asylum-seekers in Israel are stuck; they cannot return to Eritrea, they cannot live as equals in Israel, and it is incredibly difficult to be repatriated elsewhere. I find that living in liminality creates a sense of hopelessness amongst Eritrean asylum-seekers, making it difficult for them to feel motivated to take agency over their lives.

Eritrean asylum-seekers feel little sense of agency over their lives in Israel; NGOs believe it is their mission to build asylum-seekers' sense of agency. The mission of the NGOs included in this study is to help Eritrean asylum-seekers have equal access to rights and build lives in Israel. However, this mission is difficult to accomplish because Eritrean asylum-seekers do not want to build lives in Israel, and NGOs have little agency themselves because they cannot change the policies that deny asylum-seekers rights.

Methods and Limitations of Study

Methods

The research for this thesis project was performed through reading relevant literature in a comparative manner using the materials available to me as a student at the University of Michigan. These materials included published journals, books, NGO reports, and reports from international governmental organizations, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees. Reports provided data and evidence to explain and support the arguments made by authors of books and journals. The reports published by international governmental organizations provided insight into how the international community perceives the issue of Eritrean asylum-seekers in Israel, while NGO reports provided insight into their missions and how the issue is perceived locally in Israel. I conducted semi-structured interviews[1] to understand how the theories and evidence aligned with the lived experiences of those working at NGOs. I chose to focus on the years 2007 - 2018 because Eritrean asylum-seekers began arriving in Israel around 2007 and stopped crossing the border in the beginning of 2019. According to Hamishmony-Yaffe (2020), "before 2006, only 2,731 migrants entered Israel. By the end of 2015, this figure had increased to 64,365, of whom some 46,437 still resided in the country, while the remainder had left. By the end of the first quarter of 2019, during that period there were no new entries; the

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number of migrants still in Israel had declined to 33,121 Eritrean asylum-seekers" (pg. 159).

While asylum-seekers who arrived in Israel during this time were from a few African countries, I

chose to focus on Eritrean asylum-seekers because they were the largest percentage of African

migrants living in Israel with an illegal residency status (Hamishmony-Yaffe, 2020, p. 159).

I conducted interviews with two individuals who possess experience working at two of

the NGOs in Israel: ALEF and the African Refugee Development Center (ARDC). I chose to

focus on these two NGOs because I had contacts from these organizations after my internship at

ALEF. I interviewed Bryan Roby, former Higher Education Coordinator at the ARDC, and Kei

Ishii, Director of ALEF. If I were to continue this thesis project, I would expand my reach to

other NGOs. Both interviews lasted for approximately one hour to an hour and a half, and both

were conducted via Zoom. I would have preferred to conduct the interviews in person; however,

differences in location posed a constraint to this. I took notes during the interviews to record the

conversations, and I also recorded the interviews for later analysis. I chose to use a semi-

structured interview style due to time constraints. I asked the following questions in my

interviews:

1. If you are willing, please provide your age.

2. How many years have you/did you work at (ARDC/ALEF)? How many years
   have you/did you work in the NGO space?

3. If you are no longer working in the NGO space at the (ARDC/ALEF), why did
   you leave?

4. How would you describe your experience at (ARDC/ALEF)?

5. How has working at (ARDC/ALEF) impacted your life?

6. What was the best part about working at (ARDC/ALEF)? The worst?

7. What part about working at (ARDC/ALEF) needs improvement?

8. How do you see your relationship with the Eritrean asylum-seeking community? What shaped that relationship? How do you see that relationship developing in the future? What could improve it?

9. Do you feel that (ARDC/ALEF) is achieving its mission? Why or why not?

These questions aimed to understand the lived experiences of working at an NGO and how the interviewees perceived their work. Both interviewees were only able to meet for about an hour, and I wanted to ensure that I asked questions relevant to my research topic. While the interviews remained mainly structured, the conversations often sparked new questions, and both interviewees were willing to answer additional questions as we conversed.

My aim for this project is to put the interviews in conversation with prior writing about this topic to understand how NGOs in Israel shape the experiences of Eritrean asylum-seekers, how they navigate the complex political and cultural landscape that they operate in, and what it is like to work at an NGO in this space. The interviews offer a unique understanding of prior research and how the experience of working at an NGO shapes how NGOs engage with Eritrean asylum-seekers to build their agency.

Limitations of Study

This paper focuses on two interviews as case studies: one with Bryan Roby, a former volunteer at the African Refugee Development Center (ARDC), and the second with Kei Ishii, Director of ALEF. Due to time constraints, this paper is only able to explore these two organizations using interviews and research. To gain a more comprehensive understanding of the topic, further research should be conducted that explores other NGOs operating in Israel to compare the experiences of other NGOs to those of ALEF and the ARDC. Furthermore, this paper does not include conversations with Eritrean asylum-seekers themselves. To evaluate

Eritrean asylum-seekers' sense of agency, this paper uses interviews with Eritrean asylum-seekers conducted by other authors and how Kei and Bryan perceived the agency of their clients. The interviews with Kei and Bryan allowed me to analyze how NGOs see themselves making an impact in the lives of their clients. For the purposes of this paper, this evidence allowed me to interpret Eritrean asylum-seekers' sense of agency from the perspectives of the NGOs they work with. I was not able to conduct my own interviews with Eritrean asylum-seekers because I did not have contacts while living in the U.S. Further research should be conducted that includes interviews with Eritrean asylum-seekers to better understand their experiences living in Israel and how they perceive their own agency after engaging with NGOs.

Literature Review

Eritrean asylum-seekers in Israel live in a state of liminality. African asylum-seekers are the largest group of non-Jewish immigration that the nation of Israel has ever faced, and the state's domestic immigration policies were not prepared to address the influx of people crossing its borders, many by foot (Hamishmony-Yaffe, 2020). Israel implements a policy of non-deportation for African asylum-seekers, meaning the state allows asylum-seekers to remain within its borders under conditional visas that prevent asylum-seekers from building a permanent life in the country. These visas restrict which sectors asylum-seekers can be employed in, limit the services asylum-seekers have access to, and must be renewed frequently (Hamishmony-Yaffe, 2020). When a child is born to a stateless person in Israel, that child is neither a citizen of Israel nor a citizen of Eritrea. While Eritrean asylum-seekers are allowed to live in Israel, the state actively denies Eritrean asylum-seekers access to citizenship and their rights as refugees. The Israeli government's lack of intervention has left the role of aid to many NGOs (Hamishmony-Yaffe, 2020).

A myriad of literature exists that examines Israel's immigration policy and the impact it has on the lives of African asylum-seekers. Further research dives into the roles of specific NGOs, including both Israeli-based and founded by Eritrean asylum-seekers themselves to address the needs of their community. Many of these studies include interviews with asylum-seekers and individuals working or volunteering at NGOs. My research seeks to add to this conversation, using interviews with individuals from two NGOs as case studies and analyzing the experiences of working at those NGOs in a comparative manner. I seek to understand how NGOs engage with their clients and facilitate relationships with the Eritrean asylum-seeking community to understand the lived experiences of Eritrean asylum-seekers in Israel. In doing so, I also seek to understand how these relationships shape the lives of those working and volunteering at NGOs. Furthermore, I seek to put the authors who have researched NGO responses in Israel in conversation with one another and in conversation with the interviews I conducted to understand cultural and community responses to the crisis and how NGOs and Eritrean asylum-seekers can most effectively collaborate to create sustainable change.

Non-Jewish Immigration Policy in Israel

In 1950, two years after its birth in 1948, Israel passed the Law of Return, granting Jewish people around the world the right to citizenship in Israel (Hamishmony-Yaffe, 2020, p. 161). Hamishmony-Yaffe (2020) claims that the Law of Return is based on a moral obligation towards the Jewish people embedded in the nation-state nature of Israel; however, no such moral obligation existed regarding non-Jewish migrants (p. 161). Kravel-Tovi (2012) mentions that in 1970, the Law of Return was amended to include those with Jewish ancestry as well as their spouses, allowing for an estimated 1,000,000 immigrants from the Soviet Union to enter Israel in the 1990s (p. 741). Kravel-Tovi (2012) writes that while many of these immigrants claimed Jewish ancestry, to some policymakers, this population made Israel "less Jewish" (p. 742).

Kravel-Tovi (2012) claims that most of the immigrants coming from the Soviet Union were accepted as Israeli citizens but not as Jewish people (p. 742). In the context of immigration from the Soviet Union, the state of Israel endorsed a conversion policy aimed specifically for this population, demonstrating how the state has attempted to control its demographics in the past (Kravel-Tovi, 2012). Kravel-Tovi (2012) claims that the creation of a Jewish nation-state is Israel's "national mission" (p. 742). This national mission is reflected in Israel's immigration policies, and it implies a sense of nationalization and moral duty toward the Jewish people (Kravel-Tovi, 2012, p. 742).

Hamishmony-Yaffe (2020) mentions that since Israel's establishment in 1948 and until the early 2000s, small groups of non-Jewish immigrants arrived in the country, including a group of Vietnamese immigrants in 1977 and 1979, Bosnian immigrants in 1992, and Kosovar Albanians in 1999 (p. 159). Israel was one of the first nations to grant asylum to Vietnamese refugees in 1977 under the leadership of Prime Minister Menachem Begin (Huynh, 2020, p. 1). About 360 Vietnamese individuals received Israeli citizenship, none of whom identified as Jewish (Hyunh, 2020, p. 2). Ad hoc decisions were made in these cases, and asylum was granted on a humanitarian basis (Hamishmony-Yaffe, 2020). Prior to 2006, only 2,731 migrants had entered Israel; by the end of 2015, this figure increased to 64,365 (Hamishmony-Yaffe, 2020). With increasingly growing numbers, ad hoc decisions ceased to be feasible for African asylum-seekers. Israel was welcoming to asylum-seekers from Vietnam but not to African asylum-seekers. I hypothesize that this is because the number of immigrants arriving from Vietnam was small compared to those coming from Africa; a larger number of non-Jewish immigrants was viewed as a potential threat to the Jewish nation-state.

All these authors agree that policymakers view non-Jewish immigration as a threat to Israel as a Jewish state, leading to exclusionist policy that reflects these fears. The size of immigrant populations likely influences this fear. I argue that African asylum-seekers are perceived as a threat to Israel's "national mission," explaining the state's non-deportation policy. While many immigrants from the Soviet Union had Jewish ancestry, the state of Israel never viewed the population as fully Jewish, leading to the creation of a conversion policy to protect the state of the nation. While Vietnamese immigrants were granted citizenship in Israel, the population was quite small, and policymakers may not have viewed this population as a threat to the nation's Jewishness.

According to Hamishmony-Yaffe (2020), 98% of migrants living in Israel with an illegal residency status are African, of which 74% are Eritrean, 19% Sudanese, and the remaining from other African countries (p. 159). A history of unclear domestic policy toward non-Jewish immigration did not set a precedent for how to deal with the influx of asylum-seekers coming from Africa, enabling Israel's loose policy toward the population. The large influx of non-Jewish immigrants from Africa may threaten Israel's status as a Jewish state, explaining the state's disengagement and indirect need to control the asylum-seeking population. Bringing all these authors together has illustrated how Israel's policy has continued to be intentionally disorganized and absent, furthering my argument that the lack of government involvement has allowed for an increase in the involvement of NGOs to deal with this relatively new crisis.

The Perceived Role of NGOs

In this section, I will analyze how authors have theorized the roles of NGOs in the literature to better understand the roles that NGOs take on when serving African asylum-seekers living in Israel. Mercer (2002) argues that grassroots organizations tend to be smaller and by and for marginalized groups, while NGOs are larger and often created by outside groups (p. 6).

Mercer (2002) would define NGOs in Israel that were established by Eritrean asylum-seekers as grassroots movements. Other NGOs work with Eritrean asylum-seekers as mediators. For example, the African Refugee Development Center (ARDC) has worked with Eritrean asylum-seekers as volunteer translators. While the concept of a "grassroots organization" is helpful to think about how NGOs are run and how they engage with clients, in the context of this thesis, it is difficult to create rigid boundaries for the types of organizations because NGOs in Israel serve many different purposes and clientele.

NGOs may operate at a national or regional level. While the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) has an office in Tel Aviv, signaling some international participation, many of the active NGOs are based in Israel and operate at the national level (Mercer, 2002). The levels that NGOs operate at changes the roles that they take on when working with Eritrean asylum-seekers. Smaller grassroots organizations can provide more personalized services as well as community-oriented events, while larger organizations, like the UNHCR, focus more on navigating domestic and international policies and visa applications. Mercer (2002) goes on to explain how civil society plays a key role in ensuring democratic practices, and NGOs often check the power of the state by challenging its autonomy (p. 9). In Israel, many of the NGOs take on responsibilities of the state, challenging the authority of the Israeli government.

Frohnert (2019) claims that NGOs hold three types of authority: expert, moral, and logistical. Frohnert (2019) defines authority as the possession of influence; moral authority is the ability to exert influence based on moral claims, logistical authority is the ability to exert influence to organize relief efforts and mobilize communities, and expert authority is the ability to exert influence because one is in possession of useful information regarding rules and

regulations (Frohnert, 2019). The way that NGOs exert authority shapes how civil society ensures democratic practices in Israel, as Mercer (2002) explained. In Israel, NGOs often serve as mediators between asylum-seekers and the state. While NGOs in Israel who work with Eritrean asylum-seekers often exert all three types of authority, expert authority is especially notable. NGOs often provide support with visa renewal processes and understanding Israeli domestic policy toward non-Jewish immigration and asylum-seekers. In the context of Israel, I argue that NGOs exert expert authority that usually would be exerted by the state, agreeing with Mercer (2002) that NGOs challenge the authority of the state; NGOs provide key information about the state's rules and policies that govern the lives of African asylum-seekers. Interviews with Eritrean asylum-seekers discussed later in this piece reveal that Eritrean asylum-seekers often perceive NGOs as possessing the same authority as the state, sometimes not understanding a difference between the two.

I argue that NGOs challenge the undemocratic norm of the government's lack of involvement and restriction of the rights of asylum-seekers in Israel, creating access to resources so that Eritrean asylum-seekers can be self-sufficient in a new country. While Mercer (2002) argues that NGOs often challenge the authority of the state, I argue that NGOs in Israel sometimes take on the authority of the state when engaging with clients. Frohnert (2019) builds on Mercer's (2002) ideas, elaborating on the types of authority that NGOs hold that enable them to challenge the authority of the state and mobilize communities. I argue that NGOs in Israel exert expert authority, acting as indirect mediators between the state and asylum-seekers to explain and guide individuals about the laws and regulations that govern and limit their lives. This thesis seeks to understand how those working at NGOs perceive the roles of their organizations and the impact they can make through interviews and case studies, providing an

insider perspective into how the NGOs that comprise Israel's civil society work to ensure a democratic state.

African Asylum-Seekers in Israel

"As of 2005, African asylum seekers arrived in Israel by foot from Sudan and Eritrea, crossing into the country from Egypt after having marched through the Sinai desert" (Hamishmony-Yaffe, 2020, p. 158). To arrive in Israel, Eritrean asylum-seekers cross through the northern border of Eritrea into Sudan, then cross the northern Sudanese border with Egypt, and finally cross the border from Egypt into Israel. Along the journey, many Eritrean asylum-seekers experience kidnapping by smugglers and abuse by intermediaries (Hamishmony-Yaffe, 2020, pg. 158). African asylum-seekers arrived in Israel from 2006-2012 (Hamishmony-Yaffe & Mesghanna, 2015). While this time period is relatively recent, there is an array of writing analyzing the situation, from anthropological works about the asylum-seeker experience to analysis about the different organizations that exist to support asylum-seekers.

Amitay (2023), Birger (2020), Willen (2007), and Hashimshony-Yaffe (2020) all discuss how the "othering" of asylum-seekers in Israel systematically legitimizes their dehumanization and how dealing with this "othering" has allowed for Israeli policy that encourages a liminal state of living. Amitay (2023) defines agency as an individual's belief in their ability to direct their life toward desired goals and aspirations despite severe life circumstances and trajectories (p. 528). Many scholars discuss agency as a key term to analyze the role of social institutions that work with asylum-seekers, evaluating whether these institutions renew or deter an individual's sense of agency. Amitay (2023) claims that African asylum-seekers in Israel are "crimmigated," meaning they are treated not only as unrecognized migrants but as criminals (p. 533). Amitay (2023) argues that this branding makes it easier for the state to delegitimize asylum-seekers' efforts to earn a living by implementing ambiguous procedures and a policy of

conditional release visas (p. 533). Willen (2007) draws upon ethnographic work with West African migrants in Tel Aviv and discusses how their "illegality" changes the way they experience the world, touching on Amitay's (2023) earlier point about the criminalization of asylum-seekers. Willen (2007) places a focus on the sensory and how asylum-seekers experience their illegal status and being "othered" in everyday life. Birger (2020) talks less about the association between being a "criminal" and being a "migrant," focusing on the state of "permanent temporariness" that Eritrean asylum-seekers live in because of the non-deportation stance the state of Israel has taken. Birger (2020) notes how an increase in polarizing politics and the lack of government involvement has emphasized the role of nongovernmental institutions to support asylum-seekers (p. 265). Birger (2020) mentions how living with a status that requires constant visa renewal has caused many Eritrean asylum-seekers to feel like they are losing control over their lives, leading to the deterioration of mental health and loss of a sense of agency.

Hashimshony-Yaffe (2020) agrees with Birger that a lack of government support has led to an increase in involvement of civil society organizations. While Birger (2020) discusses the strain this has put on the organizations and their relationships with asylum-seekers, Hashimshony-Yaffe (2020) sees this as a "ray of hope" for asylum-seekers (p. 173). These authors agree with each other that the political situation in Israel creates a sense of "waiting" for Eritrean asylum-seekers, inhibiting their ability to build a permanent life in the country. However, these authors disagree about how NGOs have contributed to Eritrean asylum-seekers' sense of agency. Hashimshony-Yaffe (2020) argues that these organizations provide hope and resources for the community, while Birger (2020) and Amitay (2023) see NGOs as taking away asylum-seekers' sense of agency.

Other literature analyzes the relationships between asylum-seekers and NGOs, diving into how asylum-seekers view these organizations, how asylum-seekers see themselves, asylum-seekers' understandings of the relationships between the state and civil society, and how NGOs see themselves. Stephen and Schmautz (2011) conducted their research by interviewing homeless African refugees in Levinsky Park in downtown Tel Aviv. They found that many of the refugees they interviewed felt that a lack of an education and proper work visas held them back from building a better life in Israel. Since many refugees mainly interacted with NGOs rather than the government, many interviewees thought it was the role of NGOs to provide these services. NGOs do not have access to government resources and cannot provide asylum-seekers with work visas. Yet, some asylum-seekers confuse NGO services with those of the state because NGOs are the organizations of authority that asylum-seekers interact with daily.

Further literature addresses how asylum-seekers' sense of agency is shaped by engaging with civil society. Hamishony-Yaffe and Mesghenna (2015) focus on three types of civil society organizations created by Eritrean asylum-seekers living in Israel to feel a connection to their homeland and with one another. The organizations that Hamishmony-Yaffe and Mesghenna (2015) focus on are not large enough to be NGOs; they are smaller, membership-based, and similar to grassroots organizations (Mercer, 2002). These groups ranged from self-help groups to women's centers and highlighted the ability of the community to mobilize to support one another. Hamishmony-Yaffe and Mesghenna (2015) discuss the power of smaller organizations created within the community to preserve Eritrean culture and identity within Israel, focusing on how Eritrean asylum-seekers have mobilized their own civil society to support themselves internally. Talmi-Cohn and Kassa (2022) take a different approach and discuss how asylum-seekers work as mediators between NGOs in Israel and the local asylum-seeking community.

Some asylum-seekers are hired by NGOs to help their communities understand what an NGO is, build a sense of trust, and bridge cultural and language barriers. While the "mediator" role is not entirely self-created like the Eritrean civil society organizations, these roles empower asylum-seekers to have a sense of agency and control over their situation through helping fellow community members.

All these authors agree that Israel's domestic policy limits asylum-seekers' sense of agency and that NGOs seek to build Eritrean asylum-seekers' sense of agency. This paper explores how Israel's domestic policy has also limited NGOs' sense of agency and how this affects NGOs' relationships with their clients. Using case studies, this paper seeks to understand how Eritrean asylum-seekers' sense of agency is shaped by their relationships with NGOs.

Conclusion

The literature included in this review varies in focus, style, and aim. A broad history of the scope of policy regarding non-Jewish immigration to Israel provides essential context regarding the Israeli government's treatment of African asylum-seekers. Hamishmony-Yaffe (2020) provides context about the moral implications of the Law of Return and current state policy toward asylum-seekers, while Kravel-Tovi (2012) and Huynh (2020) provide insight into how Israel has reacted in the past to waves of non-Jewish immigrants from the Soviet Union and Vietnam. While Israel was relatively welcoming of Vietnamese immigrants, the state implemented a conversion policy for immigrants from the Soviet Union to protect the nation's Jewishness. I argue that this explains the state's fear of granting asylum to the wave of immigrants coming from Africa. Furthermore, Israel's lack of domestic policy to effectively address non-Jewish immigration has made it easier for the state to intentionally disengage.

Literature analyzing the role of specific NGOs in Israel working with African asylum-seekers provides crucial insight into what different types of NGOs exist, how they operate, how

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asylum-seekers perceive them, and how asylum-seekers perceive their own sense of agency. Mercer (2002) and Frohnert (2019) provide a framework for understanding how these different NGOs operate, what their roles are, and how effective they are in protecting Israel's democracy. My research aims to analyze these findings holistically, in conversation with one another, and alongside interviews to build a better picture about how NGOs in Israel position themselves, how they are positioned by the government and by asylum-seekers, and how they can operate most effectively.

Summary Overview

The Eritrean asylum-seeking population in Israel continues to grow every day. Children born to asylum-seekers in Israel are not granted Israeli citizenship, meaning that children of Eritrean asylum-seekers are stateless, having neither Eritrean nor Israeli citizenship. As Eritrean asylum-seekers live their lives in Israel, they start families, continuing this cycle of liminality. Further research should be conducted to understand the experiences of stateless children in Israel and how the growth of the Eritrean asylum-seeking population will change Israel's policies.

In this paper, I will focus on the experiences of those working at NGOs to better understand the relationships NGOs have with their clients. Chapter 2 will provide historical background to give useful context about the experiences of Eritrean asylum-seekers and cultural perceptions that exist regarding Eritrean asylum-seekers in Israel. This chapter will dive into international political frameworks for refugees relating to Israel, the Eritrean political situation that has forced many to flee, and Israeli domestic immigration policy. Chapter 3 will provide excerpts and analysis of interviews conducted with both Bryan Roby, former Higher Education Coordinator of the ARDC, and Kei Ishii, Director of ALEF. Chapter 4 will synthesize all the aforementioned information, analyzing how the interviews connect to existing research. Chapter

5 will reflect on my findings and provide recommendations for future research. I hope that my findings will provide a unique insight into the experience of working at an NGO in Israel by offering firsthand stories and discussion.

Chapter 2: Political Framework

Introduction

This chapter will provide historical background about international frameworks regarding refugees and asylum-seekers, how Israel fits into these frameworks, and how these frameworks shape how the Eritrean context is interpreted by international law. This chapter emphasizes the international definition of the "refugee" agreed upon in the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, of which Israel is a signatory, and how recognition of this term shapes the lived experiences of Eritrean asylum-seekers.

I will begin this chapter by outlining the international frameworks that exist for refugees that are relevant to Israel. Most importantly, Israel is a signatory of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees. Israel's ratification of the 1951 Convention means that the state agreed to the international definition of the "refugee." While Israel agreed to the 1951 Convention, the state avoids fulfilling its commitment by slowly processing asylum applications. By the end of 2014, only 2 Eritreans had been recognized as refugees in Israel (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Israel does not explicitly deny Eritrean asylum-seekers refugee status; rather, the state often does not respond to individuals about the status of their asylum applications, meaning most Eritrean asylum-seekers are never recognized as refugees. Therefore, Israel does not directly violate the 1951 Convention, yet it neither fulfills its commitment. The next section will explore the political situation in Eritrea and why Eritrean asylum-seekers would be recognized as refugees in the eyes of international law, and, therefore, by Israel. I will then describe a brief history of migration policy in Israel, analyzing the Law of Return passed in 1950 that granted Jewish people around the world the right to citizenship in Israel (Hamishmony-Yaffe, 2020) and how that was amended in 1970 to address the influx of refugees from the Soviet Union (Kravel-

Tovi, 2012). I will address the current domestic policy that exists to address asylum-seekers, political rhetoric, and how this "others" Eritrean asylum-seekers in Israel. I will discuss Israel's past responses to non-Jewish immigration, including waves of immigrants from the Soviet Union and Vietnam.

In this chapter, I argue that Eritrean asylum-seekers are refugees by definition of the 1951 Convention, a document that Israel has signed. Yet, Israel actively denies Eritrean asylum-seekers refugee status, implementing a domestic policy that allows Eritrean asylum-seekers to stay temporarily within its borders.

International Frameworks on the Rights of Refugees

The 1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol are key legal documents that form the basis of the work of the United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees (UNHCR), the branch of the United Nations that works directly with refugees. This document defines the term "refugee," outlines the rights of refugees, and establishes international standards for their protection (UNHCR, n.d.). The Convention defines a refugee as "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (UN General Assembly, 1951). Non-refoulement is the core principle of the 1951 Convention, which "asserts that a refugee should not be returned to a country where they face serious threats to their life or freedom" (UN General Assembly, 1951). The Convention stipulates that refugees should not be penalized for illegal entry or stay, meaning that the act of seeking asylum may require refugees to breach immigration rules (UN General Assembly, 1951). The 1951 Convention prohibits penalties, including arbitrary detention. (UN General Assembly, 1951). Finally, the Convention establishes minimum standards for the treatment of refugees,

including access to courts, to primary education, to work, and the provision for documentation, including a refugee travel document in passport form (UN General Assembly, 1951).

Israel is a signatory to the 1951 Convention (UN General Assembly, 1951). Although Israel agreed to the standards set out by the 1951 Convention, it has avoided fulfilling these obligations by refusing to grant refugee status to asylum-seekers entering the country. To illustrate this point, according to a Human Rights Watch Report published in 2014, by the end of June 2014, at least 6,400 Sudanese and at least 367 Eritreans had officially left Israel for their home countries, while Israel had only recognized 2 Eritreans and no Sudanese as refugees (Simpson, 2014).

Israel is unwilling to fulfill its commitment to the 1951 Convention because the state does not recognize asylum-seekers as refugees. While Israel allows Eritrean asylum-seekers to stay in the country, the state denies Eritrean asylum-seekers access to refugee status by not processing asylum claims. I argue that Israel creates a permanent state of liminality for Eritrean asylum-seekers to preserve the Jewish nation-state. I will further illustrate this idea in the third section, diving into how Israeli domestic policy does not reflect its commitment to the 1951 Convention and how this policy decision protects the Jewish nation-state. The next section describes the state repression in Eritrea and how those fleeing from Eritrea are "refugees" per the 1951 Convention.

State Repression in Eritrea and How it Pertains to the 1951 Convention

Eritrea is a state governed by an authoritarian regime under President Isaias Afwerki. One political party exists, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice, and no national-level elections have occurred since 1993. I will use the Political Terror Scale (PTS), a form of measuring state repression gathering data from the U.S. Department of State (USDS), Human Rights Watch (HRW), and Amnesty International (AI), to analyze how the political situation in

Eritrea relates to the 1951 Convention's definition of the refugee. The PTS predominantly measures violations of physical integrity rights (Wood, 2010, p. 368). From 2012-2017, Eritrea fluctuated between a PTS of 4 and 5. A score of 4 means that murder, disappearances, and torture are a part of daily life; however, this level of terror affects primarily those who express interest in politics or ideas (Carey, 2010, p.108). A scale of 5 means that the practices exhibited in level 4 are extended to the entire population, and "the leaders of these societies place no limits on the means or thoroughness with which they pursue personal or ideological goals" (Carey, 2010, p. 108). Most recently, in 2017, all three institutions gave Eritrea a 5 on the PTS (Political Terror Scale, 2021).

From 2012-2017, human rights violations, especially physical integrity rights, worsened, with an increasingly wider population being affected over the years. The Eritrean government exercised numerous forms of state repression, including disappearances, torture, arbitrary arrest, and politically motivated killings. Mandatory conscription affected every citizen, forcing people into unlimited service and slave labor. A 2016 UN Commission Inquiry described military service as "enslavement." Conscripts experienced 72-hour work weeks, arbitrary punishment, rape, and inadequate food rations (Human Rights Watch, 2023). Anyone escaping conscription risked being detained, enduring inhumane prison conditions and torture. Arbitrary arrests were the norm, and many disappeared. Journalists, political activists, politicians, and those practicing unrecognized religions, especially Jehovah's Witnesses, were targeted by the state. In May to June of 2017, 170 Evangelical Christians were arrested, and 53 Jehovah's Witnesses were imprisoned as of August (Human Rights Watch, 2023).

2017 marked President Afewerki's 26th year in power. There was no legislature, no independent civil society organizations or media outlets, and no independent judiciary. About

12% of the population had fled (Human Rights Watch, 2023). The shoot-to-kill policy remained (Amnesty International, 2021). Of 14,000 people who graduated from the Sawa National Service Camp in July, 48% were women who experienced sexual enslavement, torture, and other sexual abuse. Security forces killed 11 escaping conscripts in the capitol in April (Amnesty International, 2021). Politicians, journalists, and practitioners of unauthorized religions continued to be detained without charge or trial (Amnesty International, 2021).

Eritreans fled for fear of their lives. As previously mentioned, the 1951 Convention defines a refugee as "someone who is unable or unwilling to return to their country of origin owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion" (UNHCR, 1951). While Israel is a signatory to the 1951 Convention, the state does not grant asylum to Eritrean asylum-seekers who clearly fit the definition of a "refugee" as defined by the 1951 Convention. The next section will outline Israel's domestic policy for Eritrean asylum-seekers and how this policy protects Israel's identity as a Jewish nation-state.

An Overview of Israel's Domestic Policy Towards Eritrean Asylum-Seekers

Israel became a state in 1948. Two years later, in 1950, Israel passed the Law of Return, granting Jewish people around the world the right to citizenship in Israel (Hamishmony-Yaffe, 2020). The Law of Return is based on a moral obligation towards the Jewish people embedded in the nation-state nature of Israel; however, this moral obligation does not exist regarding non-Jewish migrants (Hamishmony-Yaffe, 2020, p. 161).

The influx of African refugees crossing the Israeli Egyptian border seeking asylum began in 2006. This number has declined greatly since 2012 when the government decided to build a wall on the border. Since the 1950s, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

(UNHCR) has been responsible for the registration and assessment of asylum applications in Israel (Hamishmony & Mesghenna, 2015, p. 124). However, the responsibility for RSD [Refugee Status Determination] was moved from the UNHCR to the Ministry of Interior in July 2009 (UNHCR, 2024). While Israel signed the 1951 Convention, the state has not incorporated this convention into its domestic policy. Eritreans and Sudanese live in Israel with non-removal status, meaning they are protected from deportation but not endowed with any socio-economic rights mentioned in the 1951 Convention (Hamishmony & Mesghenna, 2015, p. 124). Today, the 1952 Law of Entry remains the only law that addresses the entry and status of non-Jews in Israel (Hamishmony & Mesghenna, 2015, p. 124).

According to the Eritrean Citizenship Proclamation (1992), any person born to an Eritrean parent, anywhere in the world, is considered an Eritrean national; therefore, the Eritrean community in Israel is not merely diaspora community but an exiled community, a community that is in conflict with its state of origin (Hamishmony & Mesghenna, 2015, p. 125). Since August of 2008, Israeli authorities have issued conditional release permits to Eritreans and Sudanese, which function as temporary residence permits that must be periodically renewed (Simpson, 2014). These permits only allow holders to work in specific sectors, such as personal care, agriculture, construction, welding, industrial professionals, hotels, and ethnic cooking (Hamishmony-Yaffe, 2020, p. 169). In December of 2013, authorities introduced new procedures that required people to renew their permits every few months (Simpson, 2014). This process is difficult for Eritrean asylum-seekers. Already living in financially strenuous conditions, having to renew permits every few months requires asylum-seekers to pay for transportation to an office, overcome language barriers in reading difficult documentation, and face the reality of living in a country that holds them waiting. Israel's domestic policy can be summed up in a quote

from former Israeli Interior Minister Eli Yishai, who said as long as Israel cannot deport asylum-seekers to their home countries, it should "lock them up to make their lives miserable" (Simpson, 2014).

When faced with past waves of non-Jewish migration, Israel has made ad hoc decisions to determine the status of migrants. In 1970, the Law of Return was amended to include those with Jewish ancestry as well as their spouses, allowing for a wave of immigrants to enter from the Soviet Union in the 1990s (Kravel-Tovi, 2012, p. 741). While many of these immigrants were accepted as Israeli citizens, they were not accepted as Jewish people, and policymakers expressed a fear that this population might make Israel "less Jewish" (Kravel-Tovi, 2012, p. 742). In 1977 and 1979, small waves of Vietnamese immigrants came to Israel and were granted asylum under the leadership of Prime Minister Menachem Begin (Huynh, 2020, p. 1). 360 people were granted Israeli citizenship, none of whom were Jewish (Hyunh, 2020, p. 2).

In Israel, individuals coming from Eritrea are defined as illegal migrants by the state and as asylum-seekers by themselves (Hamishmony-Yaffe, 2020, p. 158). Controlling what asylum-seekers can and cannot do asserts the power of the state of Israel over asylum-seekers. Amitay (2023) defines othering as "actions aimed at discrimination and exclusion of individuals based on their social belonging to marginalized groups" (p. 526). In Israel, the state applies rhetoric and policy that "others" asylum-seekers as a tool to justify the oppressive policy it implements. By "othering" and positioning Eritrean asylum-seekers as a threat to the Jewish nation-state, the state of Israel justifies the implementation of policy that controls and oppresses this population. Amitay (2023) argues that Israel's policy toward asylum-seekers reflects a "managerial discourse" in which people are perceived as manageable objects and as cases rather than persons with lived experiences (p. 527). By denying asylum-seekers refugee status, Israel denies the lived

traumatic experiences of asylum-seekers that warrant refugee status. Amitay (2023) furthers this concept by introducing the idea of crimmigating, which is to treat individuals not only as unrecognized migrants but also as criminals (p. 533). Amitay's argument is reaffirmed by public discourse about asylum-seekers. In May of 2012, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu referred to African asylum-seekers as "illegal infiltrators flooding the country" who were "threaten[ing] the social fabric of society, our national security, our national identity, and our existence as a Jewish and democratic state" (Simpson, 2014). In August of 2012, Minister Eli Yishai claimed that "the infiltrator threat is just as severe as the Iranian threat" (Simpson, 2014). The use of the term "infiltrator" and "illegal" implies that asylum-seekers are breaking laws in coming into Israel and are, therefore, criminals. According to Hochman (2015), "The term 'infiltrators' was originally used to address individuals (mainly Palestinians) entering Israel 'knowingly and unlawfully' from enemy states, with an intention to 'cause death or serious injury to a person' (Yaron et al., 2013, p. 145). Referring to asylum-seekers as infiltrators thus associated them with actual historical events that threatened the security of the State of Israel and its citizens" (p. 361). This rhetoric "others" asylum-seekers by claiming that they threaten the nation-state of Israel, excluding them from Israel's national identity, and justifying the denial of their rights in Israel because they pose a threat to the state.

Paz (2011) explains that "... by breaking up the identity between man and citizen, between nativity and nationality, the refugee throws into crisis the original fiction of sovereignty" (p. 6). Eritrean asylum-seekers threaten Israel's national identity by disrupting the state's status as a Jewish nation-state. Paz (2011) goes on to explain how three core preoccupations influence Israel's decisions toward Eritrean asylum-seekers: securitization and its relations to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, ethnonationalism, and the legacy of the Holocaust (p.

7). Since its establishment, Israel "...has fought eight major wars, exercised countless military operations, experienced vicious terror attacks and continues to engage in the intricate Israeli-Palestinian conflict while dealing with threats of destruction" (Paz, 2011, p. 8). Israel perceives Eritrean asylum-seekers as a security threat because it is a nation in a constant state of emergency. Furthermore, Paz (2011) argues that "the idea that mass influx involves demographic change has deep roots and was tactically used by Jews themselves prior to establishment of the state and during the British mandate" (p. 11). The Holocaust is a fundamental component of Israeli society; it is a part of the foundation of Zionism (Paz, 2011, p, 12). Israel is a nation built on the concept of the "refugee;" the genocide of the the Jewish people is a part of the foundation of a Jewish state. Fear of multiculturalism is rooted in fear of losing a Jewish homeland; therefore, Israel has implemented domestic policy that prevents Eritrean asylum-seekers from living permanently in the country.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have outlined how Israel's perceptions of African asylum-seekers are reflected in its national policy. Israel is a signatory of the 1951 Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, meaning it agreed to the international definition of the refugee. The political situation in Eritrea should warrant refugee status to most fleeing, seeing that many Eritrean asylum-seekers were actively persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group, or political opinion. However, Israel does not recognize this or its agreement to the 1951 Convention in its domestic policy. The volume of asylum-seekers coming from Africa threatens the Jewish nation-state; therefore, Israel's domestic policy attempts to "manage" Eritrean asylum-seekers and prevent them from building a permanent life in Israel.

As I have argued in this chapter, asylum-seekers in Israel live in a constant state of liminality, obtaining a permit that must be renewed every few months, a constant reminder that just as the permit is not permanent, neither are Eritrean asylum-seekers' place in Israel. Political rhetoric in Israel "others" asylum-seekers and justifies the state's non-removal policy, positioning asylum-seekers as a threat to the Jewish nation-state and criminalizing them for entering the country. Eritrean asylum-seekers are perceived as a threat to the Jewish nation-state; therefore, Israel denies Eritrean asylum-seekers the status it acknowledged in the 1951 Convention.

Chapter 3: Case Studies

Introduction

In this chapter, I will outline several organizations in Israel that aid Eritrean asylum-seekers. This overview will be important to understand the relationships between NGOs and how they work together to support Eritrean asylum-seekers. Overall, the community of NGOs working in this field is relatively small and well-connected (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). This chapter will focus on two organizations using interviews for analysis: the African Refugee Development Center (ARDC) and ALEF.

The next section of this chapter will explore two case studies: the ARDC and ALEF. The first section includes an interview with Bryan Roby, Associate Professor of Jewish and Middle Eastern History at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Professor Roby served as Higher Education Coordinator at the ARDC, located in Tel Aviv, from 2011-2013. The next section includes an interview with Kei Ishii, Director of ALEF, located in Haifa, Israel. Kei founded ALEF in 2014 and has been working for the organization ever since. ALEF has been a project of the ARDC since 2019, making the ARDC its parent organization (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). While ALEF is a part of the ARDC, I chose to focus on these organizations as two separate case studies because the day-to-day operations of both differ due to context and location. The needs of the asylum-seeking community in Tel Aviv is different from the needs of the asylum-seeking community in Haifa. Additionally, ALEF is much smaller than the ARDC, and it has gained access to new resources and expanded its general reach since partnering with them (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). By analyzing the two separately, I learned that limited access to resources is a challenge for any NGO working with Eritrean asylum-seekers despite the ARDC being larger and older than ALEF. Additionally,

the partnership between the ARDC and ALEF is relatively recent, and I was interested in studying how ALEF has changed since joining the ARDC.

This chapter will end with a conclusion that puts the interviews with Bryan and Kei in conversation with one another, comparing their experiences and analyzing how their different roles shaped their experiences at ALEF and the ARDC. Further analysis of the two organizations and their individual experiences will be discussed in Chapter 4.

An Overview of the Organizations Aiding Eritrean Asylum-Seekers in Israel

In my research, I have identified four types of organizations operating in Israel to aid Eritrean asylum-seekers: non-governmental organizations (NGOs), grassroots organizations, international organizations, and government funded organizations. While these categories are helpful for analysis, they are not binary. Many of the NGOs in this paper do not fit into a single category of organization. NGOs are often larger organizations and created by outside groups, while grassroots organizations are smaller and typically run by and for marginalized groups (Mercer, 2002, p. 6). International organizations refer to international governmental organizations with a universal membership of sovereign states, such as the United Nations (United States Institute of Peace, 2010). The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) operates in Israel with headquarters in Tel Aviv, and it collaborates with various NGOs to implement projects to support Eritrean asylum-seekers (UNHCR Israel, 2024). The UNHCR partners with The Hotline for Refugees and Migrants, The African Refugee Development Center (ARDC), The Aid Organization for Asylum Seekers and Refugees (ASSAF), Kav LaOved, Mesila, The Center for International Migration and Integration (CIMI), The Refugee Rights Clinic at Tel Aviv University, Elifelet, Physicians for Human Rights - Israel, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), Levinsky Garden Library, the Eritrean Women's

Community Center, Abugida Eritrean Community Afterschool, Unitaf, Kuchinate, and the Negev Refugee Centre (NRC) (UNHCR Israel, 2024). According to the UNHCR Israel, "UNHCR relies on these organizations to implement a wide range of projects, including aid distribution, legal protection, workers' rights, advocacy, healthcare, psychosocial support, nutrition, childcare, gender related issues, rehabilitation and adult education projects" (2024).

As I previously mentioned, I argue that the categories of NGOs are not binary. Consider the ARDC, for example. The ARDC was founded in 2004 by a political refugee from Ethiopia who wanted to assist other African refugees fleeing to Israel (ARDC, 2024). One could argue that the ARDC began as a grassroots movement, started by an African asylum-seeker for African asylum-seekers. As the ARDC has grown to include volunteers from a variety of backgrounds, it has grown into a larger NGO. ALEF was founded by a small group of volunteers, none of whom were asylum-seekers. Although ALEF is a small organization, its volunteers and staff are mostly external from the Eritrean asylum-seeking community. ALEF is a project of the ARDC, meaning the ARDC funds and regulates ALEF. For the purposes of this paper, I will consider ALEF to be a project of the ARDC as an NGO. As previously mentioned, the community of organizations working with asylum-seekers in Israel is relatively small, and collaboration takes place across all types of organizations to implement projects and build capacity (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024).

Case Study: The African Refugee Development Center (ARDC)

The African Refugee Development Center (ARDC) defines itself as "a grassroots community-based non-profit organization based in Tel Aviv, aiming to promote economic and social inclusion for refugees and asylum seekers in Israel" (ARDC, 2024). The ARDC has over 500 program participants every year, providing access to educational and employment

opportunities. The ARDC believes that "refugees can contribute to Israel's economy while also benefiting from it and gaining skills that they could use elsewhere in the future" (ARDC, 2024). While the ARDC's theory of change focuses on helping refugees participate in Israel's economy, it also mentions preparing refugees for "elsewhere." The use of the term "elsewhere" supports my argument that Israel is not viewed as a permanent place of settlement for Eritrean asylum-seekers.

The ARDC runs four programs: Higher Education and Economic Inclusion, ALEF, the Schoolhouse Program, and Community Life. The Higher Education and Economic Inclusion program provides support for asylum-seekers assimilating into Israeli school systems, higher education support, tutoring, and vocational training. ALEF is the program focused on Haifa, which will be further discussed in this thesis. The Schoolhouse Program is a specialized school for adults focusing on English language and literacy, Hebrew literacy, technological literacy, video editing, etc. The Community Life program aims to "bridge the gap between asylum-seekers and Israelis to sustain and maintain the community's culture" (ARDC, 2024). Asylum-seekers possess leadership positions within the ARDC, such as serving on the board. The ARDC collaborates with several other organizations, including Mesila, the UNHCR, Kuchinate, the New Israel Fund, and they receive some direct funding from Ir Olam, the Tel Aviv municipality (ARDC, 2024). By funding NGOs like the ARDC, I argue that the state of Israel places responsibility on NGOs to support Eritrean asylum-seekers and, therefore, removes itself from directly engaging with Eritrean asylum-seekers. Rather than implementing programs itself, the state of Israel funds NGOs to do so. In 2021, the ARDC only had 9 full time staff members compared to 116 volunteers and 754 total people assisted (African Refugee Development Center,

2021). As the ARDC is mostly volunteer-based, leadership opportunities for asylum-seekers may come in the form of volunteering rather than paid employment.

Bryan Roby is 38 years old and an Associate Professor of Jewish and Middle Eastern History at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. Bryan served as Higher Education Coordinator for 2 years at the ARDC in 2011 while also volunteering at the Absorption Center in Beer Sheva. Bryan volunteered at a variety of NGOs during his time in Israel, but his experience at the ARDC stood out to him. As Higher Education Coordinator, Bryan's main role was to help Eritrean asylum-seekers gain admission into universities in Israel. Bryan mentioned that the United Nations provided a small amount of grant money for asylum-seekers to attend university; however, the grant money was only enough for 2-5 people at most (B. Roby, personal communication, January 24, 2024). Most of Bryan's work took place behind the scenes, collecting IDs for applications, reviewing files, creating an archive, administrative projects, making sense of individuals' needs, grant research, and so on. The Higher Education Coordinator position was a part-time, unpaid role, requiring 2-3 days in the office for a total of 6-8 hours per week. Bryan explained that many asylum-seekers were motivated to get higher education degrees in Israel because they wanted to attend university in the U.S. or Europe. Bryan did not speak Tigrinya, the native language of Eritrea, and he mentioned that this was an obstacle when communicating with applicants. Bryan also mentioned that the ARDC worked with two or three asylum-seekers as translators, but the translators did not always show up, which was often "difficult and frustrating" (B. Roby, personal communication, January 24, 2024).

At the time that Bryan worked at the ARDC, he felt that it was not well known, describing it as a "ragtag group of people in a pretty dinghy building" (B. Roby, personal communication, January 24, 2024). While he described his experience at the ARDC as "super

informative and unexpected," he mentioned that it was "not as fulfilling as the work at the Absorption Center, mostly because I wasn't as engaged with people" (B. Roby, personal communication, January 24, 2024). Bryan's role did not involve much direct interaction with Eritrean asylum-seekers, meaning that he did not have as much opportunity to build relationships. On the other hand, engaging directly with Eritrean asylum-seekers is a main function of Kei's role as Director of ALEF. Throughout the interview, Bryan noted that the behind-the-scenes nature of his role was the one of the biggest barriers for him when building relationships with his clients; however, for Kei, the miscommunication that comes with direct engagement is what makes his role and relationship-building challenging (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024).

When asked what the worst part about working at the ARDC was, Bryan responded that "it felt like we weren't doing much of anything and not necessarily impacting peoples' lives in any significant way, but that comes when you're in the middle of doing something" (B. Roby, personal communication, January 24, 2024). On the other hand, Bryan noted that the best part of working at the ARDC was that "you feel like you're doing something about something and feeling that you're giving a sense of that in recognizing someone else's humanity" (B. Roby, personal communication, January 24, 2024). While Bryan worked as Higher Education Coordinator for two years, he did not think anyone was considered for university during his term, and that "it felt like we were more administrators than hands on engaged with the community at large" (B. Roby, personal communication, January 24, 2024). While Bryan was aware of the work of other NGOs and how the ARDC collaborated with them, he felt that Israelis knew little about the ARDC and asylum-seekers in general (B. Roby, personal communication, January 24, 2024). When asked about his relationship with Eritrean asylum-seekers, Bryan responded, "I

wanted to have one, but I didn't think that I had any relationship with the asylum-seeking community at ARDC" (B. Roby, personal communication, January 24, 2024). He mentioned that language barriers were the main inhibitor of relationship building.

Bryan's life was impacted by his experience at the ARDC. He explained, "It definitely got me thinking about modern forms of enslavement and issues that asylum-seekers face on the way as they're traveling from country to country" (B. Roby, personal communication, January 24, 2024). Bryan has continued to pursue these topics in his research as a professor (B. Roby, personal communication, January 24, 2024). Bryan shared two memories that stood out to him from his time at the ARDC. The first moment occurred when he was sitting in on a meeting; a woman was speaking about her time in a few different countries, and she kept talking about a "madam" as her former employer, referring to a form of enslavement (B. Roby, personal communication, January 24, 2024). To preface the next memory, Bryan explained how kidnapping was prevalent for asylum-seekers when journeying through the Sinai Desert and how kidnappers would call friends to offer ransoms in exchange for agreeing to not cut off a limb (B. Roby, personal communication, January 24, 2024). Bryan shared that he witnessed one of those calls. He reflected that these experiences "gave me a richer understanding of who these people are, that they have agency and lives similar to us… ARDC was impactful in giving me a much more specific general understanding of the lives of people who seek asylum in places, the stuff that they go through, and being interested in learning and telling that history" (B. Roby, personal communication, January 24, 2024).

While Bryan felt that he was doing good work in his position at the ARDC, the experience was not truly fulfilling because it did not involve working directly with people, and the ARDC did not achieve great success in sending asylum-seekers to universities in Israel.

Although the work may have felt good, the lack of university acceptances and lack of direct engagement with asylum-seekers hindered Bryan's feeling of fulfillment. I asked if Bryan thought the ARDC's lack of success was because of legal policies regarding employment, and Bryan replied that he was not aware of those restrictions and that many people saw education as an opportunity to gain skill sets (B. Roby, personal communication, January 24, 2024). While he did not recall forming strong relationships with asylum-seekers themselves, exposure to the situation inspired him to continue researching modern forms of enslavement and the experiences of asylum-seekers more broadly. Bryan was most impacted by exposure to the issue that he gained from working at the ARDC rather than relationships with Eritrean asylum-seekers or his specific role. Although Bryan could not always see the impact of his work, his time at the ARDC had a significant impact on his life.

Case Study: ALEF

ALEF is a program of the ARDC. While the ARDC mainly operates in Tel Aviv, ALEF operates in Haifa, a city in northern Israel (ARDC, 2024). ALEF was founded in 2014 by a group of volunteers, beginning as a series of English and Hebrew classes for single men. Since then, the program has grown to provide liaison services, rights advocacy, and mediation with the Haifa municipality, lawyers and legal system, and non-profits and educational institutions (ARDC, 2024). ALEF also provides vocational training and language lessons to increase employment and social opportunities for asylum-seekers as well as basic financial needs assistance for the most high-risk members of the community (ARDC, 2024).

Over the summer of 2022, I interned at ALEF to design and implement the Environment and Sustainability Language-Learning Program for Eritrean asylum-seeking children between the ages of 8 and 10 in the community. I worked with a small team at ALEF consisting of two

full-time employees, one co-intern, and four volunteers. I was supervised by Kei Ishii, Director

of ALEF, who kindly agreed to be interviewed for this project.

Originally from the U.S., Kei is 34 years old and has been working at ALEF for most of

his career. He graduated from Beloit College in the U.S. with a degree in Anthropology and

Museum Studies, and he went on to pursue a Master's in Global Migration and Policy from Tel

Aviv University in 2014. In search of an internship during his master's program, Kei began

teaching English to a group of single asylum-seeking men once a week while living in Haifa. He

joined another student from Haifa, and they became each other's supervisors. Kei continued

teaching until 2017, when the group of volunteer teachers expanded, and he took on the role of

an administrator (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). Around 2018, Prime

Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had agreed to a deal brokered by the UNHCR to transfer a group

of African asylum-seekers to Europe, and Israel would absorb those that were left behind. This

agreement triggered protests in Israel, and Netanyahu threatened to deport all African asylum-

seekers (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). According to Kei, the issue

received more publicity during this time, and a movement began to "stop the deportation" (K.

Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). Kei began to receive calls from other NGOs,

including ASSAF and the ARDC, as well as contacts in the Haifa municipality. ALEF joined the

ARDC in 2019, and the organization has continued to grow ever since (K. Ishii, personal

communication, January 24, 2024). The publicity and sense of urgency sparked by this deal

helped Kei gain the momentum to grow ALEF into the program it is today.

Kei emphasized that "things have been much better" since ALEF joined the ARDC (K.

Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). The ARDC has access to beneficial financial

and administrative services, including accountants that could receive donations from the U.S.,

tax reductions, and so on. Joining the ARDC has connected ALEF with other NGOs working in this field, namely ASSAF, HIAS, Elifelet, the Eritrean Women's Center, Mesila, and Kuchinate, and it has given ALEF a seat at the table, especially in discussions with the UNHCR. According to Kei, the UNHCR used to have the authority to determine who is and is not a refugee, but that power was transferred to the Ministry of Interior around 2010-2011 (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). Since then, the role of the UNHCR has been mostly monitoring and capacity-building, identifying community leaders and connecting people with NGOs like ALEF. Kei mentioned that one of the most important roles of the UNHCR has been conducting interviews with asylum-seekers for the Canadian sponsorship program. This program allows for Eritrean asylum-seekers to relocate to Canada under the sponsorship of Canadian organizations and citizens (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). To be approved for this program, asylum-seekers must calculate their individual liabilities, sponsors will then guarantee an individual's welfare for one year, and then the asylum-seeker must prove their refugee or asylum-seeker status (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). Because the Ministry of Interior often does not reply to individuals' applications for asylum, the UNHCR is able to conduct interviews to determine the status of asylum-seekers applying for sponsorship in Canada. My conversation with Kei clarified that the community of NGOs working with asylum-seekers in Israel is small, well-connected, and collaborative because most Israelis do not demonstrate concern about this issue (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). When asked why Israelis do not seem to care, Kei responded that it might be because Eritrean asylum-seekers are not Jewish, there are not enough of them, they are not terrorists, and they can be used as a political tool; Kei believed that Eritrean asylum-seekers end up in the news when it's convenient for someone (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024).

When asked about his experience working at ALEF, Kei responded, "This has really become my life" (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). He described how he began working for a tourist company around the same time that he was starting ALEF, and he "had this feeling at this job [that I was] being paid not to do what I'm supposed to be doing… I'm getting calls from tourists, then I leave work and work with people who don't have rights. It was too big of a contrast, too much of a mental itch" (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). When describing the impact of ALEF, Kei responded, "I wouldn't say things are entirely positive, the people who keep getting out [of Israel] are the strongest, so the needs of the community continue to become more drastic" (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). He explained how those working with asylum-seekers "have been in emergency procedures since day one" (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). To cope with this, he explains how he has "eliminated hope" because "if there's no hope, there's no disappointment" (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024).

Kei continued to mention this "balance of hopelessness and helplessness," in which hopelessness is "feeling like you can't do anything," and helplessness is "not being able to do anything" (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). Part of the challenge for NGOs is that they cannot change Israel's policies. Kei also mentioned that it is difficult to accept that he is often not on the same page with his clients. He explained, "we keep assuming that our goals are aligned, and they really aren't" (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). To illustrate this, Kei offered an example of how a parent came to him asking for English lessons for their dyslexic child. Kei wanted to conduct Hebrew tutoring sessions for the child to help them succeed in an Israeli school; however, the parents wanted their child to receive English tutoring because English is necessary to build a better life in Canada or another English-speaking

country. Kei mentioned that many Eritrean asylum-seeking parents express an attitude that the reason they escaped a regime was to build a life for their child in an English-speaking country. Kei posed the question, "How do you be on the same side and get to some sort of cooperative relationship with the client? My answer is abandon that, there is no same page to be on, we both speak a different language in every sense of the word, and we all need to have a common third language that is tangible and measurable on both sides" (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). He explained how in this scenario, he asked the parent to sign a contract agreeing that ALEF would provide English lessons for the child if the family showed up on time and that the parent would come in once a week to complete medical papers together (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). This example illustrates how NGOs often must compromise with their clients; Kei agreed to provide English lessons even though he did not believe that was the support that the child needed most. While he agreed to sacrifice his priorities for the needs of the parent, in return, he asked the parent to work with him on medical papers. Although Kei compromised regarding the needs of the child, he created a deal with his client to ensure that the parent was taking steps to assimilate to life in Israel.

ALEF's mission is to help asylum-seekers have access to basic rights in Israel, but this mission does not always align with the goals of ALEF's clients. Kei explained that he is not "here for them to have all of their dreams come true, but for them to have an equal footing and have the things that are entitled to them to engage as equals" (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). Kei prioritizes helping Eritrean asylum-seekers assimilate to life in Israel, but Eritrean asylum-seekers want to prepare for life outside of Israel. He further explained that asylum-seekers often "perceive people [as in NGO volunteers and employees] as gatekeepers" (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). Eritrean asylum-seekers do not understand

that the resources that NGOs can provide are limited, leading some Eritrean asylum-seekers to think that NGOs are withholding information and resources. As Kei explained, it is difficult for those who have experienced trauma and are in a foreign country to see their issues as distinct things that can be overcome by logical step-by-step actions (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024).

While Kei thinks that ALEF is achieving its mission, he expressed feelings of frustration with his work. He has been "burnt out three or four times doing this job, I keep saying I can do this for one more year and then keep going, [my friends say I have a] remarkable capacity to endure" (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). Kei mentioned that throughout major crises in Israel, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the current war in Gaza, his "level of panic remains the same" because working with asylum-seekers puts him in an "emergency mentality nonstop" (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024).

It seems that Kei feels stuck in his position as Director of ALEF. He has devoted his life and his career to work with a population of people whose situation continues to worsen as time goes on; therefore, his job becomes increasingly important while simultaneously increasingly difficult. After working with such a vulnerable population, Kei explained that other jobs felt pointless and less fulfilling. While Kei believes that ALEF is making a positive contribution, he does not see an end in sight to his work because the situation continues to worsen, and he finds it difficult to stay motivated when the laws in Israel are not changing. I argue that the work of ALEF remains in a liminal state of waiting; the need for tutoring, capacity-building, and assisting asylum-seekers with general life skills will never go away as long as asylum-seekers are living in Israel and are not recognized as refugees. Until Israel's policies change, ALEF's impact will remain the same.

Conclusion

While ALEF is a project of the ARDC, the day-to-day operations of both organizations differ, as the needs of the community of Eritrean asylum-seekers in Tel Aviv differ from the day-to-day needs of the Eritrean asylum-seeking community in Haifa. Both Bryan and Kei have had different experiences working in the NGO space. Both served in volunteer roles; however, Kei helped to found ALEF as an organization, sticking with it from the beginning. I believe this has made him more resilient and willing to endure the hardships that come with his role.

Both Bryan and Kei believed their roles were important, but both described their experiences as difficult because their impact was not always direct or visible. Bryan operated mostly behind the scenes, helping with applications to higher education opportunities; however, none of the applications he worked on were successfully admitted. Bryan never felt that he was able to build a relationship with the asylum-seeking community. As Director, Kei's responsibilities are less rigid, helping with a myriad of tasks as they come. He works directly with the community in day-to-day operations; however, Kei feels that there is a disconnect between the goals of ALEF and the goals of asylum-seekers, making it difficult to manage the expectations of his clients. Kei mentioned that many Eritrean asylum-seekers perceive NGOs as gatekeepers, withholding access to information and rights. NGOs are trying to help, but they are limited in what they can do. My interviews reveal that Eritrean asylum-seekers do not always understand this, and this disconnect places a strain on the relationship between those working at NGOs and the asylum-seeking community. To overcome this, Kei takes a "give and take" approach, forming transactional agreements with asylum-seekers to make progress towards both of their goals. Kei and Bryan engaged with the Eritrean asylum-seeking community differently; however, both expressed a disconnect between expectations of NGO volunteers and Eritrean

asylum-seekers. Bryan described a lack of understanding about university processes within the Eritrean asylum-seeking community as well as unreliability of volunteer translators. Kei described a misalignment of expectations; Kei's goal is to help Eritrean asylum-seekers assimilate to living in Israel, while the goal of many Eritrean asylum-seekers is to leave Israel for the U.S., Canada, or Europe. Both Kei and Bryan mentioned how Eritrean asylum-seekers view Israel as a stepping stone to a life elsewhere.

Both Bryan and Kei described their experiences as formative. While Bryan has not devoted his career to working with Eritrean asylum-seekers in the NGO space, he has continued to study this topic through his research and teachings. On the other hand, Kei has devoted his career to running ALEF. While Kei described the job as defeating, he also expressed that other jobs would feel pointless knowing that there is a community of people living in Israel without rights. Both Bryan and Kei have described this work as an endless cycle; the need for humanitarian assistance will always exist in Israel until the state changes its non-Jewish immigration policy. Furthermore, both mentioned the lack of Israeli attention to the needs of Eritrean asylum-seekers and the situation in general.

Both Bryan and Kei provided crucial first-hand insight into the experience of operating in this field. While the two took on different roles within their organizations, both expressed similar frustrations and feelings of "hopelessness" when working with Eritrean asylum-seekers. Further analysis will be conducted in the next chapter, putting these interviews in conversation with previous research and the situation more broadly.

Chapter 4: Analysis and Discussion

Introduction

This chapter seeks to put the findings from my interviews with Bryan Roby and Kei Ishii in conversation with the research I have done thus far. I will begin this chapter by connecting the lived experiences of Eritrean asylum-seekers in Israel to broader ideas of transnationalism, nationalism, multiculturalism, and civil society. Understanding these concepts is essential to understanding the role of NGOs, how NGOs see themselves, and how Eritrean asylum-seekers perceive the roles of NGOs. These concepts will later provide insight into why Eritrean asylum-seekers and NGOs often have different expectations for working together. The next section of this chapter will explore the disconnect between NGOs and Eritrean asylum-seekers and how NGOs manage this disconnect. Finally, I will conclude this chapter by connecting the discussion with my research question, synthesizing the material that has been discussed throughout this thesis project.

My interviews with both Bryan and Kei revealed that there is a disconnect between Eritrean asylum-seekers and NGOs. While both Bryan and Kei found that their work at the ARDC and ALEF was meaningful and overall positive, they also felt that the work was discouraging and often difficult (K. Ishii & B. Roby, personal communication, January 24, 2024). NGOs are not the state; there is only so much that they can do as long as the state of Israel denies Eritrean asylum-seekers refugee status. The work of NGOs is complicated by cultural challenges and a misalignment of expectations between NGOs and their clients. This chapter will dive into how NGOs operate in this space of challenge and disconnect, referencing previously discussed works and my conversations with both Bryan and Kei.

Transnationalism, Nationalism, Multiculturalism, and the Role of Civil Society in Israel

Hashimshony-Yaffe & Mesghenna (2015) described how civil society is "the socio-political sphere which lies between state and society, between the household and the state, and which is collective in nature and non-coercive" (p. 128). According to Edward Said (2014), "civil society is made up of voluntary affiliations like schools, families, and unions, and political society is made up of state institutions whose role in the policy is direct domination" (pg. 6). In the context of Israel and Eritrean asylum-seekers, civil society organizations resist the domination of state institutions who actively deny Eritrean asylum-seekers rights. As both Bryan and Kei mentioned in their interviews, the community of organizations working with Eritrean asylum-seekers, including NGOs, international organizations, and grassroots organizations, is rather small and close-knit, often collaborating on projects to support one another (K. Ishii & B. Roby, personal communication, January 24, 2024). This group of organizations operates in the realm of civil society, "formed voluntarily and aiming to protect values and promote the interests of their members" (Hashimshony-Yaffe & Mesghenna, 2015, p. 128).

While civil society organizations aim to ensure the rights of its members (in this case, Eritrean asylum-seekers), volunteers at these organizations are also members of the civil society, and I argue that their interests are not always promoted. In his interview, Kei felt that his work at ALEF, a civil society organization, is defeating because his expectations often do not align with those of his clients. Instead of putting the client's needs above his own, Kei finds a way to reach a middle ground with clients, often compromising to progress toward both of their goals. Said (2014) mentions how, "Culture is found to be operating within civil society, where the influence of ideas, or institutions, and of other persons works not through domination but by what Gramsci (1971) calls consent" (p. 7). Civil society organizations often have to "consent" to the political

society that they face to overcome political domination. Furthermore, culture is created through the ways in which civil society organizations operate. For example, Kei explains how cultural disconnect is an obstacle when working with clients; however, he creates a "push and pull" culture in which both parties compromise to take steps toward their goals and consent to the needs of one another (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024).

According to Hashimshony-Yaffe & Mesghenna (2015), "transnationalism entails a combination of ties, networks, and organizations that cross borders and celebrates the connection between communities and their 'homeland' while decentralizing the nation-state by departing from conventional notions of exclusivity in national belonging" (p. 130). The civil society organizations in Israel working with Eritrean asylum-seekers function in a transnational space, "operat[ing] in between and in the presence and absence of two nation-states: Eritrea and Israel" (Hashimshony-Yaffe & Mesghenna, 2015, p. 128). Eritreans living in Israel in need of consular assistance are required to pay a 2% tax to Eritrea, and, at the same time, sign a "confession" of their betrayal to the nation (Hashimshony-Yaffe & Mesghenna, 2015, p. 129). For Eritrean asylum-seekers living in Israel, Eritrea has both a presence and absence in their lives. Eritrea views asylum-seekers as traitors of the nation, while at the same time, forcing a connection by making those who have betrayed the state pay a tax. Similarly, Israel recognizes the presence of Eritrean asylum-seekers by implementing a non-removal policy while also intentionally disengaging further with the population, reinforcing this duality of presence and absence.

Civil society organizations must grapple with both the presence and absence of both Eritrea and Israel in the lives of their clients. Eritrean asylum-seekers do not have a single national belonging. Those who come to Israel in search of a better life arrive only to find that Israel sees them as infiltrators, and now that they have fled Eritrea, they are considered traitors of

Eritrea. Rejected by both their homeland and new home country, Eritrean asylum-seekers in Israel are forced to accept this state of liminality, exacerbating the community's sense of "hopelessness" that Kei described in his interview (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). Hopelessness is felt by both those working at NGOs and their clients; a lack of belonging to any nation-state makes it difficult for Eritrean asylum-seekers to feel a sense of agency or motivation to make a life for oneself.

Hashimshony-Yaffe & Mesghenna (2015) argue, "Immigrant associations have a dual character, preserving the traditional way of life while also advancing modernity" (p. 134). Kei mentioned that much of his role involves helping Eritrean asylum-seekers adapt to Israeli society, such as navigating Israeli laws, learning how to use computer systems, applying for jobs, and so on. (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). While NGOs can provide spaces for Eritrean asylum-seekers to celebrate and remember their cultural heritage, their main goal is to help Eritrean asylum-seekers assimilate to Israeli culture, and these cultural contexts are very different from one another. Both ALEF and the ARDC have programs that celebrate and preserve Eritrean culture in Israel, but their priority is to help Eritrean asylum-seekers adjust to Israel's more modern way of life. This cultural disconnect further complicates the disconnect between NGOs and their clients. Kei understands the modern world that Eritrean asylum-seekers are struggling to operate in, and he is trying to help them function in that world, while asylum-seekers do not understand that world and, therefore, do not understand what it means to function in that world (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). Consequently, the expectations that asylum-seekers have for NGOs are often unrealistic; many Eritrean asylum-seekers prioritize learning English or getting to Canada, misinterpreting the reality of their situation and the importance of prioritizing building a life in Israel.

Civil society organizations in Israel operate in a nationalist context that rejects multiculturalism. As I have previously argued in this piece, "the escalation of the migrant worker and refugee migration phenomenon threatens to change the character of Israel to that of a multicultural one" (Dvir, Aloni, & Harari, 2014, p. 572). In May 2012, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu referred to asylum-seekers as "'illegal infiltrators flooding the country' who were 'threaten[ing] the social fabric of our society, our national security, our national identity… and… our existence as a Jewish and democratic state'" (Human Rights Watch, 2014). Eritrean asylum-seekers are described as "infiltrators" that threaten the nation of Israel. Both Bryan and Kei expressed frustrations regarding the lack of attention in Israel to this issue, and they both claimed that Israelis only seemed to care if politicians used African asylum-seekers as political tools (K. Ishii & B. Roby, personal communication, January 24, 2024). I argue that Prime Minister Netanyahu framed Eritrean asylum-seekers as a national security threat to gain support and affirmation from Israeli society. As Amitay (2023) reinforced, "politicians use the condemnation of asylum seekers to strengthen their power and to reaffirm their image as providing protection and security as well as to mask failures" (p. 534). The culture of Israeli society and politics to describe asylum-seekers as "infiltrators" fosters a work environment, as Kei described, that is in a constant state of emergency (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). As Malkki (1994) argued, "multiculturalism derives, precisely, from the projection of an internationalist logic onto domestic cultural difference, providing a conceptual frame for ordering and domesticating the dangerous difference within that otherwise threatens the whole logic of the 'nation-state'" (p. 60). In Israel, this difference threatens the entire existence of Israel as a nation-state.

To explain the tension between Israel's democratic structures, its international commitments, and its exertion of power and control over entrance to its territory, Paz (2011) coined the term "ordered disorder." "Ordered disorder" can be described as the state of Israel's decision to make asylum claims unsustainable and a general sense of non-policy (Paz, 2011, p. 5). Israel's choice to create chaotic and ambiguous policies for asylum-seekers sends a very clear and unwelcoming message (Paz, 2011, p. 5).

> "Ordered disorder can also be perceived as a response to the challenges the refugees pose to what anthropologist Lisa Malkki (1995a; 1995b) calls the national order of things. Issues of sovereignty and nationalism constitute the regime of order and knowledge (Malkki 1995a, 5) that make-up the Israeli nation-state, are challenged by the subversion that asylum seekers create. Their liminal status threatens the perceived national order of things as they confront the state with their refugeehood. As Agamben (1995) puts it (in reference to Arendt (1978)), refugees represent a disquieting element…by breaking up the identity between man and citizen, between nativity and nationality, the refugee throws into crisis the original fiction of sovereignty. In the face of this symbolic threat, Israel has employed a range of specialised correctives (Malkki 1995a, 8) to restore the real national order of things" (Paz, 2011, p. 6).

Eritrean asylum-seekers challenge the national identity that Israel has created for itself as a nation-state. The state actively excludes asylum-seekers from Israeli society by creating a system of disorder. In doing so, Israel has created a political playing field in which NGOs are constantly fighting the oppressive and dominating nature of Israeli political society. NGOs cannot change Israel's national policies; therefore, NGOs are in a constant state of emergency, and the situation for asylum-seekers worsens everyday as the population continues to grow and struggle amidst nonexistent and non-supportive policies.

Misconceptions and Disconnects Between Clients and NGOs

Talmi-Cohn & Kassa (2022) use the term "legal liminality" to describe the conditions endured by asylum-seekers globally as they await final status determination (p. 253). Talmi-Cohn & Kassa (2022) emphasize that the "social, psychological, and economic impact of this

'liminality' is often exacerbated by the circumstances that forced them to emigrate and/or by traumatic experiences endured as they sought asylum" (p. 252). Both Kei and Bryan alluded to this idea in their interviews; Bryan referenced a specific story in which a woman was recalling her former enslavement (K. Ishii & B. Roby, personal communication, January 24, 2024). Eritrean asylum-seekers face trauma on their journeys to Israel, including Bedouin kidnappings, Sinai torture camps, and so on. Trauma makes it more difficult for asylum-seekers to feel a sense of agency in Israel. As Birger (2020) writes, "Despite evidence of strengths and resilience, their previous traumas, combined with post-migration stressors, the constantly changing policies and lack of access to rights and services, means that many face mental health and psycho-social challenges" (p. 220). Eritrean asylum-seekers arrive in Israel to realize that building a better life is nearly unachievable because of Israel's non-deportation and non-recognition policy. Eritrean asylum-seekers are stuck with the realization that they are unable to legally do anything unless Israel's domestic policies change. Asylum-seekers described their experiences in interviews as "life without living" and "life on hold" (Birger, 2020, p. 226). It is difficult for Eritrean asylum-seekers to feel they have agency when they experienced a traumatic journey only to end up in a country that limits their lives; trauma worsens Eritrean asylum-seekers' sense of hopelessness.

Eritrean asylum-seekers "feel a high degree of helplessness and great dependence on external parties to meet these needs; [which] makes the prospect of migrating to another country or even returning home all the more plausible" (Stephen & Schmautz, 2011, p. 17). Eritrean asylum-seekers rely on NGOs to help them achieve their goal of ending up in the U.S., Canada, or Europe because they feel helpless and do not understand the reality of achieving that goal. NGOs understand how difficult it is for Eritrean asylum-seekers to leave Israel and prioritize helping Eritrean asylum-seekers build their lives in Israel. A sense of helplessness creates a sense

of hopelessness for Eritrean asylum-seekers, placing added pressure on NGOs to better their situation. However, NGOs disagree with Eritrean asylum-seekers about what "better" is, and I argue that pressure mounts for NGOs because of this disconnect. Furthermore, the inability of NGOs to help Eritrean asylum-seekers relocate worsens their sense of hopelessness. If asylum-seekers feel that their "lives are not in their hands," then I argue that they feel that NGOs hold power over their lives (Birger, 2020, p. 226). Talmi-Cohn & Kassa (2022) found that, "According to the interviews, most asylum seekers perceive NGOs and the state as one and the same" (p. 256). Eritrean asylum-seekers engage directly with NGOs more often than they do the state, and NGOs help Eritrean asylum-seekers navigate state policies, visa applications, and so on. NGOs hold a lot of power, or expert authority, in their relationships with Eritrean asylum-seekers because they understand the laws and culture better than their clients. I conclude that confusion within the Eritrean asylum-seeking community about the difference between NGOs and the state is because NGOs are the institutions of power that Eritrean asylum-seekers most directly engage with. Included is a snippet from an interview with an asylum-seeker from Talmi-Cohn & Kassa's (2022) piece: "...I know my community. They don't understand what a nongovernmental organization is. We try to explain, but… they still don't understand. They think (the organization) is the government" (p. 256).

According to Stephen & Schmautz (2011), "...refugees also expect organizations to play a supplemental role to the government in terms of service provision and the addressing of needs. Eritrean asylum-seekers feel significant anger toward organizations for 'not doing anything,' despite possessing both the information and resources to actually do so. This being said, refugees appear to overestimate the capacities of organizations, as well as underestimate these organizations' financial and service-related limitations. Generally, refugees are neither aware of

the current existence and services of refugee organizations, nor are they clear about the specific roles and responsibilities organizations should have in order to ameliorate their conditions" (p. 16). From my research and interviews, I claim that Eritrean asylum-seekers often misunderstand the powers that NGOs have with the powers of the government. Kei mentioned how asylum-seekers often perceive those working at NGOs as "gatekeepers," withholding access to rights, education, jobs, and resettlement programs to Canada, Europe, and the U.S. (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). Kei further elaborates on the term "gatekeepers," writing in a blog post for the University of Manchester that, "Our clients' experiences reinforce the idea that they don't have any agency or accountability in this process and look to civil society, local government, or anyone who has status as the gatekeepers of their futures and hopes. They expect that if they wait and gain the favour of the 'right person,' they will get out of here and that until then, they are engaging with us in civil society as a means to that end. From my end, however, I'm painfully aware of how slim the chances are for them 'to get out' and how much work is involved in pushing for it" (Global Development Institute, 2023). It is not the role of NGOs to grant asylum; their role is to help Eritrean asylum-seekers overcome the barriers that government policies create. As Kei wrote in the same blog post, "We are limited in what we can tangibly do beyond advising, assisting, and offering logistical, financial, and emotional support to clients in their individual challenges navigating a liminal life, who themselves often look to us for much more than we can possibly provide" (Global Development Institute, 2023).

I find that this feeling of "helplessness" is not just felt by asylum-seekers; it is also felt by those working in the NGO space. Kei mentions how NGOs cannot change Israeli law; therefore, the situation for Eritrean asylum-seekers continues to worsen (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). While NGOs aid Eritrean asylum-seekers as best they can, NGOs ultimately

cannot change the political situation in Israel. Eritrean asylum-seekers experience helplessness because they are denied refugee status by the state. NGOs experience helplessness in the sense that they cannot grant Eritrean asylum-seekers refugee status. I argue that Eritrean asylum-seekers often do not understand that NGOs cannot grant them status and change their situation, and this misunderstanding creates misaligned expectations for the roles of NGOs. I find that Eritrean asylum-seekers think that NGOs have the power and authority to change their situation when only the state holds this power. Kei beautifully illustrates this disconnect for both civil society and asylum-seekers in a blog post addressing how to manage these different expectations:

> "We engage our clients in various activities and programs focused on education/empowerment as a means towards increasing their agency to support them in pursuing their dreams. Finding common ground and managing expectations in this context is, more often than not, a demoralising experience for everyone involved, as the reality of the situation does not inspire hope. We cannot make any promises nor guarantees, which is the only thing that our clients are seeking. Their resettlement is 100% out of our hands as civil society actors, but our clients have the impression that we hold the keys due to a lack of understanding of the process. Adding high levels of PTSD, varied levels of education and literacy, as well as vastly different standards of accountability to the mix, and the challenge of imagining a common narrative becomes virtually insurmountable" (Global Development Institute, 2023).

Another layer to this misalignment is that many Eritrean asylum-seekers do not view Israel as the final destination; therefore, it is often difficult for Eritrean asylum-seekers to focus on building a life in Israel when they want their life to be built elsewhere. Amitay (2023) mentions, "For African [asylum-seekers], Israel was perceived as a destination of last resort since refugees arriving there would not have the resources to proceed on to Europe or America" (p. 529). Both Kei and Bryan mentioned in their interviews that many Eritrean asylum-seekers want to end up in Canada, the U.S., or Europe (K. Ishii & B. Roby, personal communication, January 24, 2024). Bryan mentioned that most asylum-seekers wanted to go to university to have

a degree that would help in a country outside of Israel (B. Roby, personal communication, January 24, 2024). Kei provided an example of when an Eritrean parent wanted their child to learn English more than Hebrew because English is the language spoken in most countries desired for relocation. This frustrated Kei because it is important that the child succeeds in school in Israel where Hebrew is the spoken language (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). Eritrean asylum-seekers often view Israel as a step to building a life in an English-speaking country. Kei explained that "this is what they [Eritrean asylum-seekers] escaped a regime for" (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). While the priorities of Eritrean asylum-seekers are often to build a life in an English-speaking country, the priorities of NGOs are to help asylum-seekers build a life in Israel, and this often creates frustration and misunderstanding between NGOs and their clients. Furthermore, once Eritrean asylum-seekers arrive in Israel and are stuck in this liminal state for a time, they begin to realize how difficult their dream of attaining a life outside of Israel is, further contributing to Eritrean asylum-seekers' sense of hopelessness.

Kei believes that he will never be on the same page as his clients, and they will never have a mutual understanding of how to help one another (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). Therefore, he finds it helpful to "have a common third language that is tangible and measurable on both sides" (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). Kei exercises a give-and-take approach; he will agree to help an asylum-seeker with their goal, like learning English, and in turn, the asylum-seeker must agree to take a step toward assimilating in Israel, like meeting with Kei once a week to review visa applications (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024).

Kei dives deeper into this in a blog post for the Global Development Institute at the University of Manchester (2023). He wrote, "Balancing our clients' expectations and ours is an exercise of imagining a narrative together where we can agree on basic premises to discuss together as we try to mitigate our clients' lack of agency with our own limited agency as civil society workers" (Global Development Institute, 2023).

Conclusion

This project sought to understand how NGOs have shaped the experiences of Eritrean asylum-seekers living in Israel from 2007-2018 and how NGOs impact asylum-seekers' sense of agency and belonging. I find in my research that NGOs have greatly shaped the lived experiences of Eritrean asylum-seekers in Israel. The state of Israel's non-deportation policy allows Eritrean asylum-seekers to live in the country but denies them status. Consequently, Eritrean asylum-seekers rely heavily on NGOs to navigate bureaucratic challenges and Israeli culture. NGOs often provide support in terms of school tutoring, language, technology, visa applications, college applications, and so on.

It is clear from my research and interviews that a major challenge that NGOs face is managing expectations of the Eritrean asylum-seekers they work with. Kei wrote, "Our clients' experiences reinforce the idea that they don't have any agency or accountability in this process and look to civil society, local government, or anyone who has status as the gatekeepers of their futures and hopes" (Global Development Institute, 2023). According to the UNHCR (2024), "Since the handover of responsibility for RSD [Refugee Status Determination] from UNHCR to the Ministry of Interior in July 2009, refugee status has been granted in only 72 cases out of a total of 81,799 asylum applications received, meaning the recognition rate of refugees in Israel stands at less than 0.1% (last updated July 2020)." The state of Israel intentionally creates a cycle

of bureaucratic engagement by forcing Eritrean asylum-seekers to live with conditional visas that must be renewed every few months to manage and control asylum-seekers. The way that Eritrean asylum-seekers engage with the state reinforces a sense of hopelessness; Eritrean asylum-seekers have to repeat the visa renewal process every few months only to have their refugee status denied every time. This cycle reinforces the idea that Eritrean asylum-seekers do not have agency over their status, causing Eritrean asylum-seekers to rely on civil society for aid (Global Development Institute, 2023).

Additionally, I find that this cycle exacerbates the notion that Israel is a stepping stone towards Canada, the U.S., or Europe for many Eritrean asylum-seekers. Many Eritrean asylum-seekers came to Israel with the intent of ending up elsewhere, and the state of Israel's denial of their status only increases this desire. Civil society organizations recognize how difficult it is for this goal to be attained, and while NGOs will assist asylum-seekers with the application process for resettlement, civil society's goal, ultimately, is to help asylum-seekers have an equal footing in Israel. NGOs focus on the now, while asylum-seekers often focus on the future because the now feels hopeless. This difference in priorities creates a disconnect between NGOs and their clients. Furthermore, I find that this disconnect worsens feelings of hopelessness for those working at NGOs. NGOs are unable to fulfill the dreams of Eritrean asylum-seekers to end up elsewhere, making it difficult for those working at NGOs to feel positively about their impact.

The state of Israel takes away asylum-seekers' sense of agency by denying them status, leading Eritrean asylum-seekers to rely on NGOs for agency. NGOs contribute to asylum-seekers' sense of agency by providing services that empower them to build lives in Israel, giving them tools to gain control over their lives. However, Eritrean asylum-seekers do not want to stay in Israel, and, therefore, do not find the resources provided by NGOs fulfill their needs. If

Eritrean asylum-seekers do not want a life in Israel, it is difficult for Eritrean asylum-seekers to feel that they have agency because they do not have control over whether they stay in Israel.

NGOs operating in this space also have limited agency. The state of Israel's domestic policy greatly limits the impact that NGOs can have. NGOs can advise, assist, and offer logistical, financial, and emotional support for their clients (Global Development Institute, 2023). However, NGOs are not able to change Israeli law that denies asylum-seekers their status. Furthermore, NGOs have no control over the processes that resettle asylum-seekers to other countries. For example, while NGOs can help asylum-seekers apply for sponsorship in Canada, NGOs are not the Canadian government and do not decide who goes. Civil society workers must manage the expectations of clients with their own limited agency, and Eritrean asylum-seekers often do not seem to understand how the powers of NGOs are limited. Both Kei and Bryan referenced a sense of limited agency in their interviews. Bryan could not guarantee that the Eritrean asylum-seekers he worked with would gain admission into universities, and Kei cannot change Israel's policies that deny his clients refugee status.

I find that NGOs in Israel have formed a civil society to collaborate to advocate for the rights of Eritrean asylum-seekers and provide services that help asylum-seekers overcome the barriers created by Israeli policy that deny Eritrean asylum-seekers their status. Those working at NGOs described their experiences as both positive and negative. The work may feel defeating because NGOs cannot ensure that Eritrean asylum-seekers end up outside of Israel, and they also cannot change the policies that limit the lives of Eritrean asylum-seekers in Israel. However, both Kei and Bryan felt that their work had a positive impact and that the situation for Eritrean asylum-seekers would be worse without NGOs. Eritrean asylum-seekers have limited agency because the state denies them status, and NGOs have limited agency because they cannot change

the policies that deny asylum-seekers status. Until the state of Israel changes its domestic policy, the situation for both Eritrean asylum-seekers and civil society will continue to worsen, and neither will have true agency over their lives.

Chapter 5: Concluding Remarks and Reflections

Summary of Findings

This paper sought to answer the following questions: How have NGOs shaped the experiences of Eritrean asylum-seekers living in Israel from 2007-2018? How do employees and volunteers in the NGO sphere perceive their role in aiding the Eritrean asylum-seeking community? How do NGOs impact Eritrean asylum-seekers' sense of agency and belonging?

This paper found that NGOs greatly shaped the lived experiences of Eritrean asylum-seekers in Israel from 2007-2018 and that Eritrean asylum-seekers have also greatly shaped the lived experiences of Israeli citizens working at NGOs. As the needs of Eritrean asylum-seekers continues to grow, the aid that NGOs provide becomes increasingly important. Kei described his work at ALEF as a "constant state of emergency" (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024). The situation for Eritrean asylum-seekers continues to worsen as the population continues to grow, but the state of Israel has not changed its policies; therefore, the situation for NGOs continues to worsen. NGOs and Eritrean asylum-seekers shape the lived experiences of one another as they navigate political barriers that create this constant state of emergency. Eritrean asylum-seekers rely on NGOs to navigate Israeli society and limitations of their status. The experience of working at an NGO becomes increasingly stressful and difficult as the situation for Eritrean asylum-seekers continues to worsen in Israel. Kei explains how he has "eliminated hope" to overcome burn-out from his role as Director of ALEF because "if there's no hope, there's no disappointment" (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024).

My research and interviews revealed that NGOs believe that their role is to help Eritrean asylum-seekers gain equal footing in Israeli society. Israel denies Eritrean asylum-seekers access to the refugee status that they should receive according to the 1951 Convention. NGOs see their

role as working to overcome these political barriers and helping Eritrean asylum-seekers access rights in Israel. Eritrean asylum-seekers do not perceive the role of NGOs in the same way; many Eritrean asylum-seekers expect NGOs to help them leave Israel for an English-speaking country, and many Eritrean asylum-seekers do not understand the limitations that NGOs face. NGOs cannot change the laws that deny Eritrean asylum-seekers rights; however, I argue that Eritrean asylum-seekers do not understand this and view NGOs as "gatekeeping" access to rights and resources. To cope with this disconnect, ALEF uses a give-and-take approach with their clients; both parties have to compromise with one another in order to make progress to achieve both of their goals (K. Ishii, personal communication, January 24, 2024).

The disconnect between NGOs and their clients creates a disconnect when defining agency. Amitay (2023) defines agency as an individual's belief in their ability to direct their life toward desired goals and aspirations despite severe life circumstances and trajectories (p. 528). In this context, the agency of NGOs and the agency of Eritrean asylum-seekers are interconnected and shape one another. NGOs work diligently to build Eritrean asylum-seekers' sense of agency in Israel. NGOs work to help Eritrean asylum-seekers feel capable of directing their lives in Israel. However, agency has a different meaning for NGOs and their clients. For many Eritrean asylum-seekers, having agency means being able to direct their life toward their goal of ending up in an English-speaking country, not Israel. Building the agency of Eritrean asylum-seekers is further complicated by the idea that NGOs lack agency themselves; NGOs cannot change the policies of the state, and, therefore, are limited in how they can aid Eritrean asylum-seekers.

Contributions, Limitations, and Recommendations for Future Research

This thesis provides firsthand perspectives about the experience of working with Eritrean asylum-seekers at an NGO in Israel. While other pieces of research focus mostly on the lived experiences of Eritrean asylum-seekers, this paper adds to the conversation by focusing on the lived experiences of NGO volunteers and employees and how their experiences shape their relationships with their clients. Understanding how NGOs mediate relationships with their clients is crucial to understanding Eritrean asylum-seekers' sense of agency and lived experiences in Israel.

Eritrean asylum-seekers began arriving in Israel around 2006; therefore, the topics discussed in this thesis are relatively new (Hamishmony-Yaffe & Mesghanna, 2015). While this thesis proves that a lot of research has already been done on this topic, it is an issue that must continue to be studied. The population of Eritrean asylum-seekers living in Israel continues to grow as Eritrean asylum-seekers continue to live in the country, have children, etc. When a child is born to a stateless person in Israel, the child is neither a citizen of Eritrea nor Israel. Therefore, as long as Israel's domestic policy does not change, the number of stateless people living in Israel will continue to grow, creating a serious humanitarian crisis. Furthermore, as the population of Eritrean asylum-seekers continues to grow, pressure on NGOs will continue to build to support this population. It is crucial that this topic continues to be studied and researched in order to stress its importance and spark change within Israel.

Limitations on time and resources prevented me from interviewing more individuals and organizations. Further research on this topic should include interviews with employees and volunteers from other NGOs in Israel. These interviews should also inquire about the relationships between the various NGOs and how they work with one another. Furthermore,

interviews with Eritrean asylum-seekers about their relationships with NGOs should be included in further projects to better understand how both parties perceive their relationship with one another. This research is crucial to better understand how NGOs can best support Eritrean asylum-seekers in Israel as the situation continues to worsen. Additionally, I was unable to include current events in this paper due to constraints on time and breadth. Research revealing how the current war in Israel has impacted the lives of Eritrean asylum-seekers is important to ensure that their voices are not forgotten.

Final Remarks

I find in this paper that NGOs greatly shaped the lives of Eritrean asylum-seekers living in Israel from 2007-2018. The non-deportation policy practiced by the state of Israel has caused the Eritrean asylum-seeking population to rely heavily on NGOs for aid. While NGOs make a great impact, their goals often do not align with those of their clients, and their impact is limited by state policies.

Both NGOs and Eritrean asylum-seekers live in liminality. NGOs operate in a constant state of emergency, unable to grant Eritrean asylum-seekers status until the state of Israel changes its domestic policies; therefore, NGOs operate in a state of waiting. Eritrean asylum-seekers live their lives in a state of in-between, exiled from Eritrea and not recognized as refugees by the state of Israel. Until the state of Israel changes its domestic policy, the cycle of hopelessness will continue for both NGOs and Eritrean asylum-seekers, both living in a constant state of liminality.

Image of plants potted in plastic water bottles in ALEF's community garden.

Image of the end of summer picnic at ALEF.

Image of a hanging plant holder made from a plastic water bottle at ALEF's office.

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