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Ethnocentrism, universalism & refugees' social rights

Ethnocentrism, universalism & refugees' social rights: The Israeli perspective

Abstract

This article is a pilot study in which we analyzed interviews with 16 inhabitants of the Tel-Aviv area, we show that Israeli adults' views of refugees are shaped by the political discourse of threat and otherness. Yet, the findings also suggest that individuals may resist the prevailing discourse and advocate for refugees' inclusion within Israeli society through the welfare regime. Thus, a gap is revealed between two perspectives which reflect current conflicting perceptions of social inclusion, the immigration regime, social rights in regards to African refugees. and the character of current-day Israeli society.

Key words: refugees, social inclusion, social-rights, universalism, ethnocentrism

Introduction

This article begins with a brief review of the literature pertaining to refugees as a global phenomenon related to social policy and refugees within the Israeli context specifically. It then presents the study's methodology and findings and concludes with a discussion of the findings and their limitations.

Asylum seekers, Refugees and the welfare state

Refugees who seek refuge in European countries as well as in other Westernized countries, including Canada and Israel, have become an international phenomenon that challenges current social frameworks, intergroup relationships and political arrangements (Hatton, 2017). For most refugees the point of departure is European welfare regimes (Hatton, 2017).

The refugee influx that occurred during the last decade, in which refugees from the Middle East, Afghanistan and Africa arrived in Europe and other Westernized countries, is considered to be the largest since the end of WWII. Yet, in the past two years the flow of refugees has declined, suggesting that the 'refugee crisis' may have ended (UNHCR, 2019).

Asylum seekers and refugees are legally considered to be in two different categories, each endowed with different social status and rights (Harvey, 2015). A refugee is legally defined under the 1951 United Nations Convention and the 1967 Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, which outlines the rights, protections and legal obligations of states to protect them (UNHCR, 2019). Refugees that are given formal recognition of their plight are entitled to social benefits and health insurance, while asylum-seekers, who have applied for refugee status, and are waiting for their status to be determined (Kritzman-Amir, 2015), are usually not given full social rights, depending on each state's policy (Harvey, 2015). In Germany for example, refugees arriving in Germany are allocated to federal states, according to the states' financial means and population. For Eritreans, refugee status recognition rate stands on 92 percent. Access to welfare services and health care is entitled but with certain restrictions **(The European**

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Commission, 2016). Italy, however, officially seeks to confine, isolate and deport refugees (UNHCR 2019).

Since the first declaration of refugee's rights in 1951 (UNHCR 2011), the right to seek asylum has been seen as an articulation of the human rights paradigm (Gibney, 2004). The basic mechanism of protection includes the non-*refoulement* obligation, which prohibits the return of refugees to their countries of origin and is not confined to the provisions of the Refugee Convention or to refugee law and practice (Harvey, 2015).

The arrival of refugees in European host countries has had socio-political effects on host countries that are related to refugees' social needs, cultural differences and refugees' effects on host countries' economies (European Commission, 2016). Studies show that while refugees are often able to economically integrate in their host countries, social integration can be more difficult for them for various reasons (OECD, 2017; Trauner, 2016). Western countries vary in their approach to the incorporation of refugees into their societies (Trauner, 2016). **German policy toward refugees, for example, has been relatively inclusive, whereas some other countries, like Greece, placed refugees in isolated camps (Schmidt-Catran & Spies, 2016). Additionally, the economic, cultural and social challenges that the arrival of refugees pose for host countries sometimes lead to the proliferation of a nationalist and ethnocentric discourse that is related to hostility toward social minorities, including refugees (Schuster, 2010). This rhetoric opposes refugees' eligibility for welfare and health services (Long, 2013).** Based on the fact that historically, welfare regimes were related to citizenship and to the expansion of social rights within the nation state, right–wing politicians all over Europe call for limited access to welfare services for refugees, who are seen as aliens and therefore not included within the scope of European nation-states' welfare regimes (Boomers & Geddes, 2005). Thus, refugees' needs for social and health services, are seen as challenging the basic function of the welfare state – which is still viewed as a mechanism of citizenship that provides benefits for state's citizens within the boundaries of the nation-state ((Esping-Andersen, 1996; Marshal, 1950). Accordingly, the ability of the Western European welfare regimes, which have been negatively affected by the rise of Neo-Liberalism, to embrace immigrants and transcend the limitations of citizenship is limited (Geddes, 2003). Thus, the inclusion of refugees

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within current Western European welfare regimes presents new challenges for European's traditional welfare perceptions and frameworks (Lipsmeyer et al, 2011).

African refugees within an ethnocentric society: The Israeli case

Since the mid-2000s significant flows of African refugees, mainly from Sudan and Eritrea, have reached Israel (ASAF, 2018). Since 2012, with the erection of a fence along the Egyptian border, the arrival of African refugees has almost completely stopped. As of January 2019, 33,697 refugees reside in Israel; at least half of them dwell in the Tel-Aviv area, mainly in poor residential neighborhoods (ASAF, 2019). Most (92%) originate from Eritrea and Sudan (Population and Immigration Authority, 2017), countries known for severe human rights violations. These people are given Temporary Group Protection (TGP) status, which grants them immunity from deportation, in line with the principle of *non-refoulement* (Kritzman-Amir, 2015).

Although Israel is a signatory to the UN Convention for the protection of refugees, Israel refuses to grant refugee status to these immigrants. As of 2019 only one refugee from Sudan and 10 people from Eritrea were granted refugee status (ASAF, 2019). Another 800 refugees were granted temporary –stay visas that must be renewed every year. The rest are granted 'Temporary Group Protection', comprising only the right to stay in the country, while excluding almost completely their rights to health and social services or work permits (ASAF, 2019).

The Israeli hegemonic political discourse, mainly from right wing politicians, exhibits a hostile approach toward refugees, labeling them as 'infiltrators' and thus contributing to their marginalization and otherness (Kritzman-Amir & Shumacher, 2012; Paz, 2011). The discourse of 'inflators' is a central means in the othering process of African refugees through which they are constructed as violating moral and cultural codes, and therefore, are viewed as 'undeserving' (Ajzenstadt & Shapira, 2012; Yaron et al, 2013). Further, a discourse has developed that emphasizes the competitive relations between local citizens and refugees, who are viewed as endangering the social, economic and cultural safety of residents of the poor neighborhoods in which refugees reside (Ajzenstadt & Shapira, 2012; Sabar, 2009). The anti-infiltration law that was passed in 1954,

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which was originally designed to secure Israel's right to protect itself, was expanded in 2008 to include refugees within its scope - allowing the state to hold African refugees in administrative detention, that is, to detain them without trial or even an indictment (Sabar & Tsurkov, 2015). The Holot detention center was built close to the Egyptian border to hold refugees who arrive in Israel (Kritzman-Amir, 2015). In November 2017 the Israeli government decided on mass deportation of refugees to Uganda or Ruanda. This plan provoked a social dispute as some favored this policy while others resisted it, using the memory of the Holocaust as a moral justification for their resistance (ASAF, 2018).

Israel's leaders' restrictive attitude toward African refugees can be understood in the context of Israel's ethno-national immigration regime. Israel's migration regime is based on ethno-national concepts of citizenship, reflected in the Law of Return, which allows selective immigration for Jews and their children and grandchildren only. Based on that, refugees are constructed as ultimate others, who pose a threat to the Jewish state and to Jews' own right to secured citizenship (Yaron et al., 2013). This perception leads to systemic institutionalized persecution of refugees, including their detention and deportation (Sabar & Tsurkov, 2015). Thus, the design and establishment of regulations, control mechanisms and penal strategies such as exclusion, detention and deportation aims to keep the states' 'Jewish Identity' intact via the exclusion of refugees and their construction as threatening 'others' (Ajzenstadt & Shapira, 2012; Yaron et al, 2013).

The ethno-national character of the Israeli immigration regime as well as the "order disorder" (the unorganized character of policy) (Kalir, 2015) characteristic of Israel's policy toward refugees means they are denied access to social benefits, leaving only NGOs to address their needs. The welfare ministry's assistance to refugees is limited to victims of severe domestic violence, as well as people who have been officially recognized as victims of human trafficking. This situation contributes to the preservation of the refugees' marginal social positioning and prevents their integration within society. Refugees' children and unaccompanied refugee minors are the exception, since they have partial access to public health services, child protection services and the public education system (ASAF, 2019).

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Until recently, most Israeli research on refugees focused on refugees' lived experiences in the context of an oppressive socio-political reality, past traumatic events and psychosocial hardships (Shamai & Amir, 2016). Other studies examine the effects of trauma, loss and economic and social hardships on refugees' coping skills, competency and agency (Lavie-Ajayi & Slonim-Nevo, 2016). Other studies broaden their outlook as they examine the effects of social discourse on social policy pertaining to refugees (Cantti, et al., 2016; Duman, 2015; Hercowitz-Amir et al, 2017). A study conducted by Tartakovsky & Walsh (2016) focused on a particular group's perceptions toward refugees - social workers' perceptions - and found that despite the prevalence of negative attitudes toward refugees among Israeli adults, social workers tend to perceive this population more positively than the general population. Yet, to date no studies have examined specifically the impact of political discourse on attitudes regarding refugees' social rights. This study aims to fill this gap in knowledge by exploring the perceptions of Israeli adults from various social backgrounds who reside in the Tel-Aviv area regarding refugees' rights to social benefits. Examining this may provide insight into the ways individuals from the majority group perceive the rights of deprived social groups in relation to dominant discourse related to immigration regimes. This leads to the following research questions: how refugees are perceived by Israeli adults from the Tel-Aviv area? how is refugees' lack of entitlement is perceived by Israeli adults from the Tel-Aviv area? How do these perceptions reaffirm or alter dominant concepts of "otherness" of refugees?

Method

This is a pilot study that was conducted in order to evaluate the feasibility of a large-scale study of the phenomenon (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Grounded in phenomenology, the current study focuses on the subjective accounts and meanings associated with the phenomenon under study. The basic assumption that guides phenomenology is that there is no objective reality and that human beings aspire to understand, interpret and give meaning to the world around them in a totally subjective manner (Strauss & Corbin, 2008). Along this line of reasoning, the current study aims to analyze the accounts adults from the Tel-Aviv area give of African

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refugees' eligibility for social rights, as they are reflected in the narratives they create. **Thus, the present study is a phenomenological study since it aims to explore the subjective meanings ascribed to refugees in the eyes of the participants.** The goal is to expand theoretical understanding of social integration of refugees, welfare and immigration policies and their relation to the hegemonic discourse and policy toward refugees. This may help identify issues that may be relevant for a larger-scale study.

Participants and Sampling

The researchers used convenience sampling, with the lead researcher, who lives in the Tel Aviv region, finding participants among her acquaintances. Convenience sampling was used as this type of sampling is suitable for pilot research (Creswell, 2012). The participants were recruited by the first author of this paper, according to her personal acquaintance with the participants, as all participants were acquaintances of her. The participants all lived in the Tel-Aviv areas, since it is the area were most refugees live. Of all participants only four lived in the center-north Tel-Aviv, which is considered as more affluent environment and whose inhabitants are considered as secular and educated. The rest lived in nearby outskirts that are considered to be less affluent and whose inhabitants are religious and are less educated. It is hoped that a broader study will be conducted that will not be limited to this specific area, but rather will include Israeli adults from around the country. Participants were heterogeneous in terms of education, occupation, age, political orientation and socio-economic status. The participants were men and women, secular and religious Jews, ages 27-66. The nature of the contact that the interviewees have with refugees varies. Thirteen participants have met refugees occasionally. Half of them (mainly those who dwell in the non-affluent outskirts of Tel Aviv) dwell next to refugees. Two participants volunteer with refugees and two participants have close relationships with refugees due to their work in the education system. These four participants have a closer knowledge and much more intense contacts with refugees than the other participants.

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Instrument

Data collection was done through semi-structured interviews that included open-ended questions on the central topics under study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This helped the interviewees reveal their individual perceptions and the meanings they construct regarding asylum seekers and refugees. With the participants' permission, all interviews were audio-taped and fully transcribed verbatim. Interviews were conducted in locations chosen by the participants, primarily in their homes, and lasted about one hour. The objective of the interviews was to explore and understand the interviewees' perspective on the phenomenon under study and to obtain the maximum amount of relevant information possible (Patton, 2015). In addition, a demographic questionnaire was administered to collect socio-demographic data. **The interviews asked the participants to share their thoughts regarding the phenomenon of refugees (e. g: "What does 'refugee' mean to you"?"); about their perceptions regarding African refugees (e.g.: "can you please tell me what you think about African refugees?"); about their thoughts and accounts related to refugees who arrive in Israel (e.g.: "can you share with me your thoughts related to the refugees in Israel?");their personal experiences and encounters with African refugees (e.g.: "have you ever meet a refugee? Can you describe your encounters with refugees?"); their perceptions regarding the 'right' social policy toward refugees (e.g.: "can you tell me how you think Israel should cope with refugees?" "do you think refugees should get health insurance and welfare benefits?"); their opinions related to the deportation of refugees and the connection between deportation and the Jewish history; their attitudes related to the social, cultural and political implications of accepting/excluding refugees from Israeli society; and the relationships between the policy toward refugees and the policy toward other minority groups and the meanings they ascribe to these relationships. The questions were open-ended, allowing participants to spontaneously raise other topics.**

Interviews were conducted in the beginning of 2018, during the campaign to deport refugees. The interviews were conducted by the first author of this manuscript, who was involved in the anti-deportation struggle. The other authors also resisted the deportation and chose to conduct this study as a part of their interest in this particular population.

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Data Analysis, Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

The study was conducted using the thematic analysis method (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Patton, 2015). In the first stage, the researchers acquired familiarity with the data by reading the interviews several times. In the second stage, we began open coding, which facilitated the identification of basic units of meaning (Creswell, 2012). Then, links and hierarchies among and within the codes were established using axial coding (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). As part of the effort to increase the trustworthiness of the study we employed peer review with faculty colleagues, full transparency regarding all research processes, quotations from the participants as well as reflexive thinking that was used by the researchers to gain a better understanding of the effects that their personal concepts, values, and social positioning might have on the research process (Patton, 2015). The current study addressed ethical considerations by leaning on ethical principles of consent, confidentiality and anonymity (Patton, 2015). The interviews were conducted only after the interviewees were fully informed about the study's goals and process and gave their informed consent.

Results: Between hostility and acceptance

Two themes were identified from the analysis. The first theme - 'Threat, criminalization and otherness' - reflects the participants' opinions of the idea that refugees are a threat. The second theme, 'Between ethnocentrism and universalism,' focuses on various perspectives regarding refugees' eligibility for social rights.

Threat, criminalization and otherness

This theme comprises participants' thoughts regarding refugees as others. These thoughts are influenced by the hegemonic discourse regarding refugees as a threat. This process highlights the effect of social and political discourse in shaping attitudes and accounts related to social minority groups.

Accordingly, 'criminal' was the main category that could be identified in the accounts of these participants. This category was directed toward emphasizing the threats refugees allegedly pose to society. These views were anchored in the social discourse that shapes the views of refugees, constructing them as the ultimate threat to

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the social order. Yardena's words demonstrate how the common discourse of threat affects her perceptions of refugees:

'They are frightening... They are different from us, they are thieves and drug addicts and murderers and they bring crime to their neighborhoods' (Yardena, a 50 year old single mother).

Other participants stress the motif of 'a disease', pointing to the alleged risks that accompany the arrival of refugees:

'They bring up with them contagious diseases such as AIDS. Who needs them with all those frightening diseases?' (Nurit, a 59 year old hairdresser).

Nurit views refugees as threatening the physical existence of society. The motif of 'a disease' evokes demonic images of an ongoing crisis that poses a threat to public health. Other participants refer to the refugees as 'migrant workers', thus portraying them as voluntary migrants who emigrated for economic reasons. This approach diminishes the hardships that accompany the forced migration of refugees:

'All these people who arrive at Israel, why don't they stay in Egypt? They come here because they are hungry and they want to work here and to send money to their families in Africa. They are not refugees, they just want to improve their economic situation and to enjoy our welfare system' (Adir, a 61-year-old dentist).

Adir's words demonstrate how defining refugees as 'migrant workers' delegitimizes refugees' claims for asylum, by devaluating the traumatic context of their immigration and their claims for protection. Furthermore, because they enter illegally through the Egyptian border, African refugees are labeled as criminals. This label is influenced by the political discourse which uses a criminalizing rhetoric. The labeling rhetoric leads Or also to refer to refugees as criminals, as follows:

I wouldn't like to live next to them because they are violent and drug abusers and they are criminals.

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Interviewer: How do you know that they are criminals?

> I read in the newspaper that they are law offenders and that they use drugs
> and drink a lot of alcohol. That is why I am afraid of them. I am afraid because
> I think they are criminals (Or, a 30 year old computer technician)

This dialogue demonstrates how the hegemonic discourse contributes to the public image of the refugees as a threat. Yet, other participants (6 participants) stress the 'asylum' motif in their accounts. It seems that these participants emphasize motifs of 'human rights' and 'personal misery' that contradict the dominant discourse related to this group of people:

> The political discourse is reflected in the rhetoric of threat that criminalizes
> and stigmatizes them. Yet, they are innocent and vulnerable people. The
> political discourse dehumanizes them and it contributes to the indifference and
> to the organized violence against these people' (Yoni, a 50 year old computer
> engineer)

Yoni criticizes the hegemonic discourse of a 'threat' and argues that this discourse is related to intergroup struggles within a conflictual and stratified Israeli society. Some participants, like Yoni, link the hegemonic discourse of refugees as a threat to the labeling and stigmatizing of other minority groups. The negative discourse toward refugees and their construction as 'others' is seen as mirroring the social process of de-legitimization and persecution of other minority groups:

> 'Those who speak against asylum speakers also speak against migrant
> workers, Palestinians, against gay men and against left wing activists…
> against all the others who do not conform to the mainstream norm…'(Yoni).

Tova echoes Yoni, viewing this process critically: as a means to preserve the state's control over "undesired" minority groups. Thus, the rhetoric of threat is viewed as an institutionalized means to preserve existing social power relations:

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'Israeli society is very stratified and that is reflected in the social attitude towards asylum seekers. The only unifying element in Israeli society is the hatred against the other - whether the other is an Arab or an asylum seeker. Hatred is prevalent mainly among the disadvantaged groups of society. The residents of these neighborhoods are not educated and they do not understand that the government which neglects them is to blame for their plight, not the refugees' (Tova, a 30 year old teacher).

Tova reflects critically on contemporary social tensions and conflicts that shape the discourse toward refugees. Her account suggests that the stigmatization of refugees helps to perpetuate social hierarchies that construct citizenship according to ethnocentric categorization. This categorization becomes a means of inclusion/exclusion within the collective that marks individuals' and groups' eligibility for social rights.

Between ethnocentrism and universalism

This theme focuses on the participants' various perspectives in regards to refugees' right to social benefits. Our analysis suggests that participants who emphasize ethno-national aspects as central to the belonging in society tend to disagree that refugees have a right to social benefits. Participants, for whom inclusion in society is based on universal ideas such as human rights, call for equal access to social services for refugees in order to improve their social integration. Leaning on ethno-national perception, Adir, for example, claims that ethno-national factors should be the only criteria for inclusion within society. Adir expresses a wish for a homogeneous society, in which the dominant ethno-national majority (e.g.: the Jewish majority) shapes the social character of society according to its cultural norms. This ethnocentric prism defines Israel as a 'Jewish state', thus excluding all other people whom are not included within the ethno–national definition of a 'Jew':

'Israel is a Jewish state. Those who are not Jews are not entitled to live here. The African refugees are Muslims or idol worshippers and therefore they cannot live here and they cannot be entitled to social services or health care services here. This is a Jewish state' (Adir, a 61 year old dentist).

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Omri, an engineer from Tel Aviv, agrees with Adir, saying:

> 'In order to be entitled to social services they have to be citizens and in order
> to be citizens they must be Jewish. This is a Jewish state' (Omri a 29 year old
> engineer)

These viewpoints resemble the political discourse of some right wing politicians
that links the right to social benefits and ethno-national factors. Alongside with
disapproving the acceptance of non-Jews into the Israeli society, some of the claim
that social rights are articulations of national identities. It appears that when
nationality, religion and citizenship are seen as intertwined, lack of national belonging
may be perceived as impending eligibility for social benefits. Furthermore, based on
the ethno-national approach, refugees are seen as endangering the national character
of Israeli society. Their 'otherness' is related not only to personal threat but also to
national threats:

> 'Not only do we have to cope with Palestinian terrorists, but we also have to
> cope with Muslim immigrants from Africa. They are Muslims and therefore
> they identify with the Palestinians and maybe some of them are terrorists.
> Therefore they should never be entitled to anything here' (Niva, a 66 year old
> pensioner).

Other participants presented a more universalistic approach toward the eligibility for
'social rights':

> 'I am an atheist. Therefore, the concept of a Jewish state is not that important
> to me. That is why I am against The Law of Return. There should be other
> criteria for immigration, for example if someone is a refugee… I believe that
> refugees and migrant workers should be granted citizenship… Besides I am
> against the concept of nation states' (Joe, a 52 year old artist).

Joe challenges the national basis for social rights as he calls for a fundamental change
in the concept of the nation state. The universal prism of human rights is accompanied

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by a challenge to the nation-state as the ultimate definer of social belonging. Based on that approach, refugees are seen as eligible for social benefits and services.

Other participants cite religious imperatives when calling for a more inclusive policy towards refugees. Yoni argues against the deportation of refugees based on his interpretation of the religious imperative, as follows: 'According to the Torah we must accept the foreigner' (Yoni).

Moreover, the collective memory of the Holocaust is revealed as leading some of the participants to exhibit a universal approach toward refugees. Zila connects the need to assist refugees to the collective memory of the Holocaust, recalling her family's story of persecution during the Nazi occupation of France:

'My family members were saved by a local peasant who hid them from the Nazis. Because of him all my sisters and my mother survived the Holocaust. This leads me to the question of whether I will have enough courage to save these refugees from being sent to their deaths' (Zila, a 65 year old volunteer with refugees' children).

Leaning on the collective memory of racism and holocaust, Tova also connects the deportation of refugees to the plight of other minority groups in Israeli society:

'I think that there is a connection between all the persecutions and all the incitements of the government. Those who incite against [the refugees] will eventually incite against me because I demonstrate against the government. Therefore, their struggle is also my struggle' (Tova).

Despite their differences of opinion, participants present a unified perspective in regards to refugees' children and unaccompanied minors. All the participants advocated for their right to welfare, education and health services. Children and unaccompanied minors were addressed through the universalistic approach by all participants:

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'Children, they are not to blame… poor children… let them learn here … what's wrong? They deserve to go to school here… they are helpless because they are children…we should help them and grant them all the rights, let them have equal rights….to go to school, to have access to health services, because they are children, they are helpless and most of them were born here and because of that they should have equal rights because we should not discriminate between children' (Ruthi, a kindergarten worker).

Niva, who is against endowing adult refugees with recognition and social rights and views them in a stereotypical way, favors giving refugees' children with recognition as refugees and social and health rights. Niva, like all other participants who talk against African refugees, distinguishes between adult refugees and their children. For her children are victims and therefore should be given more assistance than adults:

'For me children are children are children. They are always innocent regardless of their country of origin and national belonging. They live here, study here, have friends here…some of them were even born here… we must give them full access to social rights, just because of their young age… just because they are children' (Niva, a 66 year old pensioner)

All 16 participants embraced a universalistic approach toward refugees' children, while only some participants embraced a universalistic approach toward all refugees. For them being 'human' is the major criterion for social inclusion and for social rights:

'These people are human beings and this should be the main criteria for their entitlement for social services. As a human being I think these human beings should get all the benefits they need. This will lead to more social pluralism and liberalism and ultimately it will make Israel a better place for all of us…'(Nir)

Our analysis shows that the participants' views regarding refugees' eligibility for social benefits are varied. While some of them stress ethno-national factors as a basis for eligibility, others take a universalistic approach. These participants challenge the official exclusionist policy that is based on Zionist ideology. Refugees' children and

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unaccompanied minors are the only group that all participants relate to using a universalistic approach. This approach acknowledges their social rights, challenging the particularistic, ethnocentric discourse which relates to refugees as aliens. The universal approach toward refugees' children reflects the central social positioning of children within Israeli society. Thus, affecting the participants to exhibit a more universal approach toward refugees' children.

Discussion

This study presented the perceptions of Jewish Israeli residents of the Tel Aviv area regarding African refugees' eligibility for social rights and their integration in Israeli society. The study demonstrates that these perceptions are shaped by a political discourse that constructs African refugees as the ultimate 'others'. This discourse is embedded within the hegemonic concept of 'entitlement', in which entitlement is constructed as an articulation of the Zionist ideology. As a result a 'hierarchy of entitlements' is created, through which the ethno-national criteria is perceived as the major legitimate criteria for eligibility for full social rights and for inclusion within society (Ben-Porat & Turner, 2011). Furthermore, the ethnocentric discourse amplifies the stigmatization and criminalization of African refugees, who are constructed as abject others who threaten the ethno-national (i.e the Jewish) character of the collective (Ajzenstadt & Shapira, 2012; Sabar, 2009). **The study suggests that the participants' accounts are shaped in a political context. This context includes xenophobic, nationalistic and ethnocentric discourse. The participants present two contradictory perceptions of the hegemonic discourse regarding refugees and 'entitlements'. On the one hand, some of the participants echo the dominant ideology, viewing social rights and ethno-national belonging as contingent upon each other. Leaning on that perception, they contribute to their temporary, fragile social positioning and to their exclusion from Israeli society.** On the other hand, other participants challenge the hegemonic discourse and construct 'entitlement' as a universal category as they disentangle the connection between social entitlements, nationality and citizenship (Peled, 2011). Accordingly, 'entitlement' is situated within the human rights paradigm, which views social rights as universal. **This perspective undermines the status of ethno-national identity as central component of eligibility for social (as well as other) rights - thus granting African**

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refugees, as well as other minorities, access to social and human rights and providing them with an opportunity for inclusion within Israeli society. The participants who advocate for a universal approach pose a challenge to the dominant discourse. In doing so, these participants subvert basic concepts and values of social inclusion related to minority groups within Israeli society. Furthermore, these participants grant African refugees with recognition of their vulnerability and their psychological, social, economic and political hardships. African refugees are constructed as victims of persecution and trauma. It is important to note that the participants' attitudes were not related to their religious, ethnic or environmental belonging. Thus, suggesting that Israeli public views of refugees is linked mainly to the political discourse of refugees and less to contextual elements (e.g.: religious, economic, environmental etc.).

These findings highlight the effect of political discourse on shaping individuals' perceptions of minority groups (Berry, 2012). The negative discourse toward refugees is led by politicians that shape public's perceptions of threat that mediate individuals' willingness to share their national benefits with refugees. Yet the findings also shed light on the ability of individuals to resist the dominant discourse and to undermine the power of the state that is articulated through social and immigration regimes. The challenge to dominant concepts of immigration, welfare and belonging subverts the designated role of governmentality in service of ethno-national ideology (Gibney, 2004; Pobjoy, 2010). In the Israeli context, the gap between the two perspectives, the ethnocentric and the universalistic, mirrors broader social disputes related to the means of inclusion/exclusion within Israel's stratified society (Ben-Porat & Turner, 2011). These findings are relevant to social workers' practice because social workers function as the forefront of the welfare system. Furthermore, as social workers' professional mission includes confronting discrimination and racism, Israeli social workers who work in NGOs with African refugees function as advocates for their rights. Thus, offering a glimpse of hope to this oppressed group of people as well as challenging basic concepts of their own society that exclude other minority groups as well (Strier & Breshtling, 2016; Tartakovsky & Walsh, 2016).

Implications for social work practice

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Accepting the viewpoint that social work should embrace the struggle against racism and discrimination as a professional practice, we argue that social workers should intervene at the macro level to advocate for the human and social rights of this particular group of people. Accordingly, social workers should participate in public struggles to include refugees in welfare and health services. Furthermore, social work education should embrace context-informed perspectives as the basis of its professional knowledge (Nadan, 2017; Valtonen, 2008). **At the meso level- Social workers continue working closely with community leaders and other service providers in the community, such as: health care providers, educators etc.' in order to promote the acceptance and integration of refugees. At the micro level social work practice should establish therapeutic relationships with refugee clients that are based on partnership and on mutual learning. By using personal, group, and community interventions social workers may help refugee clients to cope with the stressors of their lives and gain a sense of competency and agency. Strengths, limitations & suggestions for further studies**

The present study contributes to the understanding of social perceptions of refugees' rights as a contextual phenomenon that is influenced by dominant discourse as well as welfare and immigration regimes. It also demonstrates how terms such as 'refugee crisis' evoke contradictory reactions and viewpoints that reflect a dispute between ethnocentric and universalistic perceptions related to the inclusion of minority groups within society. Yet, as this is a pilot study it has been conducted on a small sample. Therefore its findings are very limited. The study is also limited to the Israeli political and cultural context, though certain aspects may be similar to other contexts as well. Therefore further research is needed, based on a broader sample of participants, from a larger area. In addition, this study does not criticize the concept of universalism - which often refers to middle-class, gender-based, Western values. A critical analysis of this concept as used in regards to African refugees is beyond the scope of this article and should be addressed in other articles.

Based on the current study's findings we have developed a questionnaire. We hope to expand the insights gained from this exploratory study by addressing this topic in future studies using this questionnaire in larger samples of Israeli **adults from other areas in Israel and from heterogeneous backgrounds in terms of education, class division, professional orientation , ethnicity and religious affiliation. We also**

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hope to address this subject in comparative studies, using mixed method approach in other cultural and national settings as well.

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