

Because Immigration Reform is such a complex issue, we suggest visiting the following websites — associated with speakers for the *Sh'ma*-JCC Forum on Immigration — for further exploration:

hias.org
pjalliance.org
manhattan-institute.org

independent kingdom. They have a unique language that is not spoken anywhere else. They have a great sense of social solidarity reinforced by their Folkekirke (Lutheran Evangelic People's Church) and have created a prosperous, egalitarian, free society. Moreover, they showed unique bravery and generosity of spirit in saving their Jewish community during World War II. Yet the recent entry of large numbers of foreign Muslims who do not appear to respect their history, language, or culture and are in fact antagonistic to their liberal social mores, democracy, and traditions of free speech is being perceived by many Danes as an existential threat.

This attitude is becoming more pervasive in Europe because most immigrants today come from the Muslim countries of North and West Africa or Western Asia. They are largely poor, uneducated, rural people much influenced by the Islamic resurgence and the fundamentalist ideologies of Saudi Wahabbism or the Muslim Brotherhood. The Islamist factions, whether a majority or not, provide the most vocal leaders of these communities. They do not want to assimilate into local cultural norms but instead demand cultural autonomy for Sharia Law and exclusion from the provisions of legislation guaranteeing freedom of speech and equal rights for women and gays.

With the bombings in Madrid and Lon-

don, riots in France, the murder of Theo Van Gogh in Holland, and the violent protests against the Danish cartoons, the Muslim immigrants are now associated — fairly or not — with insecurity, terrorism, and threats to democracy and the European “way of life.”

So what's the Jewish angle? Undoubtedly, further immigration will increase the political clout of communities that are (according to recent surveys) more antisemitic and hostile to Jews than Europe's native populations. These immigrant communities have replaced the far right as the major source of political antisemitism and as the perpetrators of antisemitic violence against local Jewish communities. They also provide the bulk of demonstrators for anti-Zionist protests and the calls for boycotts of Israel.

So whereas immigration, both legal and illegal, into the United States and a concomitant greater national cultural diversity or increase in the size of the Latino population does not appear to be of great concern to the American Jewish community, the situation in Europe is different. Under current political conditions, a more Muslim Europe is bad news for the Jews. The presence of Islam is also a challenge to Europeans generally both to those who view secularism and those who view Christianity as the continent's heritage and identity.

Migrant Workers in Israel, and Rights

Roy Wagner

A friend of my mother's hires a migrant worker to care for her elderly father. One day, in an effort to arrange some formalities, my mother's friend went to the job broker who had assigned her the caregiver. At the office, the job broker publicly scolded the woman for the illegally low wages she paid the caregiver (around \$550 per month). My mother's friend, who is kind and generous, had never realized that she was breaking the law, and called me to ask how much she should pay the worker. I explained that the legal minimum wage would be between \$750 and \$1,000, depending on the exact nature of the work. My mother's friend was no longer eager to learn about the rights of her father's caregiver.

While this anecdote puts my mother's friend in a bad light, a fuller understanding

about migrant workers in Israel and migrant worker employment reforms will expose the hidden culprits in this story.

Until the beginning of the 1990s, Israel had few migrant workers, but did rely heavily on Palestinian labor from the Occupied Territories for construction, agriculture, and services. Before 1967, the same role was played by Palestinians inside Israel, who were subject to internal military rule. Despite the “Hebrew Labor” ideology, Israel's first-world prosperity depends, like that of many other first world economies, on turning a blind eye to state-enabled exploitation of third-world labor force.

A combination of security measures and a deliberate separation policy have led to a shortage of Palestinian workers. The “temporary” solution advocated by the government

Dr. Roy Wagner is a board member in the workers rights NGO, Kav LaOved (Worker's Hotline).

March/April 2007
 Nisan 5767

To subscribe: 877-568-SHMA
www.shma.com

was to invite migrant workers from Eastern Europe and South East Asia.

Israel's healthcare system was being privatized at the same time, and families were encouraged to care for their elderly and disabled at home. Filipino workers were called upon to provide the necessary, sometimes around-the-clock, care. A booming economy brought large numbers of tourists and pilgrims from Africa and Latin America who also blended into the labor market. At its peak in the year 2000, the number of legally and illegally employed migrant workers in Israel exceeded 250,000 (excluding Palestinians) — about one tenth of the local labor force.

As the second Intifada erupted (around the same time as the global high-tech bubble burst), the economy took a dive. Unemployment soared, and foreign workers were blamed. The fact that most foreigners took Palestinian rather than Israeli jobs or worked as 24-hour caregivers, positions that Israelis were not willing to fill, didn't matter much. An aggressive media campaign as well as a well-financed deportation police reduced the population of migrant workers by over 25 percent.

One might feel that illegally employed migrant workers cannot complain about being deported. But in Israel, the legal-illegal division is ephemeral. For a migrant worker who entered Israel legally to retain his or her legal status, the worker must be actively employed by his or her commissioning employer. If a worker is fired, traded, or quits, the worker becomes illegal. The causes are immaterial. Even if a worker suffered illegal exploitation, violence, sickness, or abuse, once that worker is no longer employed by the "legal" employer, the worker becomes deportable.

"Illegal" workers in Israel are very often people who entered with valid work visas but lost their legal status when they were no longer willing to accept rights violation or abuse (this claim is supported by official Ministry of Industry, Trade, and Labor research). Deportation targeted heavily such formerly legal migrant workers, and a revolving door emerged: formerly legally employed workers were deported so that new workers could be imported. The number of legal newcomers always exceeded the number of deportees.

A new migrant worker is charged (illegally) up to \$18,000 in order to obtain legal work in Israel. This means that workers are

sometimes fraudulently brought over just for this mediation fee. They land with a genuine visa, but no real job awaits them. They lose their legal status within hours after disembarking their plane. (For example, a worker is invited for an employer who doesn't need him. The worker is never taken to the employer, and the employer or broker then reports that the worker "escaped." A new permit is then issued for the same employer. In some cases, up to ten workers have been brought this way for a single employer.)

From an employer's point of view, new workers are preferable because they are less likely to know their rights and how to protect themselves from exploitation. So employers sometime call the deportation police, inform

But in Israel, the legal-illegal division is ephemeral.

them that a certain "troublemaking" worker was fired, and invite them to deport that worker. Then the employer can import a new more docile worker. This system motivates a highly profitable human trafficking industry.


The Israeli Supreme Court ruled in 2006 that this system of binding workers to employers constituted a modern form of slavery. Therefore, on top of implementing various protective mechanisms (due in large part to achievements of NGOs like *Kav LaOved*), the state is promoting reform. But this reform does not render workers free; rather, workers' legal status and employment will now depend on the good will of brokers instead of employers.

This reform is nothing short of letting the cat watch over the cream. Job brokers earn the most from charging workers illegal commissions and have a vested interest in deportation so that new mediation-paying workers can be brought in. But today brokers are competing for migrant worker job mediation licenses, so they must appear legitimate. That was the motivation for scolding my mother's friend for not adequately paying her father's caregiver. It was a hypocritical scene because brokers break the law by charging mediation fees and defrauding workers and because it was the brokers themselves who advised uninformed employers to pay workers less than they legally deserved. My mother's friend did not come up with the \$550 monthly wages by herself. This

is the going rate set by an unofficial brokers' cartel.

The state does practically nothing to enforce migrant workers' human and labor rights because if it did, it would have to increase welfare payments so that people could afford to pay migrant caregivers the legal minimum, or absorb the cost of keeping people in public nursing homes. (For lack of space, I will not discuss the equivalent economic intricacies in agriculture and construction.) Instead of protecting migrants' rights, the state acts as an accomplice to a crime. It facilitates the deportation of migrants while allowing new legally brought workers to be robbed by brokers and employers. Migrant workers'

rights are sacrificed so that employers and brokers can turn a profit and the state can save on investments in welfare and in labor-intensive industry reforms.

Between exploitation and deportation, migrant communities desperately try to survive. Last year, after a long and bitter public struggle, children between the ages of six and eighteen, whose primary cultural affiliation was Israeli, were allowed to become legal residents together with their parents and siblings. Nevertheless, migrant workers who give birth in Israel are still required to leave within three months. In Israel too, like in most other western countries, workers were wanted, but humans arrived. 

Making Yourself at Home: A Close Look at *Klitat Aliyah*

Deborah Golden

Jewish immigration to Israel, or *aliyah*, means ascent, in the twofold sense of physical and moral upward movement. In the biblical writings, coming to, and settling on, the land of Israel were not regarded as sufficient in themselves to attain righteousness; rather, movement in space was to be accompanied by inner transformation of consciousness. The notion of *aliyah* as both physical and moral ascent, epitomized by the story of Exodus, inspired modern political Zionism and found further expression in Israel's Declaration of Independence according to which settlement in Israel is portrayed as the realization of an ancient, historical imperative — an “ingathering of exiles” to the original birthplace of the Jewish people. Thus, Israel is the national home, and Jewish immigrants to Israel are like long-lost sons and daughters returning home, echoing the ancient biblical prophecy, “Thy children shall return to their own borders.” (Jeremiah 31:16)

These moral underpinnings continue to resonate in the context of current immigration to Israel; they serve as a guide for the encounter between newcomers and the host society, as each individual act of migration is seen to echo, and reenact, the story of the nation itself. Given the moral dimension inherent to the notion of *aliyah*, how Israel absorbs immigrants, what is called *klitat aliyah*, means more than ensuring the material well-being of

the newcomers. It is a purposeful activity designed to nurture among the newcomers deep attachment to their new home. Becoming Israeli, then, is more than legal incorporation in the state, more than acquiring and practicing political rights, and more than bettering one's life or the prospects of one's family. Rather, newcomers must come to, or be made to, remake their selves so as to share a deep sense of belonging, as if they were at home, indeed, as if they had never left in the first place. Thus, there is a fundamental contradiction between the ideology of homecoming, on the one hand, and the experience of strangeness, unfamiliarity, or even hostility, that colors everyday encounters between newcomers and Israelis. It is perhaps this contradiction that underlies much of the intensity and ambiguity in the relationship between Israelis and immigrants. And the ongoing efforts to find adequate ways to absorb immigrants are, in effect, ways to overcome this contradiction.

Indeed, one of the primary assumptions underlying the discourse of absorption, or *klitah*, is that it does not just happen; rather, for all concerned, *klitah* is something that must be actively and purposively pursued. While there may be disagreements about how best to absorb the newcomers, there is little question that they need to be actively absorbed. Moreover, the act of *klitat aliyah* — “making the newcom-

Deborah Golden is a social anthropologist and lecturer in the program for Education, Culture, and Society at the Faculty of Education, Haifa University. Her doctoral research focused on the ways in which Israelis sought to prepare newcomers from the former Soviet Union for their new lives.