



SESSION ABSTRACT

The long-term implications of migration in the intersection of ethnicity, class, gender, and space: the Israeli case

Organizer: Reut Reina Bendrihem (The Open University of Israel; Sapir College)

E-Mail Address: bd.reut@gmail.com

Abstract: The lives of immigrants in the Global-South have often been described through the eyes of First World/Northern-World scholars (Mohanty, 1988). Recent theories, such as “Theory from the South” (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2015), highlight the importance of knowledge that originates from the margins, the deprived regions of the world, as this knowledge may predict processes that could occur in the “Global-North”. One of the major phenomena that characterize the “South” is large-scale migration of different ethnic groups and their eventual convergence in a shared living space.

The proposed session will focus on the effects of external and internal migration on immigrants from various ethnic groups who live in Israel’s periphery and on the space itself. Although elitist groups perceive Israel as part of the Northern-World and a first world country, in actuality Israel is geographically located in the Middle East, and in fact many of its citizens immigrated from North Africa and Asia. These immigrants and their offspring are mainly concentrated in Israel’s southern periphery. The four papers presented in this panel examine the impact of external and internal migration to Israel’s southern periphery on the space itself and on immigrants from different ethnic groups and social classes, as well as on first, second and third generation immigrants. The studies will discuss migration’s long-term implications on immigrants lives along the axes of gender, class, ethnicity, and space. The presented case studies employ diverse methodologies such as auto-ethnography, participant observation and in-depth interviews.

SESSION SCHEDULE

Wednesday, September 28, 2022 | Slot 4 | Room 3

Yulia Shevchenko: "The woman that you are": Israeli post-soviet women challenge the gender binary (zoom)

Reut Reina Bendrihem: "The New Migration" – Practices of selection in the urban space

Sigal Nagar-Ron: The absence of numbers: immigration, inequality, and the institutional ethnic-blind approach (zoom)

Yosepha Tabib-Calif: Ethno-class identity, intergenerational relationship, and the transition to adulthood

SESSION PAPERS

The woman that you are": Israeli post-soviet women challenge the gender binary

Yulia Shevchenko

Israeli political, social, and academic discourses tend to frame post-Soviet women as passive, a-political, and anti-feminist citizens. By emphasizing the vast marginalities in the Israeli post-Soviet population, which the academic discourse has neglected so far, I wish to unravel the external standpoint which views post-Soviet women as a homogenous and obedient entity.

This paper focuses on 1.5 and second-generation post-Soviet women who immigrated to Israel during the 90s. The research is based on a qualitative mixed method of autoethnography and participants' life stories. The autoethnographic method takes into consideration the researcher's positioning as a woman located along various axes within fieldwork interactions, and thus has access to first-person interpretations. Understanding these interpretations – in Moraga's (1983) terms "theory in the flesh" – enables us to deconstruct the external gaze objectifying post-Soviet women and simultaneously deepens the research perspective, while considering their immigration experiences as only one axis in their lived experiences in Israeli society.

By combining an intersectionality perspective with Bourdieu's concept of capital, this paper will focus on one of the most prominent images experienced by post-Soviet women in Israel – the "Russian whore." This stable image is closely connected to the blurred difference between immigrant women and sex workers (Lemish, 2000), and to local perceptions of the "Soviet past". Young post-Soviet women experience the "Russian whore" image as a stigma which in turn constructs their sexuality as dangerous and deviant. At the same time, these young women use different practices in order to distance and disassociate themselves from the negative image. I will show that these distancing practices demonstrate their ethnic and gendered marginality and at the same time expose the delegitimization of the erotic capital (Hakim, 2010) they possess, and the inability to use this capital as a resource to gain social mobility.

"The "New Migration" – Practices of selection in the urban space

Reut Reina Bendrihem

The research discourse on immigration is most often explored in terms of movement between nations. Very little research has been conducted about migration processes within the nation-state. In this lecture, I will discuss internal migration taking place in Israel as part of settlement practices. The main purpose of the lecture is to show that internal migration within the nation-state is in fact a selective mechanism that preserves state racial logic and the ethno-class structure of Israeli society.

Through a case study of migration to Mitzpe Ramon - a town in Israel's southern periphery, I will show how the settlement of entrepreneurs in the town produced a selective mechanism, which I call an "eco-Jewish mechanism". This mechanism drives veteran populations, mainly Mizrahi Jews, Bedouins or the poor, out of the town, dispossessing them of, what Harvey (2008) calls, the "right to the city". At the same time, the new commers, mostly, Ashkenazi Jews, are drawn to the town where they settle and exercise their right to the city.

The eco-Jewish mechanism reflects the racial logic of the Israeli nation state. By encouraging economic and religious entrepreneurs to settle in the southern periphery the state expands the Ashkenazi-Jewish population in the area, thereby maintaining and reinforcing its sovereignty. The entrepreneurs, knowingly or unknowingly, become agents of the state who, by migrating to Mitzpe Ramon, realize the economic and religious logic of the State of Israel. Thus, the state's "Judaization" and "whitening" policy is carried out by (Ashkenazi-Jewish) entrepreneurs who settle in the town and, to use Sibly's term (1998), "purify" it from Mizrahi and Palestinian characteristics that are not part of its racial logic. To show how this process takes place I will focus on the settlement and civilizing mission, thus challenging the traditional perspective/narrative of migration.

The absence of numbers: immigration, inequality and the institutional ethnic-blind approach

Sigal Naqar-Ron

Israel is a country of immigrants from diverse countries in which ethnicity plays a major role. From its early days Israel's sociology community studied Jewish internal ethnic-inequality – the inequality between Ashkenazim (descendants of Jewish communities in Europe) and Mizrahim (descendants of Jewish communities in Asia & North Africa). I offer a new classification of the sociological literature on Israeli ethnic-inequality based on a gender perspective. Adopting this perspective reveals the roots of the distinction between the ethnic groups in discourse and practice that have to do with Mizrahi women's body and fertility that took hold in pre-state Israel (the 1920's and 1930's). The popular terms "Mizrahi" and "Ashkenazi" morphed into "scientific-constructs" with the formation of the Israeli Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) in 1948. From its inception as a statistical category ethnicity had an expiration date- two generations after immigration. Subsequently, today the CBS neither collects nor publishes data about third and further generations to immigration. Although ethnic inequality has not disappeared, the CBS created two new statistical categories aimed at measuring inequality, but bypassing ethnicity- the socio-economic cluster (1987) and the peripherality index (2008). While the former echoed the initial rationale for ethnic differentiation, the latter abandoned any trace of ethnicity, and effectively

erased the history that ushered ethnic inequality into Israel. The absence of official data regarding ethnicity hinders understanding of the mechanism of current inequality in Israel.

Ethno-class identity, intergenerational relationship, and the transition to adulthood

Yosepha Tabib-calif

This lecture explores the intergenerational family relationships through the ethno-class relationships and tries to answer the question: How do middle-class Ashkenazi youth and lower-class Mizrahi youth present these relationships and use them to explain their own absorption into adult society? All the participants in the study attended at a school that is situated in a vulnerable neighbourhood. It is an interesting milieu not only due to its adopted ideology of social integration, but also due to the unique way in which it applied these ideas – that is, by integrating low-class, Mizrahi, local students with middle-class, Ashkenazi students from outside the neighbourhood. The starting assumption of this research is that graduates of the school – both Mizrahi and Ashkenazi – began their journeys to adulthood when their ethno-class identities were explicitly and consciously part of their toolbox for assigning meaning to the realities of their lives. These realities stand in contrast to the realities of many youths in Israeli society who first encounter notions of ethno-class identity during their post-high school army service, if at all.

The empirical analysis of the data is based on a longitudinal analysis that took place over six years via regular interviews. An analysis of the interviews demonstrates that the most glaring interpretive practice among the middle-class Ashkenazi students is “continuing the inter-generational status” despite generational differences between themselves and their parents. By contrast, low-class Mizrahi students use a variety of practices – from constructing commonalities with their parents that characterizes youth engaged in a complex project of social mobility, to the work of symbolic boundary-making, which is more identified with mobile Mizrahi youth.