

Preface

Leora Bilsky

On August 1, 2010, the Israeli Government voted to approve the deportation of about 400 children of foreign workers and their parents. These children, who do not meet the Government's criteria for acquiring permanent resident status, are at the heart of a heated public debate. Supporters of the decision spoke of those slated for deportation as "an existential threat" to the Jewish character of the state. On the other side, a critical public discourse, which garnered swift support from public figures and intellectuals, supported a reversal of the decision, noting the children's Israeli identity and the Jewish people's moral obligation to remember their own history as migrants and refugees. This debate goes to the root of the trauma of the Jewish experience of expulsion, an experience that engenders apparently contradictory moral obligations: on the one hand, to strengthen the Jewish state's national character and on the other, to open Israel's gates to foreigners. Although the ethical debate focuses on the fate of the children — who, unlike their parents, can readily be identified as Israelis by culture — it has managed to obscure and even cover up the absence of an immigration policy and the dearth of public discussion of the core questions related to the essence of Israeli citizenship. As of this writing, no one has been deported.

Migrants and refugees are at the center of this issue of *Theory and Criticism*. In it, the Jewish refugee from Nazi Europe meets the African refugee; the veiled Muslim women of Europe meet the veiled Jewish women of Beit Shemesh; the Levantine meets the Canaanite. They carry in their baggage their own trades, beliefs and ideas. They speak foreign languages that require translation. Indeed, many of the articles in this issue deal with the question of translation — literal translation but also cross-cultural translation. They ask: How is it possible to transfer ideas from place to place and from one political culture to another? What is preserved in translation and what gets lost? What are the conditions that ensure the assimilation of foreign ideas? The children of foreign workers, for example, have lost their parents' cultural identity on their way to acquiring a "kosher" Israeli identity; on the other hand, this process of

one-way translation embeds the campaign on behalf of the children of foreign workers in the familiar terms of Israeli citizenship and leaves that notion unchallenged.

Itamar Mann's article, which opens the issue, juxtaposes the Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany with the African asylum-seeker knocking at Israel's gates. Mann's point of departure is Hannah Arendt's article "We Refugees" (1943), in which she pointed to the limitations of the nation-state in coping with the increasing influx of refugees towards the end of World War II. In contrast to Giorgio Agamben, who sees Arendt's article as a radical call to put the refugee, not the citizen, at the center of political thought, Mann suggests presenting the autobiographical story that serves as the foundation of Arendt's article. He refuses to skirt the issue through the generalizations and simplifications characteristic of international refugee policy and demands that we hear the foreign, different and misunderstood voice of the lone African refugee fleeing from a curse. "Refugeeism in the First Person" tries to bring back the Jewish voice of Arendt's piece — a voice that describes the experience of a national-ethnic-religious minority that undermines the logic of the nation-state — and connect it to the current political reality.

Liat Kozma travels back to the Palestine of the 1930s and examines the encounter that took place between the ideals of sexual reform imported from Central and Eastern European and the Yishuv. The sexual reform movement comprised doctors, pro-abortion activists, Communists and advocates of human rights, and many of its prophets were Jews. Persecuted by the Nazis, many were imprisoned or forced to leave Germany. Those who made it to this country brought their reformist ideas with them. The arenas for spreading the new gospel were sexual consultation centers (the first three were established in Tel Aviv in 1931), newspaper columns, and books translated into Hebrew. The sexual literature required a new vocabulary; one of the translators was the poet (and physician) Shaul Tchernichowsky. According to Kozma, something important was lost in translation. The radical impulse of the German movement was toned down and withered away. Kozma's article seeks to explain why the immigration of people and ideas did not spur radical sexual reform in Tel Aviv.

Translation also plays a central role for **Tali Schiff**, who seeks to understand Jacqueline Kahanoff's project as the translation of the notion of Levantinism from the context of the minority community in Cairo to that of the sovereign Jewish society in Israel. Schiff asserts that "Kahanoff did not see Levantinism as a way to preserve a cosmopolitan model of life. On the contrary, she sought to erect Levantinism as

a national platform for the emerging sovereign Israeli identity.” In other words, the success of the translation was contingent on its compatibility with the new political conditions facing the Jews in Israel. How can we reconcile the need to create a sense of belonging with the recognition of the fundamental impossibility of belonging? The article identifies a condition crucial to the successful translation of ideas: the existence of a mediating forum. In Kahanoff’s case, this was the periodical *Keshet*, edited by Aharon Amir, which fostered an encounter between the Levantines and the Canaanites.

In contrast to the Levantine ideal of openness towards and exchange with the cultures of the region and the world, **Shahar Sadeh** deals with the ascent of an alternative logic, the logic of separation and territorial division. This is the logic behind the “Separation Wall” that the Israeli government decided to build in 2002. Sadeh addresses the issue from a new perspective: the silence and paralysis of most Israeli environmental organizations on the issue. She asks how the organizations’ silence can be reconciled with their obligation to transnational environmental justice, and suggests that the answer lies in an analysis of the conditions of importing or translating the notion of environmental sustainability in the Israeli context. In other words, Sadeh identifies what constitutes the “Green Line of the Greens” and notes that when the idea of environmental justice was brought to Israel, its deep connection with peace movements and human-rights ideals was lost. According to her, this restrained environmental discourse allows environmentalist organizations to reach the heart of the Israeli consensus. Nonetheless, this kind of translation bears a cost — the loss of the movement’s radical edge.

Whereas Sadeh sees a tension and even a contradiction between the transnational discourse on sustainability and the silence of environmental organizations about the Separation Wall, for **Gadi Algazi** this contradiction lies at the heart of the colonial heritage that forges a dialectical unity between conservation and exploitation (“colonial ecologism”). This is also the thesis of the article by **Shalini Randeria**, “Global Designs and Local Lifeworlds.” Randeria calls for developing a view of the post-colonial situation as a continuation of colonialism in a different guise. She cites the case of the Gir Forest National Park in India, where local forces and social activists employed regulations published by a classic representative of globalization, the World Bank, when they challenged the authority of the nation-state. In Algazi’s critical essay, he seeks to translate Randeria’s insights to the Israeli reality through a case study of the Hiran Forest, which exposes the problematic aspects of Israeli conservationism.

Afforestation promotes the policy of rapacious settlement and development that is gradually dispossessing the local Bedouins; and the agent of the state charged with doing so is none other than the Green Patrol.

Eran Fisher exposes how the online discourse of technology covers up the continuing abandonment of workers to capitalist exploitation. Just as the environmental system preserves colonial control in the post-colonial era, repeated emphasis on the capacity of the new technology market to liberate people and reduce their alienation (by means of the ample place it allows for creativity, self-realization, individualized work and so on) diverts attention from the ongoing problem of exploitation.

Unlike European Jews at the beginning of the last century, who sought to assimilate into the modern nation-state by discarding traditional items of clothing, at the beginning of the twenty-first century European Muslim women choose to veil themselves and demand admission into the civic body with full acceptance of their otherness. This phenomenon, which underlies the “veil controversy” in France and elsewhere, is at the center of **Tamar El-Or**’s overview, which examines it in light of its unexpected local version: “The veiled women of Beit Shemesh.” Despite the temptation to make a simple comparison between the cases in terms of acceptance and non-acceptance of women’s head and body coverings in the public space, El-Or concentrates specifically on the difference in reactions in order to analyze the different civic regimes and their methods of controlling women and their sexuality. Unlike France, where the controversy focused on the public sphere of schools, in Israel the civic regime is transmitted through the home and family. Israel’s public debate about the deportation of foreign workers focused on the children and their families and not on the fundamental lack of comprehensive immigration policy; so, too, the state’s attempt to supervise those who became known as the “Taliban women of Beit Shemesh” passes through the private spheres of home and family and the definition of the gender-normative role of Israeli women as mothers.

Where is the space for activism and resistance of women in patriarchal political regimes? This question is also central to the article by **Shira Stav**. In contrast with the veil controversy, in which the symbol overshadowed the voice of real women, Stav examines the opposing attempt to return the symbol (the phallus) to its physical dimensions. Stav places the ancient taboo of incest between fathers and daughters at the center of the discussion. She recognizes the trap in which women find themselves when “both the prohibition of incest between father and daughter and the violation of that prohibition function to preserve the patriarchal structure in general and the

father's control over his daughter in particular." Is there a way out of the trap? Stav looks for one in subversive feminist readings of the story of Lot's daughters. According to Stav, "the fact that the father remains in the field of the symbolic and nonphysical is what allows him to hide and deny his lust, whereas the exposure of the lust gives it linguistic expression and allows us to cope with it, even to live with and alongside it, without having to act on it."

"The Epistemology of the Closet" is the first full Hebrew translation of the first chapter of the important book of the same title by **Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick**, who passed away in April 2009. It is accompanied by an introductory essay by **Amalia Ziv** and **Aeyal Gross**. *The Epistemology of the Closet* analyzes a different structure of concealment and exposure related to gay identity, which Sedgwick calls "the open secret." Sedgwick calls attention to the limitation of binary thought about "coming out of the gay closet" and seeks to replace it with something more dynamic. She chooses to do this by linking contemporary legal texts to the Book of Esther. Both instances deal with an element of identity that lends itself to concealment, and, consequently, with a person's choice as to when to be exposed and to whom. This is one of the innovations in Sedgwick's theory, which does not accept fixed and rigid categories of identity and promotes the ethical possibility of identification beyond differences. As Gross and Ziv write, "Sedgwick is a quintessential example of the inherent potential of self-identification to transcend categories of identity, a potential in which she sees the central element of queer identity."

The ethical question is at the center of **Hagi Kenaan's** article as well. Kenaan returns to the writings of Emmanuel Levinas, in which the encounter with the face of the Other opens us to a dimension of radical alterity and requires a "look" or "gaze" of a different order. Whereas for Levinas this is "a gaze without an image," Kenaan illuminates the manner in which the image reveals itself as a face. Does the image have a face? Who does it look at? And what are the implications that this carries for an ethical understanding of images? Here the "otherness" of the stranger, which is at the center of many of the articles in this issue, is given an important new turn. Kenaan takes us on a journey through the streets of Tel Aviv in order to encounter a series of images of faces of hybrid creatures, simultaneously man and wolf, drawn by Klone, a Tel Aviv-based street artist. In this context, the question of attending and responding to the "other" is underscored from a unique perspective, since the face of the image is one that seeks nothing from us. What are the grounds from which an ethics of recognition of the other can grow? Is such an ethics based on the discovery of lines

of similarity to the Other? Perhaps on the reduction of the Otherness to common universal fundamentals? And what makes it possible for a political community to open its gates to the Otherness of women, political minorities, migrants and refugees? Is it the case, as Kenaan suggests, that the essence of the gaze is always twofold and that this twofoldedness is precisely what opens before us the possibilities of new understandings?

This is my first issue as editor of *Theory and Criticism*. My predecessors, Adi Ophir and Yehouda Shenhav, positioned *Theory and Criticism* as the leading periodical in Israeli political and critical thought. I inherited a living, vibrant journal with a community of writers and readers who are among the best in Israel. As editor, I am committed to deepening the critical discourse and opening it to additional fields of study. This issue marks the journal's twentieth anniversary, an important milestone at which we can reflect on its past and seek new directions for the future. On the occasion of the journal's twentieth birthday, **Michal Ben-Naftali** gave a lecture (published here) that describes the twists and turns of its journey in terms of language: the rebellion against the sacred tongue and the attempt to create a secular language that would allow political criticism. Ben Naftali suggests understanding the journal's history in psychoanalytic terms of the sons' revolt against their father. But for her, too, something important is lost in "translation": "Is it possible to speak in the sacred tongue as in a foreign language? Is it possible, alternatively, to deviate from Hebrew in Hebrew, to behave within it as if in foreign territory, or to make a different foreign language an element functioning within it? Don't those who choose to step around the landmines of Hebrew *ipso facto* destroy the fabric essential to all conveyance of meaning?"

When choosing the articles for this issue I sought to clarify the possibilities of critical thought in the global age by means of the shared theme of translation. The link between the local political scene and the ideas and theories that developed elsewhere can free us from the limitations of convention, but it also carries the danger of oversimplification and a failure to respond to the unique character of the phenomenon under study. By developing critical tools to study the notion of cultural translation, dealt with by many of the writers in this issue, I have tried to reexamine one of the foundations of interdisciplinary research. What is the meaning of intercultural translation? Is it a simple relationship of source and transmission? Or

perhaps the cultural transmission itself modifies the source? What forms of openness are necessary to preserve the otherness of the original theory in the process of its reception? A complex picture emerges from the articles in this issue: translation as an act that requires not only the creation of new words and mediating forums, but also an understanding of the cultural, historical and political contexts. Understanding the relationship between migration and translation can help free us of the mechanical notion of translation as transferring a given content from one language to another, and replace it with the dynamic notion of translation as movement in space and time that connects meanings, identities and places. I also see the translation of key articles in political and social theory into Hebrew and the section “Among Books” as important forums for strengthening the journal’s commitment to the project of intercultural dialogue. In this issue the books section, which is edited by Nitzan Lebovic, includes three book reviews by **Oded Heilbronner**, **Zvi Ben-Dor Benite** and **Gideon Katz**. Two of the reviews are devoted to new books on Zionism and Israeli history written from a general and autobiographical perspective; the third deals with the visual side of European colonialism. Starting with this issue, selected articles will also be posted online in English translation.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the head of the Editorial Board and director of the Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, Prof. Gabriel Motzkin, along with the members of the Editorial Board, who entrusted me with the editorship. A special thanks to Ms. Sara Soreni for her kind and gentle guidance in my first steps as editor of the journal.