

review the cover

this week's essential reading

'The musicians fighting back against extremism' by Robin Denslow, BBC Magazine

'The Gnawa festival has a new significance, showing that music and Islam can co-exist at a time when Islamic State and its supporters aim to destroy any events like this'

this week's essential reading

'Scorsese a jolly good fella: Goodfellas 25 years on' by Robert Bright, The Quietus

'After Mean Streets, Scorsese saw no point in making another gangster film unless it provided something new, and for him that meant it had to be close to the spirit of documentary'

9,000

asylum seekers have left Israel since 2013

'I feel like an outlaw ... I want to live where I am free'



An African migrant covers his mouth with tape during a protest in Tel Aviv last year. Many migrants are from Eritrea and Ethiopia and are often given just 30 days to leave the country. Oded Balilty / AP Photo

→ Africans, continued from 1

Yared Tekletsion is a relative success story. Born in Eritrea and 24 years old, he lived for three years in Tel Aviv as a sous chef. We meet in a seedy bar during the day with South Sudanese men sitting drinking on plastic chairs. "I never thought I would stay in Israel," Tekletsion says. "I felt racism from the Israeli police and people every day. I have many Eritrean friends in Israel and racism makes them scared. They just work and go to church."

Tekletsion fled Eritrea after beginning his mandatory army service and realising that he would never be free in his own country. The nation is one of the most repressive in Africa, restricting speech, the media and movement.

His path to Israel took him through Sudan, Egypt and Sinai. Years later he accepted an Israeli government offer to leave for Uganda and then made his own way to Juba.

"Life in South Sudan is good," he tells me. "In Israel they didn't want others [non-Israelis] to succeed but here nobody asks for my papers. I'd like to go back to Israel on holiday and give advice to my fellow Africans there; don't go to Europe, it's too dangerous, come here and find a job."

Tekletsion, a Christian and irregular Sunday churchgoer, runs a building supplies business. He says it's hard to convince new arrivals from Israel to stay in South Sudan because the country is poor with few services or employment opportunities.

South Sudan, the world's newest state after declaring its independence in 2011, is facing a humanitarian crisis. Millions are displaced due to ongoing fighting, the economy has collapsed, tens of thousands have been killed since hostilities began in December 2013, children are recruited to fight, rape is endemic and food insecurity affects at least half the population of 11 million people.

Israel views South Sudan as a willing recipient of its surveillance equipment and defence and weapons technology. In 2013, South Sudan announced it would sell oil to Israeli companies.

Israel has maintained a close relationship with the South Sudanese for decades, especially after the 1967 Six Day War, when rebel leaders sought advice from Israel for their fight against northern Sudan. South Sudanese leaders were impressed with Israel's military success. In the following decades Israel armed the Christian South Sudanese against the Muslim north, a country today that does not recognise Israel and allies itself with Iran (though this year's Saudi-led strikes on Yemen have pitted Iranian interests against Sudanese ones because Kharoum has sided with Saudi Arabia). After 9/11, the United States joined Israel in massively strengthening its ties with South Sudanese rebels against a

northern neighbour who had sheltered Osama bin Laden in the 1990s.

In the 2000s, with fighting raging across Sudan, many South Sudanese fled to safety in countries such as Australia and Israel. Dislike of African migrants soared in Israel, leading to growing moves to expel them. "We're not in Tel Aviv, we're in Africa!" shouted a Jewish protester in Tel Aviv during an anti-refugee rally in 2011. The Israeli government continued to back South Sudanese claims for independence while urging their people to return home.

But with little infrastructure in Juba, poor health care and education, as well as ongoing insecurity, South Sudanese migrants rightly believed they were

owed protection. Israel disagreed despite many of the young asylum seekers never having seen South Sudan and viewing Israel as their home.

Robel Kosu doesn't share Tekletsion's optimism. Another Eritrean migrant who arrived in Juba four months ago, he spent six years in Israel working various jobs. The police regularly harassed him and he protested with his fellow Eritreans. At 25 years old, he is now desperate to leave Juba and get to Europe.

Without identification or a passport, Kosu says that his life is in limbo. He hasn't seen his parents or most of his siblings for years. "I feel like an outlaw. In Africa we have poor minds. I want to live where I am free, like Europe, America or Australia."

Like Tekletsion, he left Israel voluntarily but was given US\$3,500 (Dh12,900), flown to Rwanda, then told to leave by Rwandan officials, transported by

bus to Uganda and then urged by fellow Eritreans to South Sudan. "Israeli officials told me that it's better for you to leave but Africa is a bad place," he says.

His story matches the many others from migrants I hear in Juba, a path from Israel to South Sudan with corrupt officials, kidnapping threats and no work papers. Nearly every migrant I meet wants a future in Europe and doesn't fear drowning in the Mediterranean.

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Israel has a black, African population that it desperately wants to expel or ignore. There are about 46,000 asylum seekers in Israel, mostly from Eritrea and Sudan. They face institutional racism from the government, judiciary, army and public. In a 2012 poll conducted by the Israel Democracy Institute Peace Index, a majority of Israelis agreed with a statement by Likud member of the Knesset Miri Regev, the newly appointed minister for culture and sport, that Africans are a "cancer in the body" of the nation. Thirty three per cent of people believed that violence against Africans was justified. Large protests by Ethiopian Jews, held in Tel Aviv in May, highlighted the racism shown by police towards them. It's not just Palestinians feeling the brunt of state persecution.

Israel houses thousands of African refugees indefinitely in the Holot detention centre and Saharonim prison in the Negev Desert. Conditions are grim. One man inside Holot, Adil Aldao from Darfur, describes it as a "concentration camp" where food is unhealthy and stimulation is limited. "My freedom is buried in Holot," he says.

Israel gives African migrants 30 days to leave, rarely accepting their refugee claims. Israel has only ever accepted a handful of Eritrean and Sudanese migrant claims; the recognition rate is less than 1 per cent over the past six years. The alternative is long-term detention. More than 9,000 asylum seekers have left Israel since 2013 and Israel claims this

is due to its "voluntary return" programme. In reality, the government has signed secret agreements with Rwanda and Uganda and flies people to these destinations pledging job assistance and financial support. Ugandan journalist Raymond Mujuni exposed in late 2014 that Uganda had signed a deal with Israel to take thousands of its unwanted migrants in exchange for weapons and agricultural knowledge.

All the Africans I interview in Juba and a recent report by two Israeli NGOs both find empty promises to migrants by the Israeli authorities as they face abuse by people smugglers and risk of kidnapping and death.



African migrants at the Holot detention centre. Tens of thousands from Eritrea and Sudan living in Israel have been detained or ordered to report to a detention centre. Oded Balilty / AP Photo



Source: The Review

Every single European person who chose to protect and assist Jewish refugees in the Second World War is being remembered by the survivors and their families and friends. Helping refugees is a moral opportunity of the highest degree

Rami Gudovitch, co-founder of the Come True project, under NGO Become, a sponsorship programme funding the education of 120 deportee children at the Trinity boarding school in Uganda



Outside: tens of thousands of African migrants protest in Tel Aviv last year against moves to detain them. Israel refuses to recognise them as refugees, which would grant them residency rights. Heidi Levine / Sipa Press

Israel was one of the first countries to welcome South Sudan's independence in 2011. In 2012, they sent over 1,000 migrants back to Juba and Israel continues to deny that the remaining South Sudanese in their cities are refugees, treating them poorly. The first South Sudanese ambassador in Tel Aviv was appointed in 2014. Ambassador Ruben Marial Benjamin ignored numerous requests for comment.

Israel's main interest appears to be selling arms to South Sudan. It overlooks its blatant human rights abuses, a tradition that has seen brutal African militaries armed and trained for decades. Israeli defence exports to South Sudan are stable and the South Sudanese army is using Israeli weapons. A South Sudanese delegation is visiting Israel in June to attend the country's leading defence expo. Israeli Meretz politician Tamar Zandberg recently demanded that Israel cease selling weapons to Juba and follow a European Union arms embargo.

The South Sudanese government tells *The National* that there is no formal agreement between the nations to accept refugees from any country. Thousands have arrived in the last years without any state support.

A handful of dedicated advocates in Israel and South Sudan are working with the affected communities to help. After the South Sudanese community was deported from Israel, Israeli Rami Gudovitch co-founded the Come True project, under NGO Become, a sponsorship programme funding the education of 120 deportee children at the Trinity boarding school in Uganda. The group has plans to establish a similar school in Juba.

"I believe it is the responsibility of each and every one of us to make his effort to make the lives of refugees bearable," Gudovitch says. "My country, Israel, was formed by refugees fleeing from the Nazis while the world turned its back to them ... Every single European person who chose to protect and assist Jewish refugees in the Second World War is being remembered by the survivors and their families and friends. Helping refugees is a moral opportunity of the highest degree."

In Juba, Hakim Monykuer Awuok has formed a partnership with Gudovitch to build a closer relationship between Israel and the South Sudanese migrants who lived in Israel. An employee of the ministry of education and co-founder of NGO Empower Kids, Awuok tells *The National* that he believes Israel should treat its migrants with respect. "It's a waste of such talented people to be deported here from Israel," he says. "Building a school is one way to help them."

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