

Reading Response

Section 4 Module 3

The chapter of this book is about the inconsistency and unfairness that exists in granting permits for people in the West Bank to enter Israel. The author begins by saying that the main reason why such a bad system exists is that it is believed that monitoring who enters Israel through the West Bank will prevent terrorist attacks. This system causes unnecessary stress and anxiety for the families and people of the West Bank.

Israel's internal police, known as the Shin Bet, is allowed to claim that someone is a security threat, which then prevents them from getting a permit. The Shin Bet also use many spies in the West Bank as well, who provide inaccurate information on who might be a threat. Those people, who could just be in an argument with a spy, can also be deemed a threat because someone said they were and told the Shin Bet.

It is not public information what makes someone a security threat but the author compiled information over several years which shows what characteristics the Shin Bet use. Longer permits would take longer to get and having a certain type of permit would not mean that you get another type of permit. One example of this is that a woman had a permit for work but was not able to get a permit for family unification.

Generally, a person was profiled as a security threat based on 'radical simplification, standardization and homogenization.' The profiling meant that people were judged based on basic facts about them and statistics that do not show who a person really is. When government officials were asked about why people were considered a security threat the usual responses were 'denial based on classified intelligence', 'denial based on characteristics of risk' or 'removal from classification.' Employers had a lot of say over who could get permits as well but did not want to be associated with a possible security risk.

A terrible restriction for permits was based on losing a family member 'because of violence by Israeli security forces', even if someone was a bystander. A Palestinian man lost a son and other members of his family due to an attack from the military. Even though the man had work permit to Israel, he was denied entry to go visit his other son that was in the hospital because of this restriction.

People could ask for their status as a 'security threat' to be removed but the attempts were often futile. Palestinians would show up at an office and wait for their name to be called. In most cases names were never called. Even if someone was called, the Shin Bet officers would blackmail the person into working for them. If the person refused, they would not only not be allowed to get a permit, but could even end up signing a document they could not read that said they could never enter Israel. These restrictions on travel not only affected people's ability to work but also their ability to travel (which had to be done through Jordan) and ability to get medical care. A man wanted to get medical help for his four-year-old son but did not want to work with the Shin Bet and was thus not allowed to get help.

The reason the Shin Bet is able to control the lives of people living in the West Bank is because they are seen as 'security experts' and 'control all information' that is used to determine if someone is a security threat. Another reason why the Shin Bet is able to employ many agents who perform these tasks is because no one wants to be blamed for a terrorist attack. Given the state of the occupation of the West Bank, it is also unclear what rights and laws the Palestinians have. The author calls this a 'sovereignty gap.' Shin Bet's autonomy is also seen by the fact that the Prime Minister's office denied that security threat classification existed. Because of the

uncertainty about the government about the West Bank, even though the Shin Bet are exercising powers they do not have, there is no stopping them.

The Shin Bet is a bureaucratic organization that controls people's lives in illogical and harmful ways. The only way for restrictions to be removed was ultimately to go to the Supreme Court (of Israel). While they did take back some classifications as a security threat, they would mostly uphold the decisions of the Shin bet which gave them more legitimacy. The Shin Bet would present secret information (that the person in question was not allowed to know) to judges that would sway them. The author also states that many philanthropic organizations do not realize the role the Shin Bet have and that sometimes just filing a petition can help an individual. An ultimate source of power for the Shin Bet is the 'colonial' type government that exists in the West Bank.

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