

Are We Not Human?
The Journey of Eritrean Refugees Who Left Israel Under the
“Voluntary Return Scheme” – From Human Experience to Human Rights

An Abstract of the Thesis By
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This thesis is based on in-depth interviews with eighteen (18) Eritrean refugees who lived in Israel and have left it as part of a program for “voluntary” departure to a “third country”—Rwanda. The research follows their dangerous journey in search for safety. I ask how the human experience of refugees reveals the inadequacy of the Israeli Court in protecting refugees from violations of their human rights as determined under refugee laws and conventions and international law. I show that examining testimonies and listening to refugees’ human experiences may reveal the implications of the “voluntary” departure program implemented by Israel, effectively forcing people that should have been protected to leave the country and embark on a dangerous journey. I show that these human experiences and the insights they offer were not heard or accepted by the Israeli Court, which had no room for them. I therefore claim that excluding the experiences of refugees from legal discussions leads to policies that violate core principles of refugee and human rights law.