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Talia Shiff is a Postdoctoral Fellow in the Weatherhead Scholars Program based at the Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Harvard University. She is a graduate of the JD-PhD program (Northwestern Pritzker School of Law and Sociology) at Northwestern University. Her dissertation research was funded by the Josephine de Karman Fellowship Trust, the Horowitz Foundation for Social Policy, and the National Science Foundation Dissertation Improvement Grant. As part of her fellowship in the Weatherhead Scholars Program, Shiff is working on a theory driven project that looks at questions of evaluation, institutionalization and moral worth through the case of frontline asylum decision-making. A central focus of her research is what is the role of moral values in legal settings that rely on a routinized processing of cases, and how does the disconnect between the moral goals of an institution and its legal rules shape the decision-making process? Her research suggests that decision-making is comprised of moments that sometimes emphasize moral worth and at other times emphasize legal rules. Accordingly, accounting for situations where established patterns of information break down for individuals is important for understanding the conditions that generate moral deliberation in otherwise technocratic spaces. This research has implications for scholarship concerned with the role of deliberation within highly institutionalized settings of social control, the production of social inequality, and how moral orders define the connection of crime and immigration.

Evaluating the Case: Encounters of Schematic Accordance and Schematic Discordance in Asylum Adjudications

This paper offers a new conceptual framework for identifying the conditions that lead to shifts in frontline actors' disposition from rule-bound bureaucrats to moral deliberators using the example of US asylum policy. Interviews with asylum officers suggest that when confronted with case scenarios that do not align with established agency categories but do resonate with shared cultural definitions of worth, frontline actors no longer engage with their subjects as indifferent bureaucrats but critically reflect upon the categorization process. In accounting for the ways shared schemas of worth reside in tension with a rule's established instantiations, and the implications this has on processes of evaluation and actors' gatekeeping roles, this article contributes to our understanding of the conditions that motivate frontline bureaucrats to ignore, bend or defy agency rules, and when do beliefs about fairness and appropriate action, trump incentives to streamline decisions in an otherwise technocratic space.