Ethiopian Jews in Canada: A Process of Constructing an Identity

Esther Grunau
Department of Anthropology
McGill University, Montreal
November, 1995

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Arts, Anthropology.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments

I take full responsibility for the contents of this thesis. It represents my own interpretation of my data and research, rather than the views of any of the people or organizations referred to in its pages.

Abstract

In this thesis I argue that Ethiopian Jewish identity has evolved over the last century in relation to Western diaspora Jewry, Israeli society and culture, and in response to complex political and historical forces operating in Ethiopia, Israel and North America. In this sense, Ethiopian Jewish identity is a product of these factors, not an essence which precedes them. This thesis examines the evolution of Ethiopian Jewish identity through 1) historical accounts tracing the origins and recent dispersion of Ethiopian Jewry, 2) an analysis of the literature on Ethiopian Jews in Israel, and 3) subjective accounts of Ethiopian Jewish immigrants living in Montreal and Toronto.

Dans cette thèse, je défend l'idée que l'identité des Juifs éthiopiens a évolué au cours de ce siècle en relation à plusieurs facteurs: la diaspora occidentale de la communauté juive, la société et la culture israéliennes, ainsi qu'en reponse à des forces politiques et historiques complexes opérant en Éthiopie, en Israël et en Amérique du Nord. En ce sens, l'identité des Juifs éthiopiens est le produit de ces facteurs et non pas une essence qui leur préexisterait. Cette thèse étudie l'évolution de l'identité des Juifs éthiopiens à travers 1) des récits historiques retraçant les origines de la dispersion récente de la communauté juive éthiopienne, 2) une analyse de la littérature portant sur les Juifs éthiopiens en Israël, et 3) des témoignages subjectifs d'immigrants Juifs-Éthiopiens résidant àMontréal et à Toronto.

<u>Chapter 1: Introduction</u>

For the past two decades, increasing attention has been given to the community of Ethiopian Jews (historically known as *Falashas*, and self-identified as *Beta Israel*)[1] who, until the mid 1970's, were struggling to become an officially accepted part of world Jewry (Kaplan 1985 in Kaplan 1988:362). (This thesis identifies the group as either Falasha, Beta Israel, or Ethiopian Jew, depending on the historical and geographical context referred to.) By the end of 1984, before Operation Moses took place, an estimated 7,000 people had managed to successfully flee Ethiopia and to settle in Israel either independently, with the assistance of the Israeli government and other agencies through secret routes, or in smaller airlift operations of the 1970's and 1980's. Operations Moses (1984-85) and Solomon (1991) are known to have rescued an additional 22,000 Ethiopian Jews, bringing the vast majority of them together in Israel. There are currently approximately 50,000 Ethiopian Jews in Israel, a population commonly known as the most different from the mainstream Jewish immigrant groups in Israeli society. The Ethiopian Jewish population makes up 1% of the total population of Israel, and includes illegal immigration by families, individuals and groups, non-Jewish Ethiopians intermarried with Ethiopian Jews, the Falash Mora,[2] and births in Israel.

During the mid-1980's at the height of Operation Moses' airlift activity out of the Sudan to Israel, a small number of Ethiopian Jews emigrated to Montreal with the sponsorship of the Jewish Immigrant Aid Services of Canada (JIAS), local Jewish families and pro-Ethiopian Jewish organizations. At its peak, the community was approximately 150 members strong. Over the last five years, however, this community has decreased in size: there is now a small group of Ethiopian Jews in Toronto (about 25 people), and others are dispersed among Ottawa, Vancouver, the U.S. and Israel. Currently, the

---

[1]*Falasha* is a term from Ge'ez, or ancient Ethiopian, meaning *exiles* or *strangers* (Kessler and Parfitt 1985; Semi 1985), and it has a derogatory meaning for the Ethiopian Jews. The term may have been used to refer to many non-Christian or non-Amhara wandering groups without land rights or regular places of residence (Abbink 1987:143). Abbink (1987) refers to the name *Falasha* as their "caste" name. Their term of self-reference in Ethiopia was *Beta Israel* or *Israelotch*, "house of Israel" and "Israelites" respectively (Abbink 1984), although in Israel they prefer to be referred to as *yehudim haetiyopim*, or Ethiopian Jews.

[2] This is a group of Ethiopians who claim to have been forced to convert from Judaism to Christianity and are desirous of a "return to their roots" and the right to emigrate to Israel as Jews.

Montreal Ethiopian Jewish community numbers approximately 85 people. In 1989, the JIAS program to sponsor Ethiopian Jewish refugees was called off for a number of political reasons; central to the justification of this decision was the fact that Israel was planning Operation Solomon, the mass family reunification airlift of 1991.

Although the literature on Ethiopian Jews in Israel primarily treats this group as a fixed category of people which has been transported from Ethiopia to Israel, concentrating on the tensions between "Ethiopian" and "Israeli" culture due to this contact, the data gathered in my interviews indicate that it is impossible to represent Ethiopian Jews as a coherent group. When I began my fieldwork with the community in Montreal (and Toronto) I expected that such a small group of people who claim that they are all related to each other would be a tight knit community with more commonalties than differences among them. I quickly discovered, however, that the varied personal histories, ages, genders, migration experiences, and birth places of the people subsumed under the label of "Ethiopian Jews" indicate that this is a very mixed group. In addition to the heterogeneity amongst the community of Ethiopian Jews, there are important variations within the groups of which the Ethiopian Jews are a part. The larger (white) Jewish community is divided along doctrinal, cultural and linguistic lines. The Ethiopian community in Montreal is comprised of people who identify themselves ethnically as Eritrean, Amharic, Tigrayan or Oromo, religiously as Coptic Christian, Muslim or Jew, and who speak one or more of approximately 80 Ethiopian dialects.

The primary aim of this thesis is to show how "Ethiopian Jewish identity" is constructed. I will frame my argument from within two perspectives: a historical approach, which will show how Ethiopian Jewish identity has been constructed over time, in a fluid and complicated international political and religious context; and by challenging the notion of a fixed ethnic group identity.

This thesis will show that Ethiopian Jews are a heterogeneous group of people thrown together by historical events, most recently in connection with Western Diaspora Jewry. Contrary to the notion of a Diaspora community, an exiled people who preserve and evolve a group identity, the Ethiopian Jews are a product of the Jewish Diaspora itself.

The formation of group identity in relation to its diaspora is a complex process in which the group, as a self conscious identity, takes shape. In addition to self consciousness in this formation of identity, this process is also defined by the efforts of other agents (groups, institutions, bureaucracies) to identify and define the identity, limits, entitlements and characteristics of this group. In this sense, "identity" is a product of diaspora and not an essence that precedes the diaspora. This thesis will focus on the most recent occurrence which has impacted on the evolution of Ethiopian Jewish identity: their relationship over the last century with Western Jewry. Their integration and acceptance by World Jewry is complicated by the assumption that Jews are "white". This is particularly emphasized in the Canadian context, where the Ethiopian Jews are on the margins of several larger groups: Jews, Ethiopians, Africans and Blacks.

The claim that Ethiopian Jews are an "ethnic group" in the literature is problematic for several reasons. First, the notion of an "ethnic group" implies that the group is homogeneous. As this thesis will show, the people identified as "Ethiopian Jews" are a group who do not necessarily pre-exist the status ascribed to them by Israeli Rabbinical officials as "Ethiopian Jews" in 1975. The recent monographs on the history and evolution of Beta Israel identity by Steven Kaplan (1992) and James Quirin (1992) emphasize the fluidity of Falasha identity in Ethiopia, and argue that the question of their identity must be understood within the broader context of Ethiopia, and in relation to the mix of peoples with whom the Beta Israel interacted over the centuries. These issues are central to understanding the processes involved in the construction of Ethiopian Jewish identity.

Second, the concept of being identified as an "ethnic group" is relabeled and redefined once the group is out of Ethiopia, in Israel or in Canada. In Ethiopia the group was marginalized due to its distinct religion; in Israel they are newly identified as "ethnic", a distinction based on cultural differences. The Israeli notion of a collective (Jewish) identity demands that Jews emphasize their experience as (often marginalized) Others in the Diaspora in order to unite as one in the Holy Land. In reality, cultural, linguistic and socio-economic differences derived from the country of origin become salient, thus creating barriers to this ideal (Paine 1989). Groups from all over the world who were

once identified on the basis of religion are newly identified on the basis of custom, language, and cultural tradition, often in the form of a stereotype of the prior nationality. This emergence of redefining identity in a new context requires deeper analysis than simply assigning the Ethiopian Jews new "status" as an *edah* (ethnic group) in Israel.

Finally, the notion of belonging to an "ethnic group" forces definitions and oppositions upon a group that has a number of salient identifying features made up of a multi-layered identity, components of which may be highlighted more or less depending on the context and the interlocutors. The identification of being Ethiopian, Jewish, and Black requires a perspective that rejects the traditional notions of an all-inclusive category that might usually be applied in the context of belonging to a particular ethnic group.

Methodology

This thesis relies on several methodological sources. I review the literature in English on Falasha identity in Ethiopia and on the Ethiopian Jewish experience of integration in Israel. I place the question of Ethiopian Jewish identity in historical perspective by reviewing the texts which describe the main events leading up to the Israeli Rabbinate's decision to assign them official status as Jews in 1975.

I incorporate the data gathered on the Ethiopian Jews in Canada, derived from my fieldwork among the community in Montreal and Toronto from March, 1994 to April, 1995. This fieldwork includes open-ended interviews, discussions and meetings with 10 Ethiopian Jewish people, 3 informal interviews with JIAS executives, and 2 interviews with non-Jewish Ethiopians; participant observation at Ethiopian and general Jewish community events; informal meetings in Ethiopian Jewish peoples' homes; and archival research at the Canadian Jewish Congress National Archives in Montreal. All informants are identified with pseudonyms, unless quoted as speaking in an official capacity.[3]

I introduced myself to several members of the Ethiopian Jewish community through the fall of 1993 by telephone. I first attended a community event at Passover in March, 1994. I was given a warm reception there, and identified several people who

---

[3] Ethiopian names were selected from Lord (1970:305-308).

would be willing to meet with me again. In selecting informants from the community, I was limited to those people whose English was fairly fluent. I tried to speak to a range of people, however, and even with the language limitation I was able to talk to men and women from different backgrounds and of varied ages. The non-Jewish Ethiopians with whom I spoke were introduced to me through Ethiopian Jewish informants. The community events which I attended include several parties put on by the general Ethiopian Community Association, a Passover seder (ritual meal) with the Ethiopian Jewish community, the 1994 Operation Solomon commemoration by the Ethiopian Jewish community, and two Jewish community events at which Ethiopian Jews did presentations on their history and culture.

This thesis is divided into five chapters and a conclusion. The remaining section of the Introduction is a brief review of constructionist approaches to ethnic groups and identity which outlines the theoretical perspective of this thesis. Chapter Two provides a historical background of the Ethiopians' journey to becoming an official part of world Jewry, and a brief literature review of the distinguishing features of Falasha identity in Ethiopia. Chapter Three outlines the conditions in which Ethiopian Jewish emigration took place, and discusses the political setting in which to frame the contents of the paper. Chapter Four examines the Ethiopian Jews' portrayal in the literature on their identity and integration in Israel. Chapter Five focuses on the process of constructing Ethiopian Jewish identity in Canada, and will illustrate how identity is connected to different moments in time, various places, and multiple relationships with other groups of people.

CONSTRUCTIONIST APPROACHES TO ETHNIC GROUPS AND CULTURAL IDENTITY

The static category of the "ethnic group" is less applicable and less useful to understanding Ethiopian Jewish identity than is discussing "ethnic identity" in terms of establishing, maintaining, changing and negotiating *boundaries* and *relationships*. Theorists since Barth (1969) have treated ethnic identity from a relational perspective, accounting for the fluidity of identity in terms of other groups and the process by which groups interact. More recent anthropological writings have built upon these theories,

accounting for the construction of ethnic identity in its broader historical and political context. The framework on which this thesis relies is the current anthropological approach which examines how identity is constructed in diaspora, transitory, temporary communities.

Diaspora identity

The literature on diaspora communities and the deterritorialization of identity offer new approaches to the treatment of group identity. This approach suggests that we move beyond the analysis of the construction of ethnic groups themselves towards a critical interpretation of the *premises* upon which *difference* between peoples and places are constructed (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Malkki 1992) and of the processes that produce such categories as taken-for-granted (Alonso 1994). Rosaldo argues that the point "is not to declare ethnicity invented and stop there, but to show in historical perspective how it was invented and with what consequences" (1990:27 in Alonso 1994:392). In addition to placing the construction of group identity in historical perspective, this literature points out that communities and cultures are neither fixed spatially nor temporally (Gupta and Ferguson 1992; Malkki 1992; Clifford 1994; Chavez 1994).

Diaspora cultures live the tensions of separation and entanglement, of living here and remembering other places (Clifford 1994:311). This is the lived experience of temporality: "linear history is broken, the present constantly shadowed by a past that is also a desired, but obstructed future: a renewed, painful yearning" (1994:318). But contrary to Clifford's assumption that the "desired" has been lived in the past, the Ethiopian Jewish desired homeland, Israel, may not be a lived memory for many people. In some cases the desired future is expressed through memories of former expectations and hopes to leave Ethiopia for Israel, constructed through a religious ideological desire to "return" to the homeland. In other cases, the desired future is based on a glimpse of the future through a temporary stay in Israel.

The construction of Ethiopian Jewish identity is most closely linked to the Ethiopian Jews' relationship with Ethiopian Orthodox Christians and to Diaspora and

Israeli Jews. The historical and more current literature on Ethiopian Jewry is largely written by Diaspora and Israeli Jews interested in arguing the legitimacy of the Falashas as Jews under the 1950 Law of Return.[4] My analysis of Ethiopian Jewish identity accounts for the power imbalance between Ethiopian and other Jews expressed on two levels: the power and authority of World Jewry to categorize the group officially as Jews; and the dynamics of *internal othering* among Jews.

I propose to look at how identity is constructed from a perspective which accounts for the impact of the *categorizer* (the other group or groups which define "X" as "X") on the group. In addition to accounting for how the process of categorization impacts on the experience of being an "X", I argue that the assumptions behind labels which categorize people must be challenged. In the case of Ethiopian Jews, among these labels are being simultaneously "Jewish", "Black", "Ethiopian Jewish", and "African". The remaining sections expand on the above arguments.

Inventions of groups and categories

As Sollors points out, "the interpretation of previously 'essentialist' categories ... as 'inventions' has resulted in the recognition of the general cultural constructedness of the modern world. What were the givens in intellectual pursuits until very recently have now become the problematic issues" (1989:x). He suggests, as have others, that the term "ethnicity" can be meaningfully discussed as an "invention", and argues that "this usage is meant not to evoke a conspiratorial interpretation of a manipulative inventor who single-handedly makes ethnics out of unsuspecting subjects, but to suggest widely shared, though intensely debated, collective fictions that are continually reinvented" (1989:xi). But in applying his argument to the construction of group identity of any kind (ethnic, religious, national), the question left unaddressed is, "invented by whom?"

Most scholars look at the invention of ethnic or group identity as something self-ascribed, assuming that groups need to "substantiate politically motivated feelings of peoplehood" (Hobswam and Ranger 1983 in Sollors 1989), or, perhaps, that "people are

---

[4]This law states that all Jews living in the Diaspora are entitled to immigrate to Israel and to receive automatic citizenship.

agents of their own fate and will use, alter, and make innovations in their ethnic behavior for a variety of reasons" (Gans 1994). Richard Jenkins (1994) presents a compelling argument against the over-use of this approach, suggesting that (anthropological) studies of group identity have underemphasized the *external* definition of the group in its formation of identity. My analysis of Ethiopian Jewish identity will rely on Jenkins' approach to the construction of group identity through a dialectical process between the external/internal definition of group identity.

Jenkins represents social identity on a continuum between internal and external definitions and through processes expressed along a continuum between the individual and the collective levels. His conception of identity is schematically described through processes ranging from the dialectic between "I" and "me", "self-image" and "public image", and a distinction between a "group" and "category". He emphasizes that the hierarchy of social (ethnic) identity should be understood as a continuum which has only been stratified for the purposes of exposition. He explains that "'I' and 'me' unite in the creation of the sense of self which lies behind self-image. Self-images meld with public images in the complex negotiation of shared meanings and understandings that is the basis of group identity. Group identification and categorization combine in situationally-specific relations of resistance or reinforcement to produce the social reality in historical time and space of ethnicity" (1994:209).

In setting up his argument, Jenkins explains that external definition is embedded in social relationships, and that the capacity to act successfully in other people's lives implies either the power (in the form of control over resources) or the authority (which is, by definition, only effective when it is legitimate) to do so. He also reminds us of the useful distinction the social sciences has made between "categories" and "groups":

> category: A class whose nature and composition is decided by the person who defines the category ... A category is therefore to be contrasted with a group, defined by the nature of the relations between the members. (Mann 1983:34 in Jenkins 1994:200)

A group is rooted in processes of internal definition; a category is externally defined. But not all categories are equal; categories may be externally defined by anthropologists, governments, other ethnic groups, or by religious bodies, for example. Jenkins argues that

in privileging the group over social categories, which are "identified, defined and delineated by others", anthropologists have not paid enough attention to ethnicity as a social liability or stigma. He does not, however, disregard the importance of self or group identification: "a claim to ethnic identity must be validated by an audience of 'outsiders' or 'others', because without such an audience the issue would not arise, but it seems to make little sense to talk about an ethnicity which does not at some point recognize itself as such" (1994:207).

In discussing the names, natures and boundaries of groups and categories, Jenkins suggests that social identity is made up of two significant strands: the nominal (a name) and the virtual (a meaning or an experience) (1994:202). These two strands are interrelated, yet may be separated to some extent. One may change without the other changing, and may be either the product of internal process or external categorization. Jenkins' point is that the capacity of one group of people to effectively define or to constitute the condition of existence experienced by another should not be underestimated:

> The effective categorization of a [group] by a more powerful 'other' is not [just] a matter of classification .... *It is necessarily an intervention in that group's social world which will, to an extent and in ways that are a function of the specifics of the situation, alter the world and the experience of living in it.* (p.217-18, emphasis mine)

This distinction between the nominal and virtual, Jenkins argues, is rooted in the recognition that ethnic and all social identities are *practical accomplishments* rather than *static forms*.

In examining specific processes of social categorization and the contexts within which they can occur, Jenkins explains that there are various contexts in which group identity can be realized, and that "identity is produced and reproduced in the course of social interaction" (1994:209). He lists several "contexts of ethnic categorization" on a continuum from the most informal to the most formal settings for social interaction: routine public interaction, sexual relationships, communal relationships, membership of informal groups, marriage and kinship, market relationships, employment, administrative allocation, organized politics, and official classification (p.210). The implication in listing "official categorization" (as in census statistics or Nazi Germany's definition of citizenship

in terms of race) as the most formal type of categorization is that official classification is most often pejorative or stigmatizing in its content. Applying this concept to the Ethiopian Jews, it becomes apparent that official classification may initially seem empowering, and that it may not be obvious to both Ethiopian Jews and to other people that it is stigmatizing. This is a case in which the group desired the official religious classification as Jews, allowing them to fulfill the dream of immigrating to the Promised Land under the Law of Return. Receiving this classification marked a drastic change in both the group's engagement with other groups, most notably "World Jewry", and thus its internal and external boundaries of identification. This is the context in which I propose to view Ethiopian Jewish social (collective) identity: in relation to World Jewry, which, by categorizing the Beta Israel as Jews, has authorized inclusion into its own group.

The final component of Jenkins's argument on which my analysis will rely is what he refers to as the "process of internalization". He argues that "the categorized group is exposed to the terms in which another group defines it and assimilates that categorization, in whole or in part, into its own identity" (1994:216). Jenkins states:

> ... the very act of defying categorization, of striving for an autonomy of self-identification, is, of course, an effect of being categorized in the first place. The rejected external definition is internalized, but paradoxically, as the focus of denial. (p.217)

Several points must be raised regarding Ethiopian Jews in this context. While the official categorization of the group as Jews was desired by these Ethiopians, other aspects of their social characteristics have prevented their full acceptance as Jews, despite the *nominal* shift in their categorization. The most obvious of these is the assumption by other Jews that the group is "black". In Israel they are referred to as *Ethiopian* Jews (or just "Ethiopians"), never simply Jews. In Israel, ethnic terms designate weak or peripheral groups, as opposed to European mainstream populations (Ashkenazim) who do not identify themselves in ethnic terms due to stigmatizing connotations (Neeman 1994). Many Ethiopian Jews reject the *terms* of their inclusion into the Jewish world (for example, some Ethiopians refuse to comply with the conversion ceremony required of all Ethiopians wishing to marry in Israel),[5] and may resent the perception that they are black.

---

[5]See pp.52-54, for further explanation of this requirement.

In Canada, the convenient labeling of people in terms of ethnicity on both official levels (as in Census counts or in academia) and in every day language (in face-to-face interactions with other people) is confusing for Ethiopian Jewish people, in that they are not sure which category they belong to. There are too few of them in Canada to belong to the "Ethiopian Jewish" category as they would in Israel. They are selectively and sometimes simultaneously categorized in terms of religion (Jew), race (black) and nationality (Ethiopian).

Jewish identity and otherness

Silberstein explains that at the turn of the century, when secular Judaism became an acceptable alternative to religious Judaism, "the center of gravity of Jewish life shifted from the theological and metaphysical spheres to the realm of the social and cultural [and] more and more attention was given to those social and cultural [traits] that differentiated this group and this culture from others" (1994:2). The emergence of secular Jewish discourse caused the notion of Jewish identity to become essentially contested: "Zionist discourse was characterized by ongoing debate over the character and parameters of Jewish identity, a debate that continues to the present" (Silberstein 1994:3). Silberstein points out that the issue of identity is a central problem in Jewish public and academic discourse, and that with few exceptions, studies assume the natural givenness of Jewish group identity. Social scientists, psychologists and historians:

> ...presuppose the existence of an entity identified alternately as the Jewish people, the Jewish nation, or the Jewish community, the major parameters of which can be identified, isolated, and described. [They] assume as given some essential group, body of thought, or set of cultural values and practices that are taken to be essentially 'Jewish'. To speak of Judaism, the Jewish people, Jewish culture, and Jewish society is, therefore, to speak of a coherent, identifiable entity. (1994:3)

Silberstein rejects these common assumptions and suggests a constructionist notion of Jewish identity, accounting for the roles of power, struggle and conflict. He also argues that "the concept of the Other" is central to this revised interpretation of Jewish identity. Drawing on Foucault, Derrida and feminist theory, Silberstein suggests that "insofar as identity presupposes alterity, any effort by a group to establish the parameters of its own

identity entails the exclusion and/or silencing of the voices of Others" (1994:6). These ideas are important theoretical approaches for Jews (and members of other cultural groups) who, "rejecting essentialistic notions of identity and culture, nonetheless remain committed to the perpetuation of a distinct community and culture" (1994:11-12).

Silberstein (1994) explains that studies of Jewish culture and history regularly emphasize how Jews have become marginalized, excluded and oppressed as the Other. Scholars have only recently begun to look at the ways in which Jews, in the process of constructing their cultural identity, construct and define others. Of particular relevance to my argument is the way in which Jewish identity constructs and is constructed by the relationship to others *within*. Anthropologist Virginia Dominguez (1989) writes on the social and cultural processes by which Jewish cultural identity is constructed in Israel. She is concerned with the issues of otherness and exclusion that form an integral part of the ongoing construction of Jewish peoplehood (in Silberstein 1994:13). Dominguez points out that within Israeli society the major Others are Sephardi Jews:[6] the very terminology used to refer to the Ashkenazi and Sephardi Jews reveals the process whereby the Ashkenazi culture (*tarbut*) has been privileged over Sephardi tradition (*morashah*) (in Silberstein 1994:13).[7] Silberstein lists the other Others in Israeli society: "*Goyim*" (non-Jews), non-Orthodox groups, Jewish ethnic minorities, and *marginal groups within the Jewish community whose legitimacy has been questioned* such as the Benei Israel (India), the Karaites, Beta Israel (Ethiopia) and the Samaritans (1994:33, end note 51, emphasis mine). And while Ashkenazi groups maintain cultural hegemony over the Israeli Others, through the shared external Other, the Arab, the Israeli Jews construct a sense of "Israeliness" (Dominguez 1989 in Silberstein 1994:14).

In the Jewish world, Ethiopians are an internal "other". Their strangeness, in this sense, "can be seen as simultaneously the cause and the effect of boundary-drawing

---

[6] Although it isn't clear in Silberstein's account of Dominguez's argument, the implication here is that another major group, the *Mizrachim* (Jews of Middle Eastern origin) is subsumed within the category of Sephardim under the cultural hegemony of the Ashkenazim.

[7] This distinction between "culture" and "tradition" can be paralleled to the distinction, noted by Byron Good (1994), between "knowledge" and "belief" in medical discourse. "Culture" and "knowledge" are privileged over "tradition" and "belief", terms which are relegated to powerless "others".

efforts" (Bauman 1988:8). One of the main markers of their strangeness in the Jewish world is the color of their skin, and their classification as "black" and "African".

black, Black, and Jew: the problem of racial categories

It is necessary to make a distinction between a concept of skin color and a cultural category based on this concept of skin color. In this section I am using "black" (lower case "b") to refer to skin color, and "Black" (capital "B") in reference to black people in North America. Both of these concepts are important in a discussion of Ethiopian Jewish identity, particularly in Canada. Generally, whether they are in Israel or North America, Ethiopian Jews are assumed to have black skin color. In Canada, they are additionally assumed to belong to the category of Black (African) immigrants. Often, these assumptions cause other people to doubt their Jewishness. With the recent rise in tension between Black and Jewish groups, particularly in the United States over the last several years (see Blauner 1994), I suggest that having the categorization of being black and Black imposed on Ethiopian Jews in Canada creates tension on a personal, experiential level, and on an interpersonal level between Ethiopian Jews and other people.

I will examine the problem of skin color in relation to two assumptions: that the category "Jew" is intrinsically white, while the category "Ethiopian" is intrinsically black. Drawing on Gilman's (1994) article, "The Jewish nose: are Jews white? Or, the history of the nose job", I will show that the assumption that Jews are white is an historical construction. Gilman defines identity as "a combination of internal and external, psychological and social qualities — you are always where you are, not who you are" (1994:365). Jews, he states, "have formed themselves within as well as against the world that they inhabited, that they defined, and that defined them" (1994:365). But he argues against understanding this process as happening only at internal, psychological levels, and suggests that the role of physical attributes and the body in identity formation should not be overlooked.

Gilman views the body from Mary Douglas's (1970) social perspective: there is no natural way to consider the body that does not simultaneously involve social dimensions,

and the concern to preserve social boundaries is expressed in terms of bodily boundaries. Drawing on texts from 18th and 19th century European writers, scientists and physicians, Gilman shows that European Jews were perceived as black or at least swarthy well into the end of the 19th century.   He argues that the appearance, the skin color, and the external manifestation of the Jew mark the Jew as different: "For the 18th and 19th century scientist the 'blackness' of the Jew was not only a mark of racial inferiority but also an indicator of the diseased nature of the Jew" (1994:368-69). And, he suggests, "by the mid[19th]century, being black, being Jewish, being diseased, and being 'ugly' came to be inexorably linked" (1994:370). In the context of the racial science of the 19th century, this marker of black distinction imposed on European Jews signified that they had crossed racial boundaries. In crossing this boundary, Jews and Africans were compared: "being black was not beautiful. Indeed, the blackness of the African, like the blackness of the Jew, was believed to mark a pathological change in the skin, the result of congenital syphilis" (Gilman 1994:370).

In the science of physiognomy of the late 18th century, races were also grouped according to facial structure. In these groupings, Africans were considered the least beautiful in comparison to the European face, and the Jew was virtually as ugly because the Jew's physiognomy was closer to that of the African than the European. Gilman explains:

> It is the nose that makes the Jewish face, and it is this quality that is closest to that of the face of the African. It is the nose that relates the image of the Jew to the image of the Black, not because of any overt similarity in the stereotypical representation of the two idealized types of noses, but because these qualities are seen as racial signs and as such reflect as much the internal life ascribed to Jew and African as their physiognomy. (1994:371)

By the end of the 19th century, as environmental factors became accounted for in Jewish skin color, and Jews began to assimilate in appearance to their European neighbors and to rid themselves of the "diseases of the ghetto", the assumed "blackness" of the Jew became a less signifying factor. What marked Jews as visible, even as they longed to fit in, was the Jewish nose. Gilman argues that the invention of aesthetic surgery arose in response to the psychological damage caused by Jewish visibility. Although no longer categorized with Africans as black, the Jewish body remains visible and marked. In describing the historical

categorization of European Jews as black, Gilman's article shows how racial boundaries are fluid and changing over time.

Another problem with the labels "black", "Black" and "white" is that Ethiopian Jews are generally assumed to be the only, or first, Jewish group to have reminded "the Jewish people" of this historical association with being black. Friedmann and Santamaria suggest that "the arrival of the Falashas has created tensions [in Israel] for ... no generalized challenge [has] ever been made to what in the Israeli collective imagination and subconscious had previously seemed self evident, namely the identification Jew = white" (1990:57). This statement overlooks that Yemenite and some Moroccan Jews with olive or brown skin are stereotypically referred to as *shkhorim* (blacks) in Israel, whereas Ethiopian Jews are referred to as *cushim* (literally, a person from the ancient land of Cush, an area of Ethiopia, or a derogatory reference to dark-skinned people) (Dominguez 1989). Perhaps the challenge to the Israeli collective imagination goes beyond skin color to the broader implications of coming from Africa as opposed to the Middle East or North Africa. The fact that groups arriving in Israel prior to the Ethiopians have been labeled (albeit more "politely") in terms of their skin color indicates that the Ethiopians were not the first group to challenge the assumption that all Jews are white.

The assumption, most often made by other Jews and North Americans, that Ethiopians are black and subsumed within the category of Blacks, must also be questioned. Several authors have argued that Ethiopians tend to reject associating with Black or African groups (Matsuoka and Sorenson 1991; Moussa 1993; Sorenson 1990, 1991; Tebeje 1989; Van Praag 1986). While Ethiopians may recognize that their skin coloring varies from light to very dark brown, they reject their own inclusion within the North American Black cultural category, and resent the assumption by the host society that they associate with Blacks. Sorenson argues that "the fact that racial distinctions are easily manipulated and reversed indicates the absurdity of any claims that they have an objective basis and locates these distinctions where they actually occur, in the operations of power" (1993:29).

The Canadian context

This dialectic between "the group" and "others" does not occur in a vacuum; the political context in which groups interact is a factor among the differences which exist in the type of process endorsed by various "host societies". For example, the United States propagates the theory of cultural pluralism, advocating the Melting Pot in which new immigrants and ethnic groups would become as one under a shared American nationality. Israel centers its ideology of "absorption" and integration on a principle of a unified nation based on religious orientation. Canada, on the other hand, has institutionalized what is known as Multiculturalism, an ideal which presents two desirable outcomes to its ethnic groups: 1) the possible survival of ethnic groups and specifically their cultures within a multicultural society; and 2) the promise of full and equal participation in Canadian society without discrimination (Weinfeld 1994:238-9). Weinfeld suggests that the problem with this ideal is that in practice both of these objectives cannot be realized simultaneously (1994:239). But the Multicultural ideal creates other, more subtle problems. It assumes first that groups think of themselves in terms of "ethnic survival", and that groups will strive for and choose "their survival" as a crucial goal. It also underlines the emphasis placed on constructing and maintaining an ethnic identity, or on allying oneself with an already established ethnic group once in Canada.

Chapter 2: Historical Background

This chapter will provide the historical context in which to understand the process of constructing Ethiopian Jewish identity. It is divided into four sections. The first section describes the justification used by Israeli officials in ascribing Falashas status as Jews under the Law of Return in 1975. The second section briefly reviews the debates surrounding the question of the origins of the Falashas. Following Kaplan (1992) and Quirin's (1992) approaches to the evolution of Falasha identity, in this section I argue that Falasha identity must be viewed from within the historical Ethiopian context in which it emerged. Seen from this perspective, I argue that the construction of Ethiopian Jewish identity through their relationship with Diaspora Jews, Israel, and finally, immersed in Israeli society, is the most recent of a chain of historical events. It is important to view the recent developments in the relationship between Ethiopian and other Jews as stemming from the impact of a relationship which has evolved over time. The third section deals more specifically with the introduction of Western Jewry to the Falashas, and the final section reviews how the literature portrays Beta Israel identity in the former Ethiopian context.

Israel and the Falashas: Official recognition as Jews

In February, 1973, over a century after the first attempts to arouse the concern of western Jewry to the existence of Ethiopian Jews, the Sephardi Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef declared that these Jews belong to the Lost Tribe of Dan. He claimed that "they are Jews who must be saved from absorption and assimilation", and that their immigration to Israel had to be accelerated, "making them partners in the building up of our land" (Kessler and Parfitt 1985:9). The Ashkenazim (European Jews), however, who controlled the majority of state and religious operations, were not yet in agreement with this claim. It was not until April of 1975 that the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren followed the Sephardi Rabbi's lead, and the Ministry of the Interior recognized that the Ethiopian Jews were entitled to automatic citizenship under the Law of Return (Kessler and Parfitt 1985:9).

Rabbi Yosef, in declaring the Falashas officially Jewish, was relying on the ruling of Rabbi David Ibn Abu Zimra (the Radbaz), a respected legalist and chief Rabbi of Egypt in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries (Rosen 1986:75). At that time, the Radbaz

wrote that the Falashas were Jews, more specifically descendants of the Lost Tribe of Dan, who were in urgent need of returning to the ways of their fathers, "since during their separation from the rest of world Jewry they had lost touch with many Jewish practices as well as with the Hebrew language" (Rosen 1986:75). What was most serious, the Radbaz wrote, was the Falashas' lack of familiarity with Jewish oral law (*Halacha*) concerning marriage and divorce, as it meant that children of remarried divorced women would be considered "suspected bastards" (*saffek mamzerim*) (Rosen 1986:76). What this ruling implied on a practical level was that in order to be fully recognized as Jews, the Falashas would require proper conversion according to the *Halacha* (Rosen 1986:76; Kaplan 1988:362-3). This would correct centuries of "improper" divorces and remarriages.

Rival Genealogies

Although the Radbaz's ruling on the origin of Ethiopian Jewry became the basis for the official policy that prompted the Chief Rabbinate to allow for their acceptance in Israel as Jews, there are a number of other contested theories about their origins. Some authors suggest that the Beta Israel's own legend is that the group descends from King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba's son, Menelik (for example, Santamaria 1988:355), but as Kaplan points out, the Solomon-Sheba legend is the crucial element in the genealogies of numerous regional and ethnic groups, including the Amhara elite (1992:23). Other scholarly views suggest theories such as the following: that the group may be remnants of indigenous Agaw peoples who received Judaic influences from South Arabia (Yemen) and resisted the imposition of Christianity; that the Ethiopian Jews are descendants of Jewish immigrants from South Arabia who intermarried with the local population; and that Judaism reached Ethiopia through the Jewish community of Egypt.

Quirin argues that the theories on Falasha origins can be divided into three broad perspectives: 1) Falashas are descended directly from ancient Israelites; 2) Falashas are indigenous (Agaw) converts to Judaism, and refused to convert to Christianity when it became Aksum's official religion in the fourth century; or 3) they were originally Christians who rebelled against Orthodoxy and the state (1992:7). He calls these three

perspectives the "Lost Tribe", "Convert" and "Rebel" views, respectively. Quirin explains that none of these three perspectives is incontrovertible — the first two assume that Judaism was independently introduced to Ethiopia; the third concludes that the Judaic elements of the Falashas can be traced exclusively to the Old Testament's presence in Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. He and Kaplan (1992) both suggest that Falasha origins should be viewed in terms of theoretical perspectives on the definition and origins of ethnicity which "emphasize the fluidity of ethnic 'categories' and the contextual nature of their development" (Quirin 1992:26). Both authors indicate that there was likely a group of Agaw converts to Judaism or a form of Judaic-Christianity, but emphasize the dialectic process of cultural and religious exchange which occurred over time between Falashas and Orthodox Christians.

In the history of the Beta Israel in Ethiopia since the end of the last century, three events most impacted on the evolution of their identity. These are the influence of and reaction to the Protestant Missionaries over the latter half of the 19th century; the Famine of 1888-92; and the relationship with Western Jewry over the past century, ultimately resulting in the Falashas' mass emigration out of Ethiopia. Seen from this perspective, it is important to emphasize that "immigration, intermarriage, acculturation, and major religious upheavals all played a part in the formation of the people known as Beta Israel or Falasha" (Kaplan 1992:32). In the more recent Ethiopian context, the Revolution of 1974-91 also had a great impact on the Beta Israel. Not only did it coincide with the first official recognition of the Falashas as Jews under the Law of Return, but it also caused great internal migration, and escape to third countries such as the Sudan. But even prior to this revolution, as Kaplan argues, movement and change impacted on the construction of Beta Israel identity.

My assumption, when I began interviewing Ethiopian Jews in Montreal, was that they were all taken directly out of Beta Israel villages to Canada. I naively asked one older informant whether "people in your community are trying to maintain any of the original Beta Israel religious practices from the villages, now that you are in Canada". He explained:

> You should understand, some of them, they've been cut off from the village. They go to different places, they've been in Addis Ababa, some in Sudan, they already changed a lot in [how they participate in the religion]. So, they don't come straight from the villages, they start to get involved with these kind of things [politics and the revolution] too. So, that means [the changes] don't start from here, they start also back home.

Although it may have been useful, in the lobbying to save Falashas, to emphasize the pristine, traditional Beta Israel village life in order to gain sympathy and support from Western Jewry, this section shows that the situation of the Beta Israel in Ethiopia was far more complex than that. The following section will provide a more detailed account of the event in history which is a key focus of this thesis: the developments over time in the Beta Israel relationship with World Jewry.

World Jewry and the Falashas

Although the first accounts of Jews in Ethiopia reached the west in the 17th and 18th centuries, it was not until the French orientalist, Joseph Halevy, persuaded the Alliance Israelite Universelle to send him to Ethiopia in 1867 to report on his findings, that these Jews became the focus of slight but growing efforts to arouse the concern of Western Jewry (Kessler and Parfitt 1985:6-7). Halevy's student, Dr. Jacques Faitlovitch, who was sent into the Falasha communities primarily in order to counteract the foreign (European) Christian missionary propaganda popular at the turn of the nineteenth century, determined that education, reforming their Judaism, and contact with the Jews of the world would be the best ways to strengthen the bridge of solidarity between world and Ethiopian Jewry (Isaac 1992:406; Kaplan 1992:155), and to assure the survival of this "segment of Jewish people" (Kessler and Parfitt 1985:7). Faitlovitch succeeded in convincing the Jewish Agency (JA) to undertake the first official project for bringing Ethiopian Jews to Israel; in the 1950's twenty-seven youth came to Israel to study at Kfar Batya. Four of these students stayed in Israel, and the rest returned to their Beta Israel villages in northern Ethiopia to teach Hebrew and other Jewish subjects. Two of the Kfar Batya students who originally returned to Ethiopia to teach currently live in Montreal. Those who returned to their villages encouraged their people to cling to the hope of one day making *aliyah* (ascension or Jewish immigration to Israel) to the Holy Land (Rosen

1986:75). In the short term, however, it seems that this was not Israel's immediate goal (Isaac 1992).

According to some literature, one key feature of Falasha religion was the belief in the G-d of Israel, who would send the Messiah to redeem and return them to the Holy Land (Wagaw 1993:14). This aspect of their religion is depicted as "the central feature of their religion" by Kessler, who also emphasizes that this belief in the Messiah and the return to Israel is "common to Jews everywhere" (1982:68). Leslau (1951), who did research among the Falashas in 1947 and 1950, completely contradicts these accounts. He writes that at that time, they had "no interest in a Jewish national state". He states that there was no national connection to Judaism for the Falashas, in part because of their complete isolation from other Jews in that they had no news of Jewish activity in other parts of the world, and because "there is no religious persecution at present in Ethiopia" (1951:xli). Leslau explains that "it is true they feel themselves a part of the Jewish religious community, and that in their prayers the memory of Jerusalem lives on, but this memory has a religious character, not a national one" (1951:xli).

The only known attempt for the Falashas to migrate to Israel prior to the contact with Western Jewry was in 1862. Kessler and Parfitt explain that "ill-prepared and with no proper leadership, many Falashas abandoned their homes and, singing hymns and waving flags, set forth eastwards expecting that when they reached the Red Sea it would divide and let them pass over to the Promised Land" (1985:7). According to several authors (Kaplan 1992; Leslau 1951; Quirin 1992), this happened in response to conflicts between Falashas and the missionaries, or due to religious disputes which arose between Falashas and their converted relatives.

Whether this desire to return to the Holy Land had always been a central distinctive feature of Beta Israel identity as Wagaw (1993) and Kessler (1982) claim, or whether it was introduced to the culture through increasing contact with "outside Jewry", beginning most prominently with Jacques Faitlovitch, is the object of some debate. Kaplan suggests that in fact, one of the main aims of European "pro-Falasha" supporters was to project an image of Ethiopian Jewry that would be both familiar and attractive to European and

American Jewish audiences (1992:155). Furthermore, Kaplan suggests that there is little evidence to support the view that prior to their contact with external Jewish groups the Beta Israel viewed themselves as "Jews", although they consistently traced their identity to Israelites from the Biblical period. Since the late 19th century, and particularly after World War II, he argues, their image of themselves has changed dramatically: "increasingly, their accounts of their past and their religious traditions are shaped to stress the similarities, in some cases even the total identity, with those of other Jewish communities" (1992:165). Thus, apparently, their desire to come to Israel may have been strongly associated with their increasing identification with world Jewry, and an even stronger wish to be identified as Jews. This redefinition of identity also may serve, at the present time, to help them to gain acceptance and to feel more "at home" in their new, Israeli environment.

The following discussion of Beta Israel identity in Ethiopia will further show how their portrayal as a bounded group was manipulated by various interest groups at different times.

Beta Israel identity in Ethiopia

There are two relationships which stand out as salient in the literature on Beta Israel identity in Ethiopia in recent history: that to other Ethiopians, particularly neighboring Christian Amhara groups; and less directly, but no less significantly, that to World Jewry and Israel. In this section I outline the key elements of Beta Israel identity in Ethiopia primarily by looking at how the literature has portrayed them in relation to other groups in the Ethiopian context. I will examine how their differences from and similarities to other Ethiopians is described according to two processes: the process of self-distinction from other Ethiopian groups; and the process of being perceived as distinct by others in Ethiopian society. Later, I will show how these depictions have been used to contrast the Beta Israel to other Jews, both before and after their migration to Israel.

The Falashas are depicted as occupying a minority position in relation to other Ethiopians; some scholars have gone so far as to refer to them as occupying the status of an *occupational caste* (Quirin 1979), or as a stigmatized *quasi-caste* (Abbink 1987).

According to the literature, there are a number of key social institutions which contributed to maintaining cultural boundaries, and which also created the marginal, liminal status of the Falashas in Ethiopia. These institutions can be summarized as the following: religious difference and purity; landlessness and despised occupations; and the evil eye possession (*buda*). The latter two are inherently linked. Boundaries based on religious distinction and purity were defined by the Beta Israel in order to differentiate themselves from other groups. The landlessness, despised occupations and the evil eye attributions were imposed on the Falashas by other groups, and thus served to differentiate the Beta Israel from the outside.

Religious distinction and purity

Beta Israel religious ideology and purity is defined both by religious beliefs and practices which separate them from other Ethiopians, and by rites which maintain the internal purity of the Beta Israel. Several Ethiopian Jewish informants explained to me that Beta Israel villagers were more pure, clean, and strictly religious than other Ethiopians. One informant proudly told me of their reputation in Ethiopia of "smelling like water", because they were known by others as being excessively clean and pure.

Abbink (1987) outlines the major conflicts surrounding the Beta Israel relationship with their Christian neighbors. He argues that the Beta Israel initially resisted the invading Amhara and Tigray by force of arms, but later also by ideological means. They developed a politico-religious counter ideology against that of the Amhara Christians, who claimed to be Solomon's descendants, and thus the real Israelites. The Beta Israel, however, maintained their own self-definition as the real Israelites, referring to the Orthodox Christian Amhara as the "apostates" (Abbink 1987:143). In order to preserve their ethno-religious identity, the Beta Israel instituted a clear boundary between themselves and the Christian Amhara. Abbink further speculates that from the 15th to 16th centuries Beta Israel religious leaders consciously drew a religious and social line which the Beta Israel were not permitted to cross in order to avoid contamination, which could occur either by contact with Christians or by committing apostasy (Abbink 1987:144).

This religious and social line became the institution of *atankunye* (Amharic: "do not touch me"), which included rules for dealing with polluting contact by people from outside the Beta Israel community. After such an occurrence, Beta Israel were supposed to wash themselves and their clothes in the river in order to ritually purify themselves. This rule also extended to food and drink touched or prepared by non-Beta Israel (Abbink 1987:147). This rule was carried out to the extent that when Beta Israel were invited to outsiders' celebrations, they would bring their own utensils and would themselves slaughter the animals provided by their hosts in a special space kept apart for them (Semi 1985:106).

Because the assumption of the Beta Israel was that anyone from the outside was believed not to have observed their rules of purity, and hence deemed impure, Beta Israel villages were always built away from other villages, surrounded by stones or fences with hedges, emphasizing the demarcation between purity and pollution (Semi 1985:106). Moreover, if a rule of purity was violated, or if a member of the Beta Israel community had stayed outside of the village for a lengthy period of time, it was necessary for that person to go through ritual isolation, diet, and purging before being re-admitted into the community (Semi 1985:106). This significant distinction between the pure and impure was enforced by the group to distinguish themselves from the neighboring Christian and other non-Beta Israel groups. Other significant religious institutions included the strict rules for the conversion of non-Beta Israel into the community, the ritual imperative to marry within the group, and the unyielding sacredness of the Sabbath (Abbink 1987:147).

The group purity and pollution rites practiced internally among the Beta Israel defined themselves as cleaner and more virtuous than other Ethiopians. (As will become more apparent in the next section, which deals with the community in Israel, these rites became particularly symbolic of the differences between Ethiopian Jewish women and their Israeli counterparts.) Among the rules for maintaining purity internally among the Beta Israel was the requirement for strict ritual cleansing treatment of those who had had contact with a corpse (Semi 1985:106).

The more distinctive rites are those surrounding menstruating and parturient women. When they were menstruating or near giving birth, Beta Israel women were isolated in a hut (Amharic: *margam beit*) surrounded by stones (Semi 1985:105). Anyone who crossed the boundary became contaminated, as did all utensils that the woman used during the period of isolation. In either case, special cleansing rites existed which served to re-institute the contaminated back into the community. A menstruating woman remained in seclusion for at least seven days; a woman who gave birth to a male was isolated (with her child) for forty days, she who gave birth to a female was secluded for eighty days (Semi 1985:105). Following this post-partum period of seclusion, and after the proper purification rites and blessings, mother and new-born were welcomed back into the community with great celebration and festivities (Semi 1985:105). The ritual circumcision of the boy (*brit milah*) was performed on the eighth day after birth, and was not done by a priest, since doing so would have polluted him (Semi 1985:105). The excision and infibulation of the baby girl was performed by the woman who helped deliver the child.[8] The operation did not take place at a fixed time, and opinions on when the girl was "circumcised" vary from after the second week of birth to after the eighty day isolation period.

Other accounts of the purity rites of the Beta Israel are in basic agreement with Semi (1985). But it is interesting to note that Kaufman Shelemay (1986), while in agreement with Semi's description of the life cycle rituals, adds that a number of these rites were shared with neighboring communities of both Christian and Muslim faiths. The dietary rules, for example, were similar to those of their countrymen: "No Beta Israel, Ethiopian Christian or Muslim will eat pork and all slaughter their own meat, although Beta Israel prepared special knives for this purpose and carried out slaughter according to Biblical prescription" (Kaufman Shelemay 1986:43). Kaufman Shelemay also states that Beta Israel customs relating to birth and death were largely shared with Christian

---

[8] Female circumcision was also practiced by other Ethiopian groups. Although this is one aspect of Beta Israel culture which separates them from the rest of World Jewry, I have not seen this used as an argument against official recognition of the Beta Israel as Jews in any of the literature.

Ethiopians (1986:43). Numerous groups may have shared the practice of slaughtering their own meat, but no author claims that these groups shared meat with each other.

Wagaw, himself a non-Jewish Ethiopian, but from the same area and rural conditions that characterized most of Beta Israel culture reports that the Beta Israel were not the only ones regarded with mistrust, hatred and suspicion in Ethiopia (1993:13). Other religious, ethnic or linguistic communities practiced exclusion from one another and were sometimes subjected to persecution by the dominant Christian group. But because the Beta Israel were stricter in their observances of exclusion, the intensity of suspicion that led to animosity against them was stronger (Wagaw 1993:13). Quirin substantiates this argument concerning the differences between the Beta Israel and other groups, stating that despite significant similarities between Amhara-Tigray Christianity and Beta Israel Judaism, "the Beta Israel viewed Amhara-Tigray culture and the Orthodox religion as impure and immoral compared to their own religion and culture. This view was based on stricter laws concerning food, sex, birth and death" (1979:255).

Although the above accounts depict the Beta Israel as being separate, bounded and distinct from their neighbors in Ethiopia, Kaplan (1992) suggests that the rules against mixing with Beta Israel converts to Christianity, for example, were not strictly nor consistently imposed. Furthermore, during the Famine of 1888-92, the Beta Israel could not afford the luxury of preparing food and eating separately from other religious groups. The boundaries which separated the Beta Israel from the Christian Orthodox were not necessarily as strict as some literature implies, nor were they fixed over time. Ketema, an informant whose father was converted to Christianity through the Church Mission to the Jews when Ketema was still a child, supports Kaplan's claims:

> ...my *father*, was a very well known *kess* [Beta Israel priest], in the region [Gondar province]. But for some reasons which I am not going to say now, he went to a mission. It's called the Church Mission to Jews. So he became a teacher so, I was disconnected from the Ethiopian Jewish community when I was very young. ... He was excommunicated. Five hundred priests came, all over Ethiopia to excommunicate him. They went up to the mountain, they did it in a traditional way. But, he didn't wait long. You know, because my father has a very good relationship with his brothers and sisters. And my father's family they are a very strong family. So, even though they were excommunicated and we all, the family was excommunicated when we were very young, the *closeness* of the family was more than that. So, within just some years, we regained the connection.
> Q: You came back.

A: We came back. So, we were allowed to go to our grandmother's village, we are allowed to go to my uncle's village, we were allowed to go to 15 villages, in our close family. After that we cannot go. People became angry. *We* might go, we are very young, but the elders I don't think they can go. They will be insulted or there will be a fight. For example, somebody died? If he [Ketema's father] goes to the burial? He will have a problem. Somebody will insult him. But later on after five, six years things were not like that, they were getting used to it.

Ketema's comment here shows that although he and his family were initially kept outside the boundaries of the villages and rituals, within a short period of time they were mingling with relatives and allowed back into the community. This illustrates that these boundaries were flexible, and that separation and purity rites were not necessarily kept as strictly as the literature implies.

Beta Israel holidays

The distance created and maintained between the Beta Israel and other groups went beyond notions of spatial and social separation; Beta Israel self-purification also consisted of re-adaptation of religious texts and prayers (often on the basis of a Christian example), the institution of various new holy days, and rules for the conversion of outsiders (Abbink 1987:144-5). It is in this context that the literature pulls out certain distinctions and similarities both from the Ethiopian Christians, and from other Jews. Kaufman Shelemay explains that the Sabbath and a number of annual holidays carried the same significance and were celebrated on the same dates as they are by other Jews (the New Year, the Day of Atonement, the Festival of Tabernacles, Passover), although the Beta Israel observance of these holidays differed from those of the Jewish mainstream (1986:42). She describes other holidays, like the *Seged*, as being derived from precedents in Ethiopian culture, but celebrated uniquely by the Beta Israel community. Abbink describes the *Seged* as "the most important 'ethnic festival' of the Falashas [in Ethiopia], a sort of ritual affirmation of their boundary with all other Ethiopians" (1983:791). The *Seged* (which alludes to Mount Sinai) was a day of collective prayer, fasting and religious instruction, and members of the community ascend and pray atop a local mountain

(Abbink 1983; Kaufman Shelemay 1986). The day culminated in great celebration and feast, and involved the gathering of members from various neighboring Beta Israel villages.

Landlessness, despised occupations, and the evil eye (buda)

The final three social institutions which constructed boundaries around the Beta Israel in Ethiopia are landlessness and despised occupations, and the evil eye or *buda*. These mark the external definition of the group by other Ethiopians through marginalization. Evil eye accusations were applied to the Falashas as a group, although there is some controversy in the literature as to whether these types of accusations were predominantly directed at Falashas, or if they were more generally applied to any marginal groups identified through their occupations.

The *buda*, considered to be the spirit which possessed a person and the person capable of causing the spirit to possess one, was powerful and dangerous. Those accused of *buda* were thought to have the ability to harm their victims by transforming themselves into hyenas at night, roaming about graveyards and devouring cadavers. They were also able to posses other people to transform them into hyenas, cows, cats or other animals, or to cause death or illness by using his or her evil eye to enter a victim and drink the person's blood. During the 19th century as the Beta Israel reverted to despised and feared artisan occupations and the *buda* epithet developed, upward mobility to middle-level occupational positions and access to land titles and tenure became increasingly impossible (Quirin 1992:144).

While there is basic agreement in the literature about the characteristics of *buda*, authors differ in the degree to which they attribute these beliefs exclusively to the Falashas, or more generally to other marginal groups. Some authors write about the *buda* as if being a Falasha and being landless necessarily limited one to the despised artisan occupations (metal workers, potters). These characteristics of the Falashas led to *buda* accusations by Christian Amhara (Kaplan 1992; Quirin 1992; Wagaw 1993). Reminick (1976), who focuses specifically on the institution of the evil eye rather than the history or culture of the Beta Israel, concentrates on occupational status as the necessary determinant

of being accused of *buda*, implying that the belief could extend to other ethnic or religious groups as well. Young notes that "some humans (usually endogamous iron workers) can introject their cannibalistic spirit aspects, known as *buda*, into their victims", likewise emphasizing occupational status in identifying the *buda*, rather than religious or ethnic identity (1975:573). The former group of authors do, however, all acknowledge that *buda* accusations could be directed at other marginal groups as defined by their occupations, though they strongly emphasize its association with the Falashas.

Beta Israel identity in Ethiopia in the context of World Jewry

Beta Israel Judaism was developed in isolation from the other Jewish communities around the world, and largely developed in opposition to Amhara Christianity. Despite the growing religious and social boundaries between the Beta Israel and their Christian neighbors, both communities shared "a same discourse of religious symbolism, historical tradition and liturgy within which they communicated with each other" (Abbink 1987:145). Thus, the Beta Israel must be viewed as a community which shared cultural traits with Orthodox Christians, and a community which was on the fringes of world Jewry due to the Beta Israel's ignorance of rabbinical Judaism (Semi 1985:103). The Beta Israel religious practices, purity rites and holidays are key signifiers of difference from World Jewry, and are elements of Beta Israel identity which have constructed the group as an internal other among Jews in Israel and the Diaspora. Over the course of the 20th century, as contact with visiting Jews, scholars, rabbis and educators increased, major changes occurred in the religious world of the Beta Israel. In order to gain acceptance among World Jewry and with the encouragement of Jewish organizations, the Beta Israel eliminated certain practices not held in common with the Jewish mainstream (Kaufman Shelemay 1986), but debates over their origins, status and legitimacy as Jews raged on.

In contrast to the social boundaries which mark the Beta Israel as distinct from other Jews, the social institutions which set the group apart in Ethiopia and which emphasized their marginality in comparison to the mainstream (landlessness, despised occupations, *buda* attributions) were repeatedly used by political activists in order to

appeal to Jewish solidarity. Falasha marginalization in Ethiopia was frequently emphasized in the context of lobbying for the Ethiopian Jewish rescue. The appeal to a parallel history of the European Jewish experience in the past was constantly used: images of the poor, black Jews who shared nationality and skin color with their neighbors and were persecuted *simply because they were Jews* became the idiom which described the Falasha situation in Ethiopia. This arbitrary persecution on the basis of religious beliefs and practices became the discourse of anti-Semitism, and the appeal to Jewish solidarity was strengthened.

Beyond cultural and geographical differences in the nature of the surrounding reference society, Beta Israel or Falasha marginalization has been described in the literature, media, and by political interest groups based on different criteria at various times. As the top administrator in charge of the Ethiopians at one regional branch of the Jewish Agency in Israel put it in 1986:

> "They were depicted to us as destitute, poor, and severely persecuted because of their Jewishness. Now we know differently. But the depiction of them as such was helpful in precipitating a lot of dialogue that led to the mobilization of public opinion which in turn led to their coming to Israel." (quoted in Wagaw 1993:107)

Beta Israel identity as an historical construction

This varied treatment and emphasis on different characteristics of the same group of people over time and space has also supported my argument that, on a theoretical level, the construction of group identity must be placed in the historical and political context in which it is embedded.

It is important to note that it is not until 1992, after the final airlifts have brought the Ethiopian Jews to Israel, that the two major monographs (Kaplan 1992; Quirin 1992) which deal with shared characteristics and a common Ethiopian culture core are published. Christopher Clapham wrote a joint review of both Kaplan's and Quirin's books in the *Times Literary Supplement*, September, 1993. His review ends on an intriguing note:

> From the later nineteenth century, the Beta Israel were set on the path that was to see them, a hundred years later, suddenly uprooted from their indigenous social and cultural setting and transported *en masse* to Israel. Steven Kaplan, writing from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, is understandably anxious to emphasize that his work has no bearing on their acceptability as Israelis or on the rabbinical decisions that have classed them as Jews. But it is hard to avoid the conclusion that the Beta Israel *aliyah* of 1985-91 was derived from assumptions that historical research has now shown to be mistaken.

Thus, when the question of the Beta Israel's Jewishness was still tenuous, the group was presented as a bounded, separate and distinct community in order to lobby for their acceptance as Jews. Later, when it is considered "safer", their history is reinterpreted, perhaps this time more carefully, but has the consequence of fueling the doubts which former researchers and groups were careful to avoid. Kaplan, in the introduction to his book, states:

> For several years I hesitated to express in print (and particularly in Hebrew) my views on the cultural identity of the Beta Israel. In this manner, I hoped to avoid being embroiled in a pointless controversy and to prevent the misuse of my findings by those with little genuine interest in either the Beta Israel or their history. Both my own experience and that of other writers had demonstrated that 'pro-Ethiopian' organizations had little concern for the niceties of academic freedom when their most cherished myths were being challenged. (1992:10-11)

Chapter 3: Emigration out of Ethiopia

This chapter describes the political conditions in which Ethiopian Jews migrated to Israel and Canada. The first section provides a brief overview of the political situation in Ethiopia during the period in which the emigration of Beta Israel took place. The second outlines the major waves of Ethiopian Jewish *aliyah* (immigration) to Israel, and the politics involved in their "rescue". This section also shows how the issue of identifying who would be permitted entry into Israel as an Ethiopian Jew was problematic, and that the boundaries surrounding the group were fuzzy. The third and final section discusses Ethiopian immigration to North America, and Ethiopian Jewish immigration to Canada.

War and ethnic conflict in Ethiopia

The vast majority of Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees fled their country during the military dictatorship of Mengistu Haile Mariam (1974-1991), a period which restructured the Ethiopian state from a pre-capitalist monarchy (under Haile Selassie's regime) to a military dictatorship professing socialist ideals and programs (Moussa 1993). During this period, as the revolution raged, Ethiopia was also invaded by the Republic of Somalia, was engulfed in several internal wars of liberation and self determination, and was hit by drought and famine. Moussa explains that "terror, death and destruction were the dominant themes in the life of survival for those who remained in Ethiopia. In the midst of these harsh conditions, thousands chose to flee the country" (1993:15-16).

The experience of living under Mengistu's repressive military regime was compounded by a history of inter-ethnic or inter-national conflicts, depending on one's view of the political situation, between the peoples living in the Ethiopian state. These conflicts at times escalated into wars, and are rooted in complex historical and political forces.[9] Levine argues that for the last three thousand years, "the diverse peoples of Greater Ethiopia had come to constitute a loose intersocietal system by virtue of sharing similar cultural traditions and engaging in many kinds of interactions, [and that] many of

---

[9] The scope of this thesis cannot do justice to these complexities. For excellent overviews of the background to these conflicts, see Moussa (1993) chapter 4: "Wars and Nationalities", and Sorenson (1990, 1992). For details on the events leading up to the 1974 Revolution, a summary of the major political forces acting internally within the country at the time, and a description of the repressive military activities, see Moussa (1993) chapter 3: "Yekatit 66 Revolution".

these peoples became integrated into a single polyethnic imperial system through the efforts of the Aksumites and later the Amhara, *who established a single political authority over the vast territories*" (1974:87, emphasis mine). However, the term "Ethiopian" includes a number of peoples who do not think of themselves in such a way, "who reject their inclusion within such a classification, and who are attempting to assert other identities" (Sorenson 1991:69). These groups, notably the Oromo, Eritreans, and Tigrayans, essentially equate "greater Ethiopia" with Amharic culture, and are independently (often divisively even within groups and families, and along class and religious lines) fighting to assert their independence or claims to a national identity.

In 1991, the Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Revolutionary Front took over the government, vowing "to establish a multi-ethnic, multi-national nation based on democratic principles", which recognized the right of Eritreans to determine their future through an internationally supervised referendum (Moussa 1993:88). The inter-ethnic/inter-national conflicts continue to persist, however, and divisions along these political lines are rife among the community of "Ethiopians" in North America. Expatriate groups form political organizations, such as the Oromo Liberation Front, the Tigrayan Peoples' Liberation Front, the Eritrean Liberation Front and its offshoot, the Eritrean Peoples' Liberation Front. They also form community organizations, such as the Ethiopian Community Association of Quebec, the Eritrean Community of Quebec, and the Association of Ethiopian Jews (Ribeiro 1992). In addition, the Eritreans, Tigrayans, and Oromos all operate independent relief organizations in Canada (Sorenson 1991).

These ethnic and political distinctions appear less among the population in Israel, as their primary concerns in recent years have been to reunify families in Israel, and to assert their *Jewish* identity. Divisions among the population in Israel exist ethno-linguistically between Amharic and Tigrinya speaking peoples. The community is politically divided in their responses to Israeli absorption and integration policies, and to the Rabbinate's decision that all Ethiopian Jews be "officially converted" according to *Halachic* Judaism upon arrival in Israel (see pp. 52-54).

Immigration (Aliyah) to Israel

Until 1979, there were only 476 Ethiopians in Israel. There were three major waves of immigration that followed, and currently the population constitutes 1% of Israel, approximately 50,000 people in a population of 5,000,000 (Rosen and Rubinstein 1993:333). The first wave of immigrants arrived from 1980 to 1984, and consisted of some 7,500 people mainly from rural Tigray province and the Walgayt region of Begemder (now Gondar) Province who were mostly Tigrinya speakers (Rosen and Rubinstein 1993:333).[10] The second wave, Operation Moses, began in late 1984, ended abruptly in January 1985, and increased the population to about 15,000. Most of these immigrants were airlifted directly out of the bitter conditions of refugee camps in the Sudan. The third wave of immigrants, known as Operation Solomon, consisted mainly of Amharic speaking people from the Gondar region who had moved en masse to Addis Ababa to request visas to the State of Israel in 1990, after diplomatic relations were re-established between Ethiopia and Israel. This group of about 14,000 people became internally displaced, waiting approximately one year before the dramatic airlift which took place over a 36 hour period in May, 1991 brought them safely to Israel (Myers 1993). The current total population of 50,000 Ethiopian Jews includes a 1977 airlift negotiated through the Ethiopian military regime,[11] other clandestine airlifts out of the Sudan,[12] dangerous escapes through Kenya, illegal immigration by families and individuals, and births in Israel.

---

[10] See Map 1 (Ethiopia in relation to neighboring African and Middle East countries), and Map 2 (Northern Ethiopia), in Appendix A, pp.113-4.

[11] In 1977 an arms deal was negotiated between the regime of Ethiopian dictator Colonel Mengistu Haile-Mariam and Israel, which allowed for the exchange of weapons for permission to allow small groups of Falashas to fly to Israel on the condition of complete secrecy. One hundred twenty people immigrated to Israel in this way; in 1978 in Geneva, Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan "accidentally" announced to the world that Israel had been arming Ethiopia in its war with Somalia. This enraged Mengistu, and put an abrupt end to the airlifts.

[12] In March 1985, after Operation Moses was suddenly halted, U.S. Vice President Bush arranged to airlift those Ethiopian Jews left stranded in Sudan under code-name Operation Sheba. This Operation saved approximately 600 people. (Rapoport 1986)

Politics and the rescue effort[13]

From the 1950's to the mid-seventies only several hundred Ethiopian Jews came to Israel on their own, some of whom had to hide from immigration officials since they had not yet been recognized as Jews under the Law of Return (Rosen 1986). After 1974, when the Beta Israel were officially recognized as Jews, the outbreak of a violent revolution and the establishment of a military Marxist regime in Ethiopia made legal emigration of Beta Israel to Israel impossible (Rosen 1986:76; Kessler and Parfitt 1985:10). As the political situation worsened, political dissidents searched for avenues to escape the repressive regime. Thousands of people, including Falashas, left the country by foot in hopes of reaching refugee camps on the Sudanese border (Rosen 1986; Kessler and Parfitt 1985). In 1984, one major camp, *Um Raquba* (Arabic: mother of shelter), had grown to 20,000 people, 9,000 of whom were Falashas (Kessler and Parfitt 1985:11). Exit visas out of Ethiopia were given to people who had job offers, scholarships, and medical reasons to leave the country. One avenue through which Ethiopian Jews escaped, in addition to fleeing through the Sudan, was by obtaining these types of documents from North American and Israeli organizations, which would route the refugees out of Ethiopia through the U.S. or Europe, and then to Israel (or Canada).

Some people returned home to Ethiopia because of the appalling conditions of the refugee camps in the Sudan. Western governments also undertook efforts to relieve the suffering in these camps. However, neither the key governmental bodies nor the Jewish organizations that were fighting for Falasha freedom and immigration to Israel were united on their approach to the rescue of the Ethiopian Jews. The key organizations were divided into two camps: those which believed that the only impediment to Falasha emigration to Israel was Israel's reluctance to take them, and those which backed Israel's policies unquestionably. Tensions grew between the more open and secretive approaches to the "Falasha problem". The Israeli government, responding to international political pressures, wanted absolute secrecy; organizations such as the Canadian Jewish Congress

---

[13] This section is limited to the level of organizational politics in the effort to bring Ethiopian Jews out of Ethiopia. For a more detailed overview of the international political circumstances and consequences of this effort, see Wagaw (1991).

supported this stance, but other groups were actively against it. According to a number of books (Parfitt 1985 and Rapoport 1986), magazine and newspaper articles, and memos from the Canadian Jewish Congress which were circulated among local Montreal Jewish organizations in the mid-80's, the most vociferous and critical organizations against Israeli Falasha policy were the American Association for Ethiopian Jews (AAEJ), formed in 1974, and the Canadian Association for Ethiopian Jews (CAEJ), established six years later.

Members of these organizations, notably CAEJ lobbyist and Toronto film-maker Simcha Jacobovici, accused the Israeli Government of indifference to the Falashas' suffering in Ethiopia, and of obstructing the efforts to help Ethiopian Jews emigrate to Israel. Jacobovici charged Israel with hiding behind claims that drawing undue attention to the Ethiopian Jewish refugees' suffering in Sudan would endanger secret Israeli missions on their behalf in such articles as the *New York Times*' "Ethiopian Jews Die, Israel Fiddles", and the *Globe and Mail*'s "The Plight of Black Jews: Pawns of a Split in Israel". In Falasha: Exile of the Black Jews, a documentary film which he produced in Toronto, Jacobovici is severely critical of Israel's lack of action on behalf of the Falashas. The real issues, he argued, were prejudice, politics and lingering doubts about the Jewishness of the Ethiopians.

Charges of racism and neglect were directed at the Israeli government repeatedly. Parfitt (1985) quotes Moshe Bar Yehuda, an official of Israel's Labor Federation, in an interview by the *Los Angeles Times* in February 1979. When asked to explain why only 350 Falashas were in Israel at the time, Ben Yehuda said that "The first is prejudice - the color of their skin. The government does not want them here. Secondly, the Israeli government doesn't want to endanger diplomatic contacts with African states". Meanwhile, Ethiopian Jews already in Israel accused government officials of regarding their people as "too primitive" and "a potential burden" (Parfitt 1985:40).

It was these types of pressure groups that overwhelmingly emphasized the Ethiopian Jewish persecution in Ethiopia, using terms like "holocaust" and "genocide" to describe the desperate conditions of the Ethiopian Jews in Ethiopia and Sudan in the early-80's in order to appeal to Jewish solidarity, and to put pressure on Israel to hurry up the

rescue effort. In Jacobovici's <u>Falasha: Exile of the Black Jews</u>, Nate Shapiro of AAEJ explains how his organization saved 150 people, describing AAEJ as "a rag-tag group of amateurs who shouldn't be able to bring out anyone". His point was that if AAEJ could successfully bring 150 Ethiopian Jews to Israel, the Israeli government could have been doing more to rescue Ethiopian Jews than it was at the time. Meanwhile, as these groups continued to steal the limelight and to underscore the supposed inactivity of Israel (Parfitt 1985:57), the Israeli Intelligence Agency (Mossad) was being threatened by the potential dangers represented by these vocal and critical groups. While the government was working on clandestine escape routes for Falashas stuck in Ethiopia and caught behind rebel lines, amateur rescue efforts were destroying the Mossad's progress. In mid-1983 an AAEJ-organized overland rescue got stuck in northern Sudan and Mossad agents were forced to help them out. A few months later, two members of a rescue mission were arrested in a town on the Kenyan border, thus both disclosing the route and spelling the end of its use. On more than one occasion, unofficial emissaries visited North American groups "to persuade them that Israel was taking action on behalf of the Falashas and that independent rescue missions were both unnecessary and harmful to the overall operation" (Parfitt 1985:46). The critical North American groups remained unconvinced, and consequently developed a controversial reputation for doing more harm than good.

Parfitt (1985) and many pro-Israel supporters were critical of groups like AAEJ and CAEJ for publicizing the Falasha rescue effort. Rapoport (1986) suggests, however, that the early activities of the AAEJ may have served as a catalyst to push Israel into airlifting the Ethiopian Jews. Rapoport also points out that later on, when Israel had created secret escape routes and airlifts, AAEJ and CAEJ remained critical of Israel. "The fact was", Rapoport writes, "that the Mossad was quietly bringing out about 6,000 Ethiopian Jews in three years, while the AAEJ brought out fewer than 200", perhaps at the expense of others (1986:93).

In the winter of 1984, amidst all the critical rhetoric, the Mossad successfully airlifted over 7 000 Ethiopian Jews out of the Sudan and into Israel during Operation Moses. Meanwhile, many Ethiopian Jews also departed from the Sudan on regular

passenger flights (Kessler and Parfitt 1985:12). Operation Moses brought the total

number of Ethiopian Jews in Israel to an estimated 15,000 people (Rosen 1986:79; Kessler

and Parfitt 1985:13). Seven years later, what was believed to be the remainder of the

Ethiopian Jewish population was airlifted out of Addis Ababa. In May, 1991, during a

dramatic 36 hour period, Operation Solomon brought an additional 14,000 Ethiopian Jews

to Israel, leaving only a "small minority [of them] in Ethiopia" (*JP*, May 26:1991). Given

the fluctuating nature of who would be included within the boundaries of an Ethiopian

Jewish identity, it is difficult to know what "a small minority" means, in this case.

Who is an Ethiopian Jew? and The population problem

During a 1988 meeting,[14] David Levine, Director General of the Immigration and

Absorption Department of the Jewish Agency for Israel, described the official position on

Ethiopian Jews with respect to the Law of Return:

> The definition of [an Ethiopian] Jew who is entitled to benefit from the law of return is very
> broad in that it includes non-Jewish spouses and children of a Jewish father *or* mother.
> Consequently, an actual case of a Jewish father married to a Christian woman with twelve
> Christian children were all entitled to the right to immigrate to Israel and immediate
> citizenship. If the non-Jewish partner and/or children choose to convert to Judaism, that is
> their choice but there is no compulsion. Obvious social problems and conflicts arise but this
> is part of the process. (1988 Meeting:5)

According to Levine, for many years the Israeli authorities relied on the word of relatives

or friends to determine if a prospective Ethiopian immigrant was Beta Israel, and thus

considered a Jew under the Law of Return. Levine continues:

> It has now been discovered that in some cases there were deceptions. The problem is
> currently exacerbated by such immigrants now wanting to sponsor their relatives and friends
> with further deceptions. Furthermore, during the period of heavy immigration, especially
> during Operation Moses, it was practically impossible to carry out systematic in-depth
> scrutiny of all immigrants. Currently, due to the previous problems, and as a result of the
> much smaller numbers in a position to immigrate to Israel, much greater scrutiny can and is
> being applied. In some questionable cases, there have been lengthy delays. (1988
> Meeting:5)

---

[14] This is a document entitled "Notes of a meeting in New York on March 23, 1988 from 11:00 am to 5:00
pm", attended by thirteen leaders involved with Ethiopian migration in Israeli governmental, and
Canadian and American organizational positions. Source: Canadian Jewish Congress National Archives,
CJC records collection, Series L1 (Stan Cytrynbaum records), Box 1, File 8 (Speeches File).

No less complicated than the question of selecting people to belong to the newly constructed category of "Ethiopian Jews" is the issue of population counts of Ethiopian Jews in Ethiopia, since there are no relevant census records. Demographic data would become politically loaded, and used by different groups with different political agendas. The notes of the 1988 meeting refer to a "Mr.X" (identified as such in the original) claiming that although reports of the remaining population of Ethiopian Jews at that time numbered 30,000 people, in reality there were approximately 12,000 left in Ethiopia. He explained that one *kess* (Beta Israel priest, religious leader), while still in Ethiopia, had announced a figure of 30,000 for bargaining purposes: "it was felt that if a portion of the community would be allowed to leave the country as a result of a possible negotiation, then it would be wiser to have an inflated figure to start with" (1988 meeting:1). A source in the U.S. Embassy in Addis Ababa is also said to have reported 30,000 Beta Israel based on a calculation of 400 people per *kess*, plus several thousand people without a *kess* (the notes of the 1988 meeting do not indicate what the estimated number of priests was based on). According to Mr.X, there was no factual justification for this approach. Finally, the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), in one case, had indicated that 400 Ethiopian Jews resided in a particular village. Upon verification, says Mr.X, "it was found that none live there nor have ever lived there" (1988 meeting:1).

CAEJ used a different tactic. Rather than inflating numbers for bargaining purposes, the organization emphasized the rapidly shrinking numbers of Ethiopian Jews in Ethiopia due to starvation, persecution and disease. An undated campaign advertisement which appears to have been circulated in the early 1980's states that "at least 10,000 [Falashas] have disappeared in the last five years. Their villages are empty. Of a community that once numbered half a million, less than 20,000 remain". This evidence which shows how population figures were manipulated in order to create a certain image of the group, or to bargain for larger numbers of legal émigrés, indicates that not only were demographic data difficult to ascertain because of various political motives, but that the current number of Ethiopian Jews in Israel is highly inflated. This is a group of people

who were thrown together by chance, intermarriage and changing definitions of the boundaries around the category of Ethiopian Jews.

By 1988 there were approximately 15,000 Ethiopian Jews in Israel according to Mr.X. According to Rosen and Rubinstein, who gathered their data from the Ministry of Absorption, Israel, the total number of Ethiopian Jews in Israel by the end of 1990 was 21,278 (1993:333). As of the end of 1992, Rosen and Rubinstein state, "it can be said that at least 51,000 Ethiopians live in Israel", including 6,000 births between the years 1977-1991 (1993:333). In 1988 there were 15,000 Ethiopians in Israel, and an estimated 12,000 Beta Israel remaining in Ethiopia. Between 1988 and 1992 there was an increase of 30,000 Ethiopians in Israel through immigration. It is not clear where the additional 18,000 Beta Israel came from.

The problem of the Falash Mora

According to Wagaw (1991), after Operation Solomon there were 3 000 people in Addis Ababa and 2 000 people left in Gondar still waiting to emigrate to Israel as Falashas. These people, known as the Falash Mora, claimed "they were converted against their will to Christianity a long time ago, and that those ready to renounce this religion in favor of their original Judaism ought to be allowed to join their relatives" (Wagaw 1991:579). The main concern of the Israelis at that time was that the admission of such large numbers of "converts" would set a precedent for allowing the inflow of many would-be immigrants from other parts of the world. Given that the new regime in Addis Ababa now permitted all Ethiopians the right to leave and re-enter Ethiopia freely, it would be Israel's responsibility to decide who would be permitted entry into Israel. The Israeli government planned to send a delegation to Ethiopia in order to clarify which Falashas were Jews (Wagaw 1991:580). After long debates in Israel about whether to bring Christians to live there and under what circumstances, the Israeli government agreed to permit the immigration of Falash Mora in humanitarian and family reunification cases. Falash Mora would also be granted permission to migrate to Israel if they could provide proof of their Jewishness in the form of a certificate by a *kess*.

Two years later, a *Canadian Jewish News* (*CJN*) article (November 18, 1993) reported that the Ethiopian government had formally asked Israel to stop its *aliyah* (immigration) activities among the Falash Mora. The Ethiopian official, Hassan Shiffa, identified as the national police chief, argued that Israel's activities constitute a serious infringement on Ethiopian sovereignty, and that "we cannot accept that a foreign government determines the nationality of Ethiopian citizens". He also claimed that the Falash Mora problem is not limited to the 130-odd families who have so far moved to Israel, but that it "could affect millions of people". According to the article, "there have been reports that tremendous numbers of Ethiopians believe themselves to be descendants of Jews and would like the same consideration that the Falash Mora are receiving". Rosen and Rubinstein claim that estimates of Falash Mora still in Ethiopia range from 25,000 to 250,000 (1993:334).

A second *CJN* article (June 16, 1994) reported that hundreds of Falash Mora had emigrated to Israel over the previous several months, indicating that Israel had ignored the initial Ethiopian request to halt aliyah activities. This time, Hassan Shiffa is said to have informed Israel's ambassador to Ethiopia, Ori Noy, that the Falash Mora claim of Ethiopian Jewish heritage is a "fabrication", and that "all citizens in the northern region of Ethiopia - including himself - could be considered Falash Mora according to the Israeli definition". Furthermore, Shiffa reportedly threatened to "intervene in the situation in any way his country sees fit if Israel did not take any action". According to the author of the *CJN* article, the Ethiopian government is worried about the dislocation and chaos created by the steady migration of northern residents into squalid shanty towns around Addis Ababa, where they await visas to Israel. It is for this reason, the report continues, that the Ethiopian government does not recognize the Falash Mora as a legitimate ethnic group.

According to the article, the Ethiopian stance pits Israel's Foreign Ministry, which is eager to satisfy the Ethiopian government, against Israel's Ministry of Absorption, which "has been seeking to increase the flow of Falash Mora into Israel from the current 80 per month to 200". The Foreign Ministry reportedly argues that people who were closely involved with organizing Operation Solomon believe that the Falash Mora claims are

baseless. Meanwhile, the Israeli Absorption Ministry has denied recent news reports of "a budding industry in Addis Ababa in conversion certificates forged by *kessim*" (plural of *kess*, Beta Israel priest or religious leader). This revelation was leaked to the news media by the Israeli Foreign Ministry.

Emigration to North America

The patterns of Ethiopian (irrespective of religion) immigration to Canada are similar to those of the United States: a small number of Ethiopian students, businessmen and diplomats came to North America between 1960-1974, but the vast majority of the population are political refugees who arrived after this time (Van Praag 1986; McSpadden 1987; Sorenson 1991). Most of the refugees lived in camps in the Sudan or Djibouti, or remained for some time in first asylum countries such as Italy or Germany, before settling in Canada. Currently, the number of Ethiopians in the U.S. is approximately 25,000, most of whom are refugees, some of whom are students, undocumented aliens, and students whose visas expired and are waiting for asylum in U.S. There are significant concentrations of Ethiopians in California, Texas, Washington D.C. and New York, and smaller numbers in 37 other states (Van Praag 1986:15).

Statistics Canada (1992) documents 11,060 Ethiopian immigrants in the country, the overwhelming majority of whom live in Ontario (7,670), followed by Alberta (1,050), Manitoba (740), Quebec (695), British Columbia (565), the Maritimes (45), and the Northwest Territories (5). In the late-1980's, Montreal hosted the largest existing community of Ethiopian Jews outside of Ethiopia and Israel (*MG*, June 17, 1991), which peaked at about 150 people. The community has decreased in size over the years, small numbers of Ethiopian Jews having moved to Toronto (about 25 people), Ottawa, Vancouver, the U.S. and Israel. Some informants have indicated that other Ethiopian Jewish community members have been "lost" to Christianity (through conversion) since arriving in Canada. Four Beta Israel have died while residing in Montreal: one child was killed in a car accident, and three adults have committed suicide. Currently, there are approximately 85 people in Montreal who identify themselves as Ethiopian Jews. The

Ethiopian population in Montreal consists mainly of young, single males (males outnumber females 2:1; 92% of the total population is under 45 years old), the majority of whom were originally from Asmara (Eritrea), Addis Ababa and Gondar (Ribeiro 1992).

Ethiopian Jews emigrate to Montreal: how and why?

There are two ways to be a refugee in Canada: one is to claim refugee status upon arrival in Canada; the other is to be selected by Canadian Immigration authorities in a third country as a refugee, and given landed immigrant status upon arrival in Canada.[15] The Ethiopian Jews were selected as refugees in the Sudan or while still in Ethiopia, and entered Canada as landed immigrants under private sponsorship by the Jewish Immigrant Aid Services of Canada (JIAS). Most people were given permission to leave Ethiopia under the guise of coming to Canada as students, or (less often) for medical treatment of some sort.

The organizational politics at the local level to do with bringing Ethiopian Jews to Montreal emerged through broader connections to the situation in Israel, Ethiopia, and the larger Jewish political organizational context of North America. The Jewish organizations at the local Montreal level broadly reflect the situation described in the above section on "politics and rescue". The Canadian Association for Ethiopian Jewry (CAEJ) was first established through contacts between Baruch, the first Ethiopian Jew who came to Montreal (see Appendix B, p.115), and the existing organizational framework in the United States: the American Association for Ethiopian Jewry (AAEJ). As in many other major cities in North America at the time, Montreal Jewish organizations, university clubs, schools and synagogues created committees to assist and raise funds for the "Falasha rescue effort". The central one of these committees in Montreal was the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) Committee for Ethiopian Jewry, led by Stan Cytrynbaum, a Montreal lawyer.

---

[15] Except for the rights to vote and to carry a Canadian passport, landed immigrant status gives the individual the same rights as a Canadian citizen. After a period of three years, a landed immigrant is permitted to apply for Canadian citizenship.

At the beginning, the CJC and CAEJ committees operated together, and even shared the same chairman for the first year of the CJC committee's operation. In August, 1981, CJC officially severed ties from CAEJ, stating that relations had deteriorated between the two bodies ("CJC cuts its ties with CAEJ", *CJN*, August 20, 1981). The two groups began working separately, with different approaches to their political agendas. CJC advocated an approach which would least hinder Israeli efforts; CAEJ continued along the more aggressive lines discussed above. According to former CAEJ president Jack Hope, a Toronto lawyer, in 1992 when CAEJ finally folded: "We [CAEJ] modeled ourselves on the rejection of quiet diplomacy. Quiet diplomacy was one approach and making a hell of a lot of noise was another. We felt the squeaky wheel gets the grease" ("CAEJ shuts down after 12 years", *CJN*, Nov. 28, 1992). In another Canadian Jewish News article, "Rescue of Ethiopian Jews a sensitive subject" (May 15, 1986) which describes a CJC plenary session devoted to the rescue of the remaining Jews in Ethiopia, one person was quoted as asking "why CJC and CAEJ couldn't 'get their stuff together' and present a united front".

Not only were the organizations most involved with lobbying to save Ethiopian Jews divided, but the question of whether to back the program to sponsor the group to immigrate to Canada was one which was not wholly supported by the Jewish community. In the minutes of a meeting held in New York City, March 23, 1988 (see footnote 14, p.38), the Jewish Agency is reported to be "anxious to try to convince the Ethiopian Jews in Canada to migrate to Israel". Before the meeting, according to the Minutes, there had been one attempt to convince "the community" to migrate to Israel by someone who "was not the right person to carry it out". There was discussion at this meeting over who would be the most appropriate person to send to Montreal to convince Ethiopian Jewish Canadians to move to Israel.

In 1989, JIAS canceled the program to sponsor Ethiopian Jews to immigrate to Canada. The official reason why they called off the program was that diplomatic ties had been reestablished between Ethiopia and Israel in 1989, and that therefore, there was no reason to bring any more Ethiopian Jews here. This argument contradicts the basic tenet

upon which JIAS operates. It essentially means that there is no role for JIAS at all, since as all Jews are entitled to immigrate to Israel, there is no reason to bring *any* Jew to Canada. The three JIAS executives with whom I spoke do acknowledge, however, that there were additional factors involved in the decision to call off the program. Among these were the difficulties in integrating the Ethiopian Jewish community with the larger Jewish community once in Montreal. From the JIAS perspective another significant problem was that there was no means of direct communication to the people in Ethiopia who were trying to get to Canada. There were a lot of misunderstandings between the Ethiopian Jews already in Montreal, the social workers assigned to do Ethiopian "case work", and the executives in charge of the overall program.

The complex and sensitive nature to the entire process of sponsoring, organizing, saving and integrating Ethiopian Jews in Montreal cannot be emphasized enough. What is interesting about the issue of community officials trying to convince the Ethiopians in Montreal that they should leave for Israel is that this underscores the Ethiopians' perceived lack of subjective agency by those who, with all good intentions, set out to save them. Although this idea to push the community out to Israel seems to have been with the Ethiopian Jews' best interests in mind, it is likely that it was also in the best interests of the organizations and "Jewish community" to remove the problems which their well intended rescue had created. Here was an official body reminding the Ethiopian Jews of their status of "internal other" within the Jewish community.

From the perspective of the Ethiopian Jews who migrated to Montreal, informants express a wide variety of personal, political and economic motives both for leaving Ethiopia, and for selecting Canada over Israel for permanent residency.[16] The process of coming to Canada was often linked to the individual's perceived possibility or impossibility of migrating to Israel.

---

[16] See Appendix B, pp.115-17, for a brief description of Ethiopian Jewish informants' backgrounds and migration stories.

Chapter 4: The Construction of Group Identity in Israel

The aims of this chapter are to critically review the literature on Ethiopian Jewish identity in Israel in order to discuss the process of negotiating boundaries and redefining identities in the context of the resettlement process in Israel, and to provide a context for analyzing how Ethiopian Jewish identity in Canada emerges through a link between Israel and Canada. This review of the population in Israel is also important because the Ethiopian Jews in Canada have close and extended family in Israel: most of the people living in Canada have visited Israel at least once, and many informants refer to Israel as "home" because of these connections.

The decision to airlift, house and take care of tens of thousands of people from another country has been a huge undertaking for the Israeli government, municipalities, paid and volunteer workers, and individuals who donated goods and offered hospitality to the new immigrants. Furthermore, Israelis continue to attempt to bridge the gaps and to improve cross cultural misunderstandings and problematic situations which have arisen in this complicated process of total and very sudden cultural immersion of one group with another. This caveat is a necessary introduction to a section that may give the impression that the *only* interactions thus far between the Ethiopians and their key reference groups in Israel are conflictual and problematic. Although this is not the case, these conflicts do provide an anthropologist with a privileged window through which to examine the process of changing identity.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first is an analysis of the policies and institutions utilized in the process of officially absorbing and integrating new immigrants in Israel. The second section examines those areas of interaction with people in Israeli society which act as barriers to the Ethiopian Jews' integration. The third and final section focuses on the Ethiopian family and migration to Israel. According to the literature on Ethiopian Jews in Israel, one of the most salient and problematic issues within this community is the changes facing family structures and values. I will therefore focus on this area in order to illustrate how the overall process of transformation is effecting people in the Ethiopian Jewish community.

Absorbing ethnic groups in the State of Israel

Aliyah, the immigration of Diaspora Jews to their ancestral homeland, is regarded as the *raison d'être* of the State of Israel (Israel Information Center 1991:3). Modern Israel was conceived and built on this fundamental Zionist principle, which was based on European ideologies:

> ...the Jewish people who had sojourned in different parts of the world among strangers, as minorities, and in the process had acquired modes of behavior and of making a living not always compatible with traditional Jewish ideals, would become rehabilitated once in the land of their ancestors, where they would build an egalitarian, social-democratic state. On the whole, Israeli society was built on the quadruple principles of social democracy, modernization, integration, and Zionism. (Wagaw 1993:30-1)

The principle of integration is the one which most concerns us here.

Shuval (1989) points out that Israel's ideology of integration emphasized a collective identity, and that the concept of ethnic separatism has never been institutionalized in Israeli society. The historical basis for this, according to a variety of literature (Shuval 1989; Wagaw 1993; Ben-Rafael 1982), is rooted in the domination of early East and West European (Ashkenazi) waves of immigration. Ben-Rafael (1982) points out that although the Ashkenazi population currently makes up the minority of Israel's Jewish population (45%), the Ashkenazi Jews have a longer history of residence in Israel. This imbalance became more even in the early fifties when a sharp increase in non-Ashkenazi *aliyot* took place, but the infrastructure into which new immigrants were being absorbed was rooted in the Euro-American establishment. The result is that the numerous differences among various groups pertaining to customs, physical traits and language of origin have become blurred due to the overall split between Ashkenazi and non-Ashkenazi Jews, based largely on socio-economic cleavages between the groups (Ben-Rafael 1982:3). The social gaps between the two major categories are wide, and the divide has shrunk only slowly over the years. This divide is reflected on a number of very practical levels. For example, the settlement patterns of the two groups are distinct: generally, the distribution of Israelis shows a proportionately larger number of Ashkenazim in bigger cities (Tel Aviv, Haifa) and central Israel; Sephardim and Mizrachim (Jews of Middle Eastern origin) are higher in number in older towns on urban outskirts, remote areas on

agricultural settlements and "development towns", and in the lower-class neighborhoods of big cities (Ben-Rafael 1982:3-4). According to some studies, this geographical distribution has contributed to the stereotyping process (Shuval 1989:224).

Shuval points out that although there have been some efforts to encourage ethnic preservation in folklore, dance and music, a striking feature of Israeli society is "the acceptance by virtually all immigrant groups regardless of their ethnic origin of the process of 'Ashkenization' as the legitimate mode of becoming Israeli" (1989:223). She states:

> ...there was little active concern on the part of most immigrants from Asian-African countries and certainly among the younger ones, to preserve their traditional cultures. While there has been resentment of low status and implied 'primitiveness' there has been little effort since the 1950's and 1960's to retain ethnic traditions in a manner that would offer a real alternative to the European-tinged offering of Israeli culture. And over the years 'Ashkenization' became synonymous with modernization. (p.223-4)

Paine describes the intended ideology as follows:

> There was to be a convergence. In this process, Moroccans had further to go than, say, Iraqis, and the Hungarians less than the Iraqis, but the Germans and the Poles less than all others for it was they who put in place so many of the cultural and social norms of this reborn Israel. (1989:128)

Inasmuch as the establishment and certain academics are becoming aware of the pitfalls with this ethnocentric approach to integration, these attitudes are still pervasive. The following passage comes from an article by Sheldon Kirshner published in the *Canadian Jewish News* in July, 1993, referring to an Ethiopian woman who had immigrated to Israel thirteen years earlier: "Such is her family's successful absorption into Israel's mainstream that her brother is engaged to be married to the daughter of a long-established Ashkenazi Jewish family". In other words, successful absorption is measured according to personal relationships with an Ashkenazi family. This attitude could reflect the author's bias as opposed to a general attitude prevalent in Israel, but it nonetheless reflects a problematic outlook which can be traced back to the origins of the notions of integration and absorption discussed above.

Halper argues that the "melting pot" concept, while proclaiming the need "to mix Eastern and Western Jewish cultural elements into a uniquely Jewish blend" in practice meant that immigrants were expected to give up their ethnic cultures in favor of that of

Ashkenazi-based Israel, relegating their redundant cultures to the status of quaint but irrelevant "folklore" (1987:114). He claims that what are commonly referred to as the "mistakes of the fifties" (the pressure of the "melting pot", notions of "primitivity" rather than "culture", the channeling of immigrants to the margins of society, and the bureaucratization of "absorption") made during the process of mass immigration of Middle Eastern Jews in the decade 1950-60, are in fact being repeated in the recent and current acculturation of the Ethiopian immigrants to Israel.

There are several institutions in Israel which serve to integrate or absorb new immigrants into the society. The remainder of this section will describe three of the most central of these institutions, absorption centers, schools and the army, and will show how they simultaneously reconstruct boundaries while also serving to "normalize" the Ethiopians in the new cultural context.

Absorption centers and authorities

The quasi-governmental Jewish Agency for Israel (JA) was responsible for the processing and welfare of the Ethiopian immigrants upon arrival in Israel. At the first stage of their arrival, the immigrants were received in a care center known as the Absorption and Sorting Base, where they were identified, registered, assigned new Hebrew names, symbolically converted, and cared for medically (Wagaw 1993:93-4). At the next stage, the immigrants spent up to a year or longer in absorption centers where they learnt the rudiments of Hebrew, how to live in housing with unfamiliar furniture and appliances, and basic health practices. Following this, the immigrants were placed in permanent quarters. After this initial period, the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption, assisted by other private organizations such as the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and other relevant government departments, was responsibile for coordinating immigrant housing, training, employment, and socializing. According to Wagaw (1993), the extended period during which Ethiopian immigrants were housed in absorption centers was one in which many conflicts and problems arose.

Wagaw (1993) and Ashkenazi (1988, 1987) describe the interactions between the immigrants who arrived in Operation Moses and the absorption authorities as being colored with misinformation, misunderstandings and conflicts, and as obscured by the "good intentions" coming from both sides. Ashkenazi argues that these conflicts (both between the Ethiopian Jewish community and the officials, and within the community itself) have resulted in the "alienation of segments of the Israeli public and a weakening of the collective power of the immigrants vis-à-vis the authorities" (1988:372). The local squabbles have caused some segments of the Israeli public to see the immigrants in a negative light, and have also resulted in the loss of some "very real opportunities which could not be taken advantage of because of internal disarray" (Ashkenazi 1988:372).

Abbink (1984) reports that the immigration authorities saw the Falashas as a special case, in need of extra assistance for at least one year. Apparently, this led to a heightened 'we-they' consciousness" (Abbink 1984:145). The dichotomy that developed between the two "sides" served to create difficulties for the community, which ultimately tainted its general reputation as being problematic in certain circles of Israeli society.

One particular policy which created bitterness from the Ethiopian immigrants was the absorption authorities' decision to assign each person a new Hebrew name at the initial stage of the absorption process (Wagaw 1993:94). According to Wagaw, "the Israelis decided to adopt what they thought was the easiest system: assigning to each newcomer a Hebrew name [which would correspond, as much as possible to the meaning of the original name]; a second name would be adopted for the whole [immediate] family" (1993:120). Traditionally in Ethiopia a child keeps his or her father's *first* name as his or her second name, meaning that husbands, wives, parents and children do not share the same "last name". One of Wagaw's informants, a young, politically active immigrant from Gondar, felt that the humiliation of having to undergo changes like the conversion ceremony (see pp.52-54) and naming "was directed at the Beta Israel because they were considered ignorant, powerless, and poor". These are demands, he said, that would never be expected of the Russians, who were even more suspect of intermarriages and other

irregularities than the Ethiopians (in Wagaw 1993:126). (In Canada, Ethiopian immigrants are also assigned a common "family name" to facilitate easier identification for authorities.)

The school system and the army

Wagaw (1993) explains that the school system for educating children in Israel is divided into two bodies: religious and secular. The Israeli government had pre-determined that the Ethiopian Jewish immigrants to Israel would be considered a religious group, and thus the children would be absorbed into the religious school system. Wagaw explains that "the decision to incorporate [the Ethiopian Jews] ... into the state religious school system was made by the Knesset [(Israeli Parliament)] after consultation with Beta Israel leadership. The rationale was to mitigate or lessen the cultural and religious shocks and facilitate their smooth adjustment [and] to give the *olim* [(immigrants)] as much knowledge of the Hebrew language and modern Judaism as quickly as they could absorb it" (1993:134). Because the state religious school system is reputed to have a lower academic standard as compared to the secular system, in addition to catering to many non-Ashkenazi orthodox immigrant groups, it appears that their inclusion in this system reinforces a level of marginalization and internal otherness. At another level, the school system teaches children how to read, write and converse in Hebrew, providing an immediate forum for integration into the society, which in turn creates distance between children and their parents.

It is mandatory for young adult immigrants to complete national army services in the Israeli Defense Forces. This institution provides an immediate forum for inclusion into Israeli society for the youth who complete their army service, thus creating distance between the generations of immigrants. The army is not mandatory for Ethiopian Jewish women, although they are permitted to voluntarily sign up for service. Westheimer and Kaplan suggest that it is not surprising that so few women have chosen to sign up for the army (twenty four at the time of writing) because of cultural objections based on morality and tradition (1992:101-2). What Weil describes as more troubling "is the relatively low number, about two dozen, of Ethiopian women volunteering for *Sherut Le'umi* (National

Service)" as teachers, hospital aides, and other social service jobs (1988, 1989 in Westheimer and Kaplan 1992:101). Here, she explains, objections based on tradition carry little weight. Westheimer and Kaplan suggest that "it appears that Ethiopian Jews are only slowly beginning to ask not what their country can do for them, but what they can do for their country" (1992:101). In a country where much of the national pride rests on the success of youth in the army, it seems that this implied lack of enthusiasm, at least among Ethiopian women in Israel, would construct distance between "the Ethiopians" and Israeli society.

Barriers to integration: Tension between the mainstream and Ethiopian Jews
The religious debate

The religious conflict came to a head in September of 1985 when hundreds of Ethiopians staged a demonstration which escalated into a general strike in front of the offices of the Israeli Chief Rabbinate in Jerusalem. The Chief Rabbinate had ruled in the mid-1970's that all new Ethiopian *olim* (immigrants) would undergo mass conversion to Judaism. This ruling was made because of suspicions that not all of the Ethiopian *olim* were Jewish due to high rates of intermarriage with Christian Ethiopians, and that the group was said to be *mamzerim* (bastards, illegitimate) (see p.18). In order to alleviate the stigma attached to the community due to these suspicions, the Rabbinate decided that all Ethiopian *olim* would be converted. The conversion would consist of three main elements: *mila* (circumcision), *tevila* (ritual immersion in the *mikveh*, bath), and *kabbalat ol mitzvot* (oral declaration of the acceptance of the Torah's commandments) (Wagaw 1993:113). Since Ethiopia Jews are circumcised on the eighth day after birth, the Rabbinate proposed a symbolic procedure of drawing a drop of blood from the penis.

This conversion was carried out on almost all of the immigrants, a majority of whom were from the Tigray region, who arrived before Operations Moses and Sheba (pre-1984). Operation Moses doubled the community in a period of six weeks (December 1984-January 1985) to a total of about 15,000 people. The sudden arrival of so many immigrants made it impossible to apply the conversion process immediately, so, according

to Rosen, "seizing the opportunity, a number of Gondari political activists spoke out against the conversion ceremony", arguing that the process was the same as the Christian Amharic baptism ceremony, *timqat* (1986:79). He explains:

> Although there is no logical connection between a *tevila* meant to remove any doubts about one's Jewish status and a *timqat* to convert a Jew to Christianity, the issue became highly emotional. Logic was no longer applicable as the entire conversion process was portrayed by the leaders of the campaign as a humiliating act with racist, rather than religious overtones. The pride of the entire community suddenly became the overriding factor. After having suffered in the Sudan and having protected their faith over many centuries, the Ethiopians were offended at being required to submit to conversion or, as they believed, baptism, upon arrival in Israel. (Rosen 1986:79)

Eventually, with the pressure from the Ethiopian groups, the press and many sectors of the secular population who rallied to their cause, the Chief Rabbis made concessions. Rather than mass community conversions, the personal status of each Ethiopian was to be clarified and treated accordingly; any Ethiopian wishing to marry would have to either prove his or her Jewishness, or submit to the conversion. As Rosen put it, "rather than accept this change of policy as a victory, the young Ethiopian leaders rejected it out of hand and pressed for the waiving of all requirements" (1986:80). The Ethiopians argued that whatever the status of Ethiopian conversion and divorce procedures according to Rabbinical law, their validity among Ethiopians was unchallenged (Kaplan 1988). Thus began a series of escalating confrontations and conflicts.

The demonstration was instigated by the Beta Yisrael (Beta Israel) group of Ramat Gan. The group was led by Baruch (the first Ethiopian Jew in Montreal, see Appendix B, p.115), who was living in Israel at the time, and was funded by the controversial CAEJ. This strike underscored major divisions within the population of Ethiopian Jews in Israel, it emphasized central cross-cultural misunderstandings from both sides, it showed (to Israeli officials, the general public and the Rabbinate) a crucial lack of central leadership from the Ethiopian Jewish community, and it ultimately served to raise *new* doubts about the Beta Israel's Jewishness (Rosen 1986; Kaplan 1988). Jaffe ("Rift among Ethiopians", *JP International Edition*, October 12, 1985) argues that it also served as a political forum for other interested parties, such as the Reform and Conservative Jewish movements, which have been seeking recognition for their rabbis for years.

Finally, the strike had little impact on the original intent: the outcome was that Ethiopians wishing to marry would apply to their local marriage registrar who would examine the evidence concerning their personal status, including testimony from Ethiopian priests and elders (to be collected via an Institute for the Heritage of Ethiopian Jewry which was to be set up under the Ministry of Religious Affairs). The testimony would be considered important, but not definitive, as the Ethiopians had sought, and those whose Jewish lineage was unquestioned would be allowed to marry without the need for conversion. In fact, Kaplan explains, the proposed Institute never became operational, and at an official level, "the Ethiopians' status remained unchanged" (1988:362). The conclusion is that the issues raised in the strike on 1985 are largely unfinished: the formal legal situation of Ethiopians in Israel remains unchanged, and the bitter political, religious and social divisions which characterized the Ethiopians during the strike appeared to have continued, at least at the time in which Kaplan wrote his article (1988). Some young Ethiopians wishing to marry have chosen to concede to the ritual conversion. Others have resisted the "humiliation" by either having a *kess* perform the ritual, knowing that the State will not recognize the marriage as legitimate, or by opting to live together without any formal marriage ceremony. The subject has been less alluded to by the media and among Ethiopian Jews in recent years, as other problematic issues have arisen among the population.

Introducing the Seged *in Israel*

More than describe an interaction between "Ethiopians" and "Israelis", the introduction of the *Seged* holiday in Israel proved to highlight intense divisions within the Ethiopian population itself. The *Seged* was traditionally a festival of "exile", in which their longing for redemption and for the Holy Land was expressed. The first attempts to celebrate the *Seged* in Israel were in 1980, although the first successful attempt is considered to have been in November, 1982.

Abbink (1983) and Ben-Dor (1987) describe the initiative to hold the first *Seged* in 1980 as coming from two different sources. Abbink states that the idea to celebrate was

pushed for by the Orthodox Falasha rabbi, Rabbi Adane, who had been educated in rabbinical colleges in Italy and Israel and is the first ordained rabbi of Falasha extraction in Israel (1983:799). According to Abbink (1983), Rabbi Adane's intention was to express ethnic pride and the "well-rootedness" of the community, much as other ethnic immigrant groups in Israel had done before (such as the Moroccan, Georgian, and Indian Jews in Israel). Ben-Dor says that the first *Seged* was initiated by some of the younger people who thought that they could use the publicity of the event as a political means to exploit the Zionist aspects of the *Seged* "as an added device to publicize their accusations against the government" of not doing enough to bring their brethren to Israel (1987:148). At the time, the Beta Israel community numbered only a few hundred people, most of whom (those from the Tigray region) were concerned with remaining inconspicuous.

In the end, this first *Seged* never happened. When the buses came to the Immigrant Centers to bring the group to Jerusalem, they were boycotted by most Beta Israel (who wished to remain inconspicuous) and had to return empty. The following year, the Jewish Agency (JA) agreed to pay for buses to take immigrants from Absorption Centers to Jerusalem, as the community members promised that "since immigration had increased, they would use the *Seged* as a day of identification with their brethren, but would refrain from demonstrating against the Israeli Government or Jewish Agency" (Ben-Dor 1987:148). At the very last minute, a director of the JA, who, having heard about a planned demonstration for bringing Ethiopian Jews to Israel, canceled the buses, saying he "would not subsidize political protests against himself" (Ben-Dor 1987; Abbink 1983).

Finally, in 1982, a *Seged* was planned that actually took place. Ben-Dor (1987) and Abbink (1983) both describe it as having an "establishment" tone to it. It was planned by an Israeli planning committee, Rabbi Adane, and some key members of the Ethiopian community. The *kessim* were largely left out of the planning process due to disagreements between themselves over how the planning should be conducted. The traditional religious elements to the event were not the focus – it became a highly politicized event, at which the President of Israel and the Chief Ashkenazi Rabbi spoke, both of them reiterating the longing of Beta Israel to be part of the Jewish people, their struggle to retain their identity,

and the ardent determination of the Israeli government to bring them to Israel. Once the Beta Israel priests began to sing a part of the traditional prayers, the interest of the 800 person audience waned, and guests began to leave (including the President and the Chief Rabbi). At what was determined to be the end of the ceremony (enough people had gone, only less than 100 Beta Israel remained), Abbink questioned some of the people about how they had felt:

> The general feeling among those remaining was one of disappointment and disorientation. All Falashas questioned, except for [Rabbi Adane and his circle, who had not been familiar with the celebration in Ethiopia] said that in Ethiopia the *Seged* was a real special festival, a solemn day with much more impact. In Israel, in this form, it was a confusing and somewhat puzzling experience, which made them wonder whether celebrating it in Israel was to have any other meaning than publicity for the 'cause' of the Falashas. (1983:806)

This confusion was not felt in the same way at subsequent annual celebrations; Ben-Dor (1987) describes both the *Seged* of 1983 and of 1984 as being largely controlled by the *kessim* and Ethiopian leaders, though planned by Israeli committees, and as involving far less friction with the immigration authorities due to the increase in Beta Israel immigration at the time.

In 1985 the situation was largely influenced by the earlier events of the strike and the friction between the Ethiopians and the rabbinate over their Jewish identity. No one single celebration was held that year. Due to the chaos surrounding allegiances between different factions of the community over their stance on the strike issue, the level of organization decreased, and consequently a number of spontaneous celebrations were held at different absorption centers around the country with no central leadership by any *kess*.

I was not able to find any literature on the status of the *Seged* in more recent years. According to one Ethiopian Jewish informant in Montreal, little attention has been given to the celebration because there have been no further attempts to organize a nation-wide celebration since the early 1980's. It is unclear how significant the *Seged* is to Ethiopian Jews today, an in particular to the younger generations who have little or no attachment to such traditional practices.

Ghettoization: formation of a geographical boundary

After the initial absorption phases, during which the immigrants' basic needs were essentially taken care of by the JA and other well-intentioned volunteers and employees (in hindsight, from the point of view of the organizations and employees, these relationships caused severe cases of over-dependency on the part of the immigrants), the Absorption Ministry arranged for housing and more permanent settlement. The government wanted to disperse the immigrants among Israeli communities in order to avoid the "ghettoization" which had occurred with prior North African and Middle Eastern immigrant groups. Unfortunately, however, what transpired was perhaps worse than any of the key players could have imagined. Although a good proportion of the 1984-85 immigrants were eventually placed in permanent apartments according to original plans, still more remained in the absorption centers on a temporary basis while the search continued for permanent housing. Finally, some of the absorption centers were converted into permanent settlements, thus these immigrants remained in communities of their own, making the goal of integration far out of reach. The mass immigration of Ethiopians in 1991 coupled with the even larger immigration of Russian immigrants of the late 1980's and early 1990's produced furthers strains on the housing situation. Currently, there are centers all around the country, on the periphery of cities and in less populated areas, called *caravanim* (caravan sites). These are fabricated mobile housing sites set up for new *olim* which contribute further to the undesired result of ghettoization.

Israeli "racism", Ethiopian "primitiveness": boundaries based on stereotypes

Drs. Ruth Westheimer (the sexologist) and Steven Kaplan (a well known writer on Ethiopian history and religion) in a superficial, but conversational analysis of the changes in the Ethiopian family structure and dynamics through the Ethiopians' arrival and adjustment in Israel, only briefly address the issue of racism against the Ethiopians in Israel. In trying to stress the positive side of Israel's concern with the Ethiopians' cultural integration, they argue that "in comparison to most Westerners and especially Americans, Israelis are not very concerned with the issue of skin color. The crucial categories for

Israelis are Arab/Jew—Jew/non-Jew, Religious/Secular, and European/Middle Eastern. Black/White has never been an important distinction. For most Israelis, therefore, the primary strangeness of the Ethiopians is not their color but their culture: their language, their food, their clothes, and their manners" (1992:56-7). This statement assumes a number of things: that most Westerners and Americans are racist against dark skin color; that Israelis would be equally as "not concerned" with the issue of skin color if they had ever been faced with an immigrant group from Africa before; and that the divide between European Jew/Middle Eastern Jew is not distinguishable on the basis of skin color. Their attempt to minimize the impact of the Ethiopian Jews' skin color on their experiences of integrating as Jews is not supported by my data.

In a more thorough and thoughtful analysis of racism in Israel, Wagaw suggests that "although racial discrimination against the *olim* exists, it is not as prevalent or as conspicuous as some might think. Israeli society is very sensitive about this issue. the history of Jews in the Diaspora was that of minorities oppressed many times for their racial, cultural, or religious differences. Zionist ideology is based on the principles of egalitarianism, socialism, and justice" (1993:224). His assessment suggests that although direct racism may be difficult to detect independently of other factors (although in some cases it might be obvious), when racial discrimination becomes entangled with issues of culture, level of education and religion, it becomes a bigger issue. It is clear that racism is an extremely sensitive topic, as indicated by the critical debates that arose surrounding the issues of "when, how, and if" to bring the Ethiopian Jews to Israel.

Newman's study consisting of discussions and interviews with teachers, counselors, psychologists, social workers, and absorption personnel, suggests that "the main problem in the absorption of Ethiopian immigrants may stem from Israeli ethnocentrism and not from the 'primitiveness' and 'backwardness' of Ethiopian culture", which are a product of ethnocentrism (1987:104). The author, an applied anthropologist working for the Ministry of Education and Culture, attributes the problems to Israeli ethnocentrism, not racism. He argues that Israeli interest in the absorption process of the Ethiopian Jews emphasized the ultimate integration of Beta Israel *into* Israeli society. The

bi-directional process of integration and absorption, in which both the immigrants *and* the host society adjust to each other, was completely overlooked. Newman categorizes the main biases from the Israeli side, based on interviews, as primitiveness, education, religion, personal hygiene, and exceptionality (a category with positive connotations, referring to the common generalization about Ethiopian children being "beautiful", "cute", polite and very diligent at school).

Newman describes the "primitiveness" category as follows:

> The term is used to mean anything different and, by comparison, not as good. The issue of color and African origin strengthen the belief that the Ethiopian is a backward individual from a backward country with a backward culture. This belief is voiced early in any discussion of Ethiopians, usually in the context of the 'technological gap'. Stories circulating throughout the country cite examples of Ethiopian ignorance of modern kitchen appliances as evidence of their primitiveness. (1987:105)

This "primitiveness" stereotype encompasses a number of other negative perceptions of the Ethiopians, such as the belief that they are all illiterate, uneducated and unfamiliar with the institution called school. According to a number of sources, one comment which became almost unanimously associated with the child's ignorance at school was that "they don't even know how to hold a pencil" (Newman 1987:105). An eight-page memo circulated by the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council of New York city by Barry Weise, director of the Ethiopian Jewry Desk (January 11, 1984) cites this phenomenon at least twice. This memo depicts the Ethiopian immigrants as primitive and "lucky" to have been given the opportunities of a new life in Israel: "in bright airy apartments, Ethiopian Jews have space to breathe for the first time in their lives". It illustrates some of the views held about the Ethiopians at the time which directly feed into the stereotypes discussed above, depicting Israel as the "savior", and the new immigrants as the poor, lost and primitive souls, waiting to be "saved".

Other subjects which have received abounding attention from the media are those that fall under Newman's category of "personal hygiene". Newman states that "an almost unanimous concern exists over body odor, running noses and the menstrual cycle" (1987:105). In a section entitles "Out of the hut/into the closet", in a chapter on changing gender roles in Israel, Westheimer and Kaplan (1992) describe (somewhat more sensitively

that the title implies) the intense difficulty women have experienced in adapting to the practical impossibility of adhering to strict purity rites formerly practiced in Ethiopia. Stories of women using closets to avoid "contaminating" their families while menstruating (Westheimer and Kaplan 1992; Newman 1987) and of mothers sleeping on balconies with new-born babies to fulfill the prescribed period of isolation (Semi 1985) were circulated by the media and by word of mouth, thus reinforcing the stereotypical image of the primitive Ethiopian.

Contagion, disease, dirt: further stereotypes

This image of an unhygienic, dirty group became exaggerated after Operation Solomon in May, 1991, when new media stories appeared bearing titles like "Ethiopians face test for AIDS in Israel: airlift increased danger, officials say" (*G&M*, July 6, 1991), "HIV carrier pool said up in Israel following airlift of Ethiopian Jews" and "Israeli health officials order tests on Ethiopians" (*CH*, July 6, 1991). According to Pollack (1993), an Israeli immunologist, the prevalence of HIV among the Operation Solomon arrivals was 1.74% (a total of 243 people) as opposed to 0% in previous waves, and was believed to be the result of male sexual contact with HIV-infected women (prostitutes) while the community was housed in Addis Ababa for a few months to over a year before their departure to Israel. This finding was widely published in the international and national media. An article in *The Canadian Jewish News* estimated that 10 to 15 percent of the Ethiopians carry the AIDS virus. This type of media attention became an additional source of stigma for the community as a whole, and resulted in a number of suicide attempts and suicides (Chemtov and Rosen 1992; Chemtov et al 1993; Westheimer and Kaplan 1992).

In response to these suicides, the general shame felt by the Beta Israel community concerning their reputation among Israelis, and the obvious need for health awareness education, Chemtov and Rosen published a booklet (1992) aimed specifically at health care workers for Ethiopians. In it, they emphasize that many cases of HIV or Hepatitis B could have been contracted through avenues other than sexual relations with prostitutes, such as traditional Ethiopian medical practices which include skin piercing, blood-letting,

and receiving vitamins by injection. They hoped to point this out to health care workers and the community in general, in order to reduce the heavy stigma and shame associated with these infectious diseases.

Other infectious diseases were known to have infested the newcomers. A memo from the Ministry of Health, March 1991, lists the prevalence of malaria, intestinal parasites, tuberculosis, syphilis, hepatitis B and typhoid by percent of the population infected. This media focus on the Ethiopian immigrants as a diseased group was a cause of fear among the general Israeli population that they, or their children, would be endangered by the arrival of the population (Wagaw 1993:221).

The Family in Transition

A number of themes dominate the literature with regards to the changes in Beta Israel family values and composition due to migration. First, the literature emphasizes the fragmentation of the extended and immediate family due to tragic deaths en route to the new country, separation at the time of emigration, and the pressures to conform and adapt to Western societal norms. Second, there is a radical shift in gender roles in the new country, as the traditionally patriarchal locus of power is weakened. Third, there is a growing and problematic generation gap created between parents and children. Before discussing the impact of change on the family, I want to describe the traditional family values among Beta Israel Ethiopians living in Ethiopia.

Traditional family structure, composition and values

There is general agreement in the literature on the concept of the traditional Ethiopian family. It is patriarchal, highly valued, socially oriented, closely connected and authoritarian with raising children (Arieli and Ayche 1993; Ben-Ezer 1987; Wagaw 1993; Westheimer and Kaplan 1992; Moussa 1993; Tebeje 1989). Shared responsibilities within extended family, community and neighborhood are important parts of the Ethiopian concept of "family".

Westheimer and Kaplan explain that Ethiopians organize social life around the "flexible and often over-lapping concepts of the extended family (*zamad*) and household (*beta sa'ab*)" (1992:60). Membership in a large *zamad* provided practical benefits and social standing, as members of an extended family were expected to support each other in times of need. Within the extended family little attention is paid to the biological relationship between members. According to the context or circumstances, "grandparents, uncles, or older siblings might be a child's 'parents'; a person's 'children' might easily include nieces, nephews, stepchildren, and younger siblings" (Westheimer and Kaplan 1992:60). The extended family is often geographically dispersed; the household consists of a residential unit whose membership changes over time:

> Although often composed around a core nuclear family, widowed parents, divorced siblings, elderly relatives, various children, and even servants were often vital parts of a single *beta sa'ab*. At any given moment, the precise configuration of the *beta sa'ab* was determined by an assortment of personal preferences and needs and would change as these changed. (Westheimer and Kaplan 1992:60-61)

In the Ethiopian family, the husband is the decision maker, provider and leader of the family. The mother is primarily responsible for raising both male and female children, though when sons reach the age of about five, fathers assume responsibility for socializing them (Rosen 1987). The Amharic saying, *libam*, refers to a girl who is wise, well versed in manners, and able to skillfully manage her several roles as daughter, wife, mother, and mother-in-law (Wagaw 1993:79). The boy who is raised well is referred to as *yejegina lij*, "son of a brave father"; the ultimate shame is brought to both boy and family if described as *yeset lij*, or "child of woman" (Wagaw 1993:79). These and another Amharic saying, "marry the girl only after you have known or observed the mother", indicate the close relationship between mother and daughter and between father and son, and illustrate the importance placed on gender roles. The insult applied to both sexes, *yebalege lij*, "the son of an uncouth parent", and ultimate offense, *assadagih ayideg*, "may the one who brought you up be destroyed (cursed)" further verify the value of proper child rearing (Wagaw 1993:80).

Children are strictly raised to respect and obey parents, elders, and authority figures; punishing children harshly is expected and accepted (Tebeje 1989; Wagaw 1993;

Westheimer and Kaplan 1992; Rosen 1987). Rosen describes the first few years of a child's life as being a time of indulgence and freedom to do as he or she pleases (1987:56). After this time, however, "he is subjected to a regime of discipline, punishment and often repression in order that he may begin to acquire the traits of character which are included under the rubric of *chawa*", meaning "free, well-behaved, well-mannered, soft-spoken, graced with courtesy and refinement" (Rosen 1987:56). The child is taught to stand quietly when guests are present, and to reply to elders or authority figures in a barely audible whisper. This training is aimed at preventing the child from becoming a *balage*, "one who is ill-mannered, impudent, rude, rough, vulgar and disrespectful" (Rosen 1987:57).

Marriage has generally been accepted as a woman's goal in life, her virginity being essential (Moussa 1993:104). To ensure her virginity, clitorectomy and/or infibulation were practiced on young girls at some point between the age of seven days and seven years. It was not uncommon for a girl to be married off by her early teens (Moussa 1993:105). It is difficult to ascertain from the literature whether this practice continues in Ethiopia, and how popular it has been in recent years.

Changes in family structure

Westheimer and Kaplan (1992) argue that the changes that have occurred in the Ethiopian family Israel can be divided into two types: the internal structure of the family is reorganized as age, gender and parental authority take on new meanings; and the external borders of the family are redrawn as many of its functions are taken over by other institutions. The internal structure of the family is further changed by certain causes, such as death, divorce and separation, which produce many one-parent families. Additional problems, such as family violence and suicide, exacerbate the fragile condition of the family.

Although exact figures aren't available and the family is in a constant state of flux, in 1986 in Israel, between 30-33% of the total number of Ethiopian immigrants with children were single parents (Wagaw 1993; Westheimer and Kaplan 1992). Forty per cent

of the population were single adults. Among those who arrived during Operation Solomon (1991) the number of single parent families was somewhere between 33-50% (Westheimer and Kaplan 1992:105). Most of these families (about 80%) were headed by females. Many families were broken up through separation or death, either on the way from Ethiopia to third countries (the Sudan and Kenya) or while in the refugee camps. Other women had husbands who were left in Ethiopia (especially after Operation Moses in 1985) or who had abandoned the family since coming to Israel; still others were unwed mothers.

According to Wagaw (1993) and Westheimer and Kaplan (1992), both divorce and the use of physical force were common among families in Ethiopia. Westheimer and Kaplan (1992) point out, however, that it is important to view these types of family problems within the context of the confrontation with new values and conditions in Israel. Family violence may have been considered somewhat acceptable in Ethiopia, but in the context of Israel, this type of behavior is strongly criticized and even illegal. In the past, family problems that would have been mediated by elders and the extended family are now mediated by social services agencies and lawyers, who see violence as strong grounds for divorce. And while divorce may have been common in Ethiopia, according to one study, there is no Amharic or Tigrinya equivalent for the expression of "one parent families" (Weil 1991 in Westheimer and Kaplan 1992:106). Given the Ethiopian context of the extended family household, children were always surrounded by parental figures, even if they were not biologically in the parent-child relationship. In the western context, where the concept of family is limited to the immediate, nuclear relatives, the loss of one parent is socially, economically and psychologically disastrous.

Changes in gender and marital roles

Another major theme in the literature is the changing gender roles in the family (Moussa 1993; Sorenson 1991; Wagaw 1993; Westheimer and Kaplan 1992). Women arrive in the new country, traditionally used to having no financial or decision making power of their own. Social workers and immigration authorities urge them to get out into

the society, to learn Hebrew (English or French, in the Canadian case), study, secure a job, and use social security money allotted to them. This new found freedom creates major rifts between husband and wife, particularly in the case where the wife is the only one employed and is still expected to do the traditional "women's work" in the home (Westheimer and Kaplan 1992). As such her new identity may be seen as adaptive from the Israeli perspective, but may in reality be serving to create new factors within the traditional realm of the community which add to the break up of families, family violence, and the extremely high rate of single-parent families (usually headed by the mother). In turn, a high number of divorces ultimately stigmatizes the community and creates further strains among its members, since large extended family networks can no longer be relied on for child-care, emotional and social support (as was the case with divorces in Ethiopia, where at least in the rural areas, single-*adult* families rarely, if ever, existed).

In rural parts of Ethiopia, Ethiopian Jewish men traditionally worked in the fields, in carpentry and in metal work. Women were known for their skills in pottery, basket weaving and sewing. In Israel, the men's traditional skills are not in demand; the women, on the other hand, have been encouraged to teach their skills to their daughters, and to sell some of their wares. This power shift caused many problems such as fighting within the family, drunkenness, and unemployment among men, especially those past middle age (Wagaw 1993). Violence may have become a more common means of "keeping wives in line", and of expressing frustration over lost power in the home (Arieli and Ayche 1993; Moussa 1993; Sorenson 1991; Westheimer and Kaplan 1992).

Another aspect of gender which has created conflicts with families in Israel include the changing status of women as they abandon traditional purity laws such as post-partum and menstrual seclusion (Wagaw 1993; Westheimer and Kaplan 1992; Semi 1985). Additionally, Westheimer and Kaplan point out that a new category of young, single women has emerged, since women are encouraged to go to school, university, and to work rather than be married off as young teens. This challenges traditional assumptions about pre-marital behavior. Finally, the Ethiopian male encounters a new set of gender roles as soon as he arrives in the new country in dealing with predominantly female

absorption workers, social workers, volunteers, teachers and psychologists (Ben-Ezer 1987; Weil 1992). These workers are seen to represent the government and to be in a position of authority. Since the Ethiopian notion of authority has been traditionally associated with men, this is often a difficult contradiction for the new immigrants to adjust to.

The generation gap

The literature on Ethiopian Jews in Israel overwhelmingly points to the fact that children and young people integrate and adapt far better and faster than their parents and elders do (Newman 1987; Wagaw 1993; Westheimer and Kaplan 1992). Elders, who were once central to the family, and highly valued for their knowledge, are replaced by social services institutions. In addition, the spiritual leaders of the community (*kessim*) are relegated to an inferior position as the Rabbinate does not recognize their traditional roles as officially legitimate. Priorities in western societies tend to be child and youth oriented, thus dismissing adults and especially elders as "a generation of the wilderness" (Westheimer and Kaplan 1992:78).

These changes create certain tensions and problems between generations which are difficult to overcome. Children attend schools and become immersed in the language, values and customs of the new home, while parents generally lag behind their children, relying on them to "translate". One area which proves to be particularly difficult is with regards to the parents' new role in the school system. Children cannot rely on their parents to help with school work, and often come to school unprepared. Furthermore, western values encourage students to think independently, to speak up and to ask questions. There is painful conflict between how children are expected to act in the home, and how they are encouraged to behave outside the home. This conflict often manifests itself through increased distance between parents and children, elders and youth.

Talia, after having lived in Israel from age 10 to 13, returned to Israel from Montreal for a summer visit before Operation Solomon, when she was 17. She had the following insights on how her peers were adjusting in Israel, in relation to their parents:

> I thought there was like, total communication, *barrier*, between parents and children! The
> parents, they're so happy that their children are coming you know from boarding school,
> they don't see them often, they don't wanna tell them not to do certain things because they
> don't wanna make them angry, or they don't wanna be the bad parent. So they don't say
> anything. And the children you know they're coming from the boarding school, they're
> coming to visit to the parents, and they don't want to be told to behave in an *Ethiopian* way.
> Because they're more like, in the boarding school they're given the Israeli life, and they
> don't wanna come home for the weekend and be told [to behave in] traditional Ethiopian
> style. ... So there was a total difference. They wouldn't even speak, communicate, the
> children, they didn't even wanna talk, Amharic. ... It just *shocked* me. And there were
> others, there was a lot of suicide rate, among teen-agers. And I just didn't understand. Why
> is it. Why are they committing suicide, isn't there anybody who could talk to them, isn't
> there, what's the problem.

Talia explains that when she returned to Montreal after the summer, she had time to reflect
on the possible reasons for the communication breakdown between parents and children:

> ...the conclusion that I got to was, there was this, generation gap between the parents and the
> children, and they just don't get along. Or, there isn't anything that, they're just being
> thrown into one culture, you know. And they have to do whatever is necessary, to get along
> in that society. And that meant throwing their old *values*, and accepting the new *one*. And
> the parents, they don't wanna throw the old values and accept the new one. They want the
> old values. And live in the new society, but still have the old values. That was the thing I
> understood from what I saw.

Talia attributes the conflicts between generations to the pressures within Israeli society to
adapt to new cultural norms and values. According to her, the younger generations are
anxious to reject traditional family norms and values in order to more rapidly and
comfortably fit into the new society. The older generations are caught between wanting to
integrate while still maintaining some of the traditional Ethiopian values.

Although there is a difference between those factors which may have contributed
to Beta Israel marginalization in Israel and those which are aspects of identity change and
transition that may be seen as positive steps towards integration, it is extremely difficult to
distinguish, through a review of the literature, which processes act to alienate the
Ethiopians in Israel and those which in the long run may ease the integration process.
These elements are like two sides of the same leaf, acting in a feedback-loop relationship
with each other. In short, not all areas of distinction are cause for the Ethiopians'
marginalization in Israel, although even some characteristics which indicate positive

change and adaptation to Israeli "normalcy" may contribute to further marginalization at some level.

As this section has shown, the areas in the literature which are usually regarded as a process of changing and creating a new group identity are generally those related to the drastic transformation of the family, and to elements of difference in the community such as gender, age, and level of education. These areas may, on the one hand illustrate how well the community (or certain pockets of the community) is adapting, but they may also add to the problems in the community which create new marginalizing factors. Drastic family transitions might indicate adaptation to the new lifestyle, but they have also led to radical changes in the traditional roles of elders and youth; as leadership in the community is toppled, children and adults are suddenly in reverse roles, and people past early middle age are further pushed to the margins of society.

The feedback-loop effect between negative reinforcement and identity change is also occurring among the above factors which contribute more directly to Ethiopian marginalization. For example, the religious debate is inherently linked to both processes: on one level the issue is about Ethiopians fighting for their rights to express their religious identity as they choose, to be accepted as Jews as they are, not only after ritual conversion; on another level it reproduces conflicts and tensions between the Rabbinate, the Israeli political leaders and the community itself (which is extremely divided on the issue), thus creating a distance between the Ethiopian Jews and the "mainstream". A similar combination of identity change acting on forces to reproduce Ethiopian marginalization is apparent with regards to gender issues and tensions within the family. The traditional roles of women and the concept of the extended family become challenged, tensions rise between husband and wife, and the divorce rate increases. This ultimately further stigmatizes the community, and creates distance between "Israeli society" and "the Ethiopians".

Clearly, the negotiation of Ethiopian Jewish identity in Israel is a process which is influenced by a number of complex factors and relationships, creating boundaries between the Ethiopians and the Israeli mainstream on different levels. In this chapter I have tried to

show how the process of negotiating identity through relationships with key reference groups is inherently linked to the internal othering of the group, which is in turn linked to their being a liminal community, both sharing key elements of identity to unite them with Israel, and possessing enough distinctions which push them to the margins of the society.

This chapter offers insight on a number of different issues. First, that it may be convenient to talk about the "Ethiopian Jewish community", but in reality, divisions among the population such as gender, age, length of time in Israel, and linguistic and geographical origins in Ethiopia show that this description is, in fact, no more than a convenient label. Second, it is difficult for me to be constructively critical of the Israeli "absorption and integration" ideal and at the same time, to avoid portraying the Ethiopians as victims and poor immigrants. Part of the reason for my position is that at one point, the Israeli government and certain pro-Ethiopian political and aid groups wanted the public to view the Beta Israel as victims. Another reason is that none of the literature about Ethiopian Jews is written by an Ethiopian Jew, thus it does little to represent their side as active participants or to give the reader a sense for how the Beta Israel see themselves. The sections above describing the religious debate over the conversion of the Beta Israel and *Seged* ceremony are exceptions, since the literature portrays the Beta Israel more actively partaking in the process of negotiating their identity. Perhaps these issues are best understood as a form of group resistance against the power of the Israeli Rabbinate to dictate whether or not they are Jews, and to tell them how to be "proper" or "normalized" Jews.

Chapter 5: The Canadian Experience

In this chapter, I analyze the Ethiopian Jews' experience of integration and the construction of group identity in the context of their relationship to two broader groups: "Ethiopians" and "the Jewish community'. As a background to this, I first include a brief review of the literature on Ethiopian (irrespective of religion) refugees and immigrants in North America. While Ethiopian Jews are linked to Israel, they are immediately immersed in the North American setting, which introduces unique conditions in their process of integration. As in the literature on Ethiopians Israel, one of the areas which emphasizes these unique conditions is the impact of change and integration on the family. Thus, the first section includes an analysis of the Ethiopian family and migration to North America, comparing what has been said in the literature to what informants discuss. The second and third sections focus on how the Ethiopian Jews see themselves and how others perceive them as fitting into the broader Ethiopian and Jewish communities. The final section discusses how the construction of Ethiopian Jewish identity emerges through a link between an Ethiopian past, a Canadian present, and a relationship with Israel which connects past, present and future.

Ethiopian immigrants and refugees in North America

Regarding their identity and integration, there are three factors which are particular to the Ethiopians in North America. The first is that the literature on Ethiopian immigrants to North America suggests that Ethiopians feel both alienated by the white majority in North America and unwilling to associate themselves with blacks (Sorenson 1990, 1991; Matsuoka and Sorenson 1991; Moussa 1993; Tebeje 1989; Van Praag 1986). Ethiopians are extremely proud of the fact that their country has never been colonized and that they do not have the experience of being relegated to an inferior position by powerful, white, colonizers. One informant explained that he was "shocked" at the way he was treated when he came to Canada; he wasn't prepared to deal with being treated as inferior because of his skin color. Tebeje notes that Ethiopians themselves are sometimes perceived as racist because of their "exaggerated pride in their history, national freedom and good looks" (1989:7). The assumption by government and immigration officials that they will

automatically ease into the "African" or "Black" community is offensive and problematic for the Ethiopians.

Secondly, the literature on Ethiopians in North America focuses on the problems experienced in the communities due to an overwhelmingly young population lacking in any traditional leadership (McSpadden 1987; Matsuoka and Sorenson 1991). McSpadden (1987) outlines some of the major problems experienced by such a community in a study intended to determine the relative success of Ethiopian refugee resettlement by agencies as compared to church/synagogue congregations and volunteers. She explains that one of the factors which puts them at special risk in terms of their psychological well-being is that they represent an age group likely to experience a difficult resettlement. Specifically, she states that most are "single and alone, yet from strong extended families, their resident ethnic community is geographically scattered as well as being fragmented by political, ethnic, and linguistic differences" (McSpadden 1987:800). Her findings indicate that refugees settled by congregations and volunteer families tend to have a higher level of psychological well-being than those settled by agencies. This is partly explained by the fact that they receive more guidance and support in a familial atmosphere than they do on their own, or when relying mostly on other refugees in a similar situation. Because of their cultural tendency to respect authority and to be familiar with parental authority in particular, young Ethiopian refugees move easily, perhaps too easily for some North Americans, into looking for parental figures to seek advice (McSpadden 1987:816-7).

Finally, the assumption that "Ethiopians" exist as a unified category of people by the general public, immigration officials, and well-intending organizations in North America can evoke an angry and resentful response in the person assumed to be Ethiopian (McSpadden 1987; Matsuoka and Sorenson 1991). Ethiopians in North America generally do not understand why North Americans are so ignorant of their history and politics, and point out that referring to a person as "Ethiopian" is, in itself, a political statement. Matsuoka and Sorenson explain the double bind in dealing with these contested identities:

> The terms of reference employed easily become political. Inclusion of Eritreans and Oromos [ethnic/nationalist groups] within the category of "Ethiopians" will draw resentment from those who reject such an identification, yet to acknowledge their claims to distinct identity invites an angry response from those who insist that "Eritreans don't exist." .... Many of those who are struggling to assert distinct identities have seen relatives killed or themselves have been imprisoned and tortured; those who subscribe to an inclusive Ethiopian identity

> see the former as troublemakers intent on destroying the country. Thus, from both
> perspectives, the situation is extremely sensitive. The social worker who ignores the issue of
> distinct identity may be regarded as ignorant or insensitive, yet to inquire directly as to
> affiliation creates suspicion and resentment. (1991:251)

This group of immigrants and refugees is highly political, divided, and sensitive to these

divisions. The next section focuses more specifically on how Ethiopian Jews perceive

themselves in relation to and how they are perceived by this "Ethiopian" majority. The

remainder of this section juxtaposes what the literature on Ethiopian immigrants and

refugees in North America has said about Ethiopian families with comments by Ethiopian

informants.

Tensions within the family

Many of the problems associated with Ethiopian families and migration outlined in

the last chapter are similar to both the Israeli and North American settings. Belletetch, one

of my informants, emphasizes that her worries about other family members were a major

concern when she first arrived in Canada:

> When we came here it was not easy for us to integrate at first. We weren't sure, our family
> was half, we lost half our family in Sudan. I didn't know where my two brothers were,
> another two were somewhere else, other family was in Ethiopia. It was hard to make a
> decision to go to Israel [after coming to Canada]. The problem was, there's so many
> problems actually. Number one was the family. Two of my brothers spent four years in
> Sudan. My aunt died with four kids, my uncle's wife died with four children. In our
> culture, you don't tell anyone if someone dies. I knew all these relatives died, I was really
> confused, I wasn't thinking too much for my life, I was thinking about my family. My sister
> was wounded. So many things were worrying me, I couldn't think about what to do. If I
> had any family in Israel at that time I wouldn't have stayed here for one night.

Belletetch focuses on her family and the concerns she had about who was alive and who

was not, which are aspects of migration which might be common among refugees in

general. What is unique about her concern, however, is that she links these worries to her

decision to stay in Canada or to go to Israel. She felt she couldn't make a choice about

where her life should be; she was too worried about the conditions and locations of her

relatives. But she emphasizes that had she known that any of them were alive and well in

Israel, she would have gone there.

The literature also emphasizes that the shift in gender roles in the family are

problematic in the process of integration. But the generation gap problem is emphasized

to a greater extent in the literature on Ethiopians in Israel than on those in North America. The literature on North America emphasizes the problems associated with the fact that the Ethiopian population in Canada and the U.S. is overwhelmingly young and male. Given this particular characteristic of the communities in North America, it is not surprising that the problems between generations are not a main focus in the North American setting. Rather, as the previous section showed, feelings of isolation and a lack of guidance are expressed as central concerns. As I will show in the section on the Ethiopian Jews and the Jewish community, many Ethiopian Jews complain about a lack of guidance, support, and a feeling that they do not know enough to function properly in the new society.

Gender roles

Unlike in the Israeli literature on Ethiopian immigrants, the North American literature does not emphasize divorce among this group. But Sorenson (1991) and Moussa (1993) emphasize that family violence is recognized as a growing problem among expatriate groups. The pressure on married couples and families is similar to that in Israel, as traditional gender roles are challenged, and the male figure's authority is threatened. Moussa (1993) explains that both Ethiopian and Eritrean social service workers in Toronto indicate that many women don't follow up on job interview appointments. When asked what the reasons for this apparent lack of motivation are, many refugee women explain that their spouses discouraged them from seeking and securing employment. In my experience among the Ethiopian Jewish families and couples, however, all of the women have secured employment. In many cases the women's jobs are more prestigious in addition to being better paying than their husbands'. It was not possible for me to determine how or if this imbalance effected their marital relations, although several women complained of their "double work load", and had resigned themselves to accepting that they could never expect help with domestic work from their husbands.

One male informant comments on the stresses his wife feels, and the tension it causes between the two of them sometimes:

> Always she's feeling that I don't respect her, or she has different, some odd feelings
> sometimes, and I don't understand it, you know, but sometimes maybe I am busy, but you
> know, it's difficult. But, you know, I take it as normal misunderstandings about life so, we
> didn't have *major* misunderstandings. But, there is lot of problems. Lots of problems, her

own problems. She has lots of stresses, she has to catch up, you know, and the kids are very fast, I study a lot, and sometimes she gets lost. She tries to come up, but it's too difficult. So, then, she tries to put it on me, and then I fight, and then we throw words to each other, and then we don't speak for some time. You know, these things happen. And I think this is as a result of this pressure, and as a result of the *fast*, pace. Of life here, of the changes. And the change brings lots of *pain* in the back. *Real* pain.

The generation gap

Although the literature does not emphasize the generation gap as being particularly problematic among Ethiopian immigrants in North America, several informants commented on the problems they felt between parents and children. Because of the Ethiopian Jews' particularly marginal position among Ethiopians, Blacks and Jews, their situation perhaps is not comparable to the literature.

Based on her own experience as a child in the school system in Montreal, Talia began identifying with other children and to think of ways in which she might create a support system for them. She had felt extremely isolated when she came to Montreal from Israel to join her family, and had cut herself off from her family, the Ethiopian community, and the Jewish community. She explains that she eventually started getting more involved with the Ethiopian community after realizing that she might have a role in helping the children feel more at ease:

> ...one of the reasons why I went back to the Ethiopian community, was because I started seeing that there are younger kids. And the younger kids they were starting to go to school. And some of them were going to go to Jewish school, some of them were not going to go to Jewish school. And I just started feeling, you know? Those little feelings again and I said "whoa".
> Q: What little feelings?
> A: Like being, when I was *alone*, when I didn't have anybody to talk to. ... I identified *totally* with them. And I said, okay, I know they're not going to be able to talk to their parents, because their parents would not understand, and then they're going to go to school. I know they don't have social workers that are qualified enough to deal with things like that, with issues of being black, Jewish at the same time, being the only black person in an all-white institution.

Talia knew that there had been an after school program set up for the children in the past, where volunteers from McGill University and Hillel House would do activities and tutoring for them. But, she said, the program would run for a while, and then it would stop; from the perspective of the community, it was not very successful. During her first year at

college (CEGEP) in Montreal, she took some initiative in starting up the program again, and arranged to do so through the Young Men's and Women's Hebrew Association (YM-YWHA). The program was designed to help the children with homework, particularly in French, Hebrew, and Math, and to provide them with a forum to talk about their feelings as blacks in a white Jewish community, or in an all white school.

When I asked Talia specifically what she felt parents couldn't understand about the experience of being in school, she responded:

> I guess what I though they wouldn't understand was, if I would go and say, you know I don't like the feeling that I get when I'm like walking into an all-white school where I'm the only person and I feel like I'm stared at or I'm looked at or I'm being treated differently from the rest of them because I'm, you know [black]. Or I'm getting special privileges because I'm black, or like if I complain, for them, I thought it would just be a complaint. I felt that they would say, you're just being ungrateful, kind of thing. Cause it was put like, education is so important, you have your education, go with it. Nothing matters, really, you shouldn't worry about little thing. And that was considered little things.

Through Talia's comments, it is obvious that the pressures she had felt, and what she understood that the other children would feel, are unique to their situation as dark-skinned, Ethiopian, Jewish children. Talia hoped that if she could provide them with an opportunity to speak with someone who could share their experiences and show understanding, they might not find going to school as difficult.

For a while, this arrangement seemed to provide enough support for the children, but, Talia says, "after a while it didn't work out anymore".

> ...they were actually changing and I didn't have as much time to spend with them as much as I would have liked to. And there was also, they were also getting other information, other values they were starting to accept, it wasn't anymore accepting the Jewish values and being Ethiopian, it was also meant accepting the North American values. The guys they started dressing up like North American blacks, meaning like wearing like large pants, colorful clothes, walking like them, dressing like them, talking like them. And I was disappointed when it started happening like that because, I said, you don't need to imitate anybody, you know, to look like anybody, you know, you guys are unique you should be what you are, who you are. But you know, it was *in*. They were more comfortable acting like that and behaving like that than being, being themselves. It still is for some of them.

Here, Talia expresses that the additional pressures of conforming to behave like "typical North American Blacks" are added challenges to their "unique identity". Her role as the "big sister" to the young people with whom she identified could not protect them from *all* of these pressures.

Ketema, speaking from a parent's perspective, claims that his children have no trouble integrating with the broader Jewish community. He argues that it is the parents' generation who have more difficulty:

> My children are going to feel comfortable. *VERY* comfortable. They speak, like, you know, upright. Deep inside their heart, in their head, everything they know it. So, that's it. But *US*? That's the problem. The parents, the older ones, that's going to be a problem. .... My feeling is, my kids are well integrated, but I am going to stay like this.

Because they are being educated in private Jewish schools, Ketema has confidence that his children will feel comfortable in the Jewish community.

But what Ketema perceives as his lack of knowledge in certain areas can sometimes pose a problem between he and his wife and the children:

> ... luckily for me, I went to school of Social Work [McGill]. I studied the history of life in Canada, how it evolved to be like this. I studied about the education system. How the curriculum is made, what changes there are. I studied about technology, about information, about the soap operas, about many many influences that the kids can have. And I keep reading, you know, periodicals, I keep reading, I keep watching. So, because of that, I try to keep up with my kids. And humbly I tell them humbly that I don't know. And I really, when it comes to many many areas, I don't understand. And I don't try to understand. The only thing I try to communicate with them is: here we are. I'm challenged on many directions. *Pardon* me if I don't know it.

Although he is highly educated, having attained a second Bachelor's degree at McGill University, Ketema feels he cannot keep up with his children. He expresses even more concern with the way the children interact with their mother:

> Sometimes, like, you saw it, I was going to kill him [referring to his son, who he scolded harshly earlier for yelling in the house]. You tell him a hundred times, he will never listen to us. He treats her [mother] like, like not only friend, but, well I don't want to talk about it.
> Q: You mean your wife, he should treat her with more respect.
> A: Yeah, more respect, maybe, you know, she might not be, able to help him all the time, and his friends, be she is a mother. She might not understand most of the things that he has learned, but that only shows that he's lucky. But kids, they don't see it, that's all. They think we don't know anything.

From Ketema's perspective, the fact that his children "know" more than he and his wife should indicate to them that they are lucky. As Talia emphasized above, her concern about ever expressing her worries about difficulties at school to her parents was that they would not understand. They would say that she's fortunate to be receiving the kind of education they never had, and would tell her not to worry about "little things". As Ketema's

comments show, there is quite an emphasis on his feeling that his children are lucky, and that therefore, they have nothing to complain about.

Traditional roles in a new environment

Several Ethiopian Jewish and non-Jewish informants made comments in support of the description of the traditional Ethiopian family described in Chapter Four, and compare the typical Ethiopian family with what they see in Canada. Mesfin explains that the traditional Ethiopian child is polite, always says please, and respects his elders. Children do what their parents ask, and have 100% confidence that their parents have their best interests in mind. He says that a spanking is considered good discipline, unlike in Canada, where children's *rights* are emphasized over their *responsibilities*. Ketema explains:

> ...he's not allowed to talk. Sometimes I don't want him to talk. And they bother me a lot. I say, I don't want to talk. Because I know if I talk, they'll go and tell it to their friends. So, I don't wanna tell them about my life! ... That's the kids. As far as I see in this country, you tell them, they take the phone and they tell everybody. ... I don't know in *this* country, kids if they speak in Ethiopia, they'll kill them. Their *parents* will kill them. First, they are not allowed to hear nothing. Second, if they hear somehow if they hear, they're not supposed to tell anybody. And if they do, they're in big big trouble.

Belletetch is not as confident that the "Ethiopian way" is the right way. She says:

> ...I remember in Ethiopia. If I make a mistake my parents beat me. Here you have to explain things, to punish them. If people come [over to our house] in Ethiopia I had to stay in the kitchen. I won't do that to my kids.

It is interesting that Mesfin and Ketema indicate their efforts to maintain some semblance of their traditional understanding of how children should be raised, whereas Belletetch rejects this understanding for the "Canadian way". She states:

> It won't be too late to get a social worker to help each Ethiopian Jewish family. We don't know how to raise our children. They know more than us. If we made a mistake we don't realize. Each of us, we have to have a social worker to teach us how to raise our family properly like Canadian. If my son says, "Ma, you don't know anything", maybe they're right. They're going to school with Canadian children.

Belletetch's comment illustrates that she not only rejects a "traditional Ethiopian up-bringing", but also emphasizes her sense of feeling lost and needing guidance in the new cultural world. This comment also ties in to the theme discussed above on the generation

gap; she clearly feels a sense of distance from her children because "they know more than us".

"Ethiopians" and Ethiopian Jews

Generally, informants do not spontaneously discuss "the Ethiopian community" in relation to themselves. They by far emphasize their relationship to the Jewish community, and their struggles to fit in there. The reason for this, as I understand it, is because finding a niche within the broader Ethiopian community is not as problematic, nor as important. Furthermore, the Ethiopian Jews were brought to Canada as a distinct group by the Jewish community, which had very clear intentions to integrate them into the Jewish community. While other Ethiopians were relying on government structures to "settle" them, the Ethiopian Jews were relying on Jewish community structures, such as JIAS, to introduce them to Canadian society, and to help in the initial stages of integration.

The only opportunities I had to observe interactions between Ethiopian Jews and non-Jews were at several Ethiopian Association parties, and at the 1994 Operation Solomon commemoration put on by the Ethiopian Jewish Association, which some non-Jewish Ethiopians attended. The Ethiopian parties were basically social opportunities for people to gather, eat Ethiopian food, listen to music and dance. But there was a political slant to them also. The ticket from the first party I attended indicates that the "proceeds go to The Montreal Association for Unity and Democracy in Ethiopia (MAUDE)". According to a man identifying himself as Oromo (see p.33) whom I met outside of this milieu, these parties are attended mainly by Amhara, and he does not feel welcome there. While the language spoken amongst the people at the parties was Amharic, the songs and dance music played at these parties was a mix of many different ethnic groups and languages, clearly advocating a "unified Ethiopia". At these parties, Ethiopian Jews generally sat together at a big table, but mixed with others as well. Talia, who invited me to the parties, indicated that she didn't really *want* to go, but that she felt obliged because the various Ethiopian groups try to support each other *socially*.

Politics, however, are a different story. My impression is that Ethiopian Jews in Montreal avoid getting involved in political discussions, generally confining themselves to

a "unified Ethiopia", but not taking a stance against other Ethiopians because of this. Three Ethiopian Jews commented on their disinterest in politics:

> ... they're very politically oriented, the whole community. And I'm not very political. I don't wanna be political because I find that politics divides, and I don't want that part. But what I did, what I did tell them was that I would be willing to get involved it means if there is anything I could do in order to help individuals.

> ...I tried to spend my time dealing with individuals, and individual problems. So, when it comes to groups and politics, I never get involved. And I didn't have *time* to discuss *any* politics with anybody. I intentionally *avoided* it? And many times people come. They want to talk to me, and I said no! I'm not *scared* of them anymore.

> I had enough politics. I mean, I was born in Ethiopia. If you can help, you help your country. When someone asks, where am I from, I say Ethiopia. I am still a part of my country. If I can help, I like to help them. I can't stand to think someone is starving. I was brought up there, I remember.

In Montreal, the Ethiopian Jews do not hide their religious identity from other Ethiopians. Another informant explains:

> ...when I am with the other Ethiopian non-Jews, they know that I'm Ethiopian Jewish. And I'm very blunt about it. I don't hide it. So it doesn't bother them or they wouldn't be with me, or they could be and then not, but it's not a barrier. But it's not an issue, but it's not an obstacle either, it just seems, you could be Jewish, you could be Muslim, you could be Christian, you could be Eritrean. Like, we're here, because we kind of come from the same place. We have some kind of history, because we were in that place.

Ketema worked as the Director of the Ethiopian Association in Toronto for three years when he first moved there. He describes how it was beneficial, among the other Ethiopians who he met through the association, to be identified as a Jew:

> ... being Jewish specially, the early 90's was something special.
> Q: Something good.
> A: Yeah, something good, as far as the Ethiopians were concerned. The Ethiopians *here* in Canada. Because they think we had a special privilege? They think the Jewish community's rich? And they give us money? And they have, they think that we have everything, actually we didn't have nothing. But ...
> Q: But they had this understanding.
> A: They have this understanding. And I took it, yes, I told them yes, I get everything. And maybe I get, the fact that everybody's feeling like that towards you, makes you feel good! So, it gave me lots of morale and (laughs), you know.

Ketema used this misunderstanding to his benefit amongst the Ethiopians; it gave him confidence to know that they saw him as belonging to a group of wealthy, powerful people in Canada.

Although Talia does not hide her identity as a Jew from other Ethiopians, she is aware that some Ethiopians harbor some hostility or negative stereotypes against people in her community. She describes one such example of a young non-Jewish Ethiopian man, newly arrived in Canada, who came to a party she organized at the YM-YWHA specifically because he had never seen a Falasha before:

> ... The Ethiopian community? They told him that there is a Falashan girl who is having a party, let's go. And he never, he said that he never saw what was different about Falashas because he never saw one. He's from Addis. So he wanted to see what the Falashas look like. And from the stories that he heard, he expected to see some kind of arrogant, mean, bad, bad looking, very selfish, all the negative stereotypes. The one thing that he said was "I was expecting to find people who hate all other Ethiopians, who are not friendly or who are not sociable at all. And he *came*, on purpose just to see these people. And I couldn't believe it when he told me that. He told me that after the party, about three months after. I was totally shocked. People actually say that? He goes, "yeah". I go, "so how did you find us? Were we really bitchy? Were we like, did we eat you guys?" That was how because they're like, you know, the evil eye they're gonna eat you. That's how they're describing us. So he goes, "no, actually, I was trying to find something weird about you guys, and I didn't. You guys are all more sociable and more friendly than anybody I've met. When I came into the door, there were people greeting you, smiling and happy and hugging, and kissing, I thought I was back home. I didn't see anything different." I said, "well I hope you went and you told your friends that." And he said, "no, I didn't."

While some Ethiopians distinguish themselves and "Falashas" on the basis of such stereotypes, others emphasize the commonalties between the groups. One informant, an Orthodox Christian Ethiopian man who strongly advocates political unity in Ethiopia and refuses to discuss ethnic or national divisions, explained that the Orthodox Church of Ethiopia has very similar laws to Judaism. The only difference, he claims, is that Jews don't accept Jesus. For him, religion is not an important dividing factor between Ethiopians; his vision of a unified Ethiopia unites all people, religions, and ethnic backgrounds.

In addition to these types of stereotypes persisting amongst some members of the community in Canada, Talia explains that other Ethiopians tend to hold a grudge over the Ethiopian Jews, precisely because of the degree to which Israel and other Jews helped them. She explains that many Ethiopians resent Operation Solomon (1991), as it marked the sudden end of Mengistu's regime in Ethiopia, and the beginning of the Revolutionary Front which replaced it:

> So they're saying that Israel had a deal with the American government to hold the government that's in position now, to stall them, until Israel will take the people out. And

then once they took out the people, the States gave the permission to go in, the
Revolutionary Front. So they're having a grudge over us saying that, you're celebrating that
day, for you know the exit of your people, but for the murder of our people.
Q: Why is it the murder of their people?
A: Because they are against this revolution. The Revolutionary Front that's in power right
now.
Q: They were pro-Mengistu?
A: That's another twist. They were not even pro-Mengistu. They were against Mengistu,
but they didn't want this guy either. Mengistu was a dictator for them.

The Ethiopian discourse about Ethiopian Jews easily becomes political. Here, Talia is
clearly talking about the feelings of Ethiopians who advocate a unified Ethiopia, and who
view the current political climate as one which is tearing Ethiopian ethnic groups apart. In
addition, Talia explains that many Ethiopians resent the meaning of the airlifts to Israel to
the Ethiopian Jews; they are tired of hearing about "how we called you names and how we
tortured you".

This section has touched upon some interactions between Ethiopian Jews and non-
Jews in Canada. Some of the tensions between the two groups are embedded in past
stereotypes of Falashas in Ethiopia, others relate to peoples' political stances on Ethiopia
or Israeli and American involvement with the Falasha rescue effort, and some are based on
an understanding of what it means to be Jewish in Canada. The following section will
describe the Ethiopian Jews' interrelations with other Jews in Canada.

"The Jewish community" and "Ethiopian Jews"

The Jewish community in Montreal is diverse linguistically, doctrinally, and
ethnically. This community has the largest proportion of immigrants in North America:
45% as compared to 33% in Toronto, and 17% in New York (Allied Jewish Community
Services 1991:2). The largest immigrant group here consists of French speaking North
African and Middle Eastern Jews. Because of the diverse nature of the Jewish community
in Montreal, and particularly the division between French and English speakers, the
context in which the Ethiopian Jews are immersed is unique in North America.

I had several opportunities to observe interactions between Ethiopian Jews and
other Jews in Montreal. Unlike the social events or parties at which I observed Ethiopian
Jews and non-Jews interact, these events were more formal meetings to which one or more

Ethiopian Jewish person was invited in order to give a speech or presentation. One of these was a Na'amat Women's meeting put on by the "*Am Echad* Group" (one nation, peoples) which included an "authentic Ethiopian dinner", music and video, and guest speaker, Baruch Tegegne, proudly referred to as the "first Ethiopian Jew to come to Canada" in the flyer for the event. Seven Ethiopian Jewish women attended the event, several of whom brought their husbands and children. These women prepared food, sang, and danced for the group of about 60 non-Ethiopian Jewish attendees, most of whom were middle-aged to elderly women. One of the Ethiopian members introduced the various events as the evening progressed, first declaring that when she came to Canada she felt lonely and apart from the Jewish community, but that since she had joined Na'amat, she doesn't feel lonely anymore. Before Baruch's speech, two students from Bialik High school presented the Ethiopian members with a check for $ 900 which they had earned through a fund raiser at school in order to collect money for the Ethiopian Jewish community.

Baruch's one hour speech was very dramatic; he elicited a strong emotional reaction from the audience of pity and empathy. He began by explaining that "today, all of us are together", and that "you have all heard of Operation Solomon and Moses, but today I want to tell you about my life history, so that you'll understand where we are right now". Throughout his speech, Baruch emphasized his identity as a Jew, distinct from other Ethiopians, and the same as other Jews. Some excerpts from this speech are as follows:

> I was born in Ethiopia in a small village, maybe 200 families live together. I know from that time I started to feel the difference between me and the *Goyim* (non-Jews). In order to get freedom we had to sacrifice.

> No matter where I live, even if I was in a remote area of Africa I was treated as a Jew. Not like a brother.

> It was not easy to be a Jew in that remote part of Africa, believe me. They called us Falasha, outsiders, not part of this land.

> I want to talk to you as a Jew, my message to you is that we're the same.

Baruch's discourse employs terms such as "Jew" and "*goy*" in order to appeal to the common experiences he shares with the audience.

He also described how people reacted to him when he went to study in Israel, now emphasizing the struggle he experienced throughout his life to be accepted as a Jew:

> Some of the teachers there [Israel] hugged us and welcomed us. Some told us, Baruch, why don't you take a bath, you're too dirty.

> All the kids wanted to touch my hair. Why is it curly. Why am I black. How am I a Jew. How could I explain that?

At times he emphasized that Ethiopian Jews be included within the boundaries of "all Jews", at other times he commented on the distance he felt from other Jews, indicating an acknowledged separation between Ethiopians and other Jews.

After Baruch's speech, one of the women in an official position within the Na'amat group spoke with me briefly. She told me how they've done a lot for the Ethiopian Jews in Montreal: "we've organized Brits (*brit milah*: ritual circumcisions for newborn boys), collected toys, *we've really taken them under our wings*" (emphasis mine). This community is still in a position of relying on the powerful Jewish Other to take care of them, teach them, and integrate them, a role which the broader community accepts, to some extent. The Ethiopian Jews' desire to be accepted among other Jews was strongly felt at this meeting, and at others I attended like it.

Although these types of public interactions present a positive, albeit imbalanced, relationship between the communities, the more private discourse indicates that there are a lot of conflicts between them. One thing on which there is general agreement among Ethiopian Jews, JIAS executives, and case workers involved in the community's integration is that the process has been difficult, confusing and problematic for all parties involved.

Perhaps the problems integrating the community is one reason why the program to sponsor Ethiopian Jews to Canada was called off. Alternatively to canceling the program, the Canadian Jewish community could have sponsored *more* Ethiopian Jews to create a stronger support network for them. Two Ethiopian Jewish informants remark on the small size of their community:

> They're too small, even if they want to protect their own culture, their own religion, they're too small community, they're not an independent community. They're with the other community, with the Jewish community. They're a very small minority community. I don't know, tomorrow, the children, which side they're going to go.

...you know, like Russians, for example, have friends who are Russians only. Ethiopians, they don't have so many Ethiopians here, and that's why they can't integrate. It's not because they are black and white. No. It's because, all the white people are here, all Ethiopians are here, and they don't know each other!

The community is too small to be independent, yet there are still barriers to integrating with the other Jews. Both informants indicate that the Ethiopian Jews are separate from other Jews. Although the second informant above claims color is not the reason for this barrier to integrating, he contradicts himself in setting up an opposition between "all the white people" and "all Ethiopians". He compares his community to another recent immigrant group to Israel and to Canada, the Russian Jews, who are larger in number.

Another Ethiopian Jewish informant talked about how JIAS stopped the program to bring Ethiopian Jews to Canada, saying that they are better off in Israel. He argues that Ethiopian Jews have every right to choose whether to settle in Canada or in Israel; just being Jewish does not mean that they have to go to Israel. He, like the above informant, compares his community to the Russians, and wonders why they are still coming to Canada. He argues that there is a double standard: Israel can take the Russian Jews too, but they are still immigrating to Canada. He hesitates to blame this on racism, but suggests that stereotypes of black people as unemployed and non-productive members of society might be a reason why the Jewish community chooses to sponsor Russians over continuing to sponsor Ethiopians. One on one, he says, people are kind and welcoming, but as a whole, as a community, they're not. The next section on the construction of Ethiopian Jewish identity in Canada will present a more detailed picture of these interactions, and of Ethiopian Jewish experience as internal other to the Jewish mainstream.

As a caveat to the following sections, although the emphasis in this chapter may seem entirely pessimistic, there are optimistic sides to this story as well. Several children in both Montreal and Toronto have had bar or bat mitzvahs (the Jewish rite of passage for boys and girls which marks the transition to adulthood), and many are successfully attending Jewish schools and summer camps. Many of the young adults are attending university or college. Some families and individuals still attend local synagogue regularly,

spend time volunteering for Jewish groups, or participating in activities at the YM-YWHA. Publicly, many Ethiopian Jewish people are a part of the Jewish community, and many parts of the Jewish community are actively accepting them. It is the more problematic aspects of this community's process of integrating which is experienced at a more private level, and which my data supports, that illustrate the process of constructing an identity. As I mentioned at the beginning of Chapter Four, the tensions created through the introduction of two cultural worlds offers a framework through which to analyze the construction of identity.

Expectations, disillusionment and misunderstandings

The Ethiopian Jews express a strong sense of needing help from the broader Jewish community, and have some very clear expectations as to what the community should be providing for them. From the JIAS side, many of these expectations were unreasonable and unrealistic. These expectations and the Jewish community response to them created tensions similar to those discussed in Chapter Four between "the immigrants" and "absorption authorities and volunteers". In Montreal, as in Israel, a "we/they" dichotomy emerged between the Ethiopian Jews and JIAS, and other large community organizations involved in settling and integrating new immigrants. Because of the very sensitive nature of these interactions, I refrain from identifying informants by their pseudonyms.

Two informants describe their general expectations from members of the Jewish community:

> I thought if people interview us they would solve our problems. But some people were sick, in hospital. We lost three people to suicides, but nobody talks about it.

> I go to the Jewish Vocational Service and they don't help me, so I become *angry* with them. So that way it's just indirectly. It's not their *fault*, you know, at first yes, I knew, I thought they *had* a responsibility, but then I learned they don't *have* a responsibility. You know, it's just a service organization, like *any* organization. So, you can use the service, if you are lucky you get a job through that, if not, you are just like any individual. It doesn't matter whether you are Jewish or not. So, like that, then they don't have any responsibility.

Two other informants, early arrivals in Montreal and people who were involved in some capacity in working both with the Jewish community structures and the Ethiopians, offer

explanations for the cross cultural barriers and misunderstandings these expectations

caused:

> They have expectation that Westerners are better than them. I came to rest in this country [Israel]. They had an image that Israel would redeem them, a dream to go to *gan eden* [the Garden of Eden]. What they see is not the way you see it. Ethiopian eyes see a big house, big everything, you have everything. He sees two people living in a big house, in Ethiopia 100 people lived in that. All these new things are new for him.

> When they came, the money business, it wasn't happening in the right way. There was competition and resentment over who was getting money to get families out. They blame me, I got caught between the families. I was trying to organize it, they blame me. There was no plan, no nothing. We needed orientation, explanation like in Israel. The expectations of the group was very high, especially the young ones. Some were lying about family members, money was disappearing. I said stop, then I became the enemy. I was in the middle. Some would stay on welfare, not working. Then they would ask JIAS for money. Still people complain. They go to work in the factory, they don't like it, so they go home and quit. They thought the scholarship was real! There was an assumption, the stereotype of Canada that everyone is rich. They had expectations to be taken care of. Relatives send them money from Canada, they don't say who it's from, it's like an endless pit.

> Some Canadians, they like to help, then the people come and there's communication problems. They [Ethiopians] want their own advantage, they don't look at them in a friendly way. They don't think people also have other problems, other things to do with their life. Then Canadians get upset. A Canadian family may invite a family [Ethiopian] for a holiday, Ethiopians don't understand it - they always want something for their own advantage. One Canadian said they [Ethiopian Jews] only call him when they want something, never to get to know him. The Ethiopian always think you came to save them, to help them, that's why they are only calling you when they need help.

People expected material goods once they arrived such as basic household items

and financial support. Two women refer to their reactions to the kitchen supplies provided

by JIAS:

> Everyone says we were lucky because we got new stuff. We had four plates, four cups, if someone came to our house, we had to finish first and then give. It was really hard for me. It was totally crazy.

> I was by myself. We had a lot of problems with JIAS. They gave us disgusting dishes. You wouldn't give them to an animal. No curtains, no nothing.

They also expected education and support in the area of creating an independent

organization which would represent the Ethiopian Jews.

> Like, for example, we have been trying to organize ourselves since 1985. We worked so hard, every time we get to some point, we have a problem together. Why? I don't know. We are not ready to make business organization. Maybe social, but not business.
> Q: What's the difference?

A: Social means talking about culture, religion. Business is to raise money and organize ourselves to be more independent as a community. [Now we have events sometimes], it's working, it's not enough. Not everyone is there. I want to see everyone there. I'm not the only one here, we have to share everything. We mostly share problems, not happiness.

I really care for my community. I don't mind to work 24 hours for my community. Maybe we'll have a chance to organize our community. We can't organize by ourselves. Maybe I can learn how to organize from other groups. I try to give my time because I can't make a donation right now.

Every year we have to say "I don't have enough money for school fees, camp fees, Y [YM-YWHA] fees". If people could go somewhere else, like Jewish Family Services, it would be better. We can't go to our community [for money] it's not enough. It's hard to go by myself, I may not have enough words to ask the camp, maybe I feel it's a shame to ask for lower money. I don't have a problem to ask, to talk to the leaders. I ask. But the others, they don't know how to ask. I try to pay what I can. But how long can we live like this. If I want to be a member of Y, of synagogue if I don't pay, I can't be a member. If I want to send my kids to camp I can't if I don't have enough money. If you don't know somebody inside you can't do anything.

In addition, there were great expectations that other relatives would be "rescued", and many people felt that sponsorship should be automatically offered to people who they determined were suffering in Ethiopia:

My expectation is, I go there [(to the big Jewish organizations)] with a problem and I want them to solve it. Like for example, I go there, and tell them listen. I got a letter from Ethiopia. Here is a brother of mine, or here is a family of mine in trouble. Can you help them? And I expect them to help them. I go there and tell them, here listen. Here are we Ethiopians here, with a certain problem. We have problems. Here are Ethiopians with certain limited education, people who have never had any access to education, and they want to go to school, they want to have some skills. They couldn't get employed! Because they don't have skills! What can you do? And when they don't do anything, then, that's where, you know, I go with expectations, you know, and they *never* meet your expectations, never. You can, can ask *everybody*. And that's where the problems came. Like, then, we are complaining a lot.

This created a power struggle. As the question of immigrating to Canada is highly bureaucratized and official, JIAS and/or the provincial government should have control over this, not a group of immigrants themselves. From the management perspective, the program had to be controlled by those with the authority to do so.

Finally, Ethiopians express expectations that the Jewish community structures would help them to learn to be Jewish, and to include and integrate them.

When it comes to helping yourself in terms of jobs, and settling down, it's better to be by yourself. I mean you better depend on your efforts, on your own resources. That's what I think. But when it comes to the religion part, and the community part and, these things, you *can't* do it by yourself. I think they have a responsibility too. I still feel that they have a

> responsibility. What are they for? If not for Jewishness. It's just for politics. They want to talk about Holocaust, they want to talk about people who hate Jews? It doesn't make sense! They themselves if they don't bring the Jews together, if they see that the Jewish people are getting lost, you know? They say the save Jews from Sarajevo, or Ethiopia, over there, how about the Jews here? Once they are intermarried, their children are gone, they go to Catholic school, they go to that school, they are nowhere to be found. Where is the feeling of the Jewish now? That's stupid! Like Ethiopians here. They come here, they say they rescued them, and what happened?

This section shows how tensions created through the initial interaction between Ethiopian Jews and the organizations involved with integrating them constructs a boundary between the Ethiopian Jews and broader Jewish community in Canada.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF ETHIOPIAN JEWISH IDENTITY IN CANADA

This section examines how identity is constructed and echoes back and forth between multiple places, peoples and moments in time. It is divided into three parts: one on Ethiopia, one on Canada, and one on Israel. Each section describes how these three realities echo back and forth in the memories, experiences, and anticipated futures of the informants. In addition, this section supports my argument against treating the ethnic group as a fixed category. It illustrates the wide variation in life experiences and understandings of what it means to be an Ethiopian Jew, among those people subsumed under this category. Furthermore, it shows how the process of transformation to becoming an Ethiopian Jew was and is constructed by cultural events, and not pre-existing circumstances. Finally, this section shows how Ethiopian Jewish identity is constructed in relation to varied historical moments, geographical or spatial locations, and multiple relationships to other groups of people.

Ethiopia and the past

This section shows how Ethiopian Jewish identity relates to people's memories of a lived past in Ethiopia, or of an incorporated memory of a past which they have learned since leaving Ethiopia.

Informants make a distinction between life for Ethiopian Jews before and after the revolution in Ethiopia. Ketema states:

Life for example, in terms of being Jewish, before the revolution, it was bad and it was good. It was bad because people, thought of you as a caste, like as a lower class. And, they call you names. It was good because there are so many people accepting you.
Q: Why were they accepting you?
A: Like friends, like family.
Q: Okay, you mean the Jews.
A: The surrounding [groups]. I'm talking about the surrounding. I'm talking about the *other* people other than the Jews. The Christians.

Mebratu and Belletetch describe life in Gondar city for Ethiopian Jews:

Mebratu: Once in a while, we had a problem with the neighbors. They called us *kayla*, that means evil eye, they called me that and I had to defend myself.

Belletetch: Nobody knew we were Jews in Gondar. If they knew, no one would help us. Like we wouldn't get a baby-sitter, cleaning lady. They won't stay with Jewish people.
Q: Why?
A: Because they believe evil eye, something like that. Every *Pesach* we would take a holiday to the village. We felt we would die inside if we didn't go to the village. We loved to be in the village area but it was just farming - no jobs. In the village we have special places - like we have some areas to live together. We had good friends, Christians. It depends on the area. Especially in Wogera area it was worse. In the city, people knew we were Jewish, but they saw we didn't do anything Jewish so we were okay.

The above accounts indicate that although Beta Israel were distinct from their neighbors, they interacted with Orthodox Christians, even referring to them as "good friends" or "family".

After the revolution began, the situation changed for Ethiopian Jews. Ketema explains:

After the revolution, things were good for Ethiopian Jews. Why? Because, ... this was communist regime, no religion, but also, there is another thing about it. Ethiopian Jews can *have* land, like anybody. Nobody's allowed to look, at an individual, as lower than the other individual. Rich or poor, everybody's equal. So you become equal, you know?

But Assefa describes how even though all were supposedly equal, society resisted these changes. Before and after the revolution for the Ethiopian Jews, according to Assefa, were not much different. He explains that because the revolution brought equality for all religions, there may have been more freedom for the Jews. But he draws a distinction between the government and society:

The government may say anything that they want, but the society has to accept it. And if the society doesn't accept it, I don't know, there is no use for passing a law or something.
Q: Do you have any idea why the society wouldn't accept it?
A: Cause they are very conservative, that's why. The society they have been taught Jews are the ones who killed *Christ*, they are the worst of people, you know? That's what they were

told, in this society. So like they have this hatred towards Jews. And many of them don't even know, haven't ever seen a Jew, or haven't ever suspected that we were Jews.

Several informants discuss the changes they felt because of the revolution:

Mebratu: It was a really big change from a peaceful city [Gondar]. All of a sudden you see people being killed all over the place. That made me want to leave faster. We still went to school, but I remember seeing dead people. People would be whispering and talking in the morning, then we knew something happened the night before. We didn't want to stay in that kind of chaos.

Ketema: It was the time where, there was change, everything was changing, and it was changing in many directions. In politics, or in terms of going to Israel, or in terms of being an immigrant in Sudan, many people dying, or, being uprooted from where you lived for two thousand years, or, being going to Israel, for promised land, or immigrate to a new country, to Canada, you know, you can see it in many many ways, whether it's good or bad, then you have to sit down and work it out, there is no one word to describe it. It's good because suddenly, you are considered as a human being, you are equal, you are respected? It's bad because you cannot practice your religion anymore. Because you have to belong to a party and kill somebody...

Ketema emphasizes the persecution aimed against Jews at that time:

Takale was taken to prison, for a crime. And the crime was having a *kippah* on his head. He was killed with my brother. My brother was accused of being related to an organization. But Takale, was only, he had worn a *kippah* publicly. So both of them, they were taken and killed because they were Jews.

Ketema describes his motivation to leave Ethiopia and join the "Jewish people":

So, when I heard about the Jewish people helping the Ethiopian Jews, my dream was to come here, get the necessary help and live in peace. With the Jewish people, you know? Not to be bothered by somebody, not to be taken to prison anytime they want, not to torture me because of your religion, not to persecute you because of your personality. You know, this is what I want to run away [from].

Issac accuses those who claim that their Jewishness was the reason for persecution of being "good businessmen". In other words, they used this "persecution complex" to get pity and to escape Ethiopia. According to Issac, in reality, the problem was purely politics. Perhaps the real problems of persecution were related to politics and the revolution, as opposed to peoples' Jewish identity. Some people used the political persecution experienced by the group in order to appeal to Western Jewry and to speed up their rescue.

Another theme which people referred to in their Ethiopian pasts is the degree to which they were religiously observant. Mebratu and Belletetch, who both come from Gondar city, describe their recollections of being religious in Ethiopia.

> Mebratu: There were no synagogues around. It was not very traditional.

> Belletetch: Over there we were more religious than here. *Shabbat* is for everybody. Here [in Montreal], its' not an obligation. There, we did everything communally. The holiday is for everyone, not here. For example if you don't want to celebrate *Shabbat* you don't have to. I miss that a lot. In Israel they do the same thing. It was a lot of fun. So many relatives, friends there, it's the same as Ethiopia.

> Belletetch: If I don't go to synagogue I can't stand it. If I pray I feel good inside. I become clean, everything my mind. Even if I saw the Torah I remember about Ethiopia. It reminds me of home. This is a free country, I have right to be a Jew, to see Torah.

Belletetch relates her religious experience in Ethiopia to both Canada and Israel. Mebratu's cursory remark about a lack of tradition contrasts to her comments strikingly.

Talia, who hadn't known she was Beta Israel in Ethiopia, comments on her memory of her family's religious practices:

> Yeah, well, one of the things that I know was the Judaism ritual, the Friday night candle lights. For me it didn't make any difference whether she was lighting a candle or not because it didn't make any sense to me at that moment, like at that time I didn't associate it with anything. The other thing was because of the Jewish holidays, they fall on the same weeks or during the same period of time as the Christian holidays in Ethiopia. The preparation for those holidays usually takes a *weeks* you know, people are going to start preparing their own stuff, so when my mom was preparing for *ours*, for me it was as if she was preparing like everybody else, you know, getting together. Because basically what we did was, as a child, I had my friends and I would you know, participate in their activities, whenever there was a holiday we would get together to whatever it's required you know? The celebration. So for me the preparation didn't have a Judaism significance.

Talia explains that there was so little difference between her mother's preparation for the Beta Israel holidays and what she was her neighbors doing, that she was not suspicious that she was "different" from the others.

"I didn't know I was Jewish"

Assefa knew was that his mother was from Gondar and that his father was from Nazareth, a city near Addis Ababa. It wasn't until two weeks before he left Ethiopia that he found out his mother was Beta Israel, and that he would now be identified as a Jew. And although his father comes from an Orthodox Christian family, according to Assefa,

"whatever his religious my father might be, he's quite a Zionist. And plus he's married to a Jew, and normally he's considered a Jew". He explains why he didn't know:

> They didn't tell me I was Jewish until I was about to leave Ethiopia. And the reason was, if they told me when I was young, I could have I don't know, tell it to friends, to people, when I was a kid, like I didn't know nothing about it. But for them it would have been, they would be, I don't know, the black sheep for the village? For the area. So, they didn't tell me that, and we didn't participate. Like all the kids in our neighborhood they used to go to church almost. We never did. They used to do Christmas, we never did. And I like, I told them, like I used to ask them questions, but they never answered me straight. If they told me, like they told me if you want to have fun with the kids like have *fun* but. Nothing. They told me they're atheists.

Talia learned of her Jewish identity when she was taken for a vacation to Israel, and remained there at a boarding school. She explains why her parents didn't tell her:

> According to the explanation that I got from my parents, for one thing it was hard to practice their Judaism over there. The second thing if they would have told me about it I would tell my friends and sooner or later everybody would know. And they would be having difficulties whether it was in the work place, in the neighborhood things like that.
> Q: What kind of difficulties would they expect?
> A: A withdrawal I guess from their jobs, being fired from their jobs, socially they would be discriminated against, kind of being pointed at, being laughed at, name callings, basically the same thing that happened in the village because in the city there isn't that many Jewish people.

Talia's father, however, denies that they would have been persecuted if others had known they were Beta Israel. He says that it wasn't a secret at all, he just didn't tell them. His wife then totally contradicts him and says they never told anyone they were Jewish; they would not have had any friends. She seems annoyed with him for indicating otherwise. Talia's father also recalls that in Ethiopia, everyone lived happily together, all ethnic groups and religious groups. He clearly wants to hold on to this image of a unified Ethiopia.

Assefa describes his reaction to learning he was Jewish:

> I used to play with the kids, who used to be Orthodox Christians. And, like Ethiopia, it's an Orthodox Christian society. And, ... I don't know, Jews. They're like, there was this myth that the Jews are the Christ killers. And I believed in it ... uh ... like I know about it, it's, things like that, you know? So, when I found out like that's me, I just didn't know how like how to how to *react* ... I just shut my mouth and, ... I don't know ... kept on going until I left Ethiopia. When I came here, I guess, some people had to tell me like what's really happened, you know? What I am.

It is interesting that Assefa emphasizes Jews a Christ killers rather than Beta Israel as possessing the evil eye, as other informants did in the last section. This might be explained by the fact that he went to a Catholic school in Ethiopia, where references to the tensions between "Jew" and "Christian" would have been employed.

Assefa's knowledge of life for Ethiopian Jews in the past is constructed from information he learned once he came to Canada. I asked him what type of things he learned:

> Well not much, cause I suspect that usually people that used to live in the countryside, I know what kind of life they lived. And the Jews they didn't live a very different life from them. It's just probably the religion that makes them a bit different but, I don't know, they're Ethiopians. It's not much, what I learned.

He also learned about his history when he visited his family in Israel:

> Q: What did you learn about your history?
> A: That it was really hard for them. And, and I even asked questions, when I went to Israel I asked many questions to my grandmother, and my mother. ... and, like how we came, how the Jews went to Ethiopia, how they used to live.

He learned about mainstream Judaism in Montreal with his foster family. He explains:

> ...my foster parents told me many more things about Judaism than my real parents. So that's where I find out I found out more things about Israel, Judaism, *Shabbat*, ...

Talia learned about Judaism in Israel, but, like Assefa, was not introduced to her Beta Israel history until she came to Canada:

> ... the Jewishness part of me that I identify, well I couldn't say identify most, but the one that keeps coming at me, it's the part of me that learnt the Judaism in Israel. Because that's when I was introduced to in the beginning, about what Judaism is all about. That, and the whole process that I went through, is the Judaism part that I know. Because that's the one that I know, that's the one I experience. But when I came here [Montreal], I was faced with another story, another history, which is the Ethiopian Jewish history part.
> Q: So you weren't faced with that story until you got to Montreal?
> A: Exactly. So I had to learn, from my dad, and from the people from the community, their stories, their individual stories, where they used to live, what they went through and things like that. That's when I started knowing that there is a uniqueness in them. And there is some kind of culture and tradition and specific things that they did which kind of stood them apart from the other Ethiopian, the larger Ethiopian community.

Talia emphasizes Beta Israel uniqueness among other Ethiopians, Assefa focuses more on their similarity. Because he lived first with a foster family, and then on his own, he was probably not as exposed to stories about the unique history of the Beta Israel as Talia was.

Canada and the present

Being an "internal other"

Several informants comment on their sense of being distinct, separate and marginal in relation to other Jews in Canada. Three people report the following:

> Few of them are, you know, accepting that we are Jewish.

> How can we be integrated into the Jewish community? Larger community. Are we integrated? Are we going with them? Or are we just simply on the side-lines. And many Ethiopian Jews feel that we are not integrated in the Jewish community. We are just side people, you know?

> And I kind of got hurt, I got offended, and I always felt I have to defend myself for being Jewish, or like for being black and Jewish, and, at the same time, I felt like, I have to prove that I was. I didn't know what I have to do to prove it, I just knew I had to prove to them that I am Jewish.

Mebratu expresses his feeling of being an internal other through anticipating marriage:

> If I get married she has to be Ethiopian Jewish. There won't be any complications. If I marry a white Jew I won't be doing anything for my kids. They won't be accepted by both sides. They'll go through tough times. I won't be doing them any favors.

Assefa explains that he never felt he "belonged" in his foster family:

> ...even though I try to be like to ... to join you know to ... what do you call it?
> Q: Participate?
> A: Yeah, participate, to be the *member*, you know? There was still like these thoughts I don't *belong* here, how long am I staying here. There was this question. And at that time my parents' immigration process was starting up. So because of that I was just waiting for the *day*, when are they coming. *Then* I'll move out and be with my own family.

Belletetch describes her desire to work with the other Jews, thus indicating that she feels separate:

> I'm torn, between white Jews and Ethiopian community. We can't complain all the time, if we have a problem, we have to talk to people, say our concerns. We have to go to synagogue. We have a small community. We can keep our culture, but we can't we can't make anything by ourselves. We have to be together, Ethiopians and other Jews. I like more people to participate with us in the white Jewish community.

She also explains how she feels like a "symbol" for a Jewish organization she and some other Ethiopian Jews belong to:

It's not our stage, X.[17] We are really low, they are much higher. We are Ethiopian community for X as a symbol. Symbol of like, when we have something to do, we don't have a car, they pick us up, they make a meeting for us, they sell a ticket for us. They're trying to help us to go out. We can't say we are a chapter of X, we are a symbol of X. We can't do any activities, they welcome us. At least we have a chance to go out. I've been a member two years. Not a social thing, not our level, we need help. It's not for us, I can't give so much money. They pay our tickets, that's why I feel ashamed. They pay for us, they welcome us, but I feel bad.

Here, she indicates her indebtedness to the Jewish Other, which reinforces her separation.

Ketema and Talia explain how they identify with other Jewish minorities within the Jewish community:

Ketema: ...the only difference is the Moroccans are not very complicated people. They are, you know, they have African background, so they are more easy to deal with.
Q: But you don't go to a Moroccan synagogue.
A: Oh, it doesn't matter. When you come to *individuals*, it's easier to deal with Yemenites, with Moroccans, with this and this, rather than *Europeans*. Europeans are very complicated people. They are very inward, they are very advanced maybe, I don't know.

Talia: [One of my former teachers] was saying, he was telling me some of the things that the Yemenite people went through. And then there was another person who was Moroccan, he was the principal of my old school. And, he was telling me things also like, when the Moroccan Jews came here, to Montreal, like a lot of hard things that they went through, and even when they went to Israel. You know, a lot of the tough things that they went through. So, people like them, they made me feel like they understood.

Talia's case is unique in that she was twice confronted with the experience of relearning her identity, in two very different contexts. In Israel, she studied at a religious boarding school, and was immersed in several years of Orthodox Jewish education. She describes this experience of sudden immersion in a new cultural world:

Like the values that I was being given, and the Jewish, that was another thing. Because I didn't know I was Jewish in Ethiopia, and then all of a sudden I got to Israel and I've been told that I'm Jewish, and I have to learn what was Judaism, and I kind of felt guilty for not having practiced it before? So I had to do it *right*! So I followed everything.
Q: Who made you feel guilty?
A: (long sigh) I really don't know who made me feel guilty, but I just know I did. Maybe it was because I was put right away in a religious school, like I was just thrown into it. And being given you know, learn! I didn't just go, you know do it step by step? So I was just being bombarded with information. So, I felt guilty for not having practiced it. So I started doing it and I said if I'm going to do it, I'm going to do it right. And I kind of followed everything, and if I didn't, if I broke a rule, I would feel guilty about it.
Q: A religious rule.
A: A religious rule. Like if I don't keep *Shabbat* for example, or if I like, it was to such an extent that if I would go to the bathroom, I wouldn't have the paper, if it's *Shabbat*, I would

---

[17] "X" refers to the organization Belletetch is discussing.

use for example a Kleenex. Or I will prepare my like I will cut the papers before *Shabbat*
goes in, and by mistake if I cut it, I would feel so guilty, you know? It was just little things
like that. So when I got here, my parents were *not* religious. ... So it was difficult to accept
them as people who are going to be taking care of me again, and at the same time people
who are not going to be, who I don't see doing what I'm being taught as a Jewish person to
do?
Q: Did that make you angry?
A: Yeah, I was angry that I felt more Jewish than them? And I didn't understand why?
And also I was angry with them because I didn't understand why they didn't come to Israel,
why I wasn't with them for this gap of time. I didn't have the understanding...

When she came to Canada, her experience of being an Other was multi-layered. She was

suddenly immersed in a context where she felt that she was more Jewish than her family,

and resented them for not knowing more. She explains:

Like I would kind of frown if I see my mom wearing a pant or like if I see my other sister
wearing shorts or things like that. But even my mom she was having a very hard time
because I wouldn't eat meat. Like the plates? I wouldn't use the same plates, so she would
go nuts, you know? It was like, I would eat with paper things, and even if she buys meat I
wouldn't eat it because I didn't trust her enough to say like this is kosher. ... So what she
did at the end was, I was hardly eating anything, I was giving her a lot of trouble, I wouldn't
dress with pants even though it was cold, I would wear my skirt, but then again, you know,
they put me in *another* Jewish school...

She also felt isolated from other Ethiopians:

...the Ethiopian community, I just didn't wanna bother with them. I didn't wanna see
anybody that was Ethiopian ... period. I just wanted to be myself. Let me be, who I am, and
that was it. Like especially there was, one of the problems I had was if anybody did not
speak Hebrew? I didn't want to deal with them. You know, just go away. Just stay away
from me, I don't want to deal with you. I couldn't listen to Ethiopian music, I couldn't
listen to people who speak in Amharic. If there was a holiday or something like that and my
mum would want us to dress in the Ethiopian clothes and all the stuff, I don't wanna dress, I
just don't want anything that reminds me of like being Ethiopian.

Faced with a new cultural, religious and personal context which confronted her

identity, Talia felt isolated and alone. In this sense she was Other not only to the broader

Jewish community, but to her own community and to her family as well. She was

frustrated with her parents' and the community's lack of knowledge and understanding of

the Jewish education and religious training she had received in Israel. This alienated her,

and she searched for anything that would remind her of what she was used to in Israel:

I was having such a hard time because I couldn't communicate with them. Like, by that
time I already lost my Amharic ability, I couldn't understand, I couldn't speak it, like when I
tried to speak I had like this heavy Israeli accent, and my cousins would make fun of me,
because of my accent? And that would irritate me? And I'm going, I'm trying to say
something, but I can't say it. So my only little safe little place, was, get a library book, go to

the Jewish Public Library, because they showed me, like my dad took me and said, this is the library, you could find you know, Hebrew books, it was just not even five minutes away from our house, so I was constantly over there. I finished the whole Hebrew section. Because that was the only thing I could do.

Her mother realized Talia needed to see something familiar in order for her to feel more accepting of the family's home:

> ... At the end she just dragged me, took me to the butcher, and she said look! This is where I buy my meat! You know, this is a kosher store, this is the Rabbi, look at him! You know? It was like, so the man he start like she spoke to him about how she was having trouble with me and all this stuff, so he started talking to me in Hebrew, which made me feel so much better. I'm like, okay, fine, I could trust her, you know?
> Q: But you were also upset because your mother wasn't using separate dishes for milk and meat.
> A: Yeah, but still I ate with the paper plates (laughs), I wouldn't use her forks, I wouldn't use her knives, I would use paper plates and everything.

She needs reassurance from a Rabbi to trust her mother, thus illustrating her need for familiarity in a new situation in which she felt isolated and alone.

Talia's understanding of what it meant to be Jewish was challenged in Canada, both within her family, and among other Jews she met in Montreal. In order to "fit in" and to feel more comfortable with her peer group and family, Talia learned that she would have to be *less* strict about her religious expectations of those around her and of herself. Unlike other Ethiopian Jews, who express a need to learn more, to know more about Judaism to fit it, Talia feels obliged to de-emphasize her religious background and identity in order to integrate with her own community, and with other Jews.

> At the end I started changing. Like, the people that I went to school with, even though they went to religious school they were not religious themselves. So they would come to school with make-up, they would wear skirts only for school, but they would take it off when they were like leaving school or they would come with their pants and they would put their skirts on when they're there. It was totally different system. And the classroom, I have male teachers, where before I didn't. It was just different. Like after two years I started watching TV. Before I didn't watch TV except for whenever I went to visit my relatives. Everything just changed, like I started adapting to the system slowly, and then kind of dropping the religious aspect of it, started reading books, reading literature and questioning why am I so ... kind of just questioning myself why am I being so rigorous with this religious stuff and I just tried slowly just dropping it?
>
> I kind of gave myself a little bit of freedom in the sense that I wasn't being very rigid, being strict about the *kashrut* (Jewish dietary laws) and the things I wasn't paying attention about in the *Halacha* way, about the things that I was doing.
> E: In a *Halachic* way.
> B: Yeah, I was just being I guess trying to be like everybody else in the school. They weren't religious at all. ... So, and they seemed happy, they seemed very happy about you

know, they were always cheerful, they were happy doing little things, they were just being kids. And I missed that. Because I was not being that.

We might expect that other children and teens attending Jewish day schools in Canada experience some similar tensions with their parents, who know less about Judaism than they do. What is interesting about Talia's case, however, is that beyond illustrating the typical problems of a generation gap, it shows the collision of different cultural world as expressed through conflicts surrounding her Jewish identity.

Color

> They are Jews among the blacks, and blacks among the Jews. That's the whole problem.
> - Baruch Tegegne, in the film Falasha, Exile of the Black Jews

This section shows how the skin color issue not only plays a role among Ethiopians and other Jews, but also among Ethiopians and other Blacks. The Ethiopian Jews' relationship with other Blacks is pronounced in Canada, where the assumption that they are black, and thus a part of the "Black community", plays more of a role in their everyday life than it would in Israel, where such a community does not exist.

Ethiopian Jews make the following statements about their feelings towards other black people:

> Belletetch: If they [my children] aren't close to the Jewish community, what will happen? If my son marries a black Canadian, we don't have the same culture. We have the same color, but not the same culture.

> Maaza: My job [at a hospital] is hard. I don't like to associate to those Blacks. If I work hard they say it's because I'm Jewish. The patients are mostly Jewish, they look at me as if I'm black. Those people [Blacks] lie a lot.

> Miriam: We are different than you [Jews]. The color. But I don't feel comfortable with other black people. Their bad manners, discipline, the thinking also, it's very different.

> Talia: Being Ethiopian, actually puts me in a position of being black, you know? And here, when I got here, to me, it didn't make a difference. Whether you're black, whatever black level you are at, you are black.

The above statements indicate that informants tend to feel separate, in some cases superior, to other Blacks. As the literature review at the beginning of this chapter

indicates, Ethiopians in general tend to dissociate themselves from Blacks in North America.

Skin color also impacts on the Ethiopian Jews' relationship with other Jews. Some people emphasize the discrimination they feel because of their skin color, others minimize the distinction based on skin. Ketema explains that color is not an issue for Ethiopians:

> No, color is not a problem. No, no, I am sure, Jewishness comes first, color comes second. And every Ethiopian is proud of his color. That's not a problem. They don't have that attitude where they feel, they are different because of their color. No.
> Q: But they might feel it from other people.
> A: No, no. Personally I don't. I don't have any problem with my kids, going to school, and they are the only black people, they never felt it. There are some people, they call names.

He denies it is a problem, but then acknowledges that his children have had some negative experiences at school where other children "call names". Ketema argues that color has nothing to do with the problems they have had in integrating with other Jews; it is a lack of knowledge and understanding between the groups which creates distance.

Baruch, on the other hand, emphasizes the distance between groups on the basis of skin color:

> Montreal, whether in Israel, you know, I go inside and everybody *turns* his face to me. But I'm sure any Arab or non-Jew, or anybody can go in and nobody turns his eyes. This effects the person, what's wrong with me? You know what I mean? Why do they turn? It's because, the Jewish people, they don't have that *experience* with different *color* to be with them! If they had that experience, they will never turn their own face just to look at that. Because if you take to the other religion, I say it all the time, if I go to the church they know there is a black, if I go to the mosque, there is a black, there is a Christian black. They are never surprised, but in the Jewish [synagogue] they are surprised. It's *new* for them. I can go to the church and say I'm a Christian, nobody's going to ask me how come I'm a Christian, but with the Jews it's still, it takes time. Still that *image*, they make suspicion. Do you understand? It still effects those people who come to pray because they are different color.

Baruch argues that his skin color was more problematic in interactions with Jews than any other group he has interacted with.

Talia comments on how her dark skin separates her more in Canada than it did in Israel. She explains that there were "Yemenites in the [boarding school in Israel], who were not any lighter than I was", and that her problems began when she left the school grounds in Israel. But in Canada, she felt "always exposed", and noticeably different from others around her at school and generally in the neighborhood. She describes the boarding

school in Israel as a "safe place" for her to be, and explains that in Canada "it wasn't safe

anymore":

> I guess the fact that I knew I was the only dark skinned person in the school, didn't make it
> easy. Like, I knew it. I stood out. I stood out because of my color. I was noticeable. Like I
> couldn't just blend in. I stood out! Whether I wanted it or not, I stood out. I tried to, I did a
> lot of things like, to pretend like I don't pay attention to it? But it was very superficial.

She describes a common reaction she would receive when she told someone she was

Jewish:

> ...they looked so curious, so kind of stunned, you know it's like when you say yeah I am
> Jewish, they say "no, you're not", I go, "yes I am".
> Q: Why would they say that?
> A: Because the only reason they would say that, was because of the color of my skin. And
> they would come also, like there was somebody who said, "you Jewish?", I go, "yes, I'm
> Jewish", they go, "no, you can't be." I go, "why not? Yes I am." And I start to get
> defensive. And he goes, "na-a-a, you're pulling my leg." I go, "why would I want to pull
> your leg. And why am I defending myself, I am Jewish." He goes "(laugh) it's a joke."
> You know? And I say, "why is it a joke?" And he says, "no, it's just it's the first time I see
> a black Jewish."

Finally, skin color becomes an issue for Ethiopian Jews in their general interactions

in Canada. Assefa and Mebratu both describe incidents with the police in which they felt

targeted because of their skin color. Assefa describes one such example:

> Cause like both incidents, the cop, he just presumed that we couldn't afford carrying that
> camera? The other one, he just presumed I don't know, maybe ... I don't want to say this
> you know, but ... the other guy was going to hit me, he's a white guy, Jewish I think? Push
> me, push him back, so, he was passing by, he pushed me I was expecting a sorry, I pushed
> him back, tell him, say sorry. Then we start into a fight, immediately.

Synagogue experiences

This section illustrates how the above themes of being an internal other, based on

their visible difference as dark skinned people, their lack of knowledge of Judaism, and

their struggles to be accepted as Jews, tie together.

Mebratu describes his experience at synagogue in Montreal:

> The problem was I didn't know what was going on there. I went a couple of times but there
> was no point. One thing, when I went to synagogue and met people for the first time they
> would ask, "why didn't you go to Israel?" Like they were choosing for me. I have the
> choice to be in Canada. I didn't feel welcome. It's kind of tough, when you go to
> synagogue, everyone stares. It made me uneasy. I don't know if it's because we were new.
> I felt disappointed. After that I kept my distance. I didn't really mix with the white Jewish
> community.

Assefa expresses similar distaste at his exposure to synagogue in Montreal. When asked

how he felt when he went to synagogue, he responds:

> [It was] Walt Disney world for me (laughs). No, it was a completely strange place for me.
> Like Hebrew, everybody's praying in Hebrew. I had no clue what the hell that was. I
> thought it was Arabic that they were praying with. Because they're from Morocco, you
> know? And the *kippah* (skull cap), I didn't know nothing about it. Everybody wore it, so I
> had to wear it too. ... I didn't understand nothing, it was so strange, especially the first
> couple of weeks. It was so strange, I didn't know nobody. I would just stay with them, and
> stand when they tell me to stand, sit down when they tell me to sit down in the synagogue.
> And spend about two hours like that and then go home to eat. That was all. After a couple
> of weeks I got tired of it, so, I didn't go.
> Q: Did you like it?
> A: ... I didn't understand it, that was it. So because of that I just didn't. And I grew up to
> be not religious. So because of that, it's, sorry I thought it was a waste of time.

Talia didn't enjoy synagogue, but her reasons are different from Mebratu's and Assefa's.

She compares her experience in Canada to that in Israel:

> I didn't like it. I found the synagogue was more materialistic here, than it was in Israel? ...
> And I did not enjoy myself being in the synagogue among women who just who come to the
> synagogue and they're talking about their jewelry, and how much money they made last
> week and what kind of car they bought ... and things like that. ... So, I said I'll just pray in
> the house. And after I'm going to the synagogue I would pray in the house, I would do my
> rituals in the house, and then after a while I started slipping out of it, I guess.

Belletetch expresses a strong desire to fit in with other Jews, and sees synagogue

as a forum to do so. She explains that the first few years of attending Canadian

synagogues were difficult, mostly because of her lack of understanding of the "different

way of praying":

> The hardest thing was to go to the synagogue and pray a different way. I love to go to
> synagogue but I thought, when they pray, it was hard for me. People were welcoming us,
> but the language, when they pray it was scaring me. We went to each synagogue to see
> which was like our culture. Finally we ended up at Shomrim Laboker synagogue, after two
> years of running around.

> In the beginning it was really tough - you don't understand anything. If you go every week
> it will be easier for you. After I got used to it, it makes me happy. We never used to go to
> the *kiddush* (Shabbat prayers over the bread and wine) after the Shabbat service, but now we
> are the first.

It is interesting to note here that Belletetch and Talia are talking about the same

synagogue. Belletetch felt most comfortable at Shomrim Laboker, when she was seeking

a place which would remind her of "her culture". Talia does not describe it as such.

Ketema has a similar experience to that of Belletetch. He explains that at the beginning it was very stressful to attend synagogue:

> Everything is new. You go to a synagogue, it's *more* stress. Because you don't know, it's a different situation! Synagogues in Ethiopia are not *like* that! Everybody here makes prayers, everybody chants, there it's not! So here, you just feel that you are left alone. You know, you don't know *anything*, and everybody's saying *some*thing. So it's even *more* stress, you know? And the services are *different*. You know? Here, the way you are *dressed*. You have the *talit* (prayer shawl), you have the *kippah*, you have everything. There, there is *nothing* like that! So here, you know, am I doing it right? ... So everything what you do, you have to learn like a child born, but born, but with millions of things to learn.

After a while and with some perseverance, though, Ketema felt more comfortable attending synagogue, much like Belletetch. He explains:

> I always went to the synagogue. I always go, but as I told you, the initial reaction was a lot of stress. Then *once* you start going, and you know, people are very welcoming, they smile to you, and they try to help you, you know, some of them really understood what was some kind of pressure on, so they tried to take it easy on you. ... Every *Shabbat* I went there.
> Q: That was an enjoyable thing for you? You liked it?
> A: It was not enjoyable. No, it was not enjoyable, but, I knew I have to get used to it. There is no place to run.
> Q: Why did you have to get used to it?
> A: Because it's the Jewish *community* that I'm going to live with. And whether I like it or not, that's, that's all I had. I mean, where can I go? I know I have to belong to a certain community, I know I have to live in this world, I know I have to belong somewhere, and that's it, you know? I know the Ethiopian community is not going to be here, so what choice do I have? There's not going to be an Ethiopian Jewish community with Ethiopian culture , and with Ethiopian tradition, rituals, no! I know it's finished. I know it. And the sooner I learn it, I know, it's the better I am going to be. That's it.

Although Ketema feels more comfortable around North African Jews as he indicated in the section above on "internal otherness", he chooses to go to a Conservative, Ashkenazi synagogue, as does Belletetch. He feels he has to elect a community to belong to, and chooses the Jewish community. This is his motivation to persevere, even in a situation which he doesn't necessarily enjoy.

Choosing an "ethnic group" in Canada: not knowing where to belong

This section illustrates that the notion of an ethnic group is elusive, dynamic, and context-specific. Some of the following comments by informants were in response to a specific, open ended question on their ethnic identity: "in terms of ethnic or cultural

group, what do you consider yourself to be?" Followed by, "are there any other ethnic or cultural groups you consider yourself to belong to?" (from Health Care Survey Feb. 1, 1995:2). Other comments were raised spontaneously by the informant, in the context of an interview or discussion.

Regardless of how the issue of ethnic identity was raised, however, each person I spoke with found the question a difficult one to respond to, either because the terms in the question (like "ethnic", "cultural group") were unfamiliar and confusing, or because the person found it hard to select the "appropriate" answer to describe their identity. For example (in response to direct questioning on "ethnic identity"):

> Assefa: I don't know, ours is like, too specific. Black, Jewish, Ethiopian, I can't say just one. It depends on the question. I don't understand it, I don't understand it (impatient), what's "race", what's "ethnic". If you ask my culture group, I'm Ethiopian.

> Mebratu: Uhmm, um, (hesitates) I consider myself as an Ethiopian, but lean more to the Jewish side.

> Ketema: It's a difficult question. I don't have a definite answer, everything depends on how you define what you want to say. When it comes to religion, it's Jewish. Like when they classify it's the bigger group, that's the group I know more, the Ethiopians. I can communicate better, function better with the Ethiopians, but I spend more time with Jews. I'm learning the Jewish.

> Miriam: Do you mean Black? Religious-wise, I'm black, Ethiopian, Jew. I concern myself to the Jewish community. I think I have more connection this way. About the color, *after* I come to Canada I know that I am black. If they are Ethiopian Jewish I would feel more comfortable. But Ethiopian Christian and Muslim, it's a tough question, I have nowhere to go.

> Issac: (has a hard time understanding the question) Sometimes different. Other immigrants at the beginning. Ethiopian Muslim, Christian, all the same. For religion, it's Jew. All my life is Ethiopia, culture is Ethiopia. Jew is my religion, all the same: white, black, there's no difference. I don't like the distinction between Ashkenazi, Sephardi, it's racism. A Jew is a Jew.

> Talia: First I'm Ethiopian because most of my history is from Ethiopia. Also, Jewish, it has effected, is effecting my life. I'm already part of the Jewish. Sometimes I feel I belong to everybody, different groups. The Black community, maybe. A citizen of the world sometimes.

Interestingly, not one informant elected "Ethiopian Jew" as his or her response to this question. This could be because they generally don't see the "Ethiopian Jews" as having a distinct, independent community, which is largely due to the small numbers of Ethiopian Jews in Canada. Perhaps in Israel they would be more inclined to view this as a legitimate

"ethnic identity" to ascribe to. It could also mean that the combination of "Ethiopian" and

"Jew" does not make a lot of sense to the informants. As we see above, each person

makes a distinction between their Ethiopian history or culture, and a Jewish religion or the

Jews as an alternate group to belong to.

Some informants expanded on their ideas about their ethnic identity. Mebratu, for

example, rejects the connotations associated with other Blacks as his basis for inclusion

with other Jews:

> If you take Afro-Canadians, and us, like from Ethiopia, we are totally different, there's a big
> difference between us and them. I feel closer to the Jewish community.
> Q: What is the difference?
> A: For one thing, it's just culture and religion. We're closer to the Jewish than those guys.
> If you say Jamaicans or Blacks, they label us, the have got a bad reputation, say. Every time
> I go looking for an apartment, they turn me down. I know it's because I'm black, but I don't
> blame them sometimes. I don't like those Rastafarians, they have no future, they just sit and
> smoke marijuana and don't think about their future. They treat Haile Selassie like a
> Messiah - he was not perfect - he also killed people. They smoke pot, then the Jamaicans
> get a bad reputation. ... They make it really hard for us, people tend to generalize, say if
> one ethnic group does something.

Mebratu explains that he "feels closer to the Jewish community", although in describing his

synagogue experience above he states that he doesn't "really mix with the white Jewish

community" (p.100). This illustrates how his identity is defined according to his

interlocutors. Furthermore, it indicates that he does not feel particularly at ease with either

label: Black or Jew.

Two informants describe the process of defining an identity as one which involves

choices and decision making:

> There is no future in this community. Every new generation will identify themselves with
> other groups in Canada, especially the Blacks. You can't drop a small drop of water in the
> ocean. It depends on the individual. If they were already in Israel, it's a better environment
> to be Jewish. In this society there are too many choices to be different things. Here you
> must be a strong individual to identify yourself towards Judaism. As a community, I don't
> think they can be together. I don't know what my daughter will do tomorrow. If she has
> Jewish education there's more chance for her to be on Jewish side. Even the North
> Americans are 50% assimilated; what do you expect from Ethiopians?

> One by one, individuals will make decisions. Either they will make the right move, to go to
> Israel, or else, they accept the challenge of integrating themselves within the Jewish
> community [in Canada], which is a tough one, or they will get lost. This is going to happen.
> And already, I am sure. Some are intermarried, they want to go to the Jewish community,
> they couldn't, they are embarrassed sometimes, they think it's so difficult, and even though
> they want to, they cannot do it.

In contrast to the above accounts which indicate a need to *select* one aspect of this multi-layered identity, Talia emphasizes all of them. Because of her particular experience in coming to Canada, and how alienated she felt at the beginning, Talia has learned to integrate all layers of her identity. She refers to her identity as a "package deal":

> Being Ethiopian, okay, doesn't, I don't have to just stand up and say you know I'm Ethiopian so I'm going to be neglecting the Jewish part of me. Or the fact that I'm not going to identify myself as a North American Black person would normally say you know like being identifying themselves as Afro-Americans or things like that. And also being Jewish, it doesn't necessarily mean that I have to just enclose myself within the Jewish community and forget my *other*, my other areas and my other cultural values and beliefs. Such as being born in Ethiopia, and having a history in Ethiopia, and coming here, coming here *also*, I'm like experiencing *other* experiences and getting other values and information as a black person. And, just *learning* in general, like what is really, what *are* my roots, what *are* my histories, what are my, cultural, you know, heritages. That's what makes me the whole package.

She also talks about the pressure of selecting an identity, and how she doesn't feel she can select an appropriate category, when requested to do so:

> [You start to learn] that you are being asked, to some degree being *asked* to identify myself, with what category do I fall in. Like, for example, you look at the job resume and you say, with what parts do you identify yourself with: Indian, Black, or you know, there is something like that, and I would say, I would identify myself with the Black, because that's the only area that fits me. You know it's like, I don't identify myself with Indians because I'm not Indian, I can't identify myself with Asian because I'm not Asian, okay, and I can identify myself with *white* (laughs) but, I'm *not*, so this box fits and I'll put it there.
> Q: What would you put if you could put something?
> A: None! It's like if there was none, I would put none. You know? Or I would say all, I would rather say all than say none, because, I just, I guess the part of me that's talking now is the part that says, all of you is important. ... I wanna keep all of them together. I don't want to separate them. ... I think I've done that already, and it's not a great feeling.

It's not clear why Talia feels she *can* identify with "white". It could be because she sees "black" as an inferior category, although this is unlikely given her emphasis on integrating all aspects of her identity. It could be that she associates "white" with Jews, and hence feels she can identify herself in this way.

Israel: past, present, and future

This section shows how Ethiopian Jewish identity is constructed through a memory, lived experience, or anticipated future in Israel. Three informants lived in Israel for extended periods of time. For all three, this was their first exposure to other Jews and

to learning normative Judaism. In our discussions, these three informants emphasized an idealized future in Israel less than the other informants, although they still maintain that Israel is "home". For some people, Israel is remembered as a part of their lived experience in Ethiopia. But for Talia and Assefa, who were not aware of their Beta Israel identity until leaving Ethiopia, Israel was not a meaningful part of their lived past in Ethiopia. This Beta Israel connection to Israel in Ethiopia is something they learned about in Canada, and have incorporated into their notions of a Beta Israel history. Every person I spoke with except for one informant, whose own extended family are all still in Ethiopia (she was not Beta Israel; her husband was), has been to Israel at least once for an extended visit with family. Everyone with whom I spoke, including the woman who had never been to Israel, referred to Israel as "home".

As we have seen in the above sections and throughout this thesis, many informants compare and contrast their experience as Jews in Canada to their memories and experiences of Ethiopia and Israel. In this section, I draw out those excerpts which refer specifically to informants' comments on Israel in relation to the memories, experiences, and expectations described in the above paragraph.

Several informants describe their memories of Israel in the context of their former lives in Ethiopia:

> Mebratu: We knew we were different, special. We were told by our parents that we'd go to Israel. I wanted to go to Israel. We took it for granted that some day we'd go to Israel. We knew it.

> Belletetch: [During the revolution] an old man 95 years, he doesn't know what he was doing. He walked through the desert, telling everyone, "it's time to go to Israel. Not tomorrow, now." Wherever you go, everyone says it's time to go. It's G-d's calling, it's time to go. In the city, nobody mentioned to go to Israel. In the village they were more anxious. It's written in the Torah.

Ketema compares this past to the present, lived conditions of Ethiopians in Israel:

> Like for Ethiopian Jew, it was promised land. That was the attraction [in Ethiopia]. You know, it attracts them like magnets, you know? Once they are there, I thing to be together. That's the most important thing in life. To be together with your family.

In the past, Israel represented the ideological "promised land" for the Beta Israel. Now, Israel represents family unification and togetherness.

Although Assefa has no memory of the importance of Israel when he lived in Ethiopia, he has since learned of its former significance for the Ethiopian Jews:

> ... when they were in Ethiopia, they used to say, they prefer going, Israel is our homeland you know, that's where we belong. And, that's where they *are* now. Not North America or Europe. Unlike other immigrants who went to Israel, they prefer coming to North America than Israel. Ethiopians enjoy more Israel than any other place.

Assefa emphasizes the Ethiopian Jewish bond with Israel through stressing that they prefer to be in Israel, as opposed to other countries, and in contrast to other immigrant groups who would rather live somewhere else. His reference to the group as "they", and his description of them being in Israel indicates that he excludes the Ethiopian Jews here in Canada from the group. Figuratively speaking, this group is typically diasporic: neither "here" nor "there", the Ethiopian Jews are caught between alternate geographical locales.

Informants stress the significance of family in their descriptions of their visits to Israel:

> Mebratu: The first time I went I loved it. Sometimes I don't know what I'm doing here. I just want to be there. One thing - to be with I mean everybody's Jewish. To live in that atmosphere, society, is really good. What I like about it is that the people there - there is something in common between us. The Israeli's, they are more friendly than here, the neighbors know each other.

> Belletetch: I haven't seen my family for a long time. When they tell me who died, it was really tough. But I'm so happy with my family. One Shabbat we spent with all our relatives. When I saw everyone I was crying. They're getting old, I don't want to leave them behind.

Ketema expresses Israel as a part of an "eternal past" of the Ethiopians. He describes the sense he got from speaking to Ethiopian Jews in Israel on one of his several visits:

> Ketema: Everybody that I spoke to ... they talk about their life, as if they have been there for one million years. They never talk about like in Canada, we talk about when I was in Ethiopia. Like this, like that, you know, we compare. In Israel, I've never heard a single person, comparing his life with Ethiopia. Everybody's, if they complain, it's as if they have, you know, when they talk it's as if they have been there for a hundred years, for 200, maybe 1000, 200 000 years. But it's as if they have been living there forever, just like that.

For Ketema, time is elastic. Although the vast majority of the Ethiopian Jews now in Israel did not physically arrive until the early 1980's, they live there now as though they've been there forever.

In Canada, Israel constructs a bond between young, single males in Montreal. Assefa describes his social situation when he first came to Canada:

> I used to hang out more often with Mebratu and some other [Ethiopian Jewish] guys. Cause we have more understanding to one another. First of all, our parents all of us, live in Israel. For them and for me. So, which makes things much more easier. Because, I don't know. If your parents live somewhere else, and you start talking about Ethiopia or, your parents, for us, we used to talk about Israel and our *parents*. And we're Jews, and we felt like, as a *family*.

Here, again, there is a strong emphasis on family and the distance felt between those "stranded" in Montreal, and those in Israel.

All Ethiopian Jews with whom I spoke express the desire to move to Israel in the future. Even those who hadn't yet been there talked about Israel as their preferred home. Mebratu explained that "everyone I talk to eventually they want to go to Israel. All the Ethiopian Jews". Several informants indicate their plans to make *aliyah*:

> Mebratu: Oh yes, I plan to go. I'm waiting to get my [camera] equipment and then I'm going. My parents have been bothering me to go ever since they moved there.

> Belletetch: What am I doing here. I have nothing here. I have a long term plan. At least the children have to finish high school. But maybe I can't wait 'til then. Our grandfathers taught us our country is Israel. That's my home. That's my homeland. Since I came back [from a visit two years ago] I ask myself every morning: "what am I doing here?"

> Assefa: I have many ideas. Um, one of them is should I move when I finish my study? Or should I move now. ... Well, I'm finishing my studies in three years and I'm out of here. That's all I'm thinking about.

Ketema has a plan to buy a piece of land in Ashkelon, Israel, and expects that his children will go to university in Israel. He describes his expectations of living there:

> Living with 2000 families, between 2000 families. What do you expect? Everybody talking your name, ... If you die they will come and cry and weep. Somebody dies you go, you be together. Somebody has a wedding you go there and you enjoy, dance. If you go to, if it's holidays everybody's invited, ... that's where you belong.

Many other people also emphasize the family in their ideas about the future. Assefa, for example, describes his positive expectations of moving to Israel in relation to how many family he has there:

> I would expect more happiness in it [living in Israel]. I'm surrounded by my cousins. Here, it's quite hard you have to make friends, you know? That you really trust. But there, I have cousins and brothers and sisters. So once you have that you really don't have to worry much.

He emphasizes that Israel is home throughout our interview:

> It's the atmosphere, you know, you just, me, if I live in Toronto, if I live in Ottawa or here? It's all the same. In Israel, when you live there, it's good, you know? ... Maybe it's, I don't know, home?

> I know my country is Israel, my home I guess. So because of that I prefer there than anywhere else.

> This is not my country, so, I've gotta find what's best for me. If you don't feel home, there's no use of living here. Like, I don't know, if I don't feel home in Quebec, and I don't feel home in Toronto, but I could find a better job in Toronto, then I have nothing that I'm attached in Quebec. But like, if you're attached to one place, if you feel home? And you know you could find a better opportunity down there [somewhere else] but like, you prefer in your heart by staying where you are! .... Even if I couldn't find a job or what I could be offered here, I could still feel like I'm home, you know? Down there [Israel].

Assefa defines Israel as "home" in part through a negation of Canada as home.

Baruch and Talia, in recalling their lived experiences of Israel for an extended period of time, emphasize their distance from people in the society. Unlike the other informants, who have had contact with Israel in recent years, Baruch and Talia lived in Israel at a time when there were few Ethiopian Jews there. They emphasize a lack of family and their separation from others in Israel, in contrast to the above accounts:

> Baruch: So many things happened to me [in Israel], I am a veteran. To be black and Jewish, we were the first people there, my group. We didn't give up, we still believe one day it's gonna be our home. A person without family without anything around him facing all these differences. It wasn't easy.

> Talia: Well, not everybody was the same. It was kind of I guess when I was in the boarding school I was in the safe environment. Because I see the people that I know, the people that I see every day, but once I had to step out of the school back yard, and just come to the real world, you know to the real Israeli society, it was different. Because, not everybody, like just the term being religious and not being religious already put a gap between myself and the others. And then there's the fact that I was a minority, and that you know, during that whole circumstance and people at that time, they were not, they still had problems with accepting Ethiopians as Jews. Because of the color issue. So it was hard for me in terms of making friends outside of school? No, no, I didn't have any friends outside of school. I only had the friends that I had inside of school, or the friends that were my cousins. But other than that I didn't have any friends.

Talia was not only different because of her skin color, but because she was defined as religious in a largely secular "outside world".

This chapter shows how the process of constructing Ethiopian Jewish identity in Canada is experienced in relation to different groups, places, and times. Compared to Israel, where there is a large number of Ethiopian Jews, Ethiopian Jews in Canada might find their many layers of difference from the larger groups with which they integrate, and from society in general more pronounced. Because the group in Canada is linked to Israel through visits, family members, history and expectations to move there, in many ways it is a stronger force in the construction of their identity than is Ethiopia.

Conclusion

We live "in a world where 'open borders' appear more salient than 'closed communities'" (Rosaldo 1993:45). In this world, where groups migrate, regroup and reconstruct histories, the landscapes of group identity (the *ethnoscapes*) are no longer divisible into neat, tidy packages (Appadurai 1991). Gupta and Ferguson argue that in the current "world of diaspora, transnational culture flows, and mass movements of populations, ... familiar lines between 'here' and 'there', center and periphery, colony and metropole become blurred" (1992:10). Clifford points out that the "empowering paradox of diaspora is that dwelling *here* assumes a solidarity and connection *there*. But *there* is not necessarily a single place or an exclusivist nation" (1994:322, emphasis in the original). In viewing the community as imagined (Anderson 1991), the internalization of the image and sense of connectedness to the *there* which defines the diaspora is more important than determining the *there* as a fixed, concrete and single place. For the Ethiopian Jews *here* in Canada, *there* is expressed in terms of Israel and Ethiopia, and sometimes Africa.

These multiple experiences of diasporization, a common theme for Jews, "do not necessarily succeed each other in historical memory but echo back and forth" (Jonathan Boyarin, quoted in Clifford 1994:305). The Ethiopian Jews' temporary condition, general *denial* of Canada as "home", and *acceptance* of Israel as "home" makes their liminal position even more prominent. In Canada they are strangers in a "world on the move" (Bauman 1988:38) and have entered the "general condition of homelessness" (Said 1979:18 in Gupta and Ferguson 1992:9) used to describe displaced, uprooted or diaspora communities.

In this thesis I have argued that Ethiopian Jewish identity has been constructed over the last century in relation to Western Diaspora Jewry and Israel, and in response to complex political and historical forces. In this sense, Ethiopian Jewish identity is a product of historical and political events, and an evolving relationship with the Jewish Diaspora and Israel; not an essence which precedes these factors. The predominant theme in the relationship between Ethiopian and other Jews is that "we" saved "them" from their inevitable extinction, had they been left in Ethiopia without any opportunities to escape religious and political persecution. There is an obvious power imbalance in this

relationship; one gets the impression from the vast literature (none of which is written by Ethiopian Jews) about Ethiopian Jews that they are a group of people being tossed around by powerful groups of people. Generally, their "voice", or subjective agency is completely overlooked. Thus, in viewing the construction of Ethiopian Jewish identity as a dialectical process between members of the group and others, it is important to emphasize the impact of other Jews on the construction of Ethiopian Jewish identity.
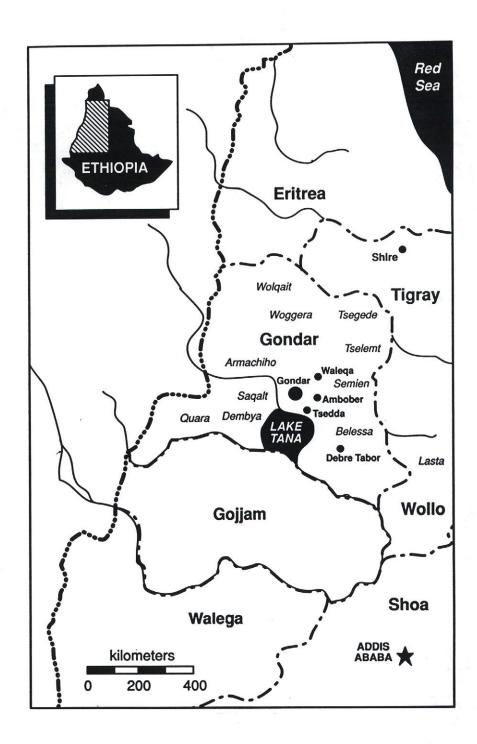
My analysis of the construction of Ethiopian Jewish identity accounts for two central processes in their relationship with other Jews: the power and authority to categorize the group officially as Jews; and the dynamics of *internal othering* among groups of people subsumed under the label of "Jews". This use of *otherness* is meant to avoid reconstructing strict boundaries between and within groups, and instead focuses on the idea of a boundary creating *tensions*. As Clifford stresses, "the relational positioning at issue here is not a process of absolute othering, but rather of entangled tension" (1994:307). Abu-Lughod suggests that "the process of creating a self through opposition to an other *always entails the violence of repressing or ignoring other forms of difference*" (1991:140, emphasis mine). According to this line of reasoning, the concept of "entangled tensions" is more useful than the treatment of "self" and "other" as opposing categories.

Appendix A: Maps

Map 1. Ethiopia in relation to Israel and surrounding African and Middle East countries[18]

---

[18] Reproduced from Wagaw 1993:6.

Map 2. Villages of Beta Israel origin and surrounding areas in Ethiopia[19]

---

[19] Reproduced from Wagaw 1993:9.

Appendix B: Ethiopian Jewish Informants

Appendix B briefly describes the backgrounds and migration experiences of the Ethiopian Jewish informants who appear in this thesis. I present this information as it was related to me by the informants; there is no reliable way to check their accuracy. All informants are identified by pseudonyms with the exception of Baruch. He was the first Ethiopian Jewish immigrant in Montreal, and has presented his personal story publicly in the Israeli and North American media, and as a speaker lobbying for the Ethiopian Jewish rescue in the 1970's and 1980's.

Baruch

Baruch was born in a village in Gondar Province, and was taken to Israel on the Kfar Batya education program (see p.20) from age 10 through 18. He returned to Ethiopia at the end of the program in 1964 where he remained until 1974. He then escaped from Ethiopia and made his way illegally through several African and European countries before returning to Israel in 1976. The Israelis initially denied him entry into the country, a difficulty which he attributes to their lingering doubts about his Jewishness, and their reluctance to accept him as a Jew because of his skin color. Finally he was permitted to stay in the country, and he completed his army service from 1976 to 1979.

In 1979 he had arranged to begin taking Falashas out of Ethiopia through the Sudan to Israel with the support of the Israeli Mossad (Intelligence Agency). The Mossad abruptly canceled this arrangement, at which point Baruch became determined to find other means of support to start the rescue effort. With the support of the American Association for Ethiopian Jewry (AAEJ), Baruch took 54 Falashas from Ethiopia to Israel via the Sudan, in order to prove to Israel that it could be done. Later that year, Baruch left Israel for Canada with his fiancee, who was born and raised in Montreal. His aim at the time was to lobby for more support in the rescue of Falashas. Baruch's adult life is one of a political activist. He was committed to the Falasha rescue effort from the late-1970's through the 1980's, speaking all over the world at Jewish conventions, and building a controversial reputation for himself in Israeli circles. Once in Montreal, he and his fiancee were married in 1980. They are now divorced, but he chooses to stay in Montreal to be near his 13 year old daughter.

Miriam

Miriam's father was a student of Jacques Faitlovitch (see p.20). She was raised near Addis Ababa, and came to Montreal from Addis in 1982. She had been in contact with Baruch, with whom she had studied with on the program in Kfar Batya, Israel. Her children came to Montreal in 1980 and lived with a foster family; Miriam joined them and stayed there with them for 10 months before moving into their own apartment. She started working with Baruch once in Montreal, "trying everything to save lives". For several years when she first arrived in Montreal, Miriam worked at JIAS, acting as a "go-between" for JIAS and the Ethiopian Jewish community.

Issac and Maaza

Issac and his wife, Maaza, are both from Falasha villages in Gondar province; theirs was an arranged marriage when Maaza was 14 years old. Maaza is the sister of Baruch. Through Baruch's efforts, she and the rest of her immediate family were put on "the list" to come to Canada. She and the two children came with her to Montreal in the spring of 1984; Issac followed six months later. According to their daughter, Issac had been active in assisting other Ethiopian Jews waiting to go to Israel. The family was living in Addis Ababa, and Issac worked for Ethiopian Airlines. Because he was fairly well established in the city and had friends working in important positions, he was able to sign as a guarantor for Ethiopian Jews seeking exit visas.

He and his wife explain that the decision to stay in Montreal "was really hard". When they first arrived they had a lot of pressure from local Jewish organizations and from the Jewish community in general to go to Israel. Issac says that because of that pressure, he felt more compelled to stay here. He didn't like being told where he should live. Issac knows he would be happier in Israel among family and friends, but is firm about staying in Montreal in order to give his children the best opportunities for education and a good future.

Belletetch

Belletetch was born and raised in a village in the Gondar area, but had lived in Gondar city since the age of 14. Her husband had been living in Addis for three years before their departure for Montreal in 1985. She explains that she would have preferred to have gone to Israel at the time, and that it was by chance that they came to Canada. Her husband started the emigration process while in Addis, where he arranged for the family to receive false scholarship papers for studying in Montreal.

Mebratu

Mebratu left Gondar city at age 16 by foot to join his elder brother, Yusu, who was living in Khartoum while assisting the Israeli Mossad create new routes out of the Sudan to Israel. Mebratu had expected to leave there and to go directly to Israel, but when he reunited with his brother three months after beginning the trek to the Sudan, Yusu said that they were going to Canada.

While still in the Sudan, Mebratu's brother got arrested because the Sudanese had found some sort of evidence of his activities with the Mossad. Yusu was in jail for two months. According to Mebratu, the Israeli's bribed the Sudanese police to get Yusu released from jail and sent him directly to Montreal in February of 1984. One month later, Mebratu came to Montreal with two other Ethiopian Jewish relatives. He now lives with his brother in an apartment in Toronto because, he says, the employment opportunities are better there than in Montreal, and he is trying to save his money to make *aliyah* to Israel. His parents and other family members moved to Israel through Operation Solomon.

Talia and Yisraela

Talia and her sisters were born and raised in Addis Ababa. At age 10 (1984), Talia and her sister, Yisraela, had gone on summer vacation to visit relatives in Israel with their father. Talia's great uncle (replacing the role of her father's father and her own

grandfather, who died before Talia "knew him") convinced Talia's father to let the girls stay in Israel in a boarding school, and to get himself, their mother and the other children out of Ethiopia whenever it was possible.

While Talia and Yisraela were in Israel at boarding school their parents and siblings emigrated from Ethiopia to Montreal. Talia is not sure if her parents' plan was to stay in Canada, but in the end they decided to stay, and sponsored the two daughters in Israel to immigrate here. Talia and Yisraela spent a total of two and a half years in Israel moving between boarding school during the year, and several sets of relatives during vacations, and summer camp during the summer. At age 13 she joined her parents in Montreal, and along with her sister, began a new adjustment in a different world.

Assefa

Assefa was born and raised in Addis Ababa, where he lived with his parents, and his younger brothers and sister. He left Ethiopia at age 16, in 1988, with his 14 year old brother. JIAS had arranged for a medical reason for his brother to come to Canada; Assefa was supposed to be with him as an assistant. When Assefa and his brother arrived in Canada, they went straight to live with a Moroccan Jewish foster family where they stayed for two and a half years. In 1990 the boys moved out of the foster home and into their own apartment, and since 1994, they have been living in separate apartments. He and his brother had expected that their parents would join them in Montreal, but they immigrated to Israel in 1991 with Operation Solomon.

Assefa says that he didn't stop hoping that his parents would come to Montreal until he knew they were safely in Israel. Now all of his immediate and close extended family is in Israel. He and his brother are the only ones in Montreal, although he does consider the rest of the community his "relatives".

Ketema

Ketema was born in a Falasha village in Gondar, but as his father was converted by the Church Mission to the Jews, they were disconnected from the Ethiopian Jewish community when Ketema was very young. He completed his high school and university in Desse, met his non-Beta Israel wife in Gojjam, but was living with her, their two children, and a son from a previous marriage in Addis Ababa before they came to Canada. Ketema explains that he could have gone to Israel, but that he was afraid for the safety of his family.

Ketema and his family arrived in Montreal in 1983. In Montreal, Ketema was very involved with the local organizations still working to rescue Ethiopian Jews. He was also immersed in trying to create a place for his own community, and felt it was an extremely frustrating time. In 1987 he and his family moved to Toronto to search for better economic prospects. He explains that he had put enough energy into his community, and that it was "time to take care of [himself]". Since then he has lived in Toronto, where his son studies at Yeshiva school, and his daughter attends a private Orthodox Jewish school. His eldest son has moved to Vancouver to pursue university studies.

Appendix C: Glossary

Ethiopic

assadagih ayideg - used to refer to a child who has done something very wrong, meaning "may the one who raised you be destroyed".

atankunye - do not touch me.

balage - uncouth, loud, noisy.

Beta Israel - house of Israel; term of self reference for Ethiopian Jews.

beta sa'ab - household.

buda - evil eye belief.

chawa - well-behaved, soft-spoken child.

Falash Mora (also Faras Mura or Falas Mura) - Falasha/Beta Israel converts to Christianity who wish to reaffirm their Judaism and immigrate to Israel under the Law of Return.

Falasha - exile or stranger; historically used by others to identify Ethiopian Jews.

Israelotch - Israelites; historical term of self reference for Ethiopian Jews.

kayla - derogatory term for Beta Israel in Ethopia, refers to evil eye belief.

kess - Beta Israel priest or religious leader.

libam - a wise, good female in family and social matters.

margam beit - ritual purity hut.

Seged - Beta Israel religious holiday.

timqat - Orthodox Christian baptism ceremony.

yebalege lij - an uncouth, badly behaved child; child who has been raised improperly.

yejegina lij - son of a brave, good parent.

yeset lij - son of unmanly behaviour; "son of woman".

zamad - extended family.

Hebrew

aliyah - ascension, to go up; Jewish immigration to Israel.

aliyot - waves of Jewish immigration to Israel.

am echad - one nation, peoplehood.

Ashkenazi (adj); Ashkenazim (n.pl.) - Jews of East and West European origin.

bar mitzvah (masc.); bat mitzvah (fem.) - the Jewish rite of passage which marks the transition to adulthood.

brit milah - ritual circumcision.

caravanim- fabricated housing or caravan sites.

cushim - people from the ancient land of Cush; a derogatory term of reference for dark skinned or black people.

edah - ethnic group.

gan eden - garden of Eden.

goy (s.); *goyim* (pl.) - non-Jews.

Halacha (n.); Halachic (adj.) - Jewish oral law.

kabbalat ol mitzvot - oral declaration of the acceptance of the Torah's commandments.

kashrut - Jewish dietary laws.

kessim - Beta Israel priests or religious leaders.

kiddush - Sabbath prayers over the bread and wine.

kippah - skull cap.

Knesset - Israeli parliament.

mamzer (s.); mamzerim (pl.) - bastard, illegitimate child.

mikveh - ritual bath.

mila - circumcision.

Mizrachi (adj.); Mizrachim (n.pl.) - Jews of Middle Eastern or North African origin.

morashah - tradition.

Mossad - Israeli Intelligence Agency of the Israel Defense Forces.

olim - immigrants.

Pesach - Passover.

Radbaz - a respected legalist and Chief Rabbi of Egypt in the late 15th and early 16th centuries.

saffek mamzerim - suspected bastards.

Seder - order; ritual Passover meal.

Sephardi (adj.); Sephardim (n.pl.) - Jews of Spanish or Oriental origin.

Shabbat - Sabbath.

Sherut Le'umi - national service.

shkhorim - dark skinned or black people.

talit - prayer shawl.

tarbut - culture.

tevila - ritual immersion in the ritual bath.

yehudim haetiyopim - Ethiopian Jews.

Appendix D: Abbreviations

AAEJ	American Association for Ethiopian Jewry
CAEJ	Canadian Association for Ethiopian Jewry
CEGEP	Collège d'Enseignment Général et Professionnel (College of General and Professional Instruction)
CJC	Canadian Jewish Congress
JA	Jewish Agency for Israel
JDC	Joint Distribution Committee
JIAS	Jewish Immigrant Aid Services of Canada
MAUDE	Montreal Association for Unity and Democracy in Ethiopia
YM-YWHA	Young Men's and Women's Hebrew Association

References Cited

Abbink, J. 1983. Seged celebration in Ethiopia and Israel: Continuity and change of a Falasha religious holiday. Anthropos 78:789-810.

1984. The changing identity of Ethiopian immigrants (Falashas) in Israel. Anthropological Quarterly 57:139-153.

1987. A socio-structural analysis of the Beta Esra'el as an "infamous group" in traditional Ethiopia. Sociologus 37(2):140-154.

Abu-Lughod, Lila. 1991. Writing against culture. In Richard Fox, ed. Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present, pp.137-162. Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press.

Allied Jewish Community Services. 1991. Montreal Jewish Community: Attitudes, Beliefs and Behaviors. Montreal: Allied Jewish Community Services Community Planning Department.

Alonso, Ana Maria. 1994. The politics of space, time and substance: state formation, nationalism, and ethnicity. Annual Review of Anthropology 23:379-405.

Anderson, Benedict. 1991. Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, revised edition. London: Verso.

Appadurai, Arjun. 1991. Global ethnoscapes: notes and queries for a transnational anthropology. In Richard Fox, ed. Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present. Santa Fe, New Mexico: School of American Research Press.

Arieli, Ariel and Seffefe Ayche. 1993. Psychopathological aspects of the Ethiopian immigration to Israel. Israel Journal of Medical Sciences 29(6-7):411-418.

Ashkenazi, Michael. 1987. Studying the students: information exchange, Ethiopian immigrants, social workers, and visitors. In Michael Ashkenazi and Alex Weingrod, eds. Ethiopian Jews and Israel, pp. 85-96. New Brunswick, U.S.A.: Transaction Books.

1988. Political organization and resources among Ethiopian immigrants. Social Sciences Information 27(3):371-389.

Barth, Fredrik. 1969. Introduction. In Ethnic Groups and Boundaries. Boston: Little Brown & Co.

Bauman, Zygmunt. 1988. Strangers: The social construction of universality and particularity. Telos 21(4):7-42.

Ben Ezer, Gad. 1987. Cross-cultural misunderstandings: The case of Ethiopian immigrant Jews in Israeli society. In Michael Ashkenazi and Alex Weingrod, eds. Ethiopian Jews and Israel, pp. 63-73. New Brunswick, U.S.A.: Transaction Books.

Ben-Dor, Shoshana. 1987. The Sigd of Beta Israel: Testimony to a community in transition. In Michael Ashkenazi and Alex Weingrod, eds. Ethiopian Jews and Israel, pp. 140-159. New Brunswick, U.S.A.: Transaction Books.

Ben-Rafael, Eliezer. 1982. The Emergence of Ethnicity: Cultural groups and social conflict in Israel. Contributions in Ethnic Studies, Number 7. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press.

Blauner, Bob. 1994. That Black-Jewish thing: what's going on? Tikkun 9(5):27-32).

Chavez, Leo. 1994. The power of the imagined community: the settlement of undocumented Mexicans and Central Americans in the United States. American Anthropologist 96(1):52-73.

Chemtov, Daniel, and Chaim Rosen. 1992. "Be 'gobez' for the sake of your health: A cross-cultural medical approach for communicating with Ethiopian immigrants about HIV, HBV infections and related diseases. Israel: Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Rashi Foundation, and NACOEJ.

Chemtov, Daniel, Chaim Rosen, Ronny Shtarkshall, and Varda Soskolne. 1993. A culturally specific educational program to reduce the risk of HIV and HBV transmission among Ethiopian immigrants to Israel: a preliminary report on training veteran immigrants as health educators. Israel Journal of Medical Sciences 29(6-7):437-442.

Clifford, James. 1994. Diasporas. Cultural Anthropology 9(3):302-338.

Dominguez, Virginia. 1989. People as Subject/People as Object: Selfhood and Peoplehood in Contemporary Israel. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Douglas, Mary. 1970. Natural Symbols. New York: Pantheon.

Friedmann, Daniel and Ulysses Santamaria. 1990. Identity and change: the example of the Falashas, between assimilation in Ethiopia and integration in Israel. Dialectical Anthropology 15(1):56-73.

Gans, Herbert J. 1994. Symbolic ethnicity and symbolic religiosity: towards a comparison of ethnic and religious acculturation. Ethnic and Racial Studies 17(4):577-592.

Gilman, Sander L. 1994. The Jewish nose: are Jews white? or, the history of the nose job. In Laurence J. Silberstein and Robert L. Cohn, eds. The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity, pp. 364-401. New York and London: New York University Press.

Good, Byron. 1994. Medicine, Rationality and Experience: An Anthropological Perspective. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gupta, Akhil and James Ferguson. 1992. Beyond "culture": space, identity, and the politics of difference. Cultural Anthropology 7(1):6-23.

Halper, Jeff. 1987. The absorption of Ethiopian immigrants: A return to the fifties. In Michael Ashkenazi and Alex Weingrod, eds. Ethiopian Jews and Israel, pp. 112-139. New Brunswick, U.S.A.: Transaction Books.

Health Care Survey (Ethnographic Interview). February 1, 1995. Montreal: Culture and Mental Health Team, Institute of Community and Family Psychiatry, Jewish General Hospital.

Hobswam, Eric and Terence Ranger, eds. 1983. The Invention of Tradition. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Isaac, Ephraim. 1992. Jewish Solidarity and the Jews of Ethiopia. In Selwyn Ilan Troen, and Benjamin Pinkus, eds. Organizing Rescue: Jewish National Solidarity in the Modern Period, pp. 304-420. Great Britain: Frank Cass.

Israel Information Center. 1991. Aliyah: The Ingathering of the Exiles. Jerusalem: Ahva Press.

Jenkins, Richard. 1994. Rethinking ethnicity: identity, categorization and power. Ethnic and Racial Studies 17(2):3-221.

Kaplan, Steven. 1985. Falashas. In Encyclopaedia Judaica Yearbook 1983-85, pp. 244-7. Jerusalem: Keter.

1988. The Beta Israel and the Rabbinate: Law, ritual and politics. Social Science Information 27(3):357-370.

1992. The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia: From Earliest times to the 20th Century. New York: New York University Press.

Kaufman Shelemay, Kay. 1986. The Beta Israel in twentieth-century Ethiopia. In Beth Hatefusoth. The Jews of Ethiopia: A People in Transition, pp. 40-74. Tel Aviv:

Beth Hatefusoth, The Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, and New York: The Jewish Museum.

Kessler, David. 1982. The Falashas: The Forgotten Jews of Ethiopia. New York: African Publishing Company.

Kessler, David and Tudor Parfitt. 1985. The Falashas: The Jews of Ethiopia. London: Minority Rights Group.

Leslau, Wolf. 1951. Falasha Anthology. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Levine, Donald N. 1974. Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Lord, Edith. 1970. Queen of Sheba's Heirs. Washington, D.C.: Acropolis Books.

Malkki, Liisa. 1992. National geographic: the rooting of peoples and the territorialization of national identity among scholars and refugees. Cultural Anthropology 7(1):24-44.

Mann, M., ed. 1983. The Macmillan Student Encyclopaedia of Sociology. London: Macmillan.

Matsuoka, Atsuko, and John Sorenson. 1991. Ethnic identity and social service delivery: some models examined in relation to immigrants and refugees from Ethiopia. Canadian Social Work Review 8(2):255-268.

McSpadden, Lucia Ann. 1987. Ethiopian refugee resettlement in the Western United States: social context and psychological well-being. Internation Migration Review 21(3):796-819.

Moussa, Helene. 1993. Storm and Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees. Dundas, Ontario: Artemis Enterprises.

Myers, Theodore M. 1993. A medical care program for Ethiopian Jewish migrants in Addis Abbaba. Israel Journal of Medical Sciences 29(6-7):334-338.

Neeman, Rina. 1994. Invented ethnicity as collective and personal text: an association of Rumanian Israelis. Anthropological Quarterly 67(3):135-149.

Newman, Stanley. 1987. Ethiopian Jewish absorption and the Israeli response: A two-way process. In Michael Ashkenazi and Alex Weingrod, eds. Ethiopian Jews and Israel, pp. 104-111. New Brunswick, U.S.A.: Transaction Books.

Paine, Robert. 1989. Israel: Jewish identity and competition over 'tradition'. In Elizabeth Tonkin et al., eds. History and Ethnicity, pp. 121-136. London and New York: Routledge.

Parfitt, Tudor. 1985. Operation Moses: The Story of the Exodus of the Falasha Jews from Ethiopia. London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson.

Pollack, Shimon and The Israel AIDS Study Group. 1993. Epidemiological and immunological study of HIV-seropositive Ethiopian immigrants in Israel. Israel Journal of Medical Sciences 29(supplement):19-23.

Quirin, James Arthur. 1979. The process of caste formation in Ethiopia: A study of the Beta Israel (Felasha), 1270-1868. The International Journal of African Historical Studies 12(2):235-258.

    1992. The Evolution of the Ethiopian Jews: a History of the Beta Israel (Falasha) to 1920. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Rapoport, Louis. 1986. Redemption Song: The Story of Operation Moses. San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.

Reminick, Ronald. 1976. Ethiopia: The evil eye belief among the Amhara. In Clarence Maloney, ed. The Evil Eye, pp. 85-101. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Ribeiro, Lidia. 1992. Communautés Éthiopienne et Érythréenne du Québec. In Profils des communautés culturelles du Québec: tome II, pp. 1-7. Québec: Publications du Québec.

Rosaldo, Renato. 1990. Others of invention: ethnicity and its discontents. Village Voice Literary Supplement 82:27-29.

    1993. Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis. Boston: Beacon Press.

Rosen, Chaim. 1986. Ethiopian Jews in Israel. In Beth Hatefusoth. The Jews of Ethiopia: A People in Transition, pp. 75-94. Tel Aviv: Beth Hatefusoth, The Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, and New York: The Jewish Museum.

    1987. Core symbols of Ethiopian identity and their role in understanding the Beta Israel today. In Michael Ashkenazi and Alex Weingrod, eds. Ethiopian Jews and Israel. New Brunswick, U.S.A.: Transaction Books, pp. 55-62

Rosen, Chaim and Ardon Rubinstein. 1993. The demography of the Ethiopian community in Israel. Israel Journal of Medical Sciences 29(6-7):333-334.

Said, Edward. 1979. Zionism from the standpoint of its victims. Social Text 1:7-58.

Santamaria, Ulysses. 1988. Ethiopian Jews: Emergence of a social movement and new spheres of analysis - an introduction. Social Science Information 27(3):355-6.

Semi, Emanuela Trevisan. 1985. The Beta Israel (Falashas): From purity to impurity. The Jewish Journal of Sociology 27(2):103-114.

Shuval, Judith T. 1989. The structure and dilemmas of Israeli pluralism. In Baruch Kimmerling, ed. The Israeli State and Society, pp. 216-236. Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York Press.

Silberstein, Laurence J. 1994. Others within and others without: rethinking Jewish identity and culture. In Laurence J. Silberstein and Robert L. Cohn, eds. The Other in Jewish Thought and History: Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity, pp. 1-34. New York and London: New York University Press.

Sollors, Werner. 1989. Introduction: the invention of ethnicity. In Sollors, ed. The Invention of Ethnicity, pp.ix-xx. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Sorenson, John. 1990. Opposition, exile and identity: the Eritrean case. Journal for Refugee Studies 3(4):298-319.

    1991. Politics of social identity: "Ethiopians" in Canada. The Journal of Ethnic Studies 19(1):67-86.

    1992. History and Identity in the Horn of Africa. Dialectical Anthropology 17:227-252.

    1993. Imagining Ethiopia: Struggles for History and Identity in the Horn of Africa. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press.

Statistics Canada. 1992. Immigration and citizenship. Ottawa: Supply and Services Canada. 1991 Census of Canada. Catalogue number 95-316.

Tebeje, Ainalem. 1989. Cultural Interaction of Canadians and Ethiopian Newcomers in Canada. Canada: Employment and Immigration Canada.

Van Praag, Nicholas. 1986. From Ethiopia to the USA: a difficult transition. Refugees (Jan.):15-16.

Wagaw, Teshome G. 1991. The international political ramifications of Falasha Emigration. The Journal of Modern African Studies 29(4):557-581.

1993. For Our Soul: Ethiopian Jews in Israel. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.

Weil, Shalva. 1988, 1989. Beliefs and Practices of Ethiopian Jews in Israel. Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Israel. (Hebrew)

1991. Ethiopian One-Parent Families in Israel. Jerusalem: Hebrew University of Jerusalem. (Hebrew)

1992. "It is futile to trust in man": Methodological problems in studying Ethiopian Jews in Israel. A Research paper submitted to the Joint Distribution Committee, Israel. Jerusalem: Hebrew University.

Weinfeld, Morton. 1994. Ethnic assimilation and the retention of ethnic cultures. In J.W. Berry and J.A. Laponce, eds. Ethnicity and Culture in Canada, pp. 238-266. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.

Westheimer, Ruth and Steven Kaplan. 1992. Surviving Salvation: The Ethiopian Jewish Family in Transition. New York: New York University Press.

Young, Allan. 1975. Why Amhara get kurenya: sickness and possession in an Ethiopian zar cult. American Ethnologist 2(3):567-584.

Archive materials

Newspaper articles:
Canadian Jewish Congress National Archives ZC collection, Ethiopian Jewry clippings file.

Newspaper Abbreviations:
Calgary Herald = CH
Canadian Jewish News = CJN
Jerusalem Post = JP
Montreal Gazette = MG
Toronto Globe and Mail = G&M

Memos, correspondence, reports, speeches, publications and brochures:
Canadian Jewish Congress National Archives CJC records collection, Series L1 (Stan Cytrynbaum records), Boxes 1-4.