Black Matters:
Young Ethiopian Jews and Race in Israel

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Elements of the thesis are considered original scholarship
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Abstract

This dissertation sheds light on the multiple articulations of race and blackness in Israel amongst two age groups of Ethiopian Jews (teenagers and young adults). My analysis of the stigma of Ethiopian Jewish blackness relies on a two-thronged approach. Racially speaking, on the one hand this group copes with lingering doubts as to the authenticity and "purity" in regards to their bloodline and genealogy. On the other hand, blackness as a racial stigma is located on the level of the epidermis and is, somatically speaking, skin deep. Both racial logics clash and contradict one another as Ethiopian Jews struggle to find their place in Jewish Israeli society. I describe in detail the historical period that formed the group that came to be known as Ethiopian Jews and recount the impact encounters with Western Jews had on their formation as black Jews living in Israel. I argue that their identity as Jews racially speaking is the platform on which Ethiopians' blackness gains traction. As such, however marginalized, their position as "internal Others" cannot be disassociated from the larger legal and structural implications of their racial inclusion into the body of the Jewish meta-family. Race and ethnic relations amongst Jews are also explored as a way to provide the backdrop against which Ethiopian Jewish blackness and claims of racism emerged.

Methodologically, I used ethnographic inquiry by way of participant observation, formal interviews, and informal discussions. Fieldwork consisted of a total of 12 months between 2007-2009. I equally analyzed the media, locally in Israel and internationally as well, that addressed the topic of race and/or racism and the integration of Ethiopian Jews.

Résumé

Cette thèse vise à élucider les multiples articulations du concept de race et de « *blackness* » en Israël parmi deux groupes d'âges de juifs éthiopiens (les adolescents et les jeunes adultes). Je propose une double approche à l'analyse du stigma attaché au « *blackness* » juif éthiopien. D'une part, racialement parlant ce groupe fait face aux doutes persistants quant à leur « pureté » généalogique. Je décris en détail l'histoire des juifs éthiopiens, tout en explorant l'influence qu'ont eues leurs rencontres avec les juifs occidentaux sur la formation du groupe en tant que Noirs vivant en Israël. D'autre part, le stigma racial de « *blackness* » constitue une référence somatique superficielle renvoyant à la couleur de la peau. Ces deux logiques raciales s'affrontent et se contredisent à mesure que les juifs éthiopiens luttent pour se tailler une place au sein de la société juive israélienne. Tel que je le démontre, leur identité raciale en tant que juifs est la plateforme par laquelle le « *blackness* » des Éthiopiens gagne du terrain. Or, malgré leur marginalisation, leur position en tant qu'un « Autres » à l'intérieur du monde juif en Israël ne peut être dissociée des implications légales et structurales plus larges de leur inclusion raciale dans la méta-famille juive. Les relations raciales et ethniques entre juifs en Israël sont également mises de l'avant pour décrire le contexte dans lequel se constitue le « *blackness* » juif éthiopien et mettent en perspective les accusations de racisme portées par ces derniers contre l'État d'Israël.

En ce qui concerne la méthodologie, j'ai utilisé principalement l'enquête ethnographique, comprenant des observations participantes, des entrevues formelles, et des discussion informelles. Le travail de terrain en Israël a duré 12 mois entre 2007 et 2009. J'ai également analysé les reportages médiatiques diffusés localement en Israël ainsi qu'au niveau international qui parlaient du thème de la race et/ou du racisme et de l'intégration en rapport aux juifs éthiopiens.

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To a little girl named after a flower

To a little girl who is truly an angel

To a little girl whose light is pure gold

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(accessed March 17, 2014)

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION: THE POWER OF STORIES

"Listen to this," Rabbi Eli says, speaking to a group of Ethiopian Israeli college students: "I'm in Washington D.C., and I get into a taxi

> a few months ago and the driver tells me "salam alekum." I told him "alekum assalam." Now, he's 100% confident that I'm ... what? [the crowd answers "Muslim"]. I was wearing a kipa. I can't be Afro-American because I have a kipa, and I can't be Jewish because I'm? [the audience replies "black"]. He asks me, "Where are you from?" I told him "From Israel," and he starts slandering the Jews, saying: "Jews are like this, and Jews are like that." I told him "Right, right" [audience laughing]. Then he said: "I didn't know there were black brothers [black Muslims] there." So I answered "I'm not black, I'm brown! (Observation notes, July 6, 2008, Tel Aviv)[1]

The crowd of 20- and 30- year olds erupts, at this point, in a roar at the image of a "brown"[2] man in a skullcap in Washington; a brown Jew misread as a black Muslim. The students know all too well the murkiness between race and religion, whether one is in the United States or in Israel; they also know that both race and religion are configured differently from one location to the next.

Rabbi Eli's excerpt highlights the complexity of race and racial identification as it pertains to Ethiopian Jews with whom I conducted my fieldwork in Israel between 2007-2009. In this study, I demonstrate how divergent understandings of race, along with the practices of inclusion and exclusion to which they give rise, operate in their everyday lives. This is significant as it embeds Ethiopian Jews' experiences with racism within the larger questions of religious, national, and racial inclusion.

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[1] Lecture given by the Ethiopian Rabbi Eli in Tel Aviv 2008. The event was organized by the Ethiopian student association.

[2] It is important to note that no other Ethiopian Israeli I was in contact with identified with the racial label "brown." It is not common to do so.

In this thesis, I argue that the formation of Ethiopian Jews as both black and Jewish in Israel is based on two notions of race: race as somatic blackness located on the epidermis (West 1994, Fanon 1990); and race as genealogy (or bloodlines) (Kaplan 2002, 1999). The first notion captures the process of increased consciousness of body and skin color (Fanon 1990) as somatic sites of stigmatized "differentness," to use Goffman's term (1963). The mere appearance of Ethiopians as ambiguous Jewish nationals in Israel underscores race as an epidermic, somatic, and essentially skin-deep marker of Jewish otherness. The second notion of race as bloodline and lineage is inscribed inside the body, deep under the skin. The belief that they are the descendants of the lost Israelite tribe of Dan is read as proof of an unbroken bloodline racially linking Ethiopian Jews to the Jewish people. These two understandings of race are not neatly separated from one another in Ethiopian Jews' everyday experiences with stigmatization. Rather, both readings intermingle with one another under the umbrella of blackness.

One of the ways I untangle race as somatic blackness from race as genealogy (or bloodlines) is by charting the historical development of Beta Israel (or, pejoratively, "Falashas") into Jews and blacks. I show that the racial identity "black," which is historically ascribed to Ethiopian Jews by Europeans, is situational and contingent. It varies widely across time and space, ranging from "reddish-brown," "black," and, to a lesser extent, even "white" (Kaplan 2002, 1999). Unlike the gradual "whitening" that characterizes immigrants to the United States (Irish, Italians, Ashkenazi Jews), Ethiopians in Israel have gotten "blacker" over time; the more they are accepted as Jews and as Israeli citizens the more "black" they have become. The partial lightening of the *Mizrahi,* or Jewish immigrants from North Africa and the Middle East was, in part, also a result of the arrival

of Ethiopians – the darkest African Jews in Israel. From the standpoint of older Ethiopians however, they are not all "black," but rather different shades of skin that index their status according to an emic system of racial classification most Israelis have never heard of.

In regards to the history of Ethiopian Jews, race is a crucial element because it bears strongly on the very question of who partakes in the Jewish nation and under what conditions. For Ethiopian Jews, the stakes of the argument revolving around race, religion and blackness could not be higher because it determines the very premise of their Jewishness and, thus, their right to live and be accepted in the nation of Jews and the state of Israel. My reading of the history of Ethiopian Jews hinges upon two interconnected movements. The first of these movements is from an outside party starting with European Jews in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries and their interactions with some Beta Israel communities. During this period, European Jews evaluated the Beta Israel's Jewish authenticity in comparison to ideal Jewish references premised upon ritual, belief and religious practice. The second is from the Beta Israel, who would become today's Ethiopian Jews. These men and women gradually but actively labored to transform themselves from rural Beta Israel into Jewish Israeli citizens according to Zionist ideals of modernity throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. This double-sided process takes meaning in the larger framework of *halacha* (Jewish religious law), which dictates Ethiopian Jews' identity as racially and biologically Jewish.

The group formation perspective of the transformation of the Beta Israel into Ethiopian Jews as advanced by Steven Kaplan (1992) and other historians, which I also adopt, does not deny what many informants believe to be true: that they have always and forever been Jewish in their religious practices, beliefs and observances, be it prior to the

interventions organized by Euro-American Jews and the state of Israel, or thereafter. The attempt to unravel their "authenticity" as Jews was fiercely debated for years prior to Ethiopians' *aliyah* [literally, "to arise"; to "make aliyah" refers to the immigration of Jews to Israel]. The discussion revolving around Ethiopian Jews' authenticity is pivotal for justifying their eligibility to participate in Israel's care regime, which includes the Right of Return and automatic citizenship, in other words, state protection offered exclusively to fellow Jews. Authenticity (i.e. being truly Jewish based on bloodlines) thus became a key political platform for pro-Falasha activists[3] and other stakeholders in their quest to further their political agendas, such as getting Jews in North America, Europe and Israel to rescue them via emigration from Ethiopia (see for example, Kaplan 1992:11). Essentialized notions of Jewish race/genealogy used to gage Ethiopians' genetic authenticity as Jews (Kaplan 2003) weighed upon this endeavor at every turn. Eventually, the collective repositioning of Ethiopian Jews upon their official recognition in the 1970s as descendants of the lost Israelite tribe of Dan allowed Beta Israel activists and their international supporters to fight for their right to be brought to Israel under the Law of Return. This demonstrates the link between the politics of recognition and the morality of merit attributed on the basis of racial and religious membership. In regards to my approach, rather than subscribe to race and blood as proof of belonging, I trace the dialogical process whereby the Beta Israel reconfigured themselves into "modern" halachic Jews.[4]

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[3] Pro-Falasha activists acted in the name of saving the Beta Israel from Ethiopia and bringing them to Israel. They formed lobby groups and influenced various levels of government in the United States, Canada, and Israel.

[4] Accordingly, I do not rehash oft-cited theories about the "real" origins of Ethiopian Jews to explain the presence of Jews in the Horn of Africa. People interested in this debate can go to the following texts: Kaplan 1992; Quirin 1992; Ullendorf 1971; Pankhurst 1992.

What all of this adds up to is the fact that the Beta Israel *became* a specific kind of black Jewish group modeled on the Western European ideal of what a Jewish person is halachically speaking (according to Jewish religious law), through interactions that began in the late nineteenth century with Western Jews. The migration of Ethiopian Jews some hundred years later transformed a de-centralized group of Beta Israel villages in Ethiopia with significant cultural, religious and linguistic diversity among them, into a seemingly homogeneous Ethiopian "community" of "black" Jews in Israel. In the dissertation I closely examine how this unfolded and what it implies for Ethiopian Israelis today.

The concept of stigma developed by Goffman in the 1960s provides a useful conceptual tool for unpacking Ethiopian Jews' blackness. In *Notes on the Management of a Spoiled Identity* (1963), Goffman writes that stigma "refer[s] to an attitude that is deeply discrediting, but it should be seen that a language of relationships, not attributes, is really needed" (p. 3). A stigma, then is really a special kind of relationship between attribute and stereotype (p. 4). In the case of Ethiopian Israelis, their "differentness" is embodied through race as a somatic indicator of blackness (skin tone, facial features, texture of hair, etc.), and the ambiguity of their racial authenticity and religious purity as real Jews. These two race-based stigmas coalesce with the ultimate "bodily sign," to borrow Goffman's term once again, of somatic blackness. As I demonstrate in Chapter Six, other stigmatized references such as socio-economic status and low level of education become attached to the stigma of race.

Another key argument I make in this thesis is that social and cultural mechanisms by means of which stigmatized color labels become attached to a diverse group of people change over time. I push this argument further by claiming that stigmas like race, however

contingent on time and place, attain some level of fixity. The fixity of the racial label "black" in Israel associated with Ethiopian Jews renders their experiences with racism and marginalization very real. In this sense, there is nothing constructed, changing or fluid about the stigma of blackness. What stands out for Ethiopians Jews racialized as black is, to use Franz Fanon's words, that they "[are] overdetermined from without" (1990: 112).

Young Ethiopian Israelis who are the focus of this research come of age amidst the push and pull of being racialized as modern Jews on the one hand, and racialized as blacks on the other. Their double racialization gains traction on the ground of Israel's identity project of shaping Jews as national in their citizenship (Handelman 2004). For the purposes of my project, Rabbi Eli's act of taking distance from the black Muslim taxi driver, and recounting it to an audience of young Ethiopian Jews who find it uproariously funny, also tells us something about the political and ideological realities within which this group is enmeshed at home. Specifically, it means differentiating themselves as black Jews from other blacks, particularly dark skinned Muslims, who represent for all the antithesis of Jews in the Israeli national space. In Israel, Ethiopian Jewish mechanisms of distanciation from other blacks, including non-Jewish African laborers from Eritrea, Ethiopia, and elsewhere as well as the Black Hebrews,[5] is telling of their commitment to the Jewish "race" (read as bloodline) and religion. Their situation also speaks to the limits of racial solidarity based exclusively on shared blackness.

[5] The Black Hebrews are African-Americans who claim to be the only true Israelites. They practice a form of African-American Judaism different from traditional and mainstream Judaism. Since the establishment of a Black Hebrew community in Israel in the 1970s, they have been fighting for their right to be recognized as legitimate Jews. In 2003, they were granted permanent residency status. Black Hebrew youths serve in the Israeli army.

The media and academics alike tend to treat the somatic racial identification of Ethiopian Israelis as "black" as a given,[6] thus creating an uncritical link between Ethiopian Jewish youths, particularly boys, who display their interest in and speak about race and modernity in the idiom of hip-hop and African-Americans. As I argue in Chapter Five, the appropriation of African-American and -Caribbean musical cultures, such as reggae and hip-hop, have for this segment of the Ethiopian population come to stand for (Jewish) modernity. This group is reshaping the modern Israeli Jew not according to the image of the pioneering white, European "New Jew," but rather according to the rich black urban African-American male, epitomized by the capitalist ability to consume at large. One of the objectives of this research is to unpack the taken-for-granted link between Ethiopian youths with the skin color black and, as an extension, with African-Americans.

My approach allows for alternative narratives of race and blackness to surface within the broader sphere of Israeli society. I explore configurations of blackness manifested by adult Ethiopian Israelis borrowed not only from an imagined African-American life, but also from Ethiopian and Caribbean-African diasporic references. These elements are put to work in carving out Ethiopian Israelis' place in the Israeli nation-state and the Jewish people as a whole (Anteby-Yemini 2004c). Moreover, they create an inclusive space of racial and ethnic positive validation from within (for Ethiopian Jews themselves). In some cases, as

[6] Much has been made of the adoption of African American cultural references by Ethiopian Israeli youngsters (Shabtay 2003; Djerrahian 2010, 2014 (forthcoming)). More than 30 years after the first large scale arrival of Ethiopian Jews, marginalized and racialized youths continue to generate academic studies, discussions, policies and media reports, and to capture public interest not only in Israel but internationally as well. The last incident that appeared in the international media in relation to recent Ethiopian immigrants was the injection of Depo-Provera, a hormonal contraceptive birth control drug.

discussed in Chapter Seven, they disseminate a positive image of Ethiopian Jews to the larger Israeli Jewish public.

1.1 Researching Race: A Theoretical Approach

The inquiry into race through the optic of Ethiopian Jews in current-day Israel takes root in the notion that genealogically, and thus, biologically, Jews form a single, identifiable race. Corcos attributes the ontology of this idea to Spanish racial anti-Semitism at the time of the Inquisition in the fifteenth century when "Jewishness was considered an inheritable biological characteristic" (2005: 37) and the "hatred of Jews had shifted from religious to racial bigotry" (p. 39). The stigma whereby Jews formed a distinct, identifiable dark-skinned race gained traction in Christian European pseudo-scientific racial ideology and anti-Semitism, and reached its apogee with the Jewish Holocaust or Shoah. With the rise of scientific racism in the eighteenth century and the quest to classify human sub-groups along a clear, racialized hierarchy, the "basic assumption" that Jews formed a "separate race was widespread throughout the nineteenth century and most of the twentieth century" (p. 49). In Christian Eastern Europe, Jews were portrayed as a culturally backward single dark race, similar to the way that the Roma were imagined. Jews were considered a threat to the national order at a time when sentimental nationalism was spreading throughout Europe. Ethno-religious cohesion among Jews across Europe, however, did not exist, as Khazzoom (2008) demonstrated.[7]

[7] In her historical analysis Khazoom shows that Jews from Germany and France began organizing Eastern Jews in the mid- to late 1800s according to the "Jewish stigma as an Oriental stigma," and considered them *Ostjuden* or "Eastern Jews" (p. 113).

Nevertheless, it is important to highlight that the state-sanctioned collective annihilation of Jews between 1939-1945, a project fuelled by racialized discourse, is one instance, albeit a pivotal one, where questions of phenotype, ideas about blood and Judaism intersect. The historical outcome of these intersections and the application of scientific language to construct Jews into a "racial group" is, like other racial identifications, locally bound and subject to change pending on where a given collective resides and at which point in time (Tessman and Bar On 2001; Banton 1978).

Similarly, the discourse on race purported by heads of state and world leaders is not formulated in a vacuum; rather, it is contingent on socio-political outcomes. On a political scale, the international discourse on Jews and race shifted in the aftermath of Nazi racism, the horrors of Word War II and the onset of Africa's decolonialization. "The race question" epitomized by the emergence of an anti-racism movement in the 1950s, was heralded by the newly established United Nations Education, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). UNESCO published four statements in 1950 with the objective to disseminate the "scientific truth" about race and officially condemn racism and its consequences. Advances in the fields of biology and genetics demonstrated that race is a socially ascribed truth rather than a biological one. Scientists argued that genetic diversity is as present within a given collectivity as it is between foreign populations, culminating in the oft-cited dogma in the social sciences that race, in fact, does not exist biologically and genetically (Nayak 2006). Backed by this scientific evidence, the post-Nazi, post-colonial and post-Civil Rights political climate has rendered the popular concept of race, as it was once used, to the margins of political incorrectness. The establishment of Israel in 1948 by victims of a genocide perpetrated against them because of their race, who declared national and

territorial independence for people who share a Jewish bloodline (i.e. racial continuity), represents a contradiction of sorts. This is further complicated by the post-Shoah climate of the "official" de-racing of Jews in Euro-American public sphere and in global institutions like UNESCO.

To state, however, that biological categorization is meaningless for organizing people racially, or that the official UNESCO stance on race as adopted by many countries worldwide has eliminated it, do not reduce the fundamental role that race plays today in structuring and representing the social world (Smedley 2007; Harrison 1995). Moreover, it does not evade the very real and concrete impact that racism continues to have (Romero 2008; Goldberg 1990). What this official de-racing points to instead is the ever-changing face of race, so to speak, and to the variety of discursive and structural channels through which it becomes operationalized in our race-less racial climate. The recent practice of re-inscribing race-as-biology within new genetics studies conducted in the wake of issues linked to biological citizenship and immigration (El-Haj 2007), works in tandem with the race-less racism prevalent today in Europe and North America (Goldberg 2011; Winant 2004).

Race, according to Kaye/Kantrowitz (2001), is not so much about denying the diversity of skin tones or hair textures among humans, or about putting forth biological truths that support or reject the idea of race. She argues instead that race is about focusing on the social process whereby references that index difference, identified almost randomly, become signifiers (Hall 1997) of separateness and of inferiority or superiority. Likewise, in the 2007 edition of *Race in North America: Origin and Evolution of a Worldview*, Smedley contends that:

> Some scientists who today reject the idea of race as a useful biological concept tend to argue that it is a myth or an abstraction that does not correspond with the reality and complexities of human biological variation. This has been confusing to those

> who grapple with the social reality of race and the concomitant experience of the same phenotypic variation that is assumed to be the basis for racial classifications. *The major reason for the confusion is that we seem incapable of making a necessary distinction between the natural biological variations in the human species that are products of largely evolutionary forces and the social meanings that were imposed on peoples with these varying features during the construction of the ideology of race*. (2007: 4-5, emphasis in original)

For scholars such as Smedley, the reality of race is not rendered meaningless in the wake of its biological "untruth." Rather, its resistance to becoming eliminated from our lexicon and its persistent power (Harrison 1995) as an essential "social fact" (Bonilla-Silva 1999), according to which socio-economic and political orders are configured and genocides committed, make race pivotal for understanding injustices and inequalities. This perspective of race, with its contradictory characteristics as a perduring source of division and hierarchisation on the one hand, and a tool for racial mobilization and coming together on the other hand, is important for the understanding of racial dynamics in contemporary Israel in the following ways. First, race-based practices of inclusion and exclusion in Israel lead us to question the cost of racism in terms of its impact on institutional and democratic participation in society. Second, racial discourse in Israel ricochets in a multitude of unexpected directions that add a layer of complexity not easily recognized by outsiders.

Stuart Hall poignantly illustrates the way in which racial discourse maintains boundaries between "us" and "them." In his landmark presentation at Goldsmiths College (UK) in 1997, he posits race not as a biological truth or untruth, but rather as a *discourse* manifested in language. Drawing from Foucault's work, he claims:

> [...] [T]he argument that I want to make to you is that race works like a language. And signifiers refer to the systems and concepts of the classification of a culture to its making meaning practices. And those things gain their meaning, not because of what they contain in their essence, but in the shifting relations of difference, which they establish with other concepts and ideas in a signifying field.
>
> […] [T]here is always a certain sliding of meaning, always a margin not yet encapsulated in language and meaning, always something about race left unsaid, always someone a constitutive outside, whose very existence the identity of race

> depends on, and which is absolutely destined to return from its expelled and objected position outside the signifying field to trouble the dreams of those who are comfortable inside.

The ways that social inscriptions of difference are made to discursively adhere to the body and thus assign value to it constitute for Hall a "system of meaning" that "becomes a factor in human culture and regulate[s] conduct" (*ibid.*). In other words, it is not so much about denying that we are not all the same in terms of "hair, skin and bones" – W.E.B. du Bois' bodily location of race – but rather, "that what matters are the systems we use to make sense, to make human societies intelligible."

When considered this way, race shifts away from biological essence and moves towards the production of ideas and knowledge about the surface features of bodies. What all of these recent studies hold in common is the notion that race is malleable and adaptable. It can seep into changing racial landscapes and political climates under new forms. Or, as Bonilla-Silva (1999) points out, race is a "social fact" similar to class and gender whereby "social relations between the races become institutionalized (forming a structure as well as a culture) and affect their social life whether individual members of the races want it or not" (Bonilla-Silva 1997:473 quoted in 1999).

When speaking of race, I refer to the process of indexing physical markers of differences that come to stand together with other references of stigma like religious authenticity, ethnicity, class, gender, culture, etc. Because the boundaries between these and race often coalesce, and because the racial dimension can overshadow other references and come to stand for them in practices of exclusion, I often use the term "ethno-racial" to underscore the murkiness between race and the racial label that references otherness. This is precisely how a variety of stigmas (ethno-cultural, linguistic, religious) ascribed to Ethiopian

Jews have bled into the stigma of race and blackness. Race thus epitomizes and comes to stand for a spectrum of differences that are not necessarily racial per se.

Race and racism in Israel are muted behind the discourse of ethnicity, Jewishness, and national unity. This does not prevent the widespread use of racial categories among Jews, as revealed in the following story. Sitting on a bus in Israel on my way home in April 2009, I began chatting with the driver. I offered him a piece of chocolate. Our exchange went as follows:

> Driver: No, I'll get fat, and I'm already like chocolate [pointing to his skin]. It will get more chocolate and then no woman will want me because I'm fat and chocolate [chuckling]. I'm black.

I looked at him closely and I couldn't help but laugh. In North America and Europe, he would look "Arab/Middle Eastern," yet in Israel, he is defined and sees himself as "black."

> Driver: You can't see? I'm black, Yemeni. Us and the Ethiopians, we're both black.

Knowing that the most popular gloss of "*cushi*"[8] [the so-called "N-word" in English] is not something I would utter to someone, I answered back hesitantly in Hebrew.

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[8] Etymologically speaking, the term cushi is in reference to the ancient land of Cush and its people (Cushites) mentioned in the Bible. The region corresponds to current-day Ethiopian and its surroundings. In regards to how it is used today in Israel, Kaplan (1999) writes that: "[…] [T]he *cushi*-nigger equivalence is problematic. Both in the Bible and in later Hebrew sources […], the term *Cushi* was a common term for Africans. In modern Hebrew it was also a nickname for others regardless of their origin, if they had particularly dark skin. What is important to note in this context, is that neither the Ethiopians' rejection of the term, nor the Israelis' growing sensitivity regarding its usage has led to its general abandonment. Other Africans and people of African descent continue to be referred to as *Cushim* by Israelis in general, and by Ethiopian immigrants themselves. Hebrew subtitles to foreign films routinely translate 'black man' and 'negro' as well as 'nigger', as *cushi*." (p. 543). As noted by Kaplan, my loose translation of the word cushi is problematic because in its popular form it can correspond to dark-skinned people as well as to the color black/brown, as in the case of 'chocolate cake,' or *ouga cushit*. Young Ethiopian Israelis I met during fieldwork, however, consistently translated this term into "nigger," and experienced it as a racial slur that indexes racial inferiority due to their blackness. My use of cushi in this dissertation is based on the meaning and symbols they attributed to the word.

GD: You are both like, "cushi"?

Without any qualms about my use of that word, he replied matter of factly:

Driver: Yes, we are both cushi. What are you doing here?

GD: I'm looking at racism and discrimination in Israel, related to the Ethiopians.

Driver: Racism? There is no racism here. Why, did someone tell you there was? Who told you that?

Shocked at how convinced he was that there was indeed no racism in Israel, I quietly whispered: "No," hoping this would put an end to our conversation.

My exchange with the Yemenite bus driver underscored the internalization process of his position as "black" (Jewish) in Israel, having accepted without question the color binary that differentiates him from "white" Ashkenazi Jews. It also points to the fluid social process of assigning skin-color labels whereby he draws a "racial" (i.e. somatic, skin-deep) similarity between Yemenites and Ethiopians. Most importantly for my discussion, these racialized positionings and their potential negative outcome are de-raced, so to speak ("there is no racism here"), in the context of the Israeli nation-state. Israelis such as this individual are clearly comfortable marking themselves by means of racial categories, yet racism itself has been de-raced into conversations that allow for discrimination.

In the case of Ethiopians, their position as Jews, racially speaking, and Ethiopians, culturally speaking, and blacks in terms of their low socio-economic status and skin color, leaves room for discussions about whether the discrimination they face is really about race, class, religious/national belonging or ethnicity. Critical Race Theory, originally born out of concerns brought forth in law and by legal scholars in regards to the role of the legal system in perpetuating racism in the United States, underscores through the concept of

intersectionality that race never operates in an isolated sphere. Rather, it functions within a web of interactions that equally call upon social divisions such as ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, etc. (Miles 2003; Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1993; Delgado and Stefancic 2001). Intersectionality, as I understand it, supports my argument that Ethiopian Israeli experiences with race cannot be separated from other stigmas with which they are associated. Moreover, Critical Race Theory reminds us that the legal, political, and social impact of racism against Ethiopian Israelis cannot be studied outside of the larger system that prescribes order and orderliness to Israeli society.

In fact, I demonstrate that their experiences with race and racism are fluid, run across and often overlap with what may seem like neat cases of racial discrimination. Legally speaking as well as in official practice and discourse, Ethiopians are an ethnic group on par with *Mizrahim* (Jews of North African or Middle eastern descent, literally called "Easterners"), or "Russians," or any other Jewish group. In discursive practices, this approach eliminates the possibility of race-based interpretations of discrimination among Jews in Israel, thus upholding the taboo of speaking about themselves in racial terms charged with memories from the Jewish Holocaust. On an official level, de-racing the relationship between Jews in Israel also cushions the sting of discrimination that exists among them by recoding intra-Jewish inequality and injustice in ethnic terms.

When I used the word "racism" in an interview with a (non-Ethiopian) community worker, he corrected me and explained that the "racism" faced by Ethiopians is not really about race but rather about *ethnic* discrimination due to the fact that they are *olim khadashim* (*olim* are Jewish immigrants who made aliyah [or immigrated] to Israel; *khadashim* means

new, in plural form[9]), similar to the one faced by Mizrahim who arrived before them. This example illustrates well Balibar's (1991) concept of a race-less understanding of racism,[10] also reinforcing Bonilla-Silva's argument of a color-blind racism (2010) that many non-Ethiopian Jewish Israelis evoked to explain instances of discrimination against Ethiopians. Looking at "racism without races" renders the task of studying race-based discrimination more elusive, especially in a country like Israel where Jewish groups are discursively re-formatted as *ethnic* rather than racial. The operating yet unspoken logic is the idea of a common race used to inscribe one's belonging to the Jewish meta-family.

Describing racism and discrimination within the dominant sphere of Israeli Jewish society, as experienced by Ethiopian Israelis, fits aptly with the concept of looking at "racism without races." Displacing the focus from "race" to "ethnicity" also underscores my use of the term "ethno-racial" to speak of race-based issues. Recoding racialized dynamics of internal exclusion (i.e. among Jewish populations) in ethnic discourse erases race from the lexicon of discrimination. According to Handelman,

> The categorization of Jewish ethnicities as distinct entities within a single classification of 'ethnic groups' has been one of the great efforts of smoothing on the part of the Israeli governmentality.
>
> In terms of Zionist ideology, this smoothing renders these ethnicities as the equals of one another within the Israeli national. In the analogy of the ideological pie, all its ethnic slices are equal to one another, existing on the same level of abstraction, each slice made of somewhat different combinations of the same essential substance. This egalitarian precept of the Zionist state can be obscured in Israeli realities of class, power, and discrimination. (2004: 49-50)

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[9] There is an expression in Hebrew, which states that Israel loves aliyah but not the olim.
[10] In a seminal publication that appeared in 1991, Balibar presents a framework for understanding the new language of race in the post-colonial era. Rather than classify populations deemed inferior on the basis of their "race," the current discourse denies that race exists or that it is used for classification, leading to implicit forms of racism today recoded as culture.

Intra-Jewish discrimination reflects distance from the Ashkenazi cultural mainstream and foreignness in relation to European Jewish traditions, as well as low socio-economic status and level of education. What complicates the phenomenon of intra-Jewish racism furthermore is that *all* Jews are racialized subjects, or have been at one point in the recent past.

Jews as Whites, Jews as Blacks

Race is a relational phenomenon. In other words, the racial category "black" gains traction in relation to what is considered its opposite: "white." Critical race theorists put forth approaches that move away from a race paradigm that holds whiteness as the norm (Romero 2008). Scrutinizing whiteness and the societal backdrop against which members of the non-dominant race are viewed lends to a relational approach (Stam 2001). Accordingly, the construction of racial classifications, a fluid and mobile process, is studied within the context of specific historical moments (Omi and Winant 1994). This approach leads to the questions of *who* is 'doing the racializing' and under which conditions, thus evoking power relations and the politics of identity. Looking at blackness in Israel thus implies undoing the unstable and problematic category of "white," its emergence in the local social context and its relation to "black." Once considered dark, oriental and gaunt in Europe, the "whitening" of Jewish immigrants to the United States supports this argument.

The United States received a massive influx of southern and eastern European immigrants, including Jews, after the 1880s. After the Second World War, the GI Bill of Rights was implemented as an act of affirmative action targeting returning soldiers. American Jews gained access to higher education, housing, and better jobs, which allowed

for social mobility and middle class stature (Brodkin 1998). This period in American history tipped the color spectrum whereby the boundaries of whiteness expanded. American Jews originally from Europe were socially constructed as "white" citizens, a move which reflected their upward mobility. As a result, they were positioned within the racial hegemonic population of whites.[11] Jews were nevertheless perceived as a different kind of white by others – 'white but not quite.'[12] Nevertheless, today they are members of the dominant white society with all the privileges and dilemmas that racial normalization entails (Brodkin 1998; Azoulay 2001; Kaye/Kantrowitz 2001).[13]

In regards to Ethiopian Jews and racial identification in Israel, it is important to account for Jews' racial identity as white and the process of Jewish whitening. In the current Euro-American imagination, it is a widely held belief that whiteness indexes Jewishness. The linkage between visible, biological reference of whiteness and the Jewish body, as I address later on, was not lost on the founders of the Jewish nation-state who internalized Euro-American measures of racial civility and the idea that Jew = white (Friedman and Santamaria 1990). This measurement was used as a yardstick to manage expectations of non-European Jews in Israel (Mizrahim and Ethiopians, in particular).

However, unlike in the United States, Israeli constructions of whiteness and blackness do not represent the main opposition and alterity along which society is organized.

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[11] See Ignatiev (1995) for the similar "whitening" of the Irish.
[12] See also Stratton (2000) as suggested by the external examiner. Stratton uses the expression "not quite white" to speak of Jews' ambiguity in regards to whiteness.
[13] Of course, this is not to imply that there are no perceived differences between Jews and other white Americans or that migration to the United States provided a panacea for discrimination against them. In post-World War II United States, European Jewish immigrants whitened at a time when anti-Semitism, anti-racism and the decreasing popularity of the idea that "Jews" are a race, gained traction (Brodkin 1998). However, other visible and symbolic references continued to be elicited to categorize and stereotype Jews, for example the mythical Jewish nose or the "Jew as a shrewd businessman."

In Israel, the main line of division runs along religion and race, articulated in terms of inclusion or exclusion from the Jewish people and the Israeli nation-state. Though I am aware of the American race model, in this research I have made an effort not to use it as my primary theoretical reference. The American race model has left its imprint on many societies that do not necessarily appropriate it wholesale (Hall 2011). This is the case in Israel where the primary racial binary is not black/white but rather Jew/non-Jew. To be sure, the racial binary black/white holds currency among Israeli Jews, as I demonstrate throughout the dissertation. This does not alter the main line of division between those who belong to the Jewish race and those situated outside of it, epitomized by Arabs and Palestinians (Handelman 2004).

1.2 Somatic (Ethiopian) Blackness and Jewishness in Israel

The articulation of Judaism in terms of a territorialized nation-state brought with it the bureaucratization of Jewish identity (Handelman 2004). Answers to the questions "Who is a Jew?" and "What does a Jewish person look like?" carry significant political weight within this context. Ironically, Israel's racialized identity politics harks back to years of violent government policies, treaties and pseudo-scientific claims that made Jews in Europe into a "race."

The arrival of Ethiopians to Israel highlighted and further exacerbated the tension between race and religion in Judaism, provoking fundamental questions about Jewish narratives of identity (Salamon 2001b). However politically incorrect in our post-Shoah world, Jews are perceived, and think of themselves, as a people and a *de facto* "race" in the genealogical sense. This becomes evident when looking at the story of how Ethiopian Jews

became members of the Jewish people (Kaplan 1999, 2003), which I explore in Chapter Three. In their case, issues of race and racism cause us to dismiss standard or familiar notions of race in practice, including biological and somatic ways of reading race and being black.

Race in its multiple forms seeped through narratives of Ethiopians with whom I was in contact. My approach to race implies locating their narratives within the larger continuum of racialized experiences among Jewish populations that preceded Ethiopians' arrival to Israel. Specifically, it entails looking at the history of the stigma associated with the Mizrahim. With time, this group moved up in the echelon of Israeli society. Their partial upward mobility coincided with the arrival of Ethiopians, in other words the "*real* cushis."[14] Unlike the Mizrahim, Ethiopian Jewish blackness can never be erased or passed onto a darker (i.e. more 'backward') Jewish Other. This is the fixity of race as stigma I show in Chapter Six. Breaking the glass ceiling of Israeli absorption is not contingent on how westernized, educated, or Israeli Ethiopian Jews become.[15]

The stigma of somatic blackness is compounded by the stigma of Ethiopian (black) blood and the ambiguity of their Jewish bloodline. In 1996, news leaked that Magen David Adom, Israel's Red Cross, was discarding blood donated by Ethiopian Israelis. Grief and discontent that had been accumulating over the years, spilled over (Anteby-Yemini 2004). Thousands of Ethiopians poured to the streets in protest. The "Blood Scandal" proved to Ethiopians that the stigma of their blood carried with it a *racialized* component that indexed

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[14] I borrow the concept of Ethiopians as being the "real cushis" from an Ethiopian Jewish interviewee who was explaining the difference between Mizrahi "cushis" and Ethiopian "cushis," qualifying the latter as the "real" ones.

[15] Of course, this label is transferred onto non-Jewish African labour migrants by Israeli society, including Ethiopian Jews themselves, as discussed in Chapter Six.

their ambiguous position as genealogically, and thus biologically, pure Jewish.[16] It also questioned their ability to participate in the Israeli polity as "fit" and "healthy," read masculine, Jews. The Blood Scandal irrevocably racialized public discourses on intra-Jewish relations from the perspective of Ethiopian Jews. It legitimized their public outcries of Jewish-on-Jewish racism in a context where the taboo of racial discourse between Jews, prevails.

1.3 METHODOLOGY

I began researching the integration of Ethiopian Jews to Israeli society in 1999 when, as a part of my master's research on the tiny group of Ethiopian Jews living in Montreal, I traveled to Israel to meet other Ethiopian Jews.[17] I lived in the south of Israel for a couple of months and volunteered at an Ethiopian community aid organization in order to gain a direct sense of their lived realities. During my stay, I made several close Ethiopian Israeli friends whose life trajectories moved me deeply. Bearing witness to the quasi-obsession and godlike status that Ethiopian children attributed to the rapper Tupac Shakur, and that young adults attributed to Bob Marley and reggae music, raised more questions rather than provided answers about their place among the Jewish people. The children's automated and uncritical attraction to these black artists was compounded by an emerging African-Caribbean club scene in Tel Aviv where Ethiopian Israelis arrived in droves on weekends. I

[16] An article on January 25, 1996 in a daily Hebrew newspaper reported that blood donated by Ethiopian Israelis were quietly discarded by the Israeli medical establishment (Seeman 1997) out of fear of HIV/AIDS contamination. Both Seeman (1997) and Anteby-Yemeni (2004) contend that the blood was initially tested and sorted prior to being destroyed.

[17] This research became my Master's thesis (see Djerrahian 2001).

returned to Israel eight years later to conduct doctoral research, first in 2007 and again in 2008.

In the beginning I focused on the relationship Ethiopian Jews had with American rap culture, most especially in regards to its portrayal of race. It quickly became clear to me that the mobilization of African-American black consumer culture by a segment of young Ethiopians was just one piece of a larger phenomenon revolving around race and integration.

As is the case for immigrant children in receiving countries around the world, the first generation of Ethiopian Israeli youngsters and teenagers born in Israel felt a severe disconnection from their family's frameworks of belonging. Indeed, the past in Ethiopia was often a source of deep embarrassment and shame for immigrant youth, who considered it a hindrance to their present-day existence as Israelis. Instead, they selected usable information about their Ethiopian heritage highlighted in rap music and reggae, thanks to the Rastafarians' deification of Ethiopia's last emperor, Haile Selassie. Subtleties like this to be found in the lived realities of Ethiopian Israeli teenagers and youngsters provide the lens for situating their marginalization within existing local racial constructs and global ideas of modern blackness. Thus, I found that it was not only important to explore stories told about this group, but also stories they told themselves about their own history and community in Israel (largely) through the idiom of race. This story doesn't end where rap and hip-hop begin.

My focus shifted soon after fieldwork began. Rather than looking exclusively at teenagers coming of age who identified with American hip-hop, I became more curious about another facet of Ethiopian Israeli life, one where empowered and educated Ethiopian

Israelis in their 20s are 30s worked to embody the transformations they wished to see in Israel. These individuals range from artists (rappers, musicians, producers, photographers, dancers, writers, actors, etc.) to activists, entrepreneurs, lawyers, social workers, and academics.

In order to capture a glimpse of the different locations where Ethiopians settled, I divided my time in Israel between four districts: the Southern District, the Tel Aviv District, the Central District and the Jerusalem District. I spent the first three months of fieldwork in the city of Be'er Sheva, the largest city in the Negev desert in the south of Israel (see Figure 1). Be'er Sheva hosted the first small wave of Ethiopian immigrants at the end of the 1970s and early 1980s, prior to the massive airlifts. It is also known for its high concentration of Mizrahim as they were placed in development towns at a time when the state was seeking to expand its hold on the desert during the 1960s following its capture by Israeli forces in 1949 (Yiftachel 2000). Since the 1980s Be'er She'va has received waves of immigrants from Ethiopia and the former Soviet Union. There is a significant population of Bedouin Arabs on the outskirts of the city. Be'er Sheva is also home to a major research hospital (Soroko), one of the top universities in the country (Ben-Gurion University of the Negev), and numerous cultural and artistic centers.

For the remainder of fieldwork, I was based an hour outside of Tel Aviv and traveled constantly to neighborhoods in Israel with the highest concentration of Ethiopian Israelis, save one – Netanya in the north. During this time I also volunteered in Ethiopian community centers located in four different cities. In each case, I contacted a youth worker and/or coordinator, introduced myself as an anthropologist doing research on youth and race, and asked whether I could teach English as a volunteer and do observations at the

same time. This allowed me to meet and work with teenagers as well as educators and community workers of all ages, some of whom I helped with their English homework or taught English to.

In addition to my role as participant-observer in youth centers I became a regular at cultural events organized by the Ethiopian student association (university or college). I attended numerous nightclubs owned by Ethiopians, or that catered to an Ethiopian crowd in Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. I went to concerts (reggae, hip-hop, Ethiopian music), participated in make-up parties for Ethiopian girls in their homes, volunteered on school trips with elementary children, took part in hip-hop dance workshops, and attended official commemorative events, Ethiopian craft shows, business launches, art shows (dance, theater, comedy, etc.), and religious festivals. I spoke with and/or interviewed journalists, students, academics, long-time activists of Ethiopian Jewish causes and recent ones as well, musicians (hip-hop, reggae, Ethiopian), dancers, artists, comedians, social workers, rabbis, community center coordinators, bus drivers, Ethiopian club owners and business people, among others. I had conversations about race and racism in Israel with non-Ethiopian Israeli friends and strangers alike, and recorded any local media reportage (newspaper, print or on-line, television) that portrayed the lives of Ethiopian Jews to the larger public in Israel.

Between 2007 and 2009, I conducted fieldwork focusing primarily on Ethiopian Israeli teenagers and young adults between the ages of 20 and 35, in cities with a high concentration of Ethiopian Jews. Approximately 45 formal interviews were recorded and 60 observation notes taken based on informal conversations. Each individual I interviewed was informed about his or her right to remain anonymous in this research and to withdraw from it at any time. Some stated that since they had nothing to hide I could use their real names;

others agreed to be anonymous. I chose to keep the identity of each interviewee anonymous, to the extent that at times I may alter the informants' personal characteristics such as gender, or the location where interviews or observations took place, as well as those of their family members when this does not hinder comprehension.

I also remained quite anonymous while living in Israel once I passed the security conundrum at the airport. In a country like Israel, where almost half the Jewish population comes from North Africa and the Middle East, my physical features lend themselves easily to being mistaken for a local Jewish Israeli. This was reinforced by the fact that I was researching a Jewish group and spoke Hebrew, the underlying logic being that only a Jewish person would wish to do so. As a young woman who looked like a local, I hovered uncomfortably between the internal and external boundaries of a society in which displays of power, machismo, and hegemonic masculinity carry important social capital (Kaplan 2006). To the everyday Israeli, I was considered a member of the dominant Jewish society – one of them. To some Ethiopian Israeli kids (usually teenagers, not adults) I spoke with, however, the racial discourse articulated a clear separation between "us" blacks, as in, "us" Ethiopian Jews and "them" the rest of Israel's Jewish population, composed of "the whites" (*ha levanim*). The physical attributes that cast me *oriental-ish* in North America provided the basis for grouping me with the unquestioned "white" group in Israel. Thus, somewhat to my surprise, my foreign whiteness and the general assumption that I am Greek, Italian, Moroccan, or Lebanese in relation to in the Canadian setting were normalized as "white" and "Jewish" in Israel. For the youths I spoke with, I too was part of a "whiteness" as a category of power they felt excluded from (Harrison 1995).

There was, however, one significant factor that allowed for some kind of familiarity between adolescent Ethiopian Israelis and myself I met: in different ways we were both a product of Ethiopia. As a *ferenj* (Amharic for a white person, a foreigner; it can also carry a negative connotation) born in Ethiopia, my basic knowledge of Ethiopian culture and a few words in Amharic amused people and provided a symbolic common ground that was more meaningful than I had originally anticipated. For one, having my family history tied to Ethiopia placed me within an intimate sphere linked to Ethiopia and to their families. This connection made me starkly different from other "white" Israeli researchers. This was not a perfect route to access, however. In speaking with Ethiopian Israelis who conducted research among their kin, it became evident that the ease, comfort, and proximity that informants felt with members of their own community provided insights to a variety narratives not readily shared with non-Ethiopian researchers, including myself. I also recognize that for some people, other doors and avenues of discourse were closed to me specifically because I am not Jewish, Israeli, or even Ethiopian. My rapport with some Ethiopian Jews may have also been influenced by the fact that I am "Christian," the most powerful religious group in Ethiopia among whom the Beta Israel lived for centuries as an ostracized minority.

My focus on the younger generation is not meant to ignore or discount the importance of what older Ethiopians have to say. The older generation, parents, grandparents, older siblings and other family members, are at the very foundation of the experiences lived by youths and young adults socialized in Israel. This is particularly true when one realizes that aliyah of the individuals that stand at the center of this study literally

occurred on the backs of the older generation, and at a great expense, one unknown to their own children or to the Israeli public.[18]

The precarious situation in the Horn of Africa propelled Ethiopian Jews to fulfill the dream of "returning" to Jerusalem. The personal sacrifices endured by leaving the comfort of their homes, families, and friends in Ethiopia, living as refugees and making aliyah, cannot be underestimated. This was compounded by the fact that the dream of return came crashing down with the reality of being integrated – they the "blackest" of "black" Jews who were by and large from a rural African provenance, farmers with rudimentary tools – into an industrialized nation-state held together by an unforgiving national ethos and a religious identity politics based on lineage, essentialism, and primordialism. What this older generation of Ethiopian Israeli immigrants experienced is nothing short of a total upheaval of their existence. The Ethiopian aliyah is represented as a miraculous redemption and proof of Israel's herculean might. This narrative contrasts with the very real, day-to-day *malaise* of integration overshadowed by the celebratory biblical interpretation. Older Ethiopian Jews were required to remodel, hide, or erase core anchors of their pious selves in the process of transitioning to more mainstream Jewish Israeli religious norms. They also bore witness to the rapid secularization of their children in the Holy Land.

Thus, spiritual migration to Israel finds meaning not only amidst the over-publicized story of "return," as evoked in Jewish nationalist thought, but the quiet and disquieting experience of "ruptures" as well (Shohat 2001). The "cost of aliyah" (Kaplan 2009, personal communication) is yet to be tabulated. In many ways, the following pages are a tribute to

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[18] I have labelled this age group the "legs of the aliyah" in reference to Ethiopian migration cohorts starting from the late 1970s, many who trekked to Sudan by foot.

parents and grandparents of the population I deal with, their children and grandchildren, as they rub up against the older generation.

The Politics of Choosing a Fieldwork Site

It is uncommon for outsiders without identity claims to either (Jewish) Israelis or (Arab) Palestinians to conduct fieldwork at the heart of one of the most politically charged regions of the twentieth century. Among other things it meant working within the context of nationalized anxieties and ongoing competitions over claims to one's place in the world. The mix between identity politics and heightened security is unforgiving. This is manifested in the way in which Israeli society finds its bearing in practices and discourses of controlling borders, be they territorial, national, religious, or ethnic.

At home in Canada, then, when introducing this research subject I usually found myself faced with a modicum of pressure to display a partisan affiliation while having to explain to surprised colleagues that working in a country whose government uses coercive, violent measures was not unusual for anthropologists. In fact, many people undertake research in some of the most undemocratic regions of the world within a discipline that flourished thanks to Europe's colonial enterprises. In that respect, Israel is no different. I was highly cognizant of the inhumane treatment of people who pose a threat to the Jewish nation-state in one form or another.

In Israel, one professional attempted to understand my choice of topic by trying to rationalize the fascination that motivates so many "Christians" to research (Ethiopian) Jews, underlining the uncommon position of a non-Jewish scholar studying a Jewish population. Another suggested I change the focus group of my topic, surely because of the amount of

researchers already working on this group. Others gave the following suggestions: as a "Christian" born in Ethiopia as I was, why didn't I study Ethiopian Christians in Israel instead? Or, since I am Armenian, I could research Armenians in Jerusalem. Another person questioned out loud my "psychological link" to Ethiopian Jews before catching him/herself mid-sentence and reframing the question to seem less intrusive and, perhaps, less Freudian.

The operative logic behind these suggestions demonstrates the prominence of the essentialist views about ethnicity, race, and religion in which I was most interested. In Israel, social categories like Jew, Christian, Arab, and so on, function as "absolute identities" (Herzfeld 1992), impressing their presence upon all overlapping, conflicted interests (national, territorial, socio-religious, etc.). The almost total lack of self-reflexivity in the English and French academic literature on Ethiopian Israelis,[19] caused me to question – *both* in the field and upon my return – the logic whereby some academic interventionists in Israel seem to revert automatically to the shared sphere of a meta-Jewishness to neutralize any need for serious thought about positionality, self-reflexivity, and power dynamics among themselves as Jewish researchers and Jewish Ethiopian Israeli participants.[20]

1.4 Overview of the Dissertation

Black Matters: Young Ethiopian Jews and Race in Israel is separated into eight chapters. Chapter Two introduces the reader to how Ethiopian Jews came to be included in the

[19] While I am aware of the general body of literature written in Hebrew on this group, in this thesis I rely mostly on academic works in English and French.
[20] I have published a book chapter on this topic elsewhere in regards to my own experience as a non-Jewish, foreign researcher in Israel in which I broach these very questions (Djerrahian 2011).

national project of modern-day Israel. I contextualize this process by explaining the history of the ethno-racial schema among Jews in Israel, particularly in regards to Mizrahim that preceded the arrival of Ethiopians. I trace past events relating to their recognition, and thus, ascription as "authentic" Jews. I also describe the ensuing internal transformations that came about due to exchanges with European Jews prior to their official, halachic acceptance that led to their inclusion into the Jewish meta-family.

In Chapter Three I detail the connection between Ethiopian Jews and race from a historical perspective by analyzing the circumstances that ushered the marking of their status as legitimate Jews in 1973, as determined by the highest Jewish religious courts in Israel. This turning point in their fight for recognition was a precursor to their aliyah, which allowed them to eventually receive Israeli citizenship. I show how the context of their departure from Ethiopia, the context of arrival in Israel and the on-going dialogue between both places informs recent Ethiopian Jewish history and the current issues these Jews are facing today. An important set of issues revolve around racial differentness, as in Goffman's notion of differentness discussed briefly in the opening section of this introduction, of somatic and epidermic stigmas, as well as lingering questions about the authenticity and purity of their Jewishness. I examine the relationship between Ethiopia, on the one hand, and Jews in the diaspora and in Israel on the other hand. I scrutinize how, along with pivotal transformations at regional and national levels in both countries, economic and political events facilitated the emigration of Beta Israel to Israel.

Chapter Four presents an overview of Ethiopian Jewish life in contemporary Israel. I argue that race and racism are not only located in the boundaries between Ethiopian Jews and the rest of Israel's Jewish population, or between Jews and Palestinian "Arabs," but

also amongst Ethiopian Jews themselves. This is highlighted in the differentiation made by older Ethiopian Jews between those considered to be descendants of slaves (*barya*) and those who were their former owners (*chewa*). I address the internal dynamics within the "Ethiopian community" through the optic of the changing Ethiopian family unit and two other sites of post-aliyah transformation: gender and generational relations.

Chapter Five looks at the most obvious and talked-about form of blackness among young Ethiopian Jews: their appropriation and attachment to African-American music and culture, particularly hip-hop and reggae. To explain American rap music's international popularity and the implications of its widespread presence around the world, including Israel, I draw from cultural globalization theory. I show how globalized blackness in the form of reggae music and American hip-hop culture constitutes one of the most meaningful and empowering resources at the disposal of Ethiopian Israelis youngsters and teenagers, particularly boys, an important segment of whom feel disempowered, to inscribe themselves within the Jewish people and the Israeli nation-state, by way of performing masculinity, modernity and coolness.

Ethnographic vignettes that detail the dynamics of racial exclusion and their impact on Ethiopian Jews make up the bulk of Chapter Six. I analyze the types of stigma that keep Ethiopians at the margins of mainstream Jewish society. I do so by exploring practices of exclusion and experiences of paternalistic infantalization that Ethiopian Israelis are subjected to at work, in schools, in nightclubs, on the street, in the bus, etc.

In Chapter Seven, I challenge the generalization of assumptions about the uncritical appropriation of African-American culture and music onto the Ethiopian community as a whole. I problematize this connection through a discussion of adult Ethiopian Israelis who

remain connected to, but critical of, the experience of African-Americans and their musical/artistic productions. These individuals explore other venues for manifesting localized blackness that speaks to their surrounding racial sensibilities. I look at how the dynamics of exclusion presented in Chapter Six provide the background for the mobilization of blackness through business ventures and artistic endeavors, and introduce the possibility of an Ethiopian Jewish middle-class being shaped by those involved in such projects.

In Chapter 8, the conclusion, I highlight the main ideas and arguments presented in this thesis and end by discussing the blackness of Ethiopian Jews vis-à-vis another population in Israel who claim the position of being the "blacks" of Israel.

Chapter 2

HISTORY OF ALIYAH:

JEWISH ORIENTALISM, OTHERNESS AND RACE IN ISRAEL

> Late afternoons usually meant a welcomed respite from the summer heat in Israel. On one such afternoon in June 2008, I was kindly allowed to participate in a workshop for Ethiopian Jewish immigrants in a new Ethiopian cultural center attached to a synagogue shaped like a *tukul*, a traditional Ethiopian rural house with a conic roof, and the distinguishable shape of Beta Israel synagogues. When I arrived at the community center, 20 Ethiopian women, mostly elderly, were sitting on chairs lined up along the wall. Two of the social workers I was speaking with, whose parents had both originated in North Africa, introduced a special guest. A young, vibrant woman in her 20s, with bleached blond hair and long, fake nails, something I would often see on Israeli women in the heavily Mizrahi populated area of Be'er Sheva, had come to give belly dancing lessons. Amit welcomed everybody and then proceeded to wrap a belly-dancing shawl across her hips and on a few other women, including the social workers who seemed clueless as to how to go about this, and blasted the music. Unlike most *muzika mizrahit* I had heard so far, a style of Israeli music that combines Western musical influences from Europe with Middle Eastern and North African music, usually sung in Hebrew, Amit had popular Arabic songs reverberating through the room at a very high volume. To an outside observer such as myself, the scene was ironic: there I was with four Mizrahi women, one of whom was the belly dancer, teaching a group of Tigrinya-speaking, pious elderly Ethiopian immigrants, most of them dressed in traditional Ethiopian garb with covered heads, facial and wrist tattoos as well as traditional Ethiopian jewelry, how to gyrate their hips and swiftly shift their pelvis forward and backward to the hugely popular Arabic dance song "Salem Alekum." (Observation June 18, 2008, Be'er Sheva)

The irony I underscore in this scene points to the layers of contradiction that constitute Israeli society and the changes that have taken root in its short history. For a nation-state historically focused on deleting, at times violently, "oriental" references, the scene of pious and traditionally dressed Ethiopian Jewish women gyrating their hips to the sounds of a popular song in Arabic, the language of Israel's threatening "Arab/Palestinian" Other, was quite a sight. Firstly, it denoted how the Mizrahi belly dancer – a member of a marginalized and racialized Jewish population – has now transformed into a representative of things Israeli: in this case supported by a song in Arabic. Secondly, the belly dancing workshop shows the extent to which "Easterness" – or *mizrahyiut* in Hebrew – has come to dominate the Israeli identity landscape. Lastly, Ethiopian women's active participation in

this workshop can be read in terms of their willingness to integrate into Israeli society, defined here by its oriental influences.

Israeli Jewish society underwent pivotal changes from the time of Mizrahim's immigration to the arrival of Ethiopian Jews. Today, Israel is more of an individualistic society based on meritocracy and networks rather than the socialist nation its founders had imagined (Ben-Rafael and Peres 2005; Ben-Eliezer 2003). Bureaucratization, rapid economic liberalization (Ben-Eliezer 2003), the formation of a prominent middle-class private sector (Ben-Rafael and Peres 2005; Adler and Kahane 1984), high scale industrialization, a neo-liberal market economy and the development of a consumer culture, have positioned Israel globally as a Western-influenced enclave in the Middle East. In this emerging westernized society, Mizrahi have become full-fledged Israelis. In Be'er Sheva, many individuals I met who work in the Ethiopian Jewish "absorption" industry were themselves Mizrahi, signaling their socialization as bona fide Israelis who now serve as a reference point for new olim.

In this chapter I turn to the dynamics of Jewish ethnic and race relations in Israel, into which Ethiopians established themselves with the advent of their aliyah. Ethiopian Jews' initial encounter with Israel occurred in "absorption centers" (Hertzog 2013) and in their interactions with the general public. I highlight the ways in which these experiences shaped the class-based racial and ethnic stigmas associated with the group today. I argue that the Ethiopian Jewish "absorption industry," composed of governmental and quasi-governmental actors, operated on the basis of the same logic used to modernize Mizrahim some 50 years earlier. These experiences ushered the "Ethiopian community's" collective mobilization as Israel's latest black Jews. In the following section I provide a brief history of

Israel and describe the landscape of intra-Jewish ethno-racial relations. It is important to understand this background because Ethiopian Jewish blackness emerged in its wake.

2.1 Context of Ethiopian Jewish aliyah

The seeds of an emerging European Jewish nationalism, planted at the turn of the twentieth century, blossomed with Israel's independence in 1948 (Ben-Rafael and Peres 2005). The Zionist project in pre-state Palestine encompassed an ethos of colonialism and militarism galvanized by the large-scale mobilization of human resources. The intensification of Jewish influx into Palestine during the British Mandate worked in parallel with the displacement and diasporization of local Arab and Palestinian populations. The call to redeem Judaism by way of aliyah and occupation, along with the "demographic politics" that started at least 30 years prior to Israel's independence (Leibler and Breslau 2005) occurred within the context of violence and conflict with neighboring populations.

Theodor Herlz's vision of political Zionism broke away from messianic or religious Judaism as a central binding principle. His idea purported a secular Jewish state with Hebrew as a national language (Zawadzki 1996). Herzl's Jewish society was modeled on the premise of a modernist and collectivist society that included social institutions like the *kibbutzim* (collective community settlements) and the *moshavim* (cooperative agricultural settlements) (Almog 2000). Central to the Zionist master narrative are discourses of enlightenment, progress, and modernization (Shohat 2001), embodied by the concept of the "New Jew." Young, secular, muscular and productive white Jewish European men represented the pioneering "New Jew." The ideal Jewish person was an antithesis to the stereotype of the awkward, gaunt, and anxiety-ridden nineteenth century diaspora Jew,

conceptualized as Oriental in the European anti-Semitic psyche (Khazzoom 2008; Kaufman and Galily 2009).

The *tzabar* (or sabra in English)[21] – the white, archetypal modern Jewish person socialized in pre-state Palestine amidst the labor movement – represents the "generational unit identified not by country of birth, but rather by affiliation to the institution [of the Jewish community in Palestine] […], educated under the mythical aura of the pioneer settler and defender" (Almog 2000: 2). By the time of independence, second-generation Jewish immigrants born and raised in Palestine constituted a social category distinguishable from new arrivals (Gottman 1951).

For the European fathers of political Zionism, the establishment of a Jewish home in Palestine required the creation of a unified nation of Jewish peoples (Zawadzki 1996). This proved to be quite a challenge since, aside from a shared religious sphere, no common culture existed among them (Kaufman and Galily 2009). From the inception of Israel, nation and state formed a single entity. After 1948, the invention and shaping of the category of nationality demanded the capturing and containment of essential difference (Handelman 2004: 45). From the outset of contemporary Jewish settlement in Palestine, aligning the heterogeneity of incoming olim with Zionism's understanding of modernity was, and remains to this day, a vital practice for Jewish nation-building.

For the Israeli government and quasi-state institutions such as the Jewish Agency, aliyah represents a colossal undertaking of mobilizing resources and organizing logistics such as food and lodging for thousands within a short period. As a settler and settling state

[21] Almog (2000:3) locates the temporal boundaries of the sabra generation between 1930 and 1960, and defines it as a group of people whose formative years coincide with those of the new Israeli society.

(Yiftachel and Meir 1998), the mass arrival of Jewish cohorts ensured the development of a Jewish enclave and subsequently, nation-state, within colonial Palestine.

According to Klausner (1960), the nationalist immigration of secular Jews that constitute the First aliyah took place between 1882 and 1903 (see also Eisenstadt 1955). This period saw the arrival of some 20,000 middle-class students from Tsarist Russia. Between 1903 and 1914 the Second aliyah brought yet another 35,000 individuals from the same region, although this cohort was marked by a socialist Zionist bent (*ibid*.). Aliyah during the interim period between World Wars essentially came from western and eastern Europe. Kimmerling (2001) contends that the governing coalition, primarily Jews of Polish or Russian origin who arrived between 1904 and 1923 and their descendents, constituted the ruling hegemonic elite of Israel from the birth of the nation well into the late 1970s.

Approximately 2.5 million Jews immigrated between 1948 and 1995, 33% from Eastern Europe. From about 1948 until 1968, Africa and Asia provided the largest bulk of Jewish immigrants (DellaPergola 2000). Diversity among olim from Europe and Russia led to distinct settlement patterns along ethnic and linguistic lines. Both groups, however, were on par in considering Jewish populations from the Middle East to be starkly different from their own communities. The encounter between Jewish immigrants from Europe and Russia, and those of Maghrebin and Middle Eastern descent, occurred at a time when Israel was establishing its hegemonic position over local Arab populations. This led to the consolidation of the fundamental racial distinction of Israeli society between Jew and the ultimate non-Jew – in other words, Palestinians. Coupled with the authorities' orientalist ideology and their quest to annihilate the "Arab" threat, a clear east/west divide emerged.

This distinction is the basis for the invention of the Jewish ethnic/racial category "Orientals" (Mizrahim). This process of turning disparate Others into a single category – Mizrahim – in turn led to the construction of a homogenous collectivity of Ashkenazim – in other words, of those who were doing the categorization (Khazzoom 2008). Turning diverse groups of European and Russian Jews into white Ashkenazim diminished ethnic inequality among them (*ibid.*). Diversity among Jewish populations, however, was not lost on observers such as Jean Gottman, the French-Jewish geographer. As early as 1951, he writes:

> Si l'on a pu discuter … sur ce que constituait l'ensemble des Juifs dans le monde: une religion ou une race, un peuple ou une entité nationale, un coup d'oeil sur Israël établit un fait indiscutable, et c'est l'extrême variété des éléments divers qui forment aujourd'hui, en Israël, un raccourci à la Diaspora. (1951:111)

Calling forth imageries of a "crossroads of civilizations" (p. 112, my translation) during early statehood denotes the meeting of otherwise isolated and contradictory worlds ("the Orient" and "the Occident"). The coming together of these populations under the umbrella of Jewish nationalism speaks to political Zionism's success in bringing together groups of people considered to be in opposition to one another. This is also true when considering, for example, the interaction between Jews from countries situated on either sides of the Cold War.

Between 1961 and the early 1990s, Jews of Asian and African origin outnumbered the Ashkenazi population (Ducker 2006). Their demographic majority status shifted when another 800,000 immigrants began to arrive in 1989, mainly from the Soviet Union and Ethiopia (Elazar and Weinfeld 2000). The former region provided Israel with the largest number of Jewish immigrants (Damian and Rosenbaum-Tamari 2000).

Far from the envisioned paradise, Beta Israel romantic expectations of "Jerusalem" quickly evaporated amidst the hustle and bustle of urban Israel.[22] In order to understand the climate in which they arrived, it is important to firmly embed them within Israel's history of migration, and race and ethnic relations. The remainder of the chapter turns to the aliyah and the integration of Jews from the Middle East and the Maghreb. Understanding the treatment of olim from the Middle East and the Maghreb some 40 years earlier is critical because the approach to their absorption determined the various cultural tracking methods applied to Ethiopian Jews.

The Aliyah of Jews from the Middle East and the Maghreb

The popularity of the kibbutz was already in decline during the early years of independence. Gottman remarks that most Maghrebin and Middle Eastern immigrants in the 1950s preferred living outside the kibbutz, adding that "on a donc adopté pour les coloniser le système de villages assez homogènes, groupant les immigrés d'une même origine ou au plus de deux origines" (1951:115). His concept of "colonization," which can also be more appropriately renamed "internal colonization" following Khazzoom, was devised to create intra-group cohesion between recent Jewish cohorts and those already socialized as sabras.

Contrary to Gottman, who claims that Mizrahim had the power to choose where they settled, Mizrahim were directed, at times forcefully, to live in peripheral areas called development towns (Yiftachel 1997; Khazzoom 2008). The paternalistic approach of Israeli

[22] It is common among migrants of any background to glorify expectations of a new home preceding their experience of encounter and integration.

authorities informed the official Zionist discourse that recounted the arrival of Jews from the Orient in terms of redemption and rescue. The Ashkenazi establishment is viewed as helping immigrants overcome their "backward" and "primitive" state. This meant shining the light of Western enlightenment upon those blinded by the Levantine culture from which they originated (Wurmser 2005; Ein-Gil and Machover 2009). Shohat writes that

> within this Promethean rescue narrative the concepts of "ingathering" and "modernization" naturalized and glossed over the epistemological violence generated by the Zionist vision of the New Jews. This rescue narrative also elided Zionism's own role in provoking ruptures, dislocations and fragmentation, not only for Palestinian lives but also – in a different way – for Middle Eastern/North African Jews.[23] (2001: 58)

The model of the "New Jew" served as a benchmark for devising integration policies and practices for Mizrahi immigrants (Shoshana 2007). Oppressive measures to "de-Arabize" and strip "primitive" Mizrahim of their religious and traditional lifestyle in order to raise their level of civilization are well documented (Yonah 2004; Shohat 1988, 2001; Wurmser 2005; Ducker 2006).[24] Identifying the Mizrahim as civilizationally inadequate vis-à-vis the sabra model, Israeli authorities called for the implementation of a set of practices, attitudes and beliefs in order to maintain Israeli society's high level of modernity. This entailed

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[23] Authors who take issue with the rescue narrative claim that North African and Middle Eastern Jews were brought and even coerced into coming to Israel during a crucial time in the state-building project, and provided a Jewish alternative to cheap Arab labor (Shohat 1988, 2001; Ducker 2006, Ein-Gil and Machover 2009). Interestingly, Arab labor in Israel is also commonly known as "black labor" or *avoda shkhora* in Hebrew, not necessarily because it is related to skin tone, but rather because of the menial nature of the work. Avoda shkhora can also be used to refer to any hard work in general, whether manual, or in an office, etc.

[24] Different labels were applied to speak of the Mizrahim. According to Shohat (2001) the previous term "Sephardim" was replaced by Mizrahim in the early 1990s, though descendants from Islamic countries began referring to themselves as such in the 1970s. Widely used in popular Hebrew, the orientalist label "Mizrahim" is normalized in Israel, continuously reinforcing essentialist dichotomies by interpreting East and West through the scope of modernization discourse and the colonialist tropes that give direction and credence to the materialization of political Zionist ideology (Shohat 1988, 2001).

managing what Khazzoom, taking her cue from Goffman's work on stigma (1963), calls "spoiled identity" (2003: 482) – that is, the Jewish Oriental within.

Khazzoom (2008) purports that the authorities' low assessment of immigrants' capacity to step up to the demands of building a Western Jewish nation-state and the subsequent de-orientalizing measures, historically take root in a series of self-imposed westernization projects that began in Europe. Labeling Jews in Europe as Oriental or Asiatic led to a whole-scale internalization and embodiment of Western ideals by European Jewish fathers of political Zionism. De-orientalization, Khazzoom argues, appears in Zionism as a project of modernization and westernization. This logic explains why the preferred mode of governance during early migration set in motion another cycle of de-orientalization, whereby the most "oriental" Jews present in Israel at the time – North African and Middle Eastern – became the targets of reform. Mizrahim behavioral and cultural accoutrements brought home tangible reminders of a regressive, unusable oriental past that the early pioneers worked hard to erase. The prescribed remedy called for practices akin to internal colonialism (*ibid.*).

In their attempt to minimize what absorbing agencies viewed as backward parental influence, Mizrahi children were separated from their families in transit camps and taken under the charge of authorities (Halper 1985). Children responded to such pressures by viewing their own parents as primitive and without capital. As a result a growing sense of alienation developed between generations (*ibid.*). Other absorption methods ranged from Hebraizing Arabic names, cutting the locks of hair of religious men, and encouraging Western-style dress. The most dismal form of internal colonization, however, is the

institutionally-coordinated kidnapping of Yemeni newborns who were given for adoption to Ashkenazi families (Shohat 1988).

The "Mistake of the 50s"

In Israel the state is responsible for absorbing, to use common discourse, Jewish immigrants. During early statehood, Mizrahim were directed toward transit camps in peripheral areas (Yiftachel 1998). Hertzog (1999) argues that these camps became centers of bureaucratic control and played an important hand in the Mizrahim's socio-economic marginalization. As a society espousing an ideology of the "ingathering of the exiles" articulated through modernization discourse (Shohat 2001), absorption agencies applied forms of social control by placing large segments of Jewish arrivals from the Middle East and the Maghreb into economically-deprived and ethnically-segregated development towns[25] or "outer cities" (as opposed to American "inner cities"). These areas were characterized by second labor markets and poor quality education (Khazzoom 2005).

In the 1960s, authorities established "absorption centers" or *mercaz klitot* (*mercaz klita* for singular) for receiving Western, middle-class immigrant academics who quickly needed to acquire a working knowledge of Hebrew (Abbink 1984). These cohorts, considered "strong" populations, received minimal state intervention during integration. While most olim experience some form of intervention, the length and term vary according to the needs identified for each group. Olim viewed in need of more direct and long-term state patronage, called "weak" populations, such as those from Asia and Africa, remained in absorption

[25] Traditionally, development towns are located in a peripheral region of the country and populated mainly by Mizrahi immigrants and their descendants (Goldberg 1985).

centers for longer periods (*ibid.*). Both "weak" and "strong" Mizrahi families were placed together in outer cities, resulting in minority overrepresentation and a fertile ground for ethnic inequality. Heterogeneous "Oriental" populations were lumped together. Existing intra-group variations like country of origin, class, degree of religiosity, education and level of urbanization, were muted and a single "Oriental" community with special needs materialized (Shoshana 2007).

In his critique of failing absorption practices known as the "mistake of the 50s," Halper (1985) contends that the bureaucracies set up for integrating immigrants could not adequately enable cultural change and integration. Coupled with the rapid deculturalization of Mizrahim and the elimination or weakening of their cultural anchors – in other words, their very means for adaptation – the Israeli absorption system stifled initiative and encouraged dependency. According to Halper the "social gap" between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim born out of the mistake of the 50s can be linked to: an extreme "melting pot" approach; a lack of understanding of the role that culture plays in ethnic adaptation and the consequent elimination of this essential vehicle; the channeling of immigrants to the margins of society; and the closed, authoritarian and complex bureaucracy that was largely exempt from any public accountability, and which turned the immigrants into "wards" of the State (*ibid.*: 114). As a result, a sense of alienation from Israeli society, as well as from their own selves and families, took root.

The centralized decision to place Mizrahim according to the demographic needs of the state (Yiftachel 1998; Eisendstadt 1955) impeded their integration (Yiftachel and Meir 1998). It also increased antagonism between Jewish and non-Jewish Arab populations who were competing against one another in the Israeli labor market (Peled 1998; Shohat 1988).

Limited occupational opportunities put Mizrahi immigrants at a severe disadvantage (Semyonov and Leventhal 1991). The cultural tracking of Mizrahim – that is, the practice of dominant elements directing weaker groups toward their own values, behaviors, and attitudes (Holt 1995: 100) – occurred with the intent of integrating them as purportedly equal partners (Khazzoom 2005, 2008). The *outcome* however, is another story.

The mistake of the 50s resulted in the creation of second-class Jewish Israelis from Middle Eastern and Maghrebin countries. Their initial lack of access to adequate housing, quality education leading to college preparation (as opposed to vocational training), and the high-inequality labor market, kept the bulk of Mizrahim in a socio-economically disadvantaged position. Their status in Israel continues to determine the quality of life of second and third generation offspring (Adler and Kahane 1984; Ducker 2006; Haberfeld and Cohen 2007). Following the transition to post-industrialization, residence in the outer cities of Israel is characterized by poverty, welfare dependency, single motherhood, depression, alcoholism, school dropout, and lower educational and occupational attainment (Khazzoom 2008). According to Ducker, however, it also gave rise to "resistance movements and struggles for equality and social justice" (2006: 3).

In the early 1970s, alienation and discrimination propelled some youths to revolt (Adler and Kahane 1984). Outcries of Mizrahi discontent became visible as the ethnic and racial dimensions of their exclusion began to crystallize by the end of the 1950s (Iris and Sharma 1972), giving rise to protests and violent social unrest (Ein-Gil and Machover 2009). Prejudice was constructed on the basis of physical traits, cultural practices, and area of origin (the Orient), though no formal, institutionalized form of discrimination was practiced (Shuval 1962). Labeling the Mizrahim as "blacks" of Israel added a racial dimension to the

segregation and cast the Ashkenazim as a non-ethnic, racially neutral white population (Shohat 1988).

A group of "Oriental" Jewish youths living in the slums of Jerusalem turned the racial epithet "black" on its head by using a highly racialised, political and provocative rhetoric to bring their societal grievances to the public's attention. "The Black Panthers" movement, founded in 1971 and named after the African-American liberation movement, "established precedents in the history of ethnic relations in Israel" (Smooha 1972: 32). Shohat (2001: 60) claims that their title is a play on the anti-Mizrahi slur "black animals" (*schwartze khayes* in Yiddish) (see also Cohen and Shemesh 1976). Acts of resistance and the Mizrahim's low status became interpreted through an ethnic/racial frame, reinforcing the widely held belief that basic references of Mizrahi identity were impediments to their successful Israelization (Yonah 2004). The discourse of race imported from the United States added a layer of racial polemics to manifest discontent, a touchy issue considering the horrors of the Shoah and Germany's racial policy upon which it was premised. The Black Panthers generated moral panic as to how to redress class divisions between Mizrahim and Ashkenazim and to improve the former's life chances (Shoshana 2007). Two key sites of Israelization, the school system (Shoshana 2012) and the army (Gottman 1951) became targeted platforms for reform.[26]

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[26] Shoshana discusses how the bureaucratic life category of the "gifted disadvantaged," a term linked to groups labeled "ethnic" in Israel, i.e. Mizrahim, became institutionalized in the late 1950s through the establishment of schools called the "Boarding School for the Gifted Disadvantaged" as a means to secure the cultural order set by authorities. Looking at the history of education and ethnopsychology, Mizrachi (2004) explores how the mental competence of Israelis considered 'fit' or not was conceptualized along ethnic lines yet neutralized through scientific discourse, a process he terms 'ethnic rehabilitation without ethnicity.' He studied a program implemented in the Israeli Defense Forces that targeted the desocialization and resocialization of soldiers deemed unfit, primarily of Mizrahi descent, in 1979, a few years after the Black Panther riots in Israel, and two years before the historical political vote that ousted the hegemonic Labor party. Mizrachi looks into the

Though the Israeli Black Panther movement is an exception,[27] on the whole acts of Mizrahi discontent were not staged in opposition to Zionism and in solidarity with Palestinians (Ein-Gil and Machover 2009). In fact, most Mizrahi sought to distance themselves culturally from their Arab neighbors (Shohat 1988) in their self-imposed work to erase any traces of Arabness and reinvent themselves as modern Israelis.

When Israeli writer Amos Oz traveled to marginalized communities in the 1980s for his book *In the Land of Israel* (1983), the anger and frustration he came across in Bet Shemesh, a neglected Mizrahi town on the outskirts of Jerusalem, was still palpable. Sitting with a group of Mizrahi men eager to express themselves to the writer, one of them intervened: "I'll tell you what shame is: they gave us houses, they gave us the dirty work; they gave us education, and they took away our self-respect. What did they bring my parents to Israel for? I'll tell you what for [...]. But wasn't it to do your dirty work? You didn't have Arabs then, so you needed our parents to do your cleaning and be your servants and your laborers. And policemen, too. You brought our parents to be your Arabs" (*ibid*.: 36).

In another interview excerpt from the same book, one interlocutor reinforced the division between Mizrahi and Arabs: "And what about the Arabs? Have they got it so bad with us? We don't let them make a living? And provide free education? And development? We give them everything. If only you [left-wingers who fight for Arab rights] didn't come

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establishment of a special military unit called "The center of the advancement of special populations," the latter being those with poor education and behavioural difficulties in adjusting to the military system (2004: 230).

[27] In his book chapter titled "Israel: Two Nations?" printed in 1973, Avineri argues that "none of the political alienation and exclusion which until very recently characterized the position of the American blacks can be found in the process which the Oriental communities are undergoing in Israel. [...] It would be foolish to deny that there still exist many popular prejudices and generalizations about the Oriental immigrants […]. But if one looks for American parallels, it is among the Italians and the Irish that one would find something akin to the position of the Oriental communities in Israel – not among the blacks" (p. 293).

along and put ideas in their heads, they'd sit quietly and say thanks instead of throwing stones" (*ibid*.: 42). This excerpt invokes the process whereby Mizrahim appropriated the logic of internal colonization and applied it to others deemed in need of the same treatment.

Writing about Jews from the Maghreb, Shuval claims that:

> not only is the negative stereotype accepted and internalized in considerable measure, but a marked rejection and hostility against members of their own group is revealed by North Africans. Such a self-hatred provides indirect evidence of prejudice in the society *since it clearly represents the North Africans' reflection of the attitudes of others toward them.*" (1962: 328, italics mine)

45 years later, Shoshana's (2007) research clearly reinforces observations made by Shuval in 1962, whereby institutional measures devised to increase the cultural capital of Mizrahim resulted, in the case of graduates of the boarding school mentioned in footnote seven, in the deep internalization of self-management practices – in other words, the conscious and self-imposed implementation of desired behavioral traits. The Mizrahi example of integration shows us that group boundaries are redrawn in the Israeli setting with the expenditure of efforts to portray one's self as Western (Khazzoom 2008).

Contrary to Palestinians however, Mizrahim were considered to come from the same "elemental substance" (Handelman 2004: 50) according to the state's racialist logic of Jewish peoplehood. This meant believing in their potential for reform in contrast to the Palestinians who could not be salvaged and modernized (*ibid*.). Thus both Mizrahim and Ashkenazim stand diametrically opposed to the non-Jewish Arab Other (Salamon 2001a, Ein-Gil and Machover 2009). The last interlocutor I quote from Oz's book clearly points to this.

After the 1967 war Palestinian workers and, subsequently, labor migrants, took on the lowest-waged, menial jobs in Israel (*avodah shkhorah*) (Ein-Gil and Machover 2009).

Since the end of the 1970s, the disaffection of Mizrahim was exploited by vehemently anti-Arab, right-wing political parties (*ibid.*) and thus came to represent an important voting block in Israel (Wurmser 2005), particularly for the religious ethnic party Shas, who mobilized disenfranchised Mizrahi youth. Khazzoom (2005) contends that Shas emerged as a response to segregation and underdevelopment, resulting, for the first time in the history of Israel, in the loss of the hegemonic Ashkenazi-led Labor Party at the hands of Likud in 1977.

It was not until the 1980s, a period of low immigration to Israel, that the Mizrahim took part in the Israeli political, economic and cultural mainstream (Rodal 2000). Starting from the 1980s and 90s, Israel underwent a "cultural revolution" to the point where much of its popular culture today is dominated by Mizrahi music, traditions, and customs (Wurmser 2005: 6). A discourse of ethnic pluralism began to appear in the Israeli national space (Handelman 2004). Second and third generation Israeli-born Mizrahim started to embrace their "orientalness," developing cultural references that fuse elements of Arab cultures with Jewish and Western influences (called *mizrahiyut*), and claiming it as a reference of nativeness and Israeliness (Regev and Seroussi 2004). The growing popularity of muzika mizrahit (eastern music)[28] peaked in Israeli popular culture in the late 1990s to the extent that it competed for the very definition of Israeliness (*ibid.*).

[28] It started out as a popular form of song among the Mizrahim before it surfaced in mainstream Israeli pop culture.

2.2 ISRAELI SOCIETY AT THE TIME OF ETHIOPIAN JEWISH ALIYAH

By the time of the Beta Israel's arrival, Mizrahim had fully internalized key references of Israeli modernity. They viewed Ethiopians the same way the Israeli hegemonic group once looked upon them. While the Mizrahi symbolized the "blacks" of Israel in regards to their status and "oriental features," Ethiopians represented an embodied blackness, one linked to essential concepts of biology, race and origin that could never lose its intensity. Unlike the Mizrahim, the sameness of this group's "elemental substance" (Handelman 2004), supposedly linking them to the Jewish people, was constantly put in doubt. However Jewish they claimed to be, the physical appearance of Ethiopians coalesced with other references of otherness, making it difficult to accept their Jewishness at face value. Unlike other non-white Jewish groups such as the Bn'ei Israel from India, a tiny population in Israel, Ethiopian Jews arrived in large numbers. Moreover, their aliyah caused a huge media frenzy abroad and in Israel, where they were received with open arms.

Initially Ethiopian immigrants in the early 1980s were sent to the south of Israel, in areas heavily populated by Mizrahim. Mizrahim had gained enough cultural capital to serve as examples of sabras to the latest cohorts of "exotic" Jews. This is the social context in which the irony I alluded to in the introduction of this chapter comes alive. The Mizrahi belly dancer's workshop for Ethiopian immigrant women showcased cultural references associated with the Levant – the same Levantine elements that Israeli authorities sought to eradicate for decades.

The scene with the belly dancer also displays a move toward a more open and pluralistic Israeli society, compared to the past. There remains however, an important socio-economic gap whereby "Mizrahi ingredients are more evident in the subculture of the poor

and working class, where the middle-class subculture is more influenced by western (though not specifically Ashkenazi) elements" (Ein-Gil and Machover 2009: 71). Despite the formation of a Mizrahi middle-class due to intermarriages and larger political and economic participation, the disparity between Ashkenazi and Mizrahi actually increased in recent years (Wurmser 2005; Shohat 2001; Haberfeld and Cohen 2007). As Semyonov and Leventhal attest in a book chapter published in 1991, "To date research on ethnic inequality in Israel has underscored significant socioeconomic disparities between two major geocultural ethnic categories: Jews of European or American origin and Jews of Asian or African descent. The latter origin groups are subordinate to the former in every aspect of socioeconomic status." Thus, while Mizrahi culture has become more prominent, the underlying inequality still exists. The disparity between both groups is not a product of whatever active discrimination remains today. It is rather the persisting effects of initial discriminatory practices that have cascaded down to second and third generation Mizrahi (Ein-Gil and Machover 2009).

2.3 Absorption measures and the bureaucratization of Ethiopians

For Ethiopians, the absorption process signified becoming urbanized and modernized according to the model of the western Israeli Jew. Abbink speaks of "Israelization" (1984: 146) that occurred at the level of the body, the spirit and the mind for olim from Ethiopia. Israelization also meant the solidification of changing religious practices that had begun decades earlier from "Falasha Judaism" to "Talmudic-Rabbinic Judaism" (*ibid*.: 141). It implied the assignment of a Hebrew name by authorities in charge of the first stages of integration, symbolically breaking the familial connection carried

through by Ethiopian names. Western clothes replaced the traditional rural Ethiopian garb with which they came. Kippas, a relatively recent introduction to the Beta Israel as a result of contacts with European Jews in the early 1900s, were instrumentalized by immigrants in order to differentiate themselves from other marginal black populations in Israel, like Black Bedouins or the Black Hebrews, who were not considered Jewish (Ashkenazi 1985).

Ethiopians lived in absorption centers for a year or more, where all their basic needs were met on site. This set up allowed the delivery of medical, educational and bureaucratic services in the initial period, provided housing as well as language and vocational training (*ibid*.). Because Ethiopians were considered a weak population (Ben-Eliezer 2004) in need of direct and long-term state intervention, special programs were created to manage and control the transfer of skills necessary for urban life and participation in a market economy (Offer 2007). This period shaped their public identity, still lingering today, of a "special group" in need of "special assistance" (Abbink 1984). While the transfer of some technical know-how was indeed justified, for example how to work an oven, how to flush a toilet, or how to open a bank account, etc., researchers have pointed out that the paternalistic attitude of absorbing efforts as a whole was infantilizing (Salamon 2003; Hertzog 1999, 2013; Wagaw 1993; Askhenazi 1985). Like the Mizrahim before them, immigrants' behavior was often mistaken for immaturity (*ibid*.: 94). Once again, measures that had the trappings of colonialist paternalism abounded as immigrants were told what to eat, what to wear, how to pray, and even how to go to the toilet (Salamon 2003: 6-7).

Their integration was further complicated by the fact that Ethiopian olim of the first cohorts (early 1980s and before) represented by and large a rural population with almost no experience of post-industrial urban society, technology, or economy (90%, according to one

community worker), and a high percentage of illiteracy (80% according to this same person). To be sure, the reasons for their low economic status are complex and do not hinge exclusively on the absorption industry, though it played an integral part.

This scenario, however, does not account for the ways in which immigrants mobilized – and continue to mobilize (Salamon, Kaplan and Goldberg 2009) – their efforts creatively and strategically (Abbink 1985). Friction between Ethiopian immigrants from the 1984 cohort and absorption workers certainly existed because of difficulties with cross-cultural communication and unfamiliarity with each other's behavioral codes (BenEzer 2002). This explanation, however, dismisses both power dynamics entrenched in institutional intervention and the hierarchical order in which they occurred. Significant behavioral changes and cultural adaptations were required of immigrants as they eased into a post-industrial, westernized setting (Ashkenazi 1985). In this regard, there is nothing original or unique about the integration experience of Ethiopian Jews, to the extent that some self-imposed modifications are required when moving from a familiar habitus to an alien setting. However, contrary to other receiving countries like Canada, the United States or Australia, in Israel the "absorption" of olim of all backgrounds is a national project of internal colonization delegated to the higher authorities of the Jewish agency and other related ministries. It is a project that requires, on the part of the person being absorbed, a death of their past in order to reinforce the "elemental substance" (Handelman 2004) that binds them to other Jews. This is due to the fact that, "Although Israeli society contains immigrant groups from a wide variety of countries and socio-cultural environments […], ethnic relations in Israel have a different character from those in more pronounced pluralist settings due to the underlying common identity operative in the Jewish sector" (Abbink

1984: 139). It is within the setting of an "overarching national identification" that the choices made by Ethiopians themselves must be analyzed.

Ethiopian Jewish immigrants re-fashioned their cultural and religious selves into an Israeli Jewish eda (ethnic group) by bringing drastic adaptations to the very raison d'être of their motivation to live in Israel and become Israeli:

> While most other subgroups coming to Israel had to change only a part of their former pattern of life, this population had to change much more. They were asked to change even their religious concepts and behavior – which they expected to continue as the most stable reason for living in Israel. Enforced changes contribute to a lowering of self-esteem, a weakening of the feeling of security and the loss of identity. (Schneller 1987: 50)

Ethiopian olim can easily be depicted as passive victims of the Israeli integration system. Abbink's (1985) observation of a group of immigrants in an absorption center in 1981 illustrates that resistance tactics, however subtle they may be, were indeed deployed by Ethiopians (Kaplan 1998). On numerous occasions, Abbink (1984,1985) emphasizes the willingness and readiness of immigrants to become Israeli at all cost, while expressing pride in their heritage much quicker than was the case for Mizrahim.

Ethiopians' own predisposition to adapt and eventually discard or re-invent some long-held practices and beliefs not in line with the idea of the "modern" Israeli citizen, is a key element of their integration seldom mentioned in academia. Salamon, Kaplan and Goldberg (2009) provide an exception. Speaking of the relationship between women and finances in their study of the *iqqub* (rotating credit associations) organized by Ethiopian women, they write:

> Although rooted in a particular Ethiopian experience, the flourishing of the iqqub and its framing as an Ethiopian institution – both in structure and terminology – should not lead us to invoke simplistic notions of continuity or preservation. As the material above shows, these cultural practices emerge from a far more complex matrix of creativity in which elements of 'tradition' mobilized in a new setting, not to preserve the past, but to confront the challenges of a new futures. (p. 411)

2.4 Comparing the experiences of Mizrahim and Ethiopian Jews

In her discussion of the book *One People: The Story of the Eastern Jews* (Dvora and Rabbi Menachem Hacohen, with an introduction by Abba Eban, 1986), Ella Shohat writes:

> This book forms part of a broader national export industry of Sephardi "folklore," an industry which circulates (the often expropriated) goods – dresses, jewelry, liturgical objects, photos, and films – among Western Jewish institutions eager for Jewish exoticism (1988: 7).

The search for Jewish exotica has taken a different turn in the case of Ethiopian Jews. Jewish populations from North Africa and the Middle East arrived to Israel on the basis of their undisputed membership in the Jewish nation. This was not the case for Ethiopian Jews. Their integration into Israel continues to occur under a cloud of doubt as to their genealogical and racial Jewishness.

The script of Ethiopian Jewish integration is borrowed from the experience of Mizrahim who became Israeli at the margins of western Jewish normativity. There remain, however, important distinctions to be made between the integration trajectory of both groups, primarily in terms of state and public support. In comparison to olim from the Middle East and the Maghreb, Ethiopians were greeted with an unprecedented show of warmth and affection by the public, media and government, which quickly revealed a patronizing streak (Salamon 2001a; Ben-David and Ben-Ari 1997). Ethiopian Jewish immigration occurred at a time when both the larger Israeli public and officials consciously sought to avoid the "mistake of the 50s" (Schwarz 2001). This did not prevent mistakes from being made (Hertzog 1999, 2013; Wagaw 1993).

However, the Israeli public, as well as Jewish communities in Europe and North America, made unprecedented efforts to help Ethiopian Jewish refugees. Moreover,

authorities displayed enthusiasm for Ethiopian folklore faster than they did for the Mizrahim. They officially recognized specific cultural holidays that did not threaten the national and religious order (i.e. traditional dance, clothes, music, cuisine, the *Seged* celebrations,[29] as well as art – pottery in particular). As a result, it took less than a generation for some Ethiopians to cultivate ethnic consciousness, while Mizrahi took much longer to do so.

Incorporating manageable doses of exotic Jewish otherness into the Israeli cultural mainstream certainly demonstrates a shift in attitude. This shift unfolds within a context of intense social anxiety over the perceived need to be like the dominant cultural group. As the experience of Ethiopian Jews testifies, a change of attitude towards intra-Jewish diversity is manifested in institutionalized and political performances staged for nationalist purposes (Handelman 2004).[30]

The opening of Israeli society to the diasporic cultures it emerged from is nevertheless evidenced by the proliferation of ethnic media (Russian, Ethiopian, etc., radio stations, newspapers and TV shows). There is also a shift in attitude whereby one needs to filter but not necessarily discard *all* cultural baggage in order to attain Israeliness (Shuval and Leshem 1998). In this sense, Jewish immigrants of the 1980s, 1990s and onward

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[29] The Seged is an annual religious holiday originally held in northern Ethiopia where disparate Beta Israel communities would gather on a mountain for a mass ceremony.

[30] The Moroccan Jewish celebration of Mimouna and the Ethiopian Jewish Seged are prime examples. Both are officially recognized as national holidays by the state. Every year, politicians show up at these events and there is wide media coverage of their presence. At the Seged ceremony in 2009 in Jerusalem, I observed the "official" nature of the interactions between the politicians and the Ethiopian Jewish priests, who are not recognized by the state of Israel as having any religious authority. This led me to consider that the participation of key politicians references an epidermic type of inclusiveness and the performance of a superficial interest in Israel's Jewish ethnic groups.

benefited from a less rigid space to negotiate their cultural identity; yet, as Domínguez contends about the early absorption of Ethiopian Jews:

> […] [T]he presupposition that they may encounter color prejudice against them creates an atmosphere in which color is highlighted. Concern not to invoke the negative connotations of primitiveness in Israeli society goes along with policies and actions that index the inference that they are primitive." (1989: 72)

In this chapter, I analyzed the historical circumstances under which the Beta Israel came to be included in the Jewish nation and to take part in the project of modernity in Israel. By using the previous experiences of Mizrahim, I showed how Israeli absorption operated on the premise of the internal colonization of orientalized and racialized Jewish Others.

The arrival of Ethiopian Jews disturbed established ethno-racial categories. In the next chapter, I take a closer look at the effect of migration to and settlement in Israel on the Ethiopian family unit. In particular, I focus on two sites of transformation: gender gaps and generational splits.

Chapter 3

IN THE FLESH: BECOMING ISRAELI

For young Israelis whose family made aliyah, a "roots trip"[31] (*tiyul shorashim* in Hebrew) to North Africa, the Middle East, Europe or the former Soviet Union, is very much in vogue (Safran 2003; Kugelmass 1995; Levy 2010). During fieldwork, I met a number of young Ethiopians brought up in Israel who had traveled to Ethiopia to see firsthand the country they and/or their parents had left behind.[32]

Ainat's story is different from the rest of young Ethiopian Israeli roots tourists her age. Not only had she been to Ethiopia at least twice when we met, but she had also made a point during one of those visits to travel to her parents' native village far in the north of the country. Her encounter with old neighbors revealed a profound and unexpected depth to her understanding of her family's life in Ethiopia and their reasons for making the perilous journey to Israel. The official narrative of Israel's heroic rescue and redemption of Ethiopian Jews recounts their aliyah in terms of leaving hostile neighbors. The tight-knit relationships that bound the Beta Israel to the local Ethiopian environment, as in Ainat's family's case, have become muted in Israel's national narrative.

Sitting in her cozy apartment near Tel Aviv, shaded from the onslaught of the relentless August sun, Ainat, a bespectacled young woman in her early 30s, was visibly

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[31] A journey back to the old country.

[32] Ethiopian elders often return for visits, to get treated by local traditional healers, or to make business contacts. While some journey to their village of origin in more remote sites further north, for logistical reasons many do not. This has led to a phenomenon of "homeing" (Anteby-Yemini 2004c) Addis Abeba mostly by elders with little to no exposure to urban life before moving to Israel.

consumed by her parents' memories of life in Ethiopia. Having arrived to Israel as a seven-year old, her parents' nostalgia provided stories about caring non-Jewish neighbors:[33]

> […] Sometimes I say to myself, "How come they never run out of stories?" There is always something small that reminds them [of Ethiopia]. It can be some kind of behavior: "In Ethiopia it was like this and like that." It can be a specific food. They say "In Ethiopia it was like this and like that." I mean, *everything* reminds them of Ethiopia. […] These stories [were] in our home all the time, all the time.
>
> […] One of the more meaningful things our parents used to tell us was how their relationships with their neighbors were […]. They were warm and loving connections […] with Christians and Muslims who lived in the village next to my parents'. […] It was an undeliverable connection [*kesher lo yioman*]. People used to say "Come on, our parents forgot [the bad things] about the past, what it was like then, and remember only the good." This is what I thought too …

Immigrants in general idealize their former homes in the midst of integrating to an unfamiliar place. As Ainat recounted the journey back to Ethiopia, she undid the thin line between what she once believed was a romanticized account of her family's village life and the reality that transpired:

> […] [W]hen I arrived in Ethiopia I saw [for myself]… I talked with the people and I saw how much … [In the village] one of them told me, he was around 38 years old, which means he was eight when my parents left. He told me: "I remember your father because when you left your father gave my parents," - again it's not serious, it doesn't sound serious to us, but it's the fact that an eight year old boy had this engraved in his mind. My father gave the sickle to him as a present. He said: "He gave me four of them." You see how, first of all he remembers this and it's a positive experience. And you say to yourself, man! An eight year old kid, live your life! What do you care about those Jews who left a long time ago? And suddenly you see how much they love [us], and how much they miss [us], and how much they remember [us].

One meeting in particular moved her deeply:

> This [encounter] really moved me. I remember a very specific meeting. My father gave me names of people who lived in the village opposite ours. [He gave me the name of] a Muslim, some guy, he was very old then. I got to their house and there were two people there. One of them was really, really old. Suddenly he started to ask me how is so and so and how is so and so, and he remembered... He counted almost

[33] As Ashkenazi (1988:376) points out, "Even in Ethiopia, where the Beta Israel's status was very low, there were ongoing and apparently satisfying social relations with their non-Jewish neighbors."

> every person who was maybe a bit younger than him, but all of them already passed away. I remember that, as he was asking me, I simply started to cry because first, it moved me, also because he mentioned some *qessotch* [Ethiopian Jewish priests] who passed away who were my relatives. But what moved me the most [is that] I stood in front of a man who is around 80 or 90 years old and he recounted names of people one after the other with such clarity, and I said [to myself] "Only big love can make him remember like that." […] So I told him, like, "They passed away" and he started crying, but I'm telling you, such a cry, as though it was *like it came out of his belly*, as if it was something really emotional […]. [italics mine]

The belly – the embodied location of pain in Ethiopian culture – illustrates the deep-seated sorrow felt by this Muslim elder when he found out about the death of the *qessotch* whose names he recounted with astonishing clarity. Witnessing this was quite emotional for Ainat. The cries of the old man remained vivid in her mind. She became animated when describing the overwhelming grief he expressed. Seeing him mourn the loss of old friends struck a chord with Ainat's sorrow about the death of her own family's past. The old man's cry provided a very tangible reminder of the very personal "cost of aliyah" (Kaplan 2009, personal communication) and the sacrifices made by Ethiopian Jews to leave their homes.

I begin this chapter with Ainat's story because, as Harvey demonstrates in *Spaces of Hope* (2000:16), the body as a "social construct […] cannot be understood outside of the forces that swirl around it and construct it." What happens at one scale cannot be understood outside of the nested relationships that exist across a hierarchy of scales, the systemic products of changing technologies, modes of human organization and political struggle (*ibid.*:75). Harvey's understanding of the position of the body vis-à-vis the hierarchy of scales is relevant for my understanding of Ainat's story. Her migration journey to Israel and return to Ethiopia is embedded in the synchronic occurrence of events that impacted the local Ethiopian context and prompted families like hers to make life-changing sacrifices in the name of aliyah. Globally, the history of European Jews in the nineteenth and twentieth

centuries provided the backdrop for the establishment of Israel. This made the emigration of the Beta Israel possible in the first place.

My objective in Chapter Three is to trace the connection between Ethiopian Jews and race from a historical perspective by analyzing the circumstances that ushered the ascription of their status as legitimate halachic Jews. I show how the context of departure, the context of arrival and the on-going dialogue between both places, like in Ainat's case, must be tied to the analysis of recent Ethiopian Jewish history and the current issues they face in Israel. I examine the relationship between Ethiopia on the one hand, and Jews in the diaspora and Israel on the other hand. Along with pivotal transformations at the regional and national levels in both countries, this relationship was a precursor for the emigration of the Beta Israel.

3.1 CONTACT

Interactions amidst the arrival or departure of a group of people in a given location necessarily challenge definitions of who migrants are and what position they assume vis-à-vis others. In this day and age of intense traveling and global connections, one can easily be swept away by ideas of mobility, movement and circulation (Augé 1999). However, cultural exchanges and the arrival of foreign elements have the potential to transform a place at the local level. This is the scenario in which encounters unfolded between the Beta Israel in northern rural villages of Ethiopia and the European Protestant missions sent to convert them to Christianity in the nineteenth century. They were the first to consider the Beta Israel as "Jews" (Kaplan 1987). Christian proselytizing interests instigated key changes and "inaugurated the Beta Israel encounter with Western modernity" (*ibid.*: 39).

European Jewish scholars responded with a counter-mission at the turn of the twentieth century (*ibid*.) as a response to the growing spiritual threat posed by the Protestant missions. Counter-missions led to intermittent contacts with the Beta Israel and European Jews throughout the 1900s. Interactions between both groups gave way to colossal transformations in the collective self-perception and religious practices of the Beta Israel.[34] Historically isolated from other Jewish communities (Grunau 1995: 29), they began to redefine their religious identity in relation to European Jewish travelers. Encounters of that period laid the groundwork for a history of "patronage activities" (Aslanian 2011) established in Ethiopia by Euro-American Jewish groups on behalf of the Beta Israel, and later, during their integration process in Israel.

The politicization of the Beta Israel's messianic worldview and spiritual attachment to "Jerusalem" along the lines of European Jewish nationalism was shaped by numerous factors. The modernizing forces instigated by the Italian occupation and the Beta Israel's desire for education (Summerfield 2003), followed by the Shoah and the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, were key to this process. "Falashas" began to view themselves as an inherent part of a larger Jewish nation. The years leading up to the Beta Israel's exit from Ethiopia can be characterized as a period of a self-imposed "evolving religious orientation" (borrowed from Kaplan and Rosen 1996: 173) – or reorientation – in order to meet modern standards of religious and genealogical inclusion. The streamlining of Beta Israel religious and cultural traditions with contemporary Judaism unfolded over a number of decades and was replete with internal tensions. Some embraced the changes in behavior and beliefs

[34] The political situation in Ethiopia (the Italian occupation), Europe and the United States (World War I, II, the Shoah) determined the intermittency of programs set up by Western Jews (Summerfield 2003).

predicated on Western contemporary Judaism as an expression of an attainable modernity, culminating in a permanent shift in their collective religious identity.

Raising awareness of the group's existence in European and North American diaspora communities was primarily the mission of Joseph Halevy and his disciple, the driven Polish-French Jewish scholar, Jacques Faitlovitch (1881-1955). Faitlovitch contributed his life to nurturing Jewish diasporic consciousness among the Beta Israel. He sensitized Jews around the globe about their plight, collected money, set up schools and assisted a few Beta Israel communities in the Gondar area (see Figure 2). In the process he branded their image as a pre-Talmudic lost tribe, a portrayal that is still popular today (Shabtay 1999: 4). Faitlovitch also undertook the task of "updating" their religious system so that it reflected halacha, working relentlessly to align Beta Israel religion with Rabbinical and Talmudic traditions.

The interactions between the Beta Israel and Western Jews were deeply embedded in the colonialist worldview of the day. Faitlovitch believed in the superior nature of "Falashas" compared to the "half savages" that populated their surroundings:

> […] Ils forment un peuple intelligent, actif, supérieur à ceux qui les environnent […]. Lorsque je me suis trouvé en Afrique parmi ces Falachas entourés de peuplades à demi-sauvages, j'ai ressenti une joie indicible en constatant leur énergie, leur intelligence, les hautes qualités morales qui les distinguent. (1905:26)

Whatever claims of moral superiority Faitlovitch made in his attempt to divorce "Falashas" from their organic environment, his mission was deeply embedded in an approach best described as colonial paternalism. This worldview still governs many aspects of the relationship between Ethiopian Israelis and the various government bodies in charge of their integration and life in Israel (Salamon 2003).

Steeped in this ideology, the project of engineering ethno-religious affinity between two otherwise alien populations was far from egalitarian. Summerfield and Shelemay use the noun "interference" to describe this process, attaching a negative connotation to the power dynamics that imbued interactions as well as the sharing, reception, and reformulation of foreign influences by the Beta Israel. Contact between the two groups, writes Summerfield, initiated a period of external interference ultimately transforming "Falashas," an Ethiopian phenomenon, into Ethiopian Jews, whose culture, religion and identity became increasingly connected with that of world Jewry (2003:ix). In *A Song of Longing*, Shelemay writes:

> Although I remain deeply supportive of the future of Ethiopian Jews in Israel, I suspect I will always be troubled by the manner in which Westerners so arrogantly sought – and largely succeeded – to transform these people into mirror images of themselves. The political debate of the late twentieth century over the religious status of the Beta Israel was probably unavoidable, given the longstanding cultural interference by outsiders. A positive result is that the Ethiopian Jews have realized many of their dreams. But in turn, they have become ashamed of their past (1991:151).

It is plausible that these exchanges were successful in transforming the Beta Israel into Jews (from a European point of view) because doing so allowed them to thwart the encroachment of Christian missionary projects. The success of these "external interferences," however, completely depended on the willingness of some Beta Israels to appropriate - or at least to consider and debate – new religious elements introduced by early European Jewish visitors. Moreover, foreign ideas of Jewishness found a fertile ground among the Beta Israel. The Beta Israel re-considered their religious identity because the religious information disseminated by European Jews struck a chord. This may have been due to parallels drawn between themselves and European Jews, such as certain religious practices, the focus on "Jerusalem," and the fact that foreign Jews differentiated themselves from other Ethiopian

Christians who held similar Judaic practices. It may also have been influenced by the fact that the messengers of change were white Europeans who held an important symbolic capital in rural Ethiopia.

Over the course of many decades, Faitlovitch advocated extensive religious and cultural reforms in the few communities where he intervened, mainly among Amhara populations (Abbink 1985). During his long absences, "indigenous change agents" (*ibid.*) – Ethiopian students that he hand picked and sent abroad for schooling – carried out his mission. After receiving an education, they returned to their villages and pursued his vocation of disseminating changes to the Beta Israel religion.

The encounter with Protestant missions and European Jews sent ripples of religious questioning across Beta Israel communities years before their arrival to Israel. Inter-generational tensions between religious Beta Israel leaders and young, Europeanized "indigenous change agents" took root during this process (Summerfield 2003). Religious reforms instigated by the European-educated Beta Israel elite were slowly and unevenly incorporated over several decades. They were not spread uniformly nor accepted without resistance, particularly from elders and religious leaders.[35] As Abbink demonstrates, not all segments of the group were exposed and influenced equally (see also Summerfield 2003:127).[36] This is also due to the fact that "however convenient it may be to talk about the Falasha "community," the Jews of Ethiopia possessed neither centralized communal institutions capable of making decisions for the group as a whole nor efficient mechanisms for enforcing decisions made at anything other than the village level" (Kaplan 1987:37). In

[35] For a more detailed description of this period, see Trevisan Semi 2007, Messing 1982, Summerfield 2003, among other sources.
[36] Regarding religious differences among the Beta Israel in Ethiopia, see Messing 1982.

other words, the Beta Israel were not collectively organized around a governing focal node. This makes it difficult to speak of them in terms of a "community." In reality, they were scattered across vast regions in the north and divided linguistically, and also in terms of their religious practices.

The Beta Israel of the Tigre region spoke Tigrinya, practiced a more traditional form of religion, and benefited to a much lesser extent from the efforts of Jewish aid groups than did Amharic-speakers in Gondar (Corinaldi 1998:181). Amhara-speaking Beta Israel from this region were exposed much longer to "pan-Jewish" references (Shelemay 1977). By the time of their emigration to Israel, these divisions exacerbated long-standing regional and linguistic differences among them.

For Beta Israel populations who came in contact with Faitlovitch's message, transformation called for drastic changes in behavior. From the viewpoint of contemporary Judaism, traditional Beta Israel beliefs and practices were divided into two categories. On the one hand, their link to Judaism hinged upon what can be described as a "modified mosaism" (*mosaïsme modifié*, Faitlovitch 1905:21), endorsed as proof of the genealogical Jewish origins of the Beta Israel. Mosaic and pre-Rabbinical practices added credibility to key historical documents, particularly Radbaz's responsa,[37] in which he attested to a connection between Jews and the Beta Israel (Kaplan 1992). Mosaism, along with their rudimentary style of life, served to conjure their biblical image as Jews who lived as "in the

[37] Radbaz (1479-1573): A respected talmudic scholar and halachic authority, and chief Rabbi of Egypt. This confirmation from a highly esteemed authority was pivotal for the halachic (i.e. according to Jewish law) recognition of a shared *point of origin* and *continuity* defined by the Sephardi Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef in 1973 and the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren in 1975 (Grunau 1995:17).

time of Moses." This representation was widely disseminated by pro-Falasha activists in their quest to authenticate the Beta Israel's Jewish lineage.

Indigenous and "primitive" traditional practices perceived as a hindrance to modernizing efforts were discouraged, such as: monasticism (Kaplan 1987); women's seclusion during the menses (see Leslau 1957; Corinaldi 1995; Salamon 1999); *zar* possession cults (Young 1975; Kaplan 1990; Shelemay 1991; Nudelman 1999); infibulation (Moussa 1993; Grunau 1995; Faitlovitch 1905); body tattoos (Seeman 1999); animal sacrifices; and beliefs in amulets and supernatural powers (Anteby 1999), among others.

However nonlinear, the process of refusing, accepting and applying some of the reforms brought about by Faitlovitch's culture brokers and change agents over many decades shows that the Beta Israel were less passive than what is generally suggested in the literature. Summerfield corroborates this when he reminds us that "one should not overlook the fact that the initiative for contact with "other Jews" was taken by the Falashas themselves and would appear to predate the arrival of (Christian) missionaries" (2003:34). By reaching out to other Jews prior to Faitlovitch's arrival, and eventually, inventing new religious traditions prompted by external influences, the Beta Israel were – and still remain – active constructors of their own modern Jewishness.

Pre-Aliyah Jewish Tourism to Ethiopia in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century

The "campaign for change" promulgated by pro-Falasha interventionists during the 1940s (Summerfield 2003) increased contacts between some Beta Israel villages and Euro-American Jewish activists. Humanitarian aid projects deployed among the Beta Israel in the second half of the twentieth century were directly inspired by the aftermath of the Jewish

Holocaust (Djerrahian 2001). In the 1950s, a group of Beta Israel children were sent to Israel to study Hebrew and normative Judaism in the hopes of returning to their villages and becoming teachers among their kin. During this time, Jewish agencies opened schools and offered services in some Beta Israel villages (Summerfield 2003). In the second half of the twentieth century, diplomatic connections between Israel and Ethiopia largely governed the frequency of contact between Euro-American Jews and the Beta Israel. The network was severed for some years following the coup d'état in Ethiopia in 1974.

To my knowledge there is no systematic study conducted on the impact of Jewish patronage activities, including Jewish tourist missions to Ethiopia, in the latter part of the twentieth century. How did humanitarian aid projects unfold within the power imbalance of the rich, white Westerner coming to gawk at the existence of "Mosaic Jews?" How were visits organized in such a way that the Beta Israel themselves bettered their material situation with the arrival of tourists thirsty to connect with a group marketed as remnants of their own Jewish biblical past? Did non-Jewish neighbors develop a newfound respect for "Falashas," who garnered the attention of white Euro-Americans? Perhaps this exacerbated the hatred towards what was otherwise a despised minority?

It is known that Beta Israel women crafted clay statues and pottery adorned with the Star of David. The Star of David was adopted specifically by the Beta Israel as a sign of Judaism resulting from exchanges with Western Jews (Anteby-Yemini 2004c; Kaplan and Rosen 1996). Looking at how clay artifacts, which provided an income for local families, were invented and came into circulation gives credence to the "overwhelming evidence for the external initiatives behind the production of Falasha figurines" (*ibid.*:177). Falasha figurines traveled to Europe, North America and Israel by way of pro-Falasha activists,

visitors and development workers. Pro-Falasha activists often exposed them as proof of an ancient and untouched exotic Jewish tribe during fundraisers in Europe and North America. In Ethiopia however, the Star of David is more often than not connected to the largely Coptic Christian population (approximately half the country). It adorned clothes and other apparels worn by emperors in imperial Ethiopia, and it is not uncommon to find the Star of David in Ethiopian churches. During a trip to Ethiopia in January 2010, I noticed that some places in Addis Ababa displayed it as a Christmas decoration.

According to Kaplan and Rosen (1996), villagers and government officials capitalized on visits by American Jewish tourists. They developed Wallaka into a tourist destination where one could meet the "Black Jews of Ethiopia" and purchase a statuette. The increasing presence of foreigners was not lost on the children of the village. One young Ethiopian Israeli I spoke with recounted that when people came from "America" in the 1970s, they took pictures of many Falasha families, including hers. To her knowledge, photographs taken of children like Shoshana by Jewish tourists remain the few portraits available of the communities who later migrated to Israel. Shoshana often spoke of her desire to start a project that would make these photographs available on-line to the people they portray, who rarely, if ever, own pictures of themselves as children in Ethiopia.

Racial Encounters and Ethnic Categorizations in Ethiopia

Exchanges with Protestant missionaries, European Jews and pro-Falasha activists also resulted in changes in terms of the Beta Israel's color classification and racial identity. The Beta Israel started to imagine themselves perhaps not as "blacks," a racial label ascribed to the lowest status groups in Ethiopia, but certainly as more black than the white Euro-

Americans. Encounters with Westerners during the first half of the twentieth century, as elsewhere in Africa during that period, injected a foreign discourse onto local Ethiopian racial language. In order to situate exchanges between systems of racial classification, in the next pages I detail local Ethiopian readings of racial and ethnic differences.

Defining "Other" in Ethiopia

Pro-Falasha activists from the time of Faitlovitch worked hard to create and disseminate a shared narrative of victimhood between Ethiopian and other Jews worldwide. However compelling this interpretation, the Beta Israel were not the antithesis to the hegemonic Christian population in Ethiopia as was the case for Jews in Europe and elsewhere. To be sure, "Falashas" were a hated and feared minority. Due to their small demographic numbers, they were not necessarily considered a threat to the Ethiopian authority as other hated minority groups were. According to Tibebu (1996:17), the two main protagonists of the Ge'ez civilization are Amharas on the one hand, and Oromo and Muslim on the other. Sorenson speaks of Eritrean and Oromo nationalism as the antithesis to Amhara national identity (1994:5). Oromos and Eritreans were the largest minorities living in Ethiopia prior to Eritrea's independence in 1993.

In contrast to some other minority groups in Ethiopia, phenotype and physical appearance, material culture and dress did not constitute a marker of difference for the Beta Israel (Kaplan 1993: 111; Salamon 1999:23; see also Pankhurst 1995). Lipsky mentions that though "physically indistinguishable from Amharas," the Beta Israel are "recognized and discriminated against in the areas where they live" (1962:67). He attributes the group's

liminal position to their specialization in blacksmithing and ironworking, the two most despised occupations in Ethiopian society.[38]

The Beta Israel were not the only minority to practice despised occupations associated with sorcery and the evil eye. They were not the only group in Ethiopia whose rights were not protected (Pausewang 1994). Other cultural minorities were systematically marginalized and discriminated against yet the repercussions of occupying a despised caste-like position in the Ethiopian context were amplified for the Beta Israel. Wagaw writes that "Perhaps because the Beta Israel had lived in Ethiopia longer, were fewer in number, and were more strict in their observances of exclusion, the intensity of suspicion and mistrust that led to animosity and persecution was stronger" (1993:13). While Orthodox Christians in Ethiopia considered themselves the "chosen people" (Lipsky 1962:106), the Beta Israel believed in their religious superiority over the dominant Christian population (Quirin 1992:31; Grunau 1995). As a group, they represented a stigmatized and feared Other. When critical encounters with European Jews took place, their position as a "despised semi-caste group" (Kaplan 1992:154) viewed as "morally repugnant and feared as *buda* [a term used in Ethiopia to describe populations with evil supernatural powers]" (Quirin 1992:31) was clearly established.

Social Conceptions of Race in Ethiopia

In Ethiopia as elsewhere, social interpretations of values attributed to skin tones and facial features coalesce with occupation, religion, language and socio-political status. These

[38] Since being conquered between the fourteenth and seventeenth century (Quirin 1992:32), the Beta Israel's land-use rights were revoked. This had the effect of limiting the economic activities of the group. Many turned to the despised occupations referred above (Kaplan 1993:157).

references play a hand in defining the hierarchy according to which minority and dominant groups are positioned. It is well documented that marginal Beta Israel populations were discriminated against and treated as a low-status semi-caste based on occupation and religious background. Physically however, they were undistinguishable from Amharas and Tigrayans associated with the northern ruling elite.

The Beta Israel, as did other Ethiopians, actively reproduced and maintained boundaries between people within their own communities who they considered inferior. The status of inferiority was ascribed to those believed to be descendants of slaves (called barya). Important taboos regulated interactions between Beta Israel slave owners and barya. The barya are racialized in Ethiopia as darker and less refined in their physical features, beliefs, and culture. They were by and large incorporated within the fabric of Beta Israel village life.

Many authors explore physical differences between the ruling Amhara/Tigrayans of the highland plateau and other populations in Ethiopia (Lipsky 1962: 39; Donham 1986:12). The highlanders' "[…] straight noses, thin lips, attenuated body structure, and olive skin" (Rosenfeld 1986:xii) contrasted with the physical appearance of groups such as the pejoratively termed "Shankilla" or barya, historically associated with slaves and slavery (Tibebu 1996). The latter groups originated from southern Ethiopia (Salamon 2003). Military raids on neighboring populations supplied slaves associated with low-status, dark skin tone, frizzy hair and Negroid, sub-Saharan African features (Salamon 1994). Slavery was a well-established trade in Ethiopia until Emperor Haile Selassie abolished it in 1942.

Traditionally, Ethiopians' attitudes towards southerners regarded them as a conquered people, inferiors (Lipsky 1962:36,39) and racially different. Northern Ethiopians,

Kaplan explains, do not see themselves as black – a term "reserved for low status groups, most notably slaves" – but rather, as "reddish-brown" (1999:537). At present, there are no studies to my knowledge in English or French that detail how Ethiopians came to perceive themselves racially following encounters with Europeans throughout their history.[39] One can fathom, however, that interactions between the Beta Israel and Westerners (Protestant missionaries and Euro-American Jews) injected new "idioms of race," to borrow Hall's (2011) expression.

The intensification of pro-Falasha patronage activities in the second half of the twentieth century meant increased contact between Beta Israel villagers and Euro-American Jews. After the coup d'état in 1974, Ethiopia's political turn towards socialism brought with it an influx of resources from socialist countries, for example Russians who came to train Mengistu's Army. Changes in the racial imagination of the Beta Israel and ideas of blackness as the opposite of European whiteness, formed long before the eventual migration of the Beta Israel.

This became obvious during conversations I had with young Ethiopian Israeli adults in their 30s. Some had memories about meeting a ferenj in Ethiopia.[40] Haile, a worker in his late 30s for one of the Ethiopian organizations in Israel, had distinct memories. Having arrived to Israel in 1989 at age 13, I asked him when he started to see himself as black. He looked at me with some confusion and answered:

> GD: But when for the first time did you start seeing yourself as black? Because in Ethiopia …

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[39] Ethiopia has a long history of interaction with Western Europeans, such as the Portuguese.
[40] It would be interesting to conduct interviews about the memories surrounding the racial encounters that took place in Ethiopia with the older generation, in other words parents and grandparents of the people concerned in this research, since they would have had direct contacts with foreigners and locals involved with tourist projects.

Haile: No, in Ethiopia as well.

GD: Were you black in Ethiopia?

Haile: Of course, what? It's ...

GD: In Ethiopian society [you were not considered black].

Haile: Yes, exactly, but uuuh, we knew in Ethiopia,the ferenj used to come, I told you, the [Jewish] tourists.

Based on the ethnic/racial classification along which Ethiopian society was organized, I assumed that Haile would not readily identify with the color label and status "black." His reply demonstrates knowledge of basic racial differentiation, based on skin tone and place of provenance, between Ethiopians and Euro-Americans. Defining himself as black occurred in opposition to the alternative, in other words, being white and European, much like being red in the Ethiopian setting emerges in relation to local blacks. From an early age, contacts with Western tourists in his remote village near Gondar informed the binary distinction between white and black, Ethiopians and white foreigners, reinforcing his own self-perception as embodying the polar opposite of white. Along with their Jewish identity, the racial identity black indexes the very essence of what it means to be Ethiopian Jewish in Israel. Immigration to Israel ushered blackness as a permanent, stigmatized marker of Ethiopian Jewish difference.

3.2 THE ALIYAH OF JEWS FROM ETHIOPIA

On September 12, 1974, a military junta identifying themselves as the Derg deposed Emperor Haile Selassie, Ethiopia's ruler of 58 years (Moussa 1993). Ethiopia's annexation of Eritrea (1961), along with the government's imperial style of rule induced war and famine. Political discontent, in particular the lack of minority recognition, and an economic

stalemate provoked a sequence of events that resonate to this day. The Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC), the Derg's increasingly politicized military branch, seized a primarily rural country plagued by social upset and political turmoil. Famine and poverty was already widespread in Ethiopia.

Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam assumed the undisputed chairmanship of the PMAC in March 1977 (Rahmato 1987:161). Soon after, the confident political atmosphere inspired by promises of change and improvement, turned sour. The slogan "Revolutionary Ethiopia or Death" guided the Red Terror campaign in 1977-78 whereby any form of opposition, mainly student and civilian, was crushed by force of arms (Hailu, Wolde-Georgis and Van Arsdale 1994:33). Summary killings without legal process, mass detentions, and systematic torture became commonplace (Moussa 1993:63-64). Civil war and the Somali invasion of 1977-78 significantly increased military spending while people starved (Sorenson 1994) and the economy stagnated. Two episodes of famine further exacerbated the situation (1984-85, occurring just over a decade after the hunger of 1973-74 [Rahmato 1987:173]).

Legal emigration from Ethiopia under the socialist dictatorship required one of three types of documents: a work permit abroad, a scholarship or a medical note.[41] Clandestine escape routes provided an alternative for the majority of emigrants unable to obtain such documents. Neighboring countries (Djibouti, Somalia) opened their borders. From Mengistu's consolidation of power in 1974 to the end of his reign in 1991, the socio-political

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[41] Very little is written about Ethiopian migrants in Western countries during the imperial era. In his exhaustive book titled *Parcours d'Éthiopiens en France et aux États-Unis*, Abye considers the small cohort of Ethiopian diplomats and elite students living abroad between 1964 and 1974 as the first migration wave out of Ethiopia, though only 0.1% of the population resided outside of the country between 1941 and 1974 (2004:128).

and economic situation in Ethiopia produced one of the largest refugee populations in the world during that period (Sorenson 1994:70). Never in Ethiopian history did migration become a "long-term strategy" (Hailu, Wolde-Georgis and Van Arsdale 1994) to the extent it did at the end of the twentieth century.[42] As a result, Ethiopian communities proliferated and multiplied in environments where historically there were none.

Beta Israel Migration: Leaving Ethiopia

Unlike other persecuted minorities fleeing Ethiopia, the establishment of Israel in 1948 and the recognition of their identity as Jews almost 30 years later provided a state guarantor for the lives of Ethiopian Jews. Cohorts of Beta Israel escaped from Ethiopia and finally began to fulfill their dream of "returning" to Jerusalem starting form the late 1970s and early 80s.

Private rescue efforts during this period can be categorized under two headings: groups that supported Israel's conduct in response to the Ethiopian Jewish cause, and organizations who sought and succeeded to provoke Israeli and diaspora Jewish authorities to engage themselves more fully (Grunau 1995). Prior to the 1970s, a few hundred Ethiopian Jewish immigrants moved to Israel on their own. In 1977, over a hundred Beta Israel were brought under conditions of extreme secrecy in exchange for military equipment through an arms deal between Mengistu and the Israeli government. When it was publicly exposed in 1978, political relations between both countries shattered, and Beta Israel emigration became legally impossible. It was only in 1979-1980 that clusters of Beta Israel,

[42] Ethiopia's political situation produced five types of refugees: revolutionary activists, contenders for power, opponents of change, persecuted minorities (Eritreans, Tigres and Oromos) and displaced masses (Bulcha 1988:81).

mainly from the Tigre region, reached Israel. In the midst of Ethiopia's worsening situation, the corridor to the Sudan ("the Sudan route") presented an alternative. This road offered an exit for many Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees, regardless of their ethno-religious background. For the Israeli government, Sudanese refugee camps corresponded to a pick up point for displaced Beta Israel. Word went around in Beta Israel villages of a possible migration project to Israel and thousands headed west.

Subsequently, there were three Ethiopian migration waves to Israel (Grunau 1995). Between 1980 and 1984, approximately 7,500 Ethiopian Jews, mainly from Tigrinya-speakers and from the Gondar provinces, made aliyah. In 1984, the Israeli government airlifted about the same number of Beta Israel refugees from Sudan in Operation Moses. This project started in November 1984 and came to a halt four months later when diplomatic ties between Israel and the Sudan deteriorated due to irresponsible media coverage. When the Sudanese president interrupted Operation Moses, stranded Beta Israel were airlifted in the follow-up rescue effort (Operation Sheba) jointly led by the Israeli and American governments. Approximately 8,000 refugees were brought to Israel by these airlifts. The number of Ethiopian Jewish immigrants totaled to about 15,000 by the end of 1985, though many Beta Israel refugees were left behind. It would be seven more years before families dispersed by Operation Moses would reunite. Soon after re-establishing dialogue between Israel and Mengistu's government in May 1991, Operation Solomon brought over about 14,000 internally displaced Beta Israel living in Addis Abeba (Ethiopia), mainly from Amharic-speaking regions. By the time of the airlift, Mengistu had fled to Uganda with $30 million paid by Israeli officials and American Jewish organizations, a transaction that drew the operation to a close (Seeman 1997).

Ethiopian Israelis I interviewed in 2007-2009 reached Israel with one of these two migration waves as infants or toddlers. Two people were born in the Sudan. Many had distinct memories of their journey. Uri was only four when his family left their home near Gondar in the early 1980s, but he specifically remembers wearing underwear and a red shirt: "I remember it was a kind of silk, a red shirt with buttons. […] These are things you don't forget." He also recalled being sick with malaria and all the "mess" of life in a refugee camp:

> Thank God we got out of it. My sister turned around in the middle of the journey [to Sudan] and went back to Ethiopia. She came to Israel eight years later. That means she stayed there without anybody. If you speak with her you won't understand how many stories she has, because she really went through a lot, a lot of trauma. She simply stayed there alone and we couldn't go back because if we were to go back we would have been killed, so we smuggled her and… it's a whole story.

Joshua described the whole experience in biblical terms: "It's like the second exodus from Egypt … Even worse, like, in the exodus of Egypt God was with them, in this case he wasn't," because of the extremely harsh living conditions in the camps. For Yelanit, a five year-old girl during the escape, "it was hard. I remember we would walk only during the night because it was forbidden during the day, because we could be caught and all that. I remember the forests we used to hide in, and the animals and the monkeys' screams, that stuck in my head." Eli was a little boy when his parents reached the Sudan. He remembers the flight that brought them to Israel: "The [Israeli] soldiers gave us plastic bags of water. In the airplane I sat on the floor, all the children sat on the floor and the parents sat on chairs. It was an air force plane or El-Al, I don't remember so well. I remember a big airplane, full of people, and I was sitting and crying because I wanted more water."

What came to be known as "The Sudan Route" (*derech hasudan*) claimed approximately 4000 Beta Israel lives. Families endured untold hardships, torn apart by

political circumstances, disease and other misfortunes. Many children arrived to Israel as orphans.[43] Some were sent to the Sudan with older cousins or other family members while parents stayed behind to care for newborns and the elderly. In other cases, one parent left with some of the children while the other remained in Ethiopia with the rest of the family. While some literature exists on the traumas endured on the Sudan Route (BenEzer 2006), many stories remain untold. The trek claimed the lives of many grandparents, parents and children, as did life in the refugee camps. Today, the legacy of the Sudan Route holds currency for Ethiopian Jews. It resonates with the story of Jewish suffering in their quest to reach the Holy Land. As such, they have paid the ultimate price for their love of Zion and their longing to reach "Jerusalem" (Israel) at all cost. The losses endured on the Sudan Route are today an institutionally commemorated event recognized by the state of Israel.

Operation Solomon (1991) left behind 2,800 Ethiopians that the Jewish Agency categorized as Falash Mura, descendants of the Beta Israel who converted to Christianity in the nineteenth century as a result of British missionary activities. The Falash Mura claim Jewish ancestry and a right to return to Israel. These contested immigrants continue to trickle into Israel. Considered impure according to Jewish religious law, the Falash Mura willingly underwent a program of "Return to Judaism" in absorption centers. Ironically, in the eyes of the rabbinate as well as of the state, the Falash Mura occupy a position of religious "purity" not accorded to Beta Israel/Ethiopian Jews who refused to comply to demands and "reconvert" upon entering Israel in the 1980s and 1990s.

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[43] During the time I conducted fieldwork in 2008-09, an important debate was going on in Israel. In light of the worsening situation in Darfur, asylum-seeking Sudanese were fleeing to Israel. Their plea to stay on humanitarian grounds sparked a national debate as to whether Israel should grant them asylum. According to Eli, older Ethiopian Jews who traveled as adults on the Sudan Route hate the Sudanese who "robbed, stole, and raped girls," having taken advantage of a vulnerable population.

According to John, a community worker I interviewed, the migration journey of Ethiopian Jews is pivotal in considering the starting point from which the olim began their integration process in Israel:

> […] They came from Sudan [where] there was a total breakdown of the family structure because very frequently whole families did not come. Parents would send their children with an older cousin or someone because they had small children and elderly parents to take care of in the villages… Many people died along the way, you had orphans who had to more or less raised themselves, or parents who arrived having had the trauma of losing children. People arrived as widows, one part of the couple didn't arrive. If there was a married couple one would go with the children and the other stayed behind. The traditional leadership already broke down in that way because again the young people had to take care of the elderly whereas before it was the elderly who gave their set guidance. Those who came by way of Addis Abeba [Operation Salomon 1991], the men by and large could not be breadwinners. They became dependent on handouts. Children did not have a traditional framework, they were on the streets. Addis Abeba has many, many temptations … In the late 80s people came from the villages to Addis Abeba […] It wasn't going directly from the village to Israel, it was going from the village to a very difficult transition period which sometimes lasted a few years, and then to Israel. [T]he community that arrived in Israel was in many ways traumatized.

John's observations highlight two key elements of Ethiopian Jews' experiences in the last 30 years or so. Firstly, the trauma they endured, like millions of other (non-Jewish) Ethiopians who fled the country, cannot be underestimated. The location of trauma is not so much in the migration journey itself, he points out, but rather in its lasting effects on the family unit. Broken families continued to come undone after starting their new lives in Israel. Changes in the traditional, rural Ethiopian family structure will be analyzed in more detail in the following chapter, along with a discussion of their integration process.

Secondly, John's use of the word "community" indexes that the formation of a seemingly homogeneous "Ethiopian community" in Israel – a "black" Jewish community – is actually an amalgamation of de-centralized groups of Beta Israel villages. Following aliyah, dispersed "Falasha" populations in Ethiopia became a "community" of Ethiopian Jews and blacks, despite the fact that this racial label carries a very negative connotation for

the older generation. The assemblage of an Ethiopian Jewish "community" in Israel occurs on the premise of blackness. In the official Israeli Jewish narrative, blackness means being ethnically – but not necessarily racially, in terms of genealogy and bloodlines – Ethiopian (Kaplan 2003). The making of this group occurred at the intersection of existing Jewish ethnic and racial relations in Israel, on the one hand, and, as the following chapter addresses, internal fissures among Ethiopians themselves, on the other hand.

Chapter 4

THE EMERGENCE OF AN ETHIOPIAN JEWISH "BLACK" COMMUNITY: INTERNAL VARIATIONS AND CHANGES IN THE ETHIOPIAN FAMILY

The objective of this chapter is twofold. First, I argue that the Ethiopian community in Israel is multi-layered, polarized and segmented. Second, I focus on two sites of post-aliyah transformation: gender and generational relations within the family unit. From the family unit, I expand to the larger collective unit – the "Ethiopian community." I analyze the community from the perspective of its internal dynamics and variations. In the last few pages, I discuss the Ethiopian community in terms of its formation as a seemingly homogenous "black" Jewish group from the external perspective of the Israeli public.

4.1 An Internal Overview: Ethiopian Jews in Israel Today

The category "Ethiopian Jew" denotes an amalgamation of wide-ranging ethnic and religious self-identifications and experiences. Non-Ethiopians consistently overlook the extent of its diversity. While overlaps occur, core sub-categories inscribe the "community" with important divisions. Salient markers of internal divisions are: 1) ethnic and linguistic background based on the region of origin in Ethiopia; 2) immigration cohort (*vatikim* vs *olim khadashim*: veterans vs new immigrants); 3) religious background (the Falash Mura); 4) religious practices and tensions; 5) race and descent (barya vs chewa, or people of slave descent vs former masters). Social class is also a key factor of intra-communal distinction, albeit to a lesser extent. In the following section, I explore each of these divisions.

1) Ethnic and Linguistic Background Based on Region of Origin in Ethiopia

Ethiopian Israelis consistently reminded me that the majority of the community (approximately 70%) is Amhara from the Gondar region and speaks Amharic. Tigrinya-speaking populations from the Tigre region, the most northern tip of Ethiopia, comprise about 30% of Israel's Ethiopian Jews.[44] Tigres began to trickle into Israel prior to the mass migration of 1984 that brought mostly Amharas from Gondar to Israel. Today in Israel, tensions exist between (Jewish) Amharas and Tigres and according to research participants, in extreme cases families do not intermarry between the two groups.

During fieldwork, the latent hostility between Amhara and Tigre groups came to the fore on many occasions, including during observations I made and comments I heard at the Seged celebration in 2008. The Seged, mentioned in Chapter Two, is an annual religious holiday originally held in northern Ethiopia where disparate Beta Israel villages gathered on a mountain for a mass ceremony. Following the Ethiopians' migration, the Seged is now held in Jerusalem on top of Mount Zion or, more recently, on the Armon Hanatziv Promenade[45] where thousands gather every year. A smaller group of Ethiopians celebrate at the Wailing Wall, the most sacred Jewish site (see Kaplan 2005 for a discussion on the location of the Seged).[46] An Amharic-speaking friend explained why there are two locations

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[44] "Amhara" refers to the hegemonic Christian group in Ethiopia comprised of amharophones. It is, however, a socio-political rather than an ethnic term (Tibebu 1996: 45). Along with Tigres, who are culturally close to Amharas though they speak Tigrinya, both groups form what is historically considered the ruling class of Ethiopia (Bulcha 1988). "Othered" groups in Ethiopia like Oromos or Muslims are thought of as such in reference to dominant Christian Amharas/Tigres. Some authors speak of phenotypical differences between Amhara/Tigre "highlanders" (from the highland plateau) who look similar, in opposition to other populations in Ethiopia (Lipsky 1962; Donham 1986).

[45] Since July 2008 the Israeli government has declared it a "national religious holiday" like the Mimouna for Moroccan Jews, as mentioned in Chapter Two.

[46] Historically, the Beta Israel became acquainted with mainstream Jewish references like the Wailing Wall as a result of contact and exchanges with diaspora Jews.

for celebrating the Seged: "Tigrinya speakers go to the Wailing Wall (*Kotel* in Hebrew) while Amharas go to the mountain," like they did in Ethiopia. This distinction points to a general stereotype about the way that many Amharas I spoke to perceive the integration of Tigres. Negus, a community worker, shed some light on this:

> The approach of the aliyah from Tigre is easier. They want to be like everyone else [like Israelis], they want to integrate and lower their own pride. [They] want to integrate as much as possible. And [then] there are the Beta Israel who are more proud and who say: "We will decide, for 2000 years we [held to our traditions], we were by ourselves [separate from other Jews] and nobody sent us any halachic ruling [authenticating our Jewishness]. We observed the law. In short, we are above you and leave us alone […]." And on that there's resentment between both groups.

Divisions running along ethnic lines are further complicated by the fact that these two communities responded differently to the demands for official conversion to Judaism made on behalf of the Rabbinate upon their arrival to Israel. Requirements to remodel the Ethiopian Jewish body into a purely halachic one led to antagonisms between those who "reconverted" silently and others who felt it was an insult to their Jewish heritage and an explicit form of institutional racism. The general perception among Amharas I spoke with was that Jews from the Tigre region "converted" obediently and without protest. In contrast, the Amhara Beta Israel perceived doubts cast on their Jewishness as an insult, protesting and mostly refusing to comply with the request. I asked Addissa, an Amhara originally from a village close to Gondar, why her parents chose not to convert. She offered an explanation I heard often: "Why would I convert? I was Jewish before I came to Israel." While the conversion process requires that Ethiopians become 100% halachically pure in order to be full-fledged members of the Jewish people, Addissa's understanding is that the Beta Israel have always *been* Jewish. Her Ethiopian body is just as authentically Jewish as any other Jewish body. This issue highlights the dissonance between race and religion, so inextricably

linked to each another in Judaism, but turned on its head with the arrival of Ethiopians to Israel.

Weddings were another ceremonial occasion that I witnessed where the segmentation between Amharas and Tigres crystallized. In 2008 I attended a marriage between an Amhara bride and a Tigre groom. 600 plus guests were at the event. Half of them got up and danced when Amharic songs came on while the other half sat down. When a song in Tigrinya started playing, Amharas sat down and Tigres rose to the dance floor. Karen, a young Ethiopian friend, observed the same phenomenon at her friend's wedding:

> I spoke to a friend of mine [...] who is Tigre. She said "My little brother said that it's not worthwhile to marry Tigres because he has Amhara friends who tell him that they are difficult people." She said: "I also think they are difficult people." So you see? We do this [to ourselves, create animosity within the community]! It's our parents, do you understand what they do? Two weeks ago a friend of mine got married, she's Tigre and he's Amhara. In the hall they were playing Tigrit music. The music starts and all my Tigre friends said: "Now all the Amharas will ruin the [dance] circle, they don't know the dance, they jump, it's a mess … Oy what stupid people!" One group says "They are stupid" and the other group says "They are stupid", Tigres are alone [on their own], Amharas are alone [on their own], and everyone is Ethiopian!

Based on what he sees with his younger siblings, Michael believes that the Amhara/Tigre divide does not carry much weight for the latest generation of Israeli-born Ethiopians. This is reinforced by the fact that, by and large, they do not speak their parents' native language. These youths simply consider themselves to be a Jewish ethnic group – a racialized one albeit – identified as "Ethiopian" or "black." However, adults in their 20s and 30s knew enough about Ethiopian culture to differentiate between the groups.

To be sure, there is a historical and political dimension to this tension. The literature on Beta Israel history for example, is Amhara-centered. Some Tigres I spoke with expressed frustration about the fact that their group's perspective is viewed exclusively through the lens of Amhara experiences. Tigre Jewish history has thus become "amharicized" in the

Israeli context. Interestingly, this is an accusation that marginal groups in Ethiopia have made against the state's hegemonic group of Amhara and Tigre Christians. The history of groups such as the Oromo represent alternative voices written out of Ethiopia's nationalist solomonic narrative. In regards to Amhara/Tigre relations in Israel, animosity can also be attributed to the fact that Amharas received the bulk of external Jewish aid distributed to Beta Israel villages in Ethiopia. These tensions were transported to Israel and amplified with the conflicting reactions each group had to post-aliyah demands of conversion.

2) Immigration Cohort: *Vatikim* (veterans) vs *Olim Khadashim* (new immigrants)

In 2008-2009 I volunteered in Ethiopian youth centers where kids gathered after school. One center was located in a neighborhood not far from Tel Aviv with a relatively small Ethiopian community. I was hanging out outside with Shira and Ari, both 15 (November 5, 2008):

> GD: Ari, do you speak Tigrinya or Amharinya?
>
> Ari: No nothing.
>
> GD: Why?
>
> Ari: I don't like those languages.
>
> GD: What do your parents speak?
>
> Ari: My dad is Tigrinya and my mom is original Ethiopian [he used the word "regular" in Hebrew, meaning that she is Amhara].
>
> GD: You don't speak the language?
>
> Ari: No, I don't like it, what is that? [He made funny noises with his mouth] Me, it's only Hebrew and English, and I like French.

I then turned to Shira:

> GD: Shira, you speak it, no?

Shira: A little bit.

Ari: She's a new immigrant! Ha! I'm just kidding!

Ari meant to tease Shira by calling her a "new immigrant," a person who has not yet been westernized by Israeli standards and who still holds on to "backward" culture references, in this case an Ethiopian language. For Ari these elements cannot be translated into anything Israeli. Immigrants who arrived from Ethiopia not long before I started fieldwork (2007-2009) carry the stigma of embodied un-Israeliness, epitomized in Ari's world by their knowledge of an Ethiopian language. The distinction drawn between veterans and new (Jewish) immigrants holds currency in Israel across all ethnic groups. For Ethiopian Jews, the status of an *oleh khadash* (a male person who just made aliyah, a new male Jewish immigrant to Israel) contrasts to that of veterans socialized as Israelis. Contrary to my initial expectations, vatikim (veteran) Ethiopian Israelis highlighted that being an oleh is not necessarily associated with not knowing how to live in a modern, urban setting. In fact, since the 1990s, arrivals from Ethiopia come directly from large urban cities where they lived, such as Gondar or Addis Abeba. In some ways, these cohorts are in a better position to sustain the culture shock of immigration. My interview with Natalie, a religious university student in her late 20s, underscores this:

> There is a lot of difference [between vatikin and olim khadashim]. The immigrants are better than the veterans. Now they are smarter because in Ethiopia, they were in Addis, which is quite developed. They're educated, they already know what Israel is.

The difference between old and new cohorts pivots on the *demystification* of Israel and the "dream" of reaching a fantasy-like "Jerusalem." Natalie remarks:

> Most of the veterans and the parents who made aliyah to the country, they had a dream. We came only for Jerusalem. Now they come because of the money, they come because they know it's better in Israel. We only wanted Jerusalem. It's a matter of faith/belief.

Another person who arrived with the initial 1984 cohort commented:

> All the people who made aliyah with Operation Solomon were in Addis for a long time, so they knew how to behave a bit. The Ethiopians who were already in Israel told them: "How do you know what a TV is?" They were taught in Addis. They were prepared to [come] here. So ok, you get by, now there isn't [a difference] any more between those who came with Operations Solomon and Moses. They are the same. But the Falash Mura, them, the veteran Ethiopians don't like them. They say: "They're not Jewish, they called us names, they called us 'Falasha' in Ethiopia."

The people I spent time with during fieldwork, by and large from the initial Beta Israel cohorts (Operations Moses and Solomon), noted that the aliyah from Ethiopia ended in the 1990s following Operation Solomon. 57, 089 Beta Israel reached Israel between 1948 and 1999, with the majority (almost 40, 000) arriving in the 1990s. However, according to the Statistical Abstract of Israel (2007, no 58), 22, 027 Ethiopian immigrants arrived between 2000-2006.[47] These cohorts are Falash Muras, as opposed to the mostly Beta Israel populations who came with the airlifts.

In 2008 the Ethiopian youth center where I was volunteering organized an event on the eve of the Seged celebration. The administrators had invited a group of Ethiopian immigrants living in a nearby absorption center, at the request of the center's director. The difference between vatikim and olim khadashim who were Falash Mura, was palpable. They consisted of about one third of the audience. Differences between them were apparent in the way they dressed, the language they spoke among themselves (Amharic), and the total lack of contact and unease that separated one group from the other. A couple of the young men were proudly sporting "I ♥ Ethiopia" scarves written on an Ethiopian tricolor

[47] Central Bureau of Statistics, Statistical Abstract of Israel, 2007, no 58, Table 4, Subject 4, "Immigrants, by Period of Immigration, Country of Birth and Last Country of Residence." http://www1.cbs.gov.il/reader/shnaton/templ_shnaton_e.html?num_tab=st04_04&CYear=2007.

background. For the first time, I also noticed one or two young men with tattoos, adornments usually reserved for women.

3) Religious Background: The Falash Mura

As mentioned above, the Falash Mura are former Beta Israel who, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, converted to Christianity in response to the pressure from European missionaries. They have been the subject of intense debate among Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian Israelis as to whether it falls under Israel's obligation to guide them back to their Jewish faith and offer them citizenship. Liberal American Jewish organizations have been very supportive of their presence in Israel. Until 2006 the Israeli government brought over, at its peak, approximately 300 Falash Mura per month.[48] The logic behind their aliyah is premised on family reunification as well as their willingness to reconnect with Judaism and undergo conversion to Orthodox Judaism.

I asked many Beta Israel descendants what they thought of the Falash Mura immigration. Some didn't seem to care. Others believed it was important to stand behind the decision made by the state of Israel and support them, regardless of their own personal thoughts on the matter. During my stay in Israel, I did not meet anyone who self-identified as "Falash Mura," except for one person. Almost everyone else I spoke with was from the 1984 or 1991 migration cohort.

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[48] Between 2010 and 2013 alone, 7,000 Falash Mura were brought to Israel (see Sam Sokol, "Gov't celebrates 'end' of Ethiopian aliya with arrival of 450 immigrants," *The Jerusalem Post*, September 29, 2013, http://www.jpost.com/National-News/Govt-celebrates-end-of-Ethiopian-aliya-with-arrival-of-450-immigrants-324609).

Dany, a working father of four who grew up in Ethiopia, recounted unpleasant memories about the Falash Mura: "These are the same people who used to insult us and call us Jews in Ethiopia [as a derogatory remark] and buda [a term used in Ethiopia to describe populations with evil supernatural powers] and now they're here." Aaron felt the same way:

> […] Although we were persecuted in Ethiopia, and they […] even killed some of us, we did not convert to Christianity. We continued to keep/observe our Judaism. We came by foot, and we lost people [those who died on the way]. We immigrated to Israel by our own will. Some people say: "The Falash Mura were Jews but they turned to Christianity. On the other hand they immigrated to Israel directly when we were suffering." […] The Falash Mura are not wanted, so they [veteran Ethiopian Israelis] did not bond/try to connect [with them]. Now it's inside the community [now they're part of the community, in other words, it's a *fait accompli*].

Ariella, who works for an Ethiopian Jewish advocacy group, explains the backlash they received from other Ethiopian organizations for helping a group of Falash Muras fight the Knesset:

> There are organizations that work to bring Falash Muras to Israel, but we deal only with those who are here. As far as we're [the association] concerned, we don't deal with immigration to Israel, but we deal with absorption. We do not differentiate if they are Falash Mura or whatever. There were certain cases in absorption centers where they were [causing] problems and most of the immigrants are Falash Mura. They had difficulties, problems, and we were the only ones who got mobilized to help them. They held a strike here, we were with them until two o'clock in the morning and we fought in the Knesset in order to get their conditions met [conditions they requested to have at the absorption center], and they got it. Many of the other organizations cursed us, called us names and said: "Why are you helping the Falash Mura?" […] We said, first of all, they are human beings, the most basic thing. The organization's outlook is that this is a social organization and a person who thinks of himself as social doesn't differentiate between one human being and another. It makes no difference, if injustice is done to someone, it doesn't matter where, he should be sensitive to other people. It's not only Ethiopians who are miserable and others who aren't miserable!?

4) Religious Practices and Tensions

Another factor of division among Ethiopian Jews in Israel revolves around the diversity of religious practices and the encroachment of secularism. Generally, the older generation still observes traditional forms of Ethiopian Jewish religion led by Ethiopian

Jewish priests (qessotch, plural for qess). Every person I met between the ages of 15-35 follows mainstream Judaism. Young teenagers I spoke with did not mention anything about traditional religious practices at all, nor did I ask any questions about it. I was aware that cultural vestiges of an "un-modern" and unusable past are a source of embarrassment for them. From their perspective, traditional Ethiopian Judaism represents their parents' and grandparents' "outdated" religious worldview.

Some Beta Israel religious practices were eventually abandoned or concealed with the advent of aliyah. Others were partially reinvented to fit the landscape of their new home in Israel in a way that did not pose a threat to their environment. Both old and new religious practices overlap to varying degrees as concessions were made to change, maintain, or suppress some aspects from both systems. One way in which this plays out is the importance attributed by some to the traditional Ethiopian Jewish priesthood, or the qessotch. Ironically, aliyah to Israel has ultimately signified the end of a long tradition of Beta Israel practices, beliefs and liturgy developed over centuries (Tourny 2002).

Some Ethiopians are advocating for the rabbinate's recognition of the qess' religious authority, which has been completely undermined in Israel and rendered to a folklorized vestige. With each generation, knowledge about traditional Beta Israel religion is waning. I suspect that Beta Israel/Ethiopian Jewish religion has become unrecognizable for those who were raised with it in Ethiopia, as in the case of older Ethiopian immigrants in Israel. This has also been intensified by the process of mass secularization of the younger generation. The secular environment of Israeli society has been hard to come to terms with for the older generation, who are generally observant and pious. In 2008, a storyteller and educator addressed this in his presentation to a group of Ethiopian college students:

> First of all you see [the traditional Ethiopian women's] dress is long and you can't see the ankle. But here in Israel the dress goes up each year [dresses become shorter - audience laugh]. But I'm talking about the village [in Ethiopia]. [But] in the village? There's no such thing! First time that girls were wearing pants is in the Land of Israel. At the beginning there was a problem. On the one hand they wanted to be like everyone, on the other hand they were afraid that the parents would disapprove, so then what would they do? They would put on pants, and before entering the house they changed into traditional Ethiopian clothes. This lasted for a short period of time, but after the parents accepted it, they gave up. So today it's all free [to make the decision to wear pants - audience laughing and clapping].

The ease (or lack thereof) with which Ethiopians can marry is a key point of religious tension between young Ethiopian Jews and the religious authorities. Religious courts decide on all matters of marriage and divorce in Israel. The fact that many Ethiopian Jews chose not to "reconvert" poses a significant problem when time comes to get married.[49] Couples cannot marry unless all traces of doubt about the "purity" of their Jewishness are erased. This is true for any Jew wanting to get married in Israel. For Ethiopians however, it takes on a particular salience due to the "impure" (*mamzer*) status of those who did not re-convert and to the doubts pertaining to their Jewish bloodline.

During an event in 2008 organized by the Ethiopian Student Association, one of the speakers, an Ethiopian Israeli rabbi that one friend qualified as "Ashkenazi," (as in, part of the religious mainstream and culturally non-Ethiopian), captivated the audience's attention with his passionate call to nurture Jewish spirituality. When time came for questions, a sore point was exposed concerning marriage prohibitions. A female student, quite insistent on getting an answer, asked why it is so hard for Ethiopian Israelis to get married, adding: "When I serve in the army, it says in my ID that I'm Jewish. When I want to get married,

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[49] This phenomenon is true for a host of other Jews as well (see Gershom Gorenberg, "How do you prove you're a Jew?," *The New York Times*, March 2, 2008, http://www.nytimes.com/2008/03/02/magazine/02jewishness-t.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0).

why am I not considered Jewish?" (Observation notes, July 2008, Tel Aviv). Her point solicited supportive reactions from her young colleagues and a heated dialogue ensued with the rabbi.

The animosity expressed that evening towards a representative of the religious authority highlights the in-between position of Ethiopian Jews in the eyes of the Israeli nation-state. The ambiguity of their religious "purity" is not deemed a significant factor impeding their military duties; yet when it comes to matters of the Jewish *race* and the continuity of Jews as a distinct people represented through the act of marriage, traces of uncertainty about their religious purity play a central role.

5) Race and Descent: The Barya Issue

When the Beta Israel migrated they brought along their emic race-based system of classification. The pejorative view that the Beta Israel held of the barya, in other words descendants of slaves, is well entrenched in Israel. Today a form of internal racism thrives among Ethiopian Jews (Salamon 2003). Some immigrants from Ethiopia arrived with former slaves who were already incorporated into the larger family unit they once served. Salamon's (1994,1995,1999, 2001a,b, 2003) research demonstrates that racial and social divides between barya and chewa are firmly in place in the post-migratory context. Former masters continue to take measures so as to avoid blurring the boundaries by prohibiting intermarriages with barya.

Experiences of discrimination amplified for baryas once in Israel. They experienced a "two-tiered" form of discrimination: first, as members of the barya class from within the Ethiopian community, and second, as members of the Ethiopian Jewish population from

Israeli society. In Israel, their chewa masters were also subjected to discrimination, as black Ethiopian Jews in a "white" Jewish society. In Israel, information about Ethiopian race constructs and intra-community discrimination remains deeply buried. They rarely surface, and only in the most intimate settings according to Salamon (2003).[50] To the general public, however, Ethiopians personify victims of racism rather than its perpetrators.

Speaking with Ariella, an Ethiopian Israeli in her late 30s who works for an Ethiopian cultural association, it became clear that intra-community distinctions are receding as time goes by:

> Now everyone is the same more or less. There is no racism now, no discrimination among Ethiopians, except… Beta Israel to Falash Mura. That's the main [division], that's the only thing I see now.

Having heard about the negative treatment reserved for a segment of Ethiopian Jews marked as barya, I pressed on:

> Q: And there is the whole story of barya, who is barya and who is not, is this also a problem?
>
> A: This generally, that's an entirely other story.[51] […] I was exposed to this here in Israel.
>
> Q: You discovered that here?! Really?
>
> A: I did not know [about it]!
>
> Q: But if you want to marry with someone who is barya would that be possible for you?
>
> A: My parents wouldn't have let me, they would have said "Go and get married by yourself!"

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[50] To my knowledge, only one anthropologist has written and researched extensively about slavery and race in regards to Ethiopian Israelis, and I am indebted to the substantial contribution made by this author (Hagar Salamon).

[51] There is a hint, in the original Hebrew expression, insinuating that this story is worse than is communicated by the translated quote.

In terms of racialized class divisions, older Ethiopian Israelis differentiate between barya and chewa. Since the heart of the Ethiopian Jewish community shifted from Ethiopia to Israel, the internal boundaries between barya and chewa are being challenged on numerous levels, not least from younger members of the community. The barya issue will be further addressed in the following chapter.

Adaptations undergone by Ethiopian Jews in Israel, along with the traumatic migration journey, have left an imprint on the most important social unit: the family. I turn to these changes in the following section. While there is diversity within Israel's Ethiopian population, such transformations, stemming from the shared experience of migration and of being Ethiopian/black in Israel, are thus experienced collectively.

4.2 Fissures Within the Family: Gender Gaps and Generational Splits

The initial post-migration years saw a drastic reversal of the traditional family unit, a process that began upon leaving Ethiopia (BenEzer 2002), and of the strict gender roles commonly found in Ethiopia (Anteby-Yemini 2004b). Deterritorialisation was compounded by subsequent displacements experienced soon after reaching Israel. Dror, a non-Ethiopian Israeli with an extensive history of helping Ethiopian Jews, gives an outline of the main integration issues:

> […] People were sent first to absorption centers for a year or two years, sometimes more, and then to permanent housing. Children would go to school wherever the absorption center was and whenever the parents purchased an apartment they moved, sometimes in the middle of the school year. These are enormous dislocations. And of course the question of adjustment. The majority of the elder generation has not learned Hebrew. […] In the case of many of the adults there wasn't always regular attendance to *ulpanim* [Hebrew classes] especially for young people who had babies although, ironically, in many cases women who had to go work or to shop for the family acquired basic Hebrew faster than men. There was the enormous challenge of employment. How much work is Israel going to have for people who are unskilled and formally uneducated in terms of Israeli standards? […] Ethiopians learned very quickly that the little bit of manual labor still done here is

> done by foreign workers or by Palestinians, and they don't want to be foreign workers and they don't want to be Palestinians in terms of their identity. The older generation with its problems, first of all with enormous economic problems, because most end up being supported by the state […], and the language problems and problems of employment which also relate to the self image, to the ways the children view parents, to the way one copes with the ways of the new society, created a tremendous generational gap. (July 10, 2008, Tel Aviv)

Ethiopian Jewish families weathered drastic reconfigurations in the framework of their journey to Israel. The reversal of gender roles between men and women on the one hand, and of generational roles between the young and the elderly on the other, changed the very core of Ethiopian families. In rural Ethiopia, men were considered omnipotent and superior to wives and children. In Israel, however, where the gap in gender inequality is smaller, women from rural areas were presented with opportunities not readily available to them in Ethiopia. Access to vocational training, education, and remunerated work outside of the household altered marital and child rearing practices. Mothers and grandmothers were child brides by the time they started menstruating in Ethiopia. Their Israeli daughters and granddaughters, however, have delayed this process significantly and are having far fewer children by rural Ethiopian standards. Among the group of people I interacted with, Israel's secular context and Ethiopians' desire to be seen as modern Israelis have made it somewhat acceptable for some young couples to live together without getting married. This also circumvents the arduous process of getting religious authorities to approve a marriage.

Ethiopian Israeli women have been at the forefront of the process of integrating into Israeli society. They were the first in the household to be employed and to interact with non-Ethiopian Israelis, and learned Hebrew faster than their male counterparts. I asked Karen if she thought that the move from Ethiopia to Israel was easier for men or for women:

> I think it's easier for women. First of all, in Ethiopia the men are the authority, *bayl ha bait* [owner of the house, but also means a husband]. Whatever he says you have to do, whether you are his daughter or his wife or whatever. It's a safe environment

> [it's a structured environment]. Now, you come to Israel, and this safe environment is broken. For an Ethiopian guy to leave his safe environment, his authority, it's MUCH more difficult than for women [emphasis made by Karen], because now women have many more privileges and they get to say whatever they want. They progressed and they will make the effort, which is why I think most [university] students are women.

She goes on to talk about her mother's feistiness:

> My father barely speaks Hebrew, he barely understands. But my mom? She understands everything. The kids used to sit next to my parents and talk Hebrew, thinking that they don't understand so we would talk about this and that until one day my mom asked a question, and we understood that she understands Hebrew! Now there is no way I will speak in Hebrew at home, especially in front of my mom. She goes around the city, she goes to see the social worker, she complains about this and that, she gets so many things. I don't know how she does it! Sometimes I wonder how she does it, she goes to the police, somebody stole her wallet, she went to the police [and reported it]. She's amazing, she's amazing my mom, and ALL the women are like that.

Talia recognizes how hard aliyah was for her parents' generation:

> T: […] Although they came here with a lot of will, it's a dream not only of my father's, but also my grandfather's and grandfather's and grandfather's, we heard for generations on top of generations about Jerusalem and about everything. It's very hard first and foremost because it's not what we thought, so it makes you feel bad inside, and also because […] we thought that everybody here is religious, and that finally we can observe the religious laws. In Ethiopia it was hard for us, all the Christians wanted to kill us because we're Jewish, and here finally it's a country of Jews and we would be able to do it like ehh, with everyone together, with all the Jews but …it's not like that. It was a dream, it stayed a dream. My father had a lot of land [a sign of wealth in Ethiopia], he grew corn, wheat, he had horses, cows. He arrived here to the country [Israel], and because he has no diploma, he became a street cleaner. Why? This is what happened to all the adults unfortunately because they didn't study, not in a high school and not in a university. But Ethiopians are very smart, but you can't, you can't see it on them because they're not holding a diploma. It's hard, it's hard.
>
> GD: It's also very hard to see your father [in that position].
>
> T: Yes, it really hurts. It's because of all of these [things] that the problems [in the community] started, in my opinion. So you have a husband murdering his wife, and the respect, there's no respect here, who respects you? You're a cushi here, you're not ehh, not even an Ethiopian.

Talia is referring to the uxoricides (husbands killing their wives) that the community is associated with by the Israeli public. The murder of Ethiopian wives at the hands of their depressed spouses has garnered disproportionate media attention compared to other groups

in which this occurs. During our interview, a veteran non-Ethiopian community worker claimed anecdotally that in 2004-05, there were 24 spousal killings in Israel: "Six were Ethiopian; six were Russian; six were Arab and six were Israeli." The disproportion, according to her, is due to the intense media scrutiny and watchful public eye under which Ethiopian Jews live.

Another breach in the traditional family structure has been the reversal of roles between parents and children. In Ethiopia, parents held authority over children in all aspects of their lives. In Israel, absorption agencies, with the parents' consent, moved children of the initial cohorts into religious boarding schools. The connection between children and their families was thus severed at a crucial time during their integration process. Moreover, the quality of education in boarding schools was sub par. These institutions were reserved for those who were considered to be "problematic" Israeli students, a bureaucratic category that coincided with Mizrahi children. Shoshana, who studied attendees of a special boarding school for "gifted disadvantaged" students, writes:

> Boarding schools in Israel were mostly opened up to immigrants from Islamic countries and their children, a population locally termed ''ethnic'' or ''oriental.'' They were proffered as a mechanism for reeducation with the aim of shedding the pupils' ethnic capital and bringing them to adopt the (European) cultural capital that was seen as more befitting of the modern era [...]. (2012: 189)

The consequences of separating children form their parents were devastating. Parents lost their children's respect and status as the sole authority figures in their lives. Though in recent years children of Ethiopian olim are no longer sent away, the linguistic and cultural disconnect remains:

> Michael (business owner, mid 30s): When they immigrated to Israel there was an absolute disconnection between the family, between the parents and the teenagers, the children. There [in Ethiopia] parents were the authority and here it's the exact opposite. Children take the parents to the social security [office]. They are the ones who translate things to Hebrew. The children know how to read and write and the

parents don't so they don't check their homework. They do not have any influence. On the other hand, in the education system, they think that the new immigrant kids are like all the other children, that their parents are taking care of them. And the kids fall down [go down the wrong path] and get involved with a lot of crime, if it's drugs, if it's stealing, even murder.

Shlomo (coordinator of activities for youth, mid 30s): I see many parents that don't try to learn [about] the country [i.e. don't make an effort to adapt]. They say: "I lived in Ethiopia, I want it like in Ethiopia, let it remain like in Ethiopia." It prevents the child's development. We reached a different place, what's the saying: "When in Rome, do like the Romans." My parents tried to advance somewhere [progress, reach something], no matter how far, but they tried to take a step, and another step, and another step. There are parents who didn't try, who stopped. When they stop, their children also stop. […] We imitate our parents. Between the father who immigrated to Israel at the age of forty and the child who is three or four or five years old, there are such big gaps that cannot be bridged. It is very hard to bridge them. You know, you're familiar with the Ethiopian culture. I don't need to tell you what the Ethiopian culture is, it's a very, very, very strict culture, very strict. This means that the father is the [macho] man in the family, the child is under him, the woman is under him. And the child doesn't understand him, because the child says "What [do you mean] you're a man? You understand nothing. You are my father but you don't know how to read, you do not bring home a salary. At home you do nothing and… and you're going to drink beers." Sometimes my father didn't know what to do with me. He would go to my neighbor and tell her: "My son grew up in Israel, I'm from Ethiopia. Sometimes I don't know how to punish him or how to treat him, what should I do?" But it was important for him to know how I felt. There are fathers for whom it is not important to know how their son feels.

Tania (youth worker, mid 20s): The parents say to the child: "Come with us here, come with us there." The kids are running errands with the parents all the time, and then the child comes and says: "I'm their father, I'm their mouth." So when the parents tell the child to do something, the kid says: "Who are you? I'm your mouth, if it wasn't for me you wouldn't have gone to the clinic." So where are the parents? There are no parents, there are no parents.

The generational gulf between parents and their children, as well as between siblings of older and younger generations, always evoked discussions during interviews:

Uri (business owner, early 30s): Do you know what the Ethiopian problem is? There's a joke about it. The child takes his father to the doctor and he has to explain to the doctor where it hurts. The dad says to the child where it hurts in Amharic, and then the child has to explain to the doctor. The dad says he has an atom bomb in the stomach. How can a child explain that? There are language problems, there's no communication. I didn't have this, you see? My parents are young. The relationship between me and my parents is at an Israeli level completely. There are a few families in the Ethiopian community who communicate the way I do with my parents. I grew up in a different home. My parents are well educated.

Eli, a university student in his late 20s, is very conscious of the cost parents continue to bear by having chosen to immigrate to Israel:

> In my opinion our parents, the adults, we should salute them, really salute them because they came here. Physically they're here, mentally they're there [in Ethiopia] ... They live for us, for the kids, they don't live their own life. They are really disconnected from, ehh [their surrounding]. They're here and surviving, living day to day, it's worthy of admiration in my opinion.

The heavy price incurred by parents and the elderly is not to be underestimated. The journey to Israel was made on their backs, both literally and figuratively. In regards to their integration, these excerpts point to a severe dislocation that defines the lives of many older Ethiopians in Israel. Some recovered and are able to function; many have not. For the younger generation, the trauma of their families' dislocations is still palpable. One way in which teenagers I spent time with circumvented their family's situation was by cultivating a symbolic link with African-Americans, rejecting their parents' culture, and sustaining an Israeli identity at all cost. Those in their mid to late 20s and early 30s, however, had a more integrated approach to their heritage, were more open to discovering their past, and spoke with passion about the various outlets instrumentalized for composing with these dislocations.

4.3 Betwixt and Between: Differences Between Generations

Between 2008 and 2009 I volunteered in various youth centers and spent a great deal of time with young adults between the ages of 16 and 25. This age segment represents the generation of Ethiopians born and raised in Israel. In many ways they come of age as a doubly alienated minority. On the one hand, linguistic and cultural estrangement characterizes their relationships with their mothers, fathers and older family members,

including siblings. Amira, a part-time community worker at an Ethiopian youth center, was a baby when she arrived to Israel. Now in her 20s, she can't help but notice a difference between her generation and the young kids she is now in charge of:

> Q: Do you think some of the kids you work with are embarrassed about where their parents come from?
>
> A: A lot of times, not sometimes. We had a fundraiser where I work, in the center. We wanted to show Ethiopian culture to the kids, so we made *buna* [traditional Ethiopian coffee]. I asked one of the kids' moms to bring *injera* [a flat-pancake like bread]. I called him again and said: "Your mom knows she has to make injera and I want you to bring it to the fundraiser." He didn't want to do it!! He said: "Why did you have to ask my mom for injera?" [speaking dramatically] And I said [laughing]: "Your mom has the best injera in Ashdod!" "No," he answered, "You're embarrassing me!! Why did you do that?" It made me sad because … you're embarrassed by what you are?
>
> Q: Is there a difference between his generation and yours? Like people born in Ethiopia and who then came here and those who are born here like this kid?
>
> A: Yeah there is a difference. I think they suffer more. They feel like, they were raised here so they don't know what Ethiopia is, and everybody says they're Ethiopian but they're not, because they're born and raised here. So they don't have an easy time here, most of the time.

In general, I was told that kids do not find their place in the Ethiopian context of their home:

> Tania (youth worker, mid 20s): The kids have it rough. At home there's the Ethiopian tradition, and you have to go by the Ethiopian tradition which is to respect your siblings, to respect your father, your mother. These are values that Israelis don't have. For Israelis it's audacity, to demand what you want from your parents, not to ask, there's no such thing as asking. Us? It's with great difficulty that you ask your father for help because with us, we, you have to be independent […]. There isn't that connection, there's no connection between the parents and the children. […] [The kids] go out, they see the Israelis who have everything, they are spoiled, and you, you're nothing. So it eats them up inside, so they forget about Ethiopians and deny being Ethiopian. "I'm either a cushi from America" with all this rap, or "I go and commit suicide." There are many youths who commit suicide.

Martin pointed out that the severity of the problems faced by Ethiopian teenagers today is a reflection of the fact that many do not have a strong connection to their origins or a solid sense of who they are and where they come from:

> […] If your family is united and has a strong [sense of] self-esteem and self-acceptance, then it gives you the strength to deal with all the problems [the kids face]. […] If you come from a family that doesn't realize what is outside [of the household], what it means to be a [black] teenager in a white society then it's hard because you don't have anyone to support you. You don't have any internal or external resources. One of the reasons, I think, that a lot of Ethiopian teenagers associate themselves with hip-hop music and Tupac is because it's a rebellion against Israeli society that doesn't fully accept them as equals. Also because Tupac voices their inner fears and frustrations, and he really understands them. It doesn't matter to them [if he made it], if he got killed. They don't really understand that Tupac is not you. YOU have to define someone closer, who is more similar to you, who can help you face whatever you're facing.

Their sense of alienation stems not only from the cultural dissonance separating them from their families, but also from the low socio-economic status they hold in Israeli society. This dynamic thus becomes racialized because the "poor, disadvantaged" of Israel's Jewish society is also associated with the racial category "black." This has occurred at a time in history when being (American) black carries an unprecedented cultural capital, as the following chapter will show.

4.4 External Perspectives: The Emergence of a Black Ethiopian Community

However complex and fractured the population of Ethiopian Jews in Israel, to the non-Ethiopian Israeli they constitute a single "community" and ethnic group (eda). While in Ethiopia, the Beta Israel remained highly conscious of their religious and occupational distinction in relation to dominant (Christian) Ethiopians. Their presence in Israel, by way of their halachic ascription as Jews and of aliyah, re-positioned their collective identity as Ethiopians and blacks (Ben-Eliezer 2004). The arrival of the "blackest" of Jews cogently reorganized the echelons of Israeli society, and for the first time collectively combined both Askenazim and Mizrahim under the rubric of "whites" (Salamon 2003; Ben-David and Ben-Ari 1997). The presence of "black" (Jews) in a "white" (Jewish) environment set the

tone for discussions on Israeli racial and ethnic relations. Similar to the discourse put forth by the Mizrahi Black Panthers in the 1970s, young Ethiopians also draw from an imported black/white racial dichotomy originating from the United States (Kaplan 1999).

According to Anteby-Yemini (2003) and Kaplan (1999), new references of collective imagination informed primarily by race as somatic blackness has materialized among Ethiopian Israelis. The intensified use of a racial discourse has evoked racial discrimination as a trope for explaining the angst they feel due to their socio-economic margnialization (Offer 2007). These encounters have led to a shift in self-perception whereby Ethiopians have developed a heightened consciousness regarding their somatic blackness (Ben-David and Ben-Ari 1997). As an outcome, this has produced a series of new socio-ethnic and racial categories that had not been privileged or extant in Israeli society prior to the arrival of Ethiopian Jews (Salamon 2001b).

Of the scholars who infer race as a relevant category for understanding the integration of Ethiopian Israelis, many problematize how the classification of black is not a natural racial identification (for example, Kaplan, Salamon, Anteby-Yemini, Ben-Eliezer), especially not for the older generation. Contrary to this viewpoint, Ben-David and Ben-Ari (1997) automatically presume that Ethiopians are "black," that other Israelis are "white," and that both groups replicate the American understanding of the black/white race idiom. Doing so disregards the historical contexts that differentiate Israel from the United States, or how racial classification came about in the first place. Furthermore, during fieldwork, I only heard Ethiopians calling non-Ethiopian Israeli Jews "white," highlighting the fact that it is not common among Israelis to describe themselves as such.

The encroachment of race on religion takes a drastic turn when adding socio-demographic realities to the equation. Combining race and class to depict Ethiopian Jewish racialized minorities (i.e. "blacks") as victims of a "white" society erroneously conflates intra-Jewish ethnic/race relations in Israel with the history of race relations in the United States. For example, in a sociological study based on national data derived from the 1995 Israeli Census of Population, Offer posits that the overall socio-economic status of Ethiopian-Israelis is "even lower than that of Israeli Palestinians, the segment considered most marginalized in Israeli society" (2004: 45). While this claim has relevance from a purely statistical and socio-economic standpoint, it remains to be scrutinized and further contextualized. For one, it does not capture the complexity of the positions between Palestinian citizens of Israel and Ethiopian Jews. It also does not take into account that race and racism are inscribed in other locations that might easily be overlooked, such as within the Ethiopian community itself.[52] Moreover, statistics do not account for the "overarching national identification" (Abbink 1984:140) that binds Ethiopian Jews to other Jews. This is the same logic that works to alienate Palestinians and, in a different way, non-Jewish labor migrants.

Offer's analysis draws a parallel between immigration to Israel and immigration to other receiving countries without factoring in the national and religious sentiment of belonging and personal willingness to change – and change drastically – that differentiates Ethiopian Jews from, for example, non-Jewish migrants to Israel. Interestingly, however, when talking with non-Ethiopian Israelis, it became clear that the issues surrounding the

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[52] I thank Lisa Anteby-Yemini for bringing my attention to Offer's work. I am solely responsible, however, for whatever interpretation I provide here.

Ethiopian community are best interpreted through the lens of the closest living example they know of: blacks in the United States.

Whatever external, visible and/or internal changes the elders of the community heeded to in the name of becoming modern, Jewish and Israeli, the younger generation is hyperconscious of the fact that they are nevertheless singled out because of a visible stigma that cannot be strategically discarded or rehabilitated (Abbink 1984). Race and blackness have thus become the most contested, instrumentalized and over-emphasized terrain through which young Ethiopians negotiate a deep desire to *integrate* their difference as Jews and Israelis while claiming sameness and inclusion. What complicates the matter further is that the group in which they seek to integrate is itself a victim of the categorization as a distinct Jewish "race."

Based on research conducted in the early 1980s with a group of newly arrived Ethiopian immigrants, Abbink (1984) confirms that, similarly to Moroccan Jewish immigrants to Israel, Ethiopian immigrants denied and denigrated their own cultural and religious background, thus undermining their collective sense of self-worth. However, contrary to other groups of Asian or African Jewish immigrants, he reports that Ethiopians "were less likely to suppress ethnic pride and self-expression of historical and cultural traditions, after an initial denial of their Ethiopian background in the first few months" (*ibid*.: 144). Ethiopians thus rediscovered the value of their heritage much earlier than "Oriental" groups. While this observation may hold true for first-generation Ethiopian olim who arrived to Israel with a clear understanding of their Ethiopian culture, the situation becomes more complex for their children and grandchildren. For the younger generation, ethnic pride in the wake of little or no knowledge of Ethiopian culture is often subsumed by

an identification with American hip-hop culture whereby class, race and religion are conflated.

Chapter 5

MUSIC IS IN THE BLOOD

For the majority of young Ethiopian Israelis that make up the bulk of this research, finding meaningful tools in order to "be here" implies calling upon resources and symbols from "over there." This option presents one strategy to mitigate the *malaise* of a dislocated "being here." It implies virtually and/or physically following the circulatory thread connecting Israel, Ethiopia and former African slave colonies within a single mesh. That mesh is music.

In my attempt to broach the experience of Ethiopian Jews from the perspective of local Israeli notions of race and blackness, in this chapter I address the role of music as a powerful way for teenagers to relate their stories. I look at how Ethiopian adolescents live according to an understanding of race as somatic blackness and status enabled by the transnational circuits of music and globalized blackness originating from the United States. Aside from its feel-good aspect, music serves as a locator. It provides a wider narrative in which Ethiopian teenagers play center stage, contrary to their place in their homes or within Israeli society. The representations associated with music and American blackness facilitate their negotiation of racial, religious and ethnic frictions that characterize their realities in Israel. It gives framework and meaning to the lives of young Ethiopian Jews racialized as black in Israel. The encounter between Ethiopians and other Israelis gave rise to new references informed primarily by American globalized notions of race and blackness (Anteby-Yemini 2003; Kaplan 1999).

5.1 GLOBALIZED AMERICAN BLACK COOL AND YOUNG ETHIOPIAN ISRAELI BOYS

> On 6.1.1985 a "nigger" was born with a microphone, a rapper
> From Gondar, I'm […] a "soldier", I'm born there and I won't forget where I
> Come from Zion, Ethiopia, I'm a "lion" […]
> As in "Iron Lion Zion"
> [It's] Bob [Marley], it's the hip-hop version, so the grip is endless
> Each entry is an attack, [the] microphone is the path
> I do rap, since always, for me it's the past present and future […]
> Jerusalem 4000 died for you, from Ethiopia to Sudan happened because of you
> So how to go [about it]? How to remain silent? How not to fight?
> This [Israel] is my place will always be as long as I breathe, as long as I write it down
> in my notebook […]
>
> "Kalkidan," written by Kalkidan[53]

The excerpt from this song, written by Ethiopian Israeli rapper Kalkidan, clearly illustrates the transnational and symbolic journey undertaken by the first large cohort of his community towards Israel, a country in which he stakes his claims of belonging through Jamaican reggae music and American hip-hop culture. Hip-hop's ongoing international popularity and the messianic pull that connects Ethiopian Jews to Jerusalem, along with Kalkidan's actual lived experiences, invite us to rethink the discourse of resistance present within academic debates on hip-hop culture. For young Ethiopian Jews coming of age in Israel, re-thinking the discourse of resistance in hip-hop entails looking at the idiom of race and modernity through the trope of music.

In previous chapters, I detailed, diachronically and synchronically, how Ethiopians took on the racial label black, the context in which it was formed, and the local charge it carries in Israel. I also provided a sketch of the internal fissures that pose a challenge to the unity of a seemingly homogenous black "Ethiopian community." In this process, I argued

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[53] Original song in Hebrew. "ethiopia rap עם מילים -kalkidan קלקידן," YouTube video, 3:40, posted by " kalkidan10," February 9, 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VlYvRkuyGwE.

that race and racism are inscribed internally, among Ethiopians themselves, within that community space.

As mentioned in the introduction of this dissertation, the initial intention of my research was to study hip-hop culture and Ethiopian Jewish youths, inspired by my first visit to Israel in 1999. By the time I started fieldwork in 2007, I decided to enlarge my scope of inquiry to encompass other locations, albeit less obvious ones, where race and blackness operate.

This chapter is dedicated to my initial research topic whereby I scrutinize the connection between "black music" (*muzika shchorah* in Hebrew) and young Ethiopian Jews. Identification with black music and, subsequently, African-Americans, is the most talked about and easily recognizable expression of blackness among youths. The scheme of race relations called upon to explain the link between black music and young Ethiopian Jews is imported specifically from the United States and the Black Atlantic (Gilroy 1993), by way of the globalization of reggae music and American hip-hop. I start by illustrating some of the ways in which American blackness is present among teenaged Ethiopians. The history of hip-hop's South Bronx origins and the context of American race relations that its emergence foregrounded will also be addressed.

To explain American rap music's international popularity and the implications of its widespread presence around the world, including Israel, I draw from cultural globalization theory. I argue that globalized blackness in the form of reggae music and American hip-hop culture constitutes one of the most meaningful resources at the disposal of Ethiopian Israelis youngsters and teenagers, particularly boys. Adherence to hip-hop by Ethiopian boys, an important segment of whom feel disempowered, is a tool to inscribe themselves within the

Jewish people and the Israeli nation-state by way of performing masculinity, modernity and coolness. The search for male black empowerment is in contradistinction to Ethiopian elderly men who have mostly lost their authority as the ruler of the house and family.

Performative Blackness

During my initial trip to Israel in 1999, the obsession with Tupac Shakur manifested through Ethiopian young girls' and boys' drawings (between the ages of 6-12, approximately), and their queries about the artist piqued my curiosity about the circulation of American notions of blackness. How was such a fragmented image of Tupac Shakur as a black hero received and by whom? What was excluded in the process of appropriating it and why? How was it understood and where was it applied? When kindergarten students found out that I was "American," many asked me if I (personally) knew or met "Tupac." In their imagination, Tupac's origin – "America" – was blurred with Canada and occupied an idealized space where rich black men exerted power in a way that was relevant to the vision of modernity of their social environment. A doodle that many kids reproduced looked something like a child-like image of Tupac, adorned with his signature bandana and goatee (Figure 4). "Who is that?" I would ask. The answer was unanimous: "Tupac."

Figure 3: Image taken from http://patterico.com/files/2008/11/tupac.jpg.

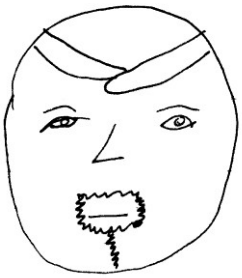

Figure 4: My interpretation of illustration made by children I worked with in 1999.

When I first showed up at the youth center where I volunteered in November 2008, almost 10 years after my initial observations about Tupac, I introduced myself to a crowd of teenage boys hanging around outside. Among them was a 15 or 16-year-old guy who was showing his friends a video of a rapper from Compton. "Hi, I'm Gaby," I said to him. He introduced himself as "Gaby." Surely he's pulling my leg, I thought. I have not met a single Ethiopian in Israel named "Gaby." We started a conversation about "where he's from." He explained how he'd been to Compton, California, a city notorious for its gangs (the Bloods, the Crips) and the birthplace of gangsta rap. I met his claim with incredulity and probed further, asking him what he was doing there and why he went in the first place. "Gaby" concocted an elaborate story about originally being from Compton. According to him, he had an African-American dad still living in Compton and an Ethiopian Jewish mother in Israel. I asked if he was Christian or Jewish – the underlying logic being that if his dad is from Compton, then he would be both:

> "Gaby": I'm Christian.
>
> Q: How come you don't speak English?
>
> "Gaby": I was born in Kyriat Moshe [a poor neighborhood with a high concentration of Ethiopian Jews and Mizrahi].

"So are you Ethiopian?" I ventured; "No," he replied, "I'm from Compton". His friends passing by on the street were calling out to him, saying "Timmy, Timmy." At some point during our conversation, he turned to me and said, "You're born in Ethiopia," in a "*that's what I've heard around here, but I don't believe it*" kind of tone. After all, he seemed to be saying that if a "white" woman from "America" was cheeky enough to take him for a ride by claiming to be born in Africa, then his fairy tale story about being from Compton was not that hard to believe.

The external attribution and internal appropriation of the racial epithet "black" by Ethiopian Israelis I interviewed for this research is modeled, to varying degrees, upon American understandings of blackness. Blackness can be owned in different ways, depending on individual character, age, life experience, personal taste in music, encounter with discrimination, worldview, etc. As I discuss in Chapter Seven, in the public's eye, Ethiopian youth, particularly boys, are conceptualized through the optic of African-American black experiences, hip-hop music, and troubled ghetto life. To be sure, youths expressed a profound emotional connection with American blackness by way of mainstream American hip-hop culture and their veneration of rapper Tupac Shakur.

The connection that stems from virtual encounters with American blackness is made widely available because of black music's globalization of hip-hop. Hip-hop in Israel has made important headway in the framework of American rap's globalization. Generally however, Israeli hip-hop is not as meaningful for Ethiopian teenagers as the American version, consumed by virtual means like MTV and YouTube, MP3 files and so on. Tupac remains the undisputed king of the roster of mythical black artists and occupies an unprecedented spotlight next to Bob Marley and Haile Selassie. It is interesting to note that of the three idols, two are light-skinned. As a bi-racial Jamaican, Marley embodies hybridity rather than racial essence (Gilroy 2005). Selassie, considered God for Ethiopianists of slave ancestry in the Americas, is proof of the existence of African civilization and power. He is also noted for his light complexion and minute stature.

5.2 CULTURAL GLOBALIZATION

Similar to other youths around the world, Ethiopian Israelis' understanding of race stems in part from mainstream American constructions of blackness and their fractured transmission on a global scale. In this section I deconstruct the way(s) in which the globalized configuration of American blackness, as a stigmatized and racialized status of underprivilege marked by cultural variations from the norm, has now become a "vital prestige" far from the memories of slavery (Gilroy 2004: 36). The modern cool (Osumare 2007) of American blackness has traveled to the Israeli context by way of reggae music and hip-hop.

The most recent phase of globalization is marked by a shift whereby the world economy is increasingly directed toward a single capital market (Harvey 1989). The pace of connectivity between people and places, ideas and practices now unfolds on an international scale. The decentering of power nodes,[54] coupled with technological innovations and the mobility *or immobility* of peoples, is the platform where globalization becomes locally grounded.[55] Both speed and means of connection and circulation have re-organized our worlds (*ibid.*: Giddens 1990). Two formulations in particular (time-space compression and time-space distanciation) have been widely quoted in reference to these changes. According to Ritzer and Stillman, "Globalization most often refers to the growth of transnational politics, the integration of the world economy, and a subsequent blending of cultures around the world" (2003: 31).

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[54] It becomes increasingly problematic to speak of global power as the exclusive purview of the West.
[55] Though the term *global* is a signifier for economic, political, social and cultural processes, it does not refer to the globe as a whole (Dirlik 2001). One needs only to think of the uneven spread of technology as a prime example of stratified accessibility to tools that facilitate participation in our virtual world.

For more and more individuals, social realities stretch across extensive geographic spaces (Lewellen 2002). In the social sciences, culture is no longer thought of in terms of territories that neatly correspond to a particular ethnic group and its history. Aided by technological advances, global networks allow an unprecedented ease for the travel of culture, embodied or virtual, as well as ideas, literature, art, etc. Movement stands at the heart of globalization though flows do not stream unhinged or in isolation from the larger spheres that regulate them. For newly formed Ethiopian diasporas, migration has prompted them to find their cultural bearings across distances. This process includes the development of networks that sustain contact between themselves and with Ethiopia.

The globalization of dominant forms of popular culture – defined here as a set of generally available artifacts like films, records, clothes, TV programs, modes of transport, etc. (Hebdige 1988) – produced in the United States has captured the imagination of laypeople the world over. The spread of mainstream American culture has generated a slew of reactions (accommodating, supporting, rejecting, bypassing and/or customizing) that determine both frictions and flows (Tsing 2005). Mass consumption and the commodification of culture have taken center-stage in this process (Appadurai 1996; Jameson 2000). Exchanges regulated in part by the United States' position as a leading force continue to assure circulation and grounding of American cultural resources by way of media-based communications and commodities. Indeed, the global expansion of the American entertainment industry[56] during late-capitalism commodity production means that the "market is now both commoditizing more culture and making commodities more

[56] Mass consumption devises innovative relationships between culture and business in which forms of entertainment like music and film generate substantial amounts of revenue for the United States (du Gay 1997; Hall and du Gay 1996; Appadurai 1996).

cultural" (Hannerz 1996). Thus, mass consumption is now the prime channel for the encounter between peoples and cultures around the world (Inda and Rosaldo 2002).

For some, the presence of western cultural references entails an unprecedented degree of cultural convergence.[57] This however should not be automatically read as evidence of world homogeneity.[58] Winter (2003) underscores that the reception and appropriation of global media products constitute active social processes interpreted according to the receiver's cultural, political and socio-economic background. In other words, the transmission of foreign information, practices, ideas and products is not a linear process. Commodities from Coca Cola to rap music do not simply descend onto mute populations. Rather, receivers customize them to the extent that local interpretations potentially alter the original meaning or use for which they were intended (Bennett 1999, 2000; Mitchell 2001; Winter 2003; Robertson 1995, Miller 1994; Ang 1985; Blair 2004). Foreign cultural influences are indigenized in the process of becoming embedded by those who appropriate them (Appadurai 1990; Smith 1990). The reception is fractured rather than whole.

Due in part to these exchanges, new forms of hybridity paved the way for cultural mishmashes unthinkable just a few decades ago. Looking at globalization exclusively in terms of cultural hodgepodges however, reproduces the same essentialism found in discourses on cultural homogenization (Hannerz 1996). Nederveen Pieterse (1995) aptly

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[57] There are also circulations and flows that move from outside toward the West (Inda and Rosaldo 2002). Many authors recognize that culture *does* move in the other direction particularly due to the migration of populations from the (former) Second and Third Worlds to the First, turning the spaces of the West into dense sites of cultural heterogeneity (*ibid.*:22).

[58] Hannerz (1991) complements this argument by distinguishing between scenarios of cultural saturation and maturation. The former implies the wholesale assimilation of imported meanings and forms whereby specific cultures come to identify strongly with them in places where they make terrain. Maturation recognizes that while transnational imports remain to some degree unchanged, with time they are taken apart and reshaped according to local dispositions.

points out that relations of power and hegemony are inscribed and reproduced *within* hybrid formations, for wherever we look closely enough we find traces of asymmetry in culture, place, and lineage. Hence hybridity raises the question of the *terms* of the mixture, the conditions of mixing and mélange (*ibid*.: 57), since power relations are part and parcel in structuring them (Tomlinson 1999).

In order to identify key elements that make up new cultural formulas, it's important to ask who is doing the cooking and which ingredients are at their disposal. In other words, what are the powers at play when formulating identities and senses of belonging, attachments and new ways of being in the world? Analyzing Ethiopian Israelis' identification with hip-hop and African-American culture entails looking at how mainstream American blackness, as a globalized reference of belonging, travels to new contexts where it is invested with shifting meanings contingent on both location and historical period (Thomas et al. 2007). Ethiopians' appropriation of blackness is drawn from the interaction between local and global precepts of race and ethnicity transmitted through the international popularity of hip-hop still thriving three decades after its birth.

"Hip-hop *still* don't stop …"

The first wave of hip-hop artists in the United States developed an "oppositional culture" (Martinez 1997:265) that reflected specific identifications based on, among other references, disadvantaged life in the ghetto, racial identification and discrimination (Dyson 1991:17). Along with the controversies and public debates it incited, rap music forced issues of unequal racial dynamics and urban decay into the American public consciousness.

The international popularity of Bob Marley's reggae music, which channeled post-colonial ideals of blackness, gave way to an emerging stylized music born in the south Bronx in the late 1970s and early 80s. From its ad-hoc, leisurely origins, hip-hop developed into an ideological movement based on the art of denouncing appalling conditions of urban decay, thus shedding light on the socio-political and economic realities of life in impoverished ghettos. By the end of the 1970s, social dislocations and structural changes engendered by Reaganomics and post-industrial degeneration (Osumare 2007) severely handicapped the landscape of the South Bronx (Martinez 1997). Hip-hop stems from the interactions between African-, Latin-, and Caribbean-American communities in New York (George 1999), and took shape during festive get-togethers or block parties where the creativity of disk jockeys (DJs) reigned free, resulting in pioneering Dj-ing techniques.[59] Starting from the late 1970s, this genre came to encompass a way of being because it provided positive social, racial and historical references to black American youths whose cultural heritage consisted of endemic displacement, poverty and decay.

The creative force of diaspora provided the gist for the emergence of hip-hop (Hall 1993). For Gilroy (1993) rap is essentially diasporic and hybrid in nature, a product of transnational exchanges between African diaspora groups in the Caribbean and the United States. The concept of diaspora, he explains, allows us to trace continuities and divergences within the experience of African populations scattered by the onset of slavery. In this scenario, cultural productions, Gilroy argues, are sites of expression where art and the politics of identity interlace.

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[59] Techniques such as cutting, mixing and scratching vinyl records.

Rap music, the most popular facet of hip-hop culture, gradually crossed over from the underground to the mainstream, and its production base moved from the streets to the studios. The ghetto (real or imagined) is hip-hop *par excellence* and continues to provide a stamp of authenticity in American and international rap. In the process of capitalizing on the hip-hop movement, black "ghettocentricity" is today a globally marketable commodity (Osumare 2007).

In the United States, rap music proliferated in the decade following its inception, unhinging controversy and the thorny issue of race relations as it spread. Like preceding forms of black American culture that found mass success in the mainstream, the popularity of rap music induced intense moral panic and provided a racialized focus for social anxiety (Springhall 1998).[60] In the 1990s the two most commercialized and publicly feared expressions of rap music were nation-conscious rap (a politicized, reflexive and at times discursively violent expression of black nationalism) and *gangsta* rap (a misogynistic, homophobic, highly commercialized and materialistic style started in Compton, California). Both sub-genres challenged and threatened the fiber of American society[61] yet ironically, their mass-scale production and distribution introduced rap music to millions of white fans or foes. Commercially successful hip-hop is central stage in the American cultural mainstream, along with the violence, superficial materiality and hypersexualization associated with it.

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[60] Springhall (1998) associates media or moral panics with adult anxieties related to fear of the future, technological change and erosion of moral absolutes, rather than with the nature of juvenile misbehaviour.
[61] The range of hip-hop's diversity is not limited to them, yet it is important to keep in mind that these are by far the most commercialized.

Looking at hip-hop exclusively as a mass consumer product does not allow for the identification of other creative and emancipatory applications to which hip-hop lends its voice. For example, hip-hop as a form of activism aims to increase consciousness and mobilize youths outside dominant circuits of power. For these adepts, the dissenting nature of hip-hop is both attractive and cool, some of whom use it to promote education, increase political awareness, and social developments within their region[62] and internationally.[63] Community-based hip-hop[64] draws on positive messages found in the original hip-hop ideology, revolving around notions of empowerment, education and self-betterment. It remains low-key and generally unknown in comparison to commercial hip-hop.

Hip-Hop: A "Black Thang?"

Though hip-hop was created amidst disenchanted Latin-, Caribbean- and African-American communities, it increasingly came to represent the struggle of blacks in the United States. By the time the movement traveled outside of North America, African-American experiences of injustice, discrimination and anger stood synonymous with hip-hop. The frustration of African-Americans[65] along with the creative outlet that hip-hop provided, made it a fascinating and exotic commodity outside the US, the mecca of rap, where minority groups of low socio-economic status found a voice through the black American history of marginalization (Potter 1995; Bennett 1999). Exported mainly from the

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[62] For example the "Hip-Hop Summit Action Network (HSAN)" initiative in the United States.
[63] See article posted on the website of UN-Habitat: "Senegalese Hip-hop artist D J Awadi made UN-HABITAT "Messenger of Truth." http://mirror.unhabitat.org/content.asp?cid=6547&catid=531&typeid=59.
[64] Of course, territorially bound, local hip-hop is not privy exclusively to positive, reflective messages.
[65] Due to hip-hop's massive popularization and industrialization, representations of African-Americans depict more than suffering and disenfranchisement. Today, hip-hop moguls are the poster boys of American-style capitalism and economic success.

US (Taylor 2005), hip-hop's circulation outside its original context accounted in part for its large-scale commercial success (George 1999:57). The African-American experience of blackness is an international commodity (Gilroy 2004) transcending language, culture, race, nation, religion, etc., that can in part be bought into. Hip-hop is also an attractive model for raising concerns by those who feel excluded from various domains of power (Watkins 2004).

Writing about the hip-hop movement in Cape Town, Watkins posits "hip-hoppers are agents who participate in the movement because they have a desire to change the way they feel about themselves and the world in which they live. Through symbolic behavior (performance), hip-hoppers are transformed from victims to victors" (p. 125).

The appropriation and indigenization of hip-hop in contexts far removed from the origins of American ghettos is not a straightforward process. Rather, it is based on a fragmented understanding of African-American history. As Maxwell points out:

> The massive labor of effacing the irreducible discontinuity of experience between (a perceived) African-American hip-hop and the local experience relies on the fabrication of an idea of an abstractable, reified *essence* of hip-hop, an essence evidenced, and thereby given credence (the term used within the scene is "represented") by the public, visible, sustained practice of rapping, writing, and breaking. (2003: 47)

For those on the receiving end, a fractured image of American life and culture is transmitted in part via the circulation and appropriation of hip-hop mass culture (Price 2006). Based on his fieldwork, Maxwell writes "Hip-hop in Australia was constructed not through a continuity of experience or history with African-American Hip-hop Culture, but through the active engagement with various forms of media" (2003: 69). It is precisely the acceleration of cultural contact instantaneously exposing us to musical experiences of the Other that cements relationships between disparate groups under the rubric of "hip-hop" (Watkins 2004). According to Osumare, hip-hop allows agency, offering a platform on

which the "out" group, in other words people who are restricted economically and politically, maneuver in their environment.[66] At the same time its globalization is successful because of the hegemonic role of the United States in the global ecumene. Osumare explains that "the extant global inequalities work in tandem with the irresistible Africanist aesthetics to construct the global lure of hip-hop" (*ibid.*:68).

The "global lure of hip-hop" actively engaged through the media and performed locally, is the channel through which Ethiopian youths develop deep emotional and psychological connections to the "Africanist aesthetics." This connection hinges upon an idealized reading of blackness through hip-hop, and has little to do with a shared history. Rather, it is solidified at an epidermic level – the skin tone – and a shared sense of disempowerment whereby both groups occupy low socio-economic status in their respective countries. Both represent an underprivileged racialized minority that does not mirror the cultural and behavioural norm of the larger society.

The advent of cultural globalization and the privileged position of the United States in this process facilitated Ethiopian Israelis' encounter with African-American and Afro-Caribbean popular culture via media channels (Anteby-Yemini 2004b,c). The youths' idealized identification with African-American celebrities "circumvents the limitations of the local, without ignoring or resisting the stamp of black otherness" (Salamon 2003: 21). American hip-hop makes explicit how the capitalist dream of both emancipation and financial riches can be tangible for underprivileged populations (Osumare 2007). On the one

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[66] Osumare explains that the United States exported the ambivalent relationship between commercial and underground rap to many countries, positing that "in global hip-hop the predictable commercial versus underground controversy also reveals a healthy coming-of-age, showing that in each site, the initiatory, resistive street hip-hop has indeed influenced the mainstream society enough for big business to capitalize" (2007: 93).

hand hip-hop equips economically and politically restricted individuals with a modicum of agency, offering them a platform of acceptance and inclusion. On the other hand, the success of its globalization is twofold: the dominant role of the United States in the global ecumene, and the ease with which racism as a standard of exclusion travels across national boundaries.

In Israel, black Atlantic musical references such as reggae and hip-hop are firmly established. The presence of a thriving reggae scene preceded Ethiopian Jewish aliyah. Reggae has a particularly impressive hold on the imagination of young Jewish Israelis in general. As an outsider, it seemed ironic that the ideology put forth by reggae and Bob Marley co-existed, without any moral qualms, with the militarized violence rendered normal in Israel. A quick look around Tel Aviv will leave any observer astonished at the sheer number of "white" Israelis who sport "*rastot*" (dreadlocks in Hebrew) and the black hair industry in Tel Aviv developed in part by Ethiopian Israelis. I turn to this phenomenon in more detail in Chapter Seven.

5.3 HIP-HOP IN ISRAEL

Hebrew rap gained popularity in Israel during the 1990s due to a radio program on the popular radio station of the Israeli Defense Forces (Galgalatz). The success of rock group Shabak Samech, the first commercial group to rap in Hebrew, was also an important factor (Korat 2007). In the following decade, hip-hop became a true messenger of the preoccupations expressed by conflicting national, ethnic, religious and political factions that make up Israel. Israeli hip-hop gives voice to Zionist ideology as it does to anti- and post-Zionism (*ibid.*), and channels both Palestinian and Israeli Jewish nationalist aspirations.

In the past five years, the most diffused hip-hop produced in Israel comes from a group of Palestinian rappers citizens of Israel (or "Arab Israelis"). The group DAM, meaning blood in Arabic and Hebrew, have been at the forefront of this phenomena. Using a provocative racialized rhetoric, DAM capitalize on African-American history of slavery and repression, presenting themselves as the only "real" blacks of Israel. Through this rhetoric they express their sense of displacement and frustration in Arabic, Hebrew and English in regards to the conditions of Palestinians in Israel and the territories. Locally in Israel, black automatically refers to Ethiopian Jews. DAM work instead on an international scale to claim the heavy symbolic title of being "the blacks" *of* Israel, rather than blacks *in* Israel, as is the case for Ethiopians. By way of media such as music, films and reportages, DAM transfer the premium suffering from the history of Jews to the current situation of Palestinians.

In her article on Israeli hip-hop, Korat distinguishes mainstream Jewish rappers from minorities (Jewish and non-Jewish). She draws distinctions in the ways that each group addresses the issue of national identity. Mainstream Jewish Israeli rappers encompass the secular Jewish middle class, while rappers from Jewish minority groups take aim at institutional oppression, underlining ethnic or regional belonging to the detriment of national identification with the Israeli state. According to the author, by denouncing racism, marginalized Jewish rappers offer a critical look at Israel. Moreover, they represent "a counterhegemonic resistance by expressing their ethnic identity through language and music" (p. 45).

As my fieldwork progressed, it became evident that the categories of Jewish majority/minority defined by Korat are not representative of the larger social perspective of

young Ethiopian Israelis with whom I was in contact. Everyone I spoke with (Israelis of various backgrounds) identified a clear racial, religious and socio-cultural demarcation between *Aravim* (Arabs) and *Etiopim* (Ethiopian Jews), or *shkhorim* (blacks), a term used by many of the interviewees. Initially, I had envisioned hip-hop to serve as a collaborative platform uniting Ethiopian Israelis and "Arabs" in their struggle against discrimination. Contrary to the logic of division applied by Korat, and also to my own initial expectations, there is no imagined continuity between "Arabs" and Ethiopian Jews. There is no connection between the groups, whether in terms of being victims of racism, targets of other dynamics of exclusion, or marginalized minorities.

In fact, the space between the groups is closer to repulsion and *dis*connection rather than unification. While I do not have ethnographic data on "Arab Israeli" perceptions of Ethiopian Jews, I suspect that some may harbor feelings of animosity and superiority over "black" Ethiopian Jews. In early 2009, for example, a bus driver in Jerusalem of Arab descent lost his job after he suggested to an Ethiopian security guard to "Perhaps drink milk and be white like me."[67] Race, embodied here in the presence of a black, African population showered with government resources, rights and privileges denied to indigenous Palestinians, is pivotal in this scenario.[68]

Ethiopian Jews I spoke with drew a clear and unambiguous line between "Arabs" and themselves. "Arabs" are considered neither white nor black but simply "Arab" (Kaplan 2002). In his article, Kaplan (*ibid.*) explains that "Arabs" have instead become invisible.

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[67] Yifat Reuven, "Bus driver to Ethiopian: Drink milk and you'll be white", published on YNet News, Feb18, 2009, http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-3673580,00.html.
[68] Bedouins and Palestinians themselves have a very stratified society also based on race and a history of slavery that saw the arrival of African slaves now incorporated into the Arab communities in southern Israel and Palestine (see Beckerleg 2007).

They remain excluded from Jewish Israeli society because they represent a threat to its very existence.

I asked Sara, a 30-year old Ethiopian Israeli woman, if she believed that Arabs were black or white:

> A: Arabs are neither black nor white.
>
> Q: They belong to another category?
>
> A: Arabs are ehhh... an Arab is an Arab, it doesn't matter if he's white or if his skin is light or black, an Arab is an Arab. An Arab, it's in the blood.

Other Ethiopians also traced a very clear divide between themselves as "Jews" and "Arabs," without necessarily evoking a racial discourse based on blood as Sara did. Many Ethiopians expounded the explanation whereby "Arabs are Arabs because they are Arabs" and "in opposition to" Jews. This logic of differentiation based on belonging to the Jewish people can also explain in part why significant ties have not been forged between Ethiopian Israelis in the south of Israel and the small population of Black Hebrews (see Markowitz 2003, 1996; Jackson 2013), or with African migrants working in Israel (Anteby-Yemini 2003). Most adult Ethiopians acknowledged that the racism faced by "Arabs" is more intense and different than what they are subjected to. This, I was told, was due to the fact that "Arabs" make claims of ownership over the very territory that allow Jews to live safely in their homeland.

During a conversation with an Ethiopian Israeli friend, she was offended to hear me speak about members of her community in terms of a "minority" (see Handelman 2004 on who is considered a minority in Israel). She replied that they cannot be considered a minority because they are Jewish – in other words, aligned with the state religion. I explained that sharing the same religion as the state does not negate the fact that Ethiopians

can form a minority group. A friend who was listening illustrated what I was saying by evoking the fact that African-Americans share the same religion as the dominant group in the United States though they are nevertheless a racial minority.

5.4 Ethiopian Israeli Youths: From Reggae and Hip-Hop to Teddy Afro

From the earliest cohorts of Ethiopian Jewish youths and their devout following of reggae music, finding their grounding in Israel meant mobilizing their racial selves by way of black music. One of the most popular clubs for reggae music was "Soweto," opened in Tel Aviv in 1985. It was named in solidarity with the anti-Apartheid movement in South Africa (Nelson Mandela was still in prison when it first opened in 1985). The owner, Gil Bornstein, was pivotal in the establishment of Israel's reggae scene. He brought reggae artists from around the world, particularly Jamaica, the UK and the US, to Israel. Bornstein also organized demonstrations three times a week in front of the South African embassy to boycott the apartheid regime and Mandela's prison term.[69] Soweto quickly became the hub of reggae music and African culture in Israel.[70]

Ethiopians came to dominate the reggae clubs during the 1990s. Catering to the taste of this growing audience, these clubs played MTV music such as reggae, ragamuffin and rap (Shabtay 2003). The Ethiopian population's clubbing habits, along with the alcohol and drug abuse that accompanied them, substantially transformed the reggae club scene. As a result, other Israelis and African migrants stopped going (*ibid.*).

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[69] Same reference as Footnote 15.
[70] David Brinn, "Reggae legends make Israel a Pessah destination," *The Jerusalem Post*, April 14, 2008, http://www.jpost.com/Arts-and-Culture/Music/Reggae-legends-make-Israel-a-Pessah-destination.

Reggae Music, Ethiopianism, and the Myth of Ras Tafari

The first wave of Ethiopian youths who came of age in Israel during the 1980s and 90s turned to reggae music for guidance and solace. Reggae provided a pan-humanistic approach that placed God and love at the epicenter of all humanity. Such an outlook was particularly attractive considering the racism they faced on a daily basis and the practices of exclusion with which they coped (such as the 1996 Blood Scandal).

Reggae music is a primary vehicle for constructing an essentialized, mythicisied Ethiopian heritage. Its ideology is based on the grandiose standing of the former Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie (1930-1974). For Rastafarians, Selassie is the black god of emancipation, empowerment and freedom. They take their name from his pre-coronation title Ras Tafari (*ras* meaning head or prince, and *Tafari* was his first given name).

Rastafarianism is an Afro-centric, post-colonial religion established in Jamaica in the 1930s. The love affair between the Rastafarian movement and Ethiopia is a product of the relationship between the African diaspora and Africa (MacLeod 2009). It is Ethiopianist in that Ethiopia symbolizes a utopian and mythical point of origin in Rastafarian thought (Zion) and hence, of return, for worldwide black emancipation (Gilroy 2005). "Traditional Ethiopianism," writes Gilroy (*ibid*.: 236), "was able to combine a strong spiritual and poetic aspect with an elaborate critique of exploitation and a principled hostility to the habitual injustices of colonial law." Global images of Ethiopia fostered by the savvy international media work undertaken by Selassie during his reign in the first half of the twentieth century consolidated this image. The Rastafarian message received global exposure as of the 1970s

due to the circulation and popularity of Bob Marley's reggae music, the first truly global pop star according to Gilroy.[71]

The attribution of Ethiopia as the custodian of black pride among former African slaves in Jamaica aroused post-colonial black diaspora consciousness. In the process, the glorification of African roots became grounded in Ethiopian history. That these roots were located in Ethiopia was not a coincidence. Ethiopia defeated Italian colonial encroachment in 1896 at the Battle of Adwa during a period when European powers successfully secured colonies in the continent (this period is known as the Scramble for Africa (1870-1914)). Racial/ethnic pride was once again espoused among blacks in the United States when Italy successfully invaded Ethiopia in 1935 and the League of Nations proved to be inadequate in stopping them (Lewis 2009).

The ideology of reggae music resonates well with Ethiopian Israeli youths because it increases the value of their otherwise "unusable" Ethiopian heritage. It also allows them to cultivate a post-colonial space of black emancipation in Israel. Selassie's post-colonial image as savior and saint of all black people put a positive spin on a pan-African, Ethiopian-based reference of blackness. This perspective gained traction in a context where everything Ethiopian – skin color, language, culture, religion, ritual, and even religious purity as Jews – was challenged, put to the test and essentially, rendered irrelevant in the face of modernity.

What young Ethiopian Israelis know about Selassie stems from the global circulation of reggae music and not necessarily from the oral history of their own families who lived

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[71] "The trans-local platform Marley occupied as the first truly global pop star was created not only by the protest music of Bob Dylan and the Beatles but by the achievements of African American athletes like Jack Johnson, Jesse Owens, Joe Louis and Muhammad Ali. Their heroic physicality was appreciated everywhere for the insubordinate answer it gave to white supremacy and the larger human story of triumph over adversity which could be read off from it" (2005: 237).

under his authority. Ironically, many have no knowledge of Selassie's autocratic style of governance (see Kapuściński 1989 for an account) or the fact that repressed populations in Ethiopia likened his rule to living under a colonialist regime. Yet in the Israeli space, Haile Selassie takes on god-like features, and sits on the pantheon next to Tupac and Marley.

Spending time with one group of young Ethiopian children (aged 7-12), it became obvious that whatever importance they placed on Selassie stems from a very fractured knowledge about him. On a stifling hot day in 2008, I was hanging out with Orit, a young Ethiopian Israeli woman in her 30s, at the local park as she kept an eye on the boys enrolled in her summer camp for Ethiopian kids. The kids seemed slightly intimidated by my presence and kept their distance. However, as soon as Orit told them that I, a "white" person, was born in Ethiopia, the tone changed. Everyone had questions for me. They thought I was insulting their intelligence by claiming to be born in Ethiopia. In Israel, I got accustomed to carrying my passport around with me as ultimate proof of citizenship. I opened my passport to show the kids that indeed, my official document warrants my claim. They were godsmacked. "Did you know Haile Selassie?" the kids inquired with beaming faces. The tone changed again however, when they found out that I was a "Christian." The possibility that I would be anything but Jewish did not occur to them. I showed them the Ethiopian cross around my neck and one of them asked me if I knew Satan. I told Orit about the incident and she became visibly upset. Turning to the kids with a disgusted look on her face, she asked loudly and firmly: "WHAT? Isn't she a human being? ISN'T SHE? She's a human being!" (Observation notes, July 28, 2008, Kyriat Moshe).[72] I wondered if

[72] Of course, this incident cannot be generalized, as no such comments were made on any other occasion, not even from other children.

they were aware of the fact that Haile Selassie, Bob Marley and Tupac were in fact all Christians.

This incident illustrates three points. Firstly, it demonstrates an important truth about the perception these kids have of the world as a Jewish world. Secondly, it points to a lack of transmission of any historical knowledge on behalf of their parents. Whatever information they have of Selassie bypasses what the elders in their families experienced in Ethiopia under his rule, whether it be positive or negative. Lastly, it underscores that looking at blackness and the supposedly "natural" link between "black" Ethiopian Jews and "black music" must be contextualized and studied case by case. This is true when considering that the expression of blackness and the information it is based on varies significantly with age. As a general rule, the older the participants, the more informed they were about historical accuracies such as Selassie's religion.

Black Aesthetics: Black Men and the Performance of Cool Modernity

In the pantheon of Ethiopian Israeli youths, the triumvirate of Tupac, Selassie and Bob Marley – epitomized by rap and reggae music respectively – share equal footing. Making Israeli blackness and Jewishness relevant in their everyday environment hinges upon black diasporic stylized productions and its mythicization of Ethiopia. This trail was literally marked on the walls of an Ethiopian nightclub I went to in August 2007.

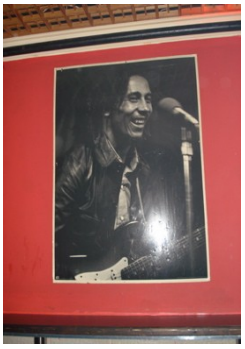

Figure 5

Bob Marley

Figure 6

Tupac Shakur

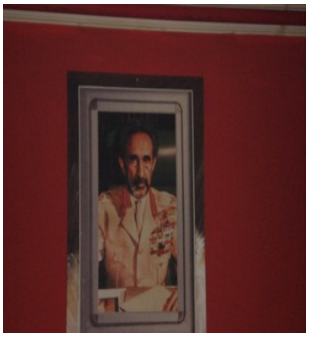

Figure 7

Emperor Haile Selassie

Pictures taken in an Ethiopian club, Tel Aviv, June 2007.

By the time I returned to Israel in 2007 after my initial trip in 1999, the popularity of rap music had significantly increased. Reggae was now in second place. This was evident by the level of commitment Ethiopian Israeli teenagers were exhibiting to rap music through their dress, hairstyle, and manners. Some teenagers attempted to speak to me in a few words of MTV English using expressions like "yo yo" and "wassup." Ethiopian Israeli rappers (all men) were making their presence felt during community events, on the internet, as well as on YouTube. While by and large the teenagers I was hanging out with preferred American rap and RnB, male Ethiopian rappers supplied a much-needed source of pride.

References to hip-hop culture and the red-green-yellow tricolor flag of Ethiopia were clear in the clothes of young adolescents: baggy jeans, and clothes and accessories with images of popular black artists. This was also apparent at an official event I attended on July 9, 2008, in the framework of a series of celebrations underlining 60 years of Israeli independence. The event commemorated the 100th birthday of Yona Bogale, the charismatic

Ethiopian Jewish leader who was pivotal in bridging some Amhara Beta Israel villages in remote areas around Gondar with international Jewish organizations years before aliyah. Entitled "100 Years of Zion,"[73] the ceremony attracted over 2000 Ethiopian Israelis of all ages. Representatives of major Jewish institutions, members of Parliament (Knesset) as well as then-prime minister Ehud Olmert were also present.

Once again, there was a clear separation between new and veteran Ethiopian immigrants. Young groups of olim khadashim, or new immigrants, clustered together, spoke Amharic to one another, and wore accessories that emphasized an attachment to Ethiopia (such as tricolor scarves and hats adorned with the Lion of Judah or "Ethiopia" marked across them in English letters). Their Israeli-born Ethiopian counterparts only spoke Hebrew among themselves. While many also bore the symbolic tricolor, theirs was in allegiance to Tupak Shakur and Bob Marley as emblems of globalized blackness, rather than to Ethiopia specifically. Many Ethiopian *tsofim* (scouts) were also present in their uniforms, as were soldiers.

Adolescents and young adults made up an important part of the audience. This is a reflection of the general age demographics of Ethiopian olim in Israel. References to globalized blackness appeared throughout the landscape through dress style. Low, baggy pants, and over-sized baseball caps worn on the side were visible, along with images of Bob Marley and the Ethiopian tricolor, as seen in the pictures on the following page.

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[73] See the on-line article "Honouring the Ethiopian Community in Israel," published by the organization World ORT on July 11, 2008: http://www.ort.org/news-and-reports/world-ort-news/article/honouring-the-ethiopian-community-in-israel/.

Figure 8 and 9: July 9, 2008 "100 Years of Zion," Jerusalem.

In dance clubs owned by Ethiopian Israelis that cater to their musical taste, as well as in the bedrooms of many teenagers, posters of black male artists abound.

Figures 10 and 11: Pictures taken by author in an Ethiopian club, Tel Aviv, June 2007.

These figures, along with the allure of coolness and the material culture of accumulation associated with them (including style of dress, style of English speech, etc.) represent black modernity and pride for young Ethiopian boys. Black modernity holds a

kernel of hope for achieving financial success in a context where Ethiopian Israelis feel disempowered and are rendered socio-economically marginal. Many find power in sound, images, and the tri-color flag of Ethiopianism and pan-Africanism. These references increase the value of their most easily recognizable collective marker: blackness. American cool blackness can be capitalized upon because of its global familiarity. This is not the case for more specific, traditional elements of Ethiopian culture.

As discussed in the previous chapter, many kids feel ashamed of their Ethiopian heritage and what they view as their parents' backwardness. David, a young rapper months away from starting his army service, explained how an intimate space exists between Ethiopian Israeli teenagers and African-Americans:

> I always make this analogy. It's not connected, but it's like … the same history […] that happens. We can learn from what happened to them […] For example, but in their case it [was], really in an extreme way. Let's say, slaves and so on, we weren't slaves. We weren't "slaves." But for example, the fact that like, they have experienced racism and we experience racism, they coped with it in a certain way, we do not know yet how to cope with it. Probably it's still fresh, like, we need one or two more strong generations [...] for us to be able to cope with the racism, and we will know how to cope with it too, united. But I do think there is a connection.

Inspired by the coping mechanism that African-Americans developed to face racism, David finds support by looking outside of Israel, towards the United States. Like "Gaby's" choice to weave a make-believe family story about being originally from Compton, the direction of David's quest is not random. Rather, it is facilitated by rap's global expansion, the messages of male artists like Tupac Shakur, the coolness of US blacks as "gifted musicians," as well as his life experiences in his immediate Israeli environment. David continues:

> In his songs Tupac talks about racism. Ahh… what is he talking about? … He catches pieces from, like, the daily neighborhood life and puts it in a song so when you hear the song, like, you say ohh, those are the things that happen here in our neighborhood, even if it's not the most [similar situation], it's not that far. We have

> this here as well, and then this makes him be closer to us, and I felt that he is closer to me. It's as though he lives here in Israel and he talks about me. […] Because they have been through it already, they have been through racism, they've been through everything. Today they are like, you know, the music that dominates the world is hip-hop.

Ties woven between Ethiopian Israeli youths and blacks in the United States become internalized, giving both direction and credence to youths' struggles to find their place in Israel. This is combined with their meager economic resources that limit the accumulation of material goods in Israel, a society based on consumption. In this context, "America" takes on a mythical aura where black men warrant respect. It is a romanticized, emancipated space (Salamon 2003) where racism, born out of centuries of hardship and repression, no longer exists. Throughout fieldwork it became evident that many young teenagers (12-15 years old) identify with fragments of African-American hip-hop culture (the rhythm, modern coolness and the image of power) without comprehending or accepting the particularities of the African-American experience as being relevant to their overall identification.

The curiosity that kids expressed about my presence as an "American" during observations, as well as their reverence for the English language, express another facet of this connection. Those with some knowledge of English automatically reverted to it when addressing me, even though I would respond in Hebrew. It became clear that knowing English represented a cultural good, a tangible bit of "America," in this case accessed through me. At the crossroads where their imagination meets the media, "America" represents a place where modern coolness is packaged in their skin tone. "Being black" becomes an advantage over other Israelis in the context of American black culture's international popularity. This advantage, however, does not yet translate into a valued

status symbol, success or financial stability. It is not something that changes Ethiopians' marginal status in Israel or betters their material realities. The positive valuation of race and skin color through rap and reggae stands in contrast to what unfolds locally around them. It allows them to negotiate the ambiguity of their religious authenticity as it pertains to their genealogical (racial) history and their somatic blackness (Salamon 2001).

MTV English and the Capital of Blackness

In Israel English represents an important status symbol (Ben-Rafael and Peres 2005). This is even truer for young Ethiopian Israelis who, with the power of knowing English, can directly tap into the symbolic capital provided by popular black American culture and music. Those who addressed me in whatever English they mustered consistently spoke in what I've termed "MTV English." In other words, the word "nigger" was liberally peppered between every two words, pronounced with a popular, urban black American accent ("niggah"). Being addressed in this way made me quite uncomfortable. I was often caught off-guard when I was greeted with the expression "Whassup niggah?" or "Yo niggah wassup?" I could not reciprocate with the same language. In fact, I came to the conclusion that the people using that word were unaware of the painful history behind it and the American racial politics that determine who can say it and when, and who is allowed to decide. For them it seemed to be as neutral as saying "Whassup man"? The reality of American race relations were all but lost on them, though everyone knew the golden rule when I explained that I can't use that word because "only black people can say that to each other."

There is a distinction to be made between the ways in which American black struggles and music was being appropriated. On the one hand, there were Ethiopian Israeli

kids who used references from hip-hop America without necessarily knowing the historical context that gave rise to them. Older participants, on the other hand, were historically informed. They aligned themselves with African-American struggles and emancipation rather than mimic the external styles and gestures they index. Ainat, a 26 year-old filmmaker, gives her opinion on the link between American blackness and Ethiopian youths:

> You asked about the Afro-American music. Yes I think that the element is the color which plays a role, [but] without any connection [to that, in other words asides from that]. I think generally that the rhythm of hip-hop is a rhythm that carries you away easily [it's catchy] […] There is a rhythm there that is very catchy, that people connect with. I do not think that only blacks [do], but let's say that Ethiopians, I think, find in this music first of all a kind of a similarity, like, you know after all they're blacks. Although it seems to me that somewhere they are making the difference that we are Ethiopians and they are something else, but yes, it is closer to them I think, and it relates to their skin color. […] Because I can't say it's [about] protest and… Those guys who really identify [with the music], not all of them know the words, nobody listens […] but you know, they connect to it more, after all it represents a kind of underdog.

I pointed out that most kids I volunteered with had little to no knowledge about African-American history.

> Yes but when I said underdogs I didn't mean that they know the history of blacks in the United States and know that they are underdogs because of that. Rather because they're, like, blacks, and you know after all they know that blacks may be experiencing a kind of racism and all that, and suddenly they see them in this world, that appears via video clips, as someone who is rich. […] So it gives them a kind of hope, then you know, maybe that's also role playing. But still I think that music, and the beat, the rhythm that sweeps them, is much stronger than what it usually says about the connection that's related to color. […] It's still, you know, a catchy music, it's young people's music. So first of all we should pay attention to the music. It seems to me that this is what sweeps them [off their feet] and after that, there is the color issue and the racial identification [that come into play]. (May 12, 2009, Ashdod)

The imaginary work at the heart of hip-hop's appropriation by people far removed from its original context entails crafting a narrative that forges a symbolic proximity to African-Americans. This process is not unique to Ethiopian Israeli youths, but rather a well-

documented and ubiquitous consequence of cultural globalization. According to Dorchin (2009), the perceived link between blackness and "white" Jewish Israeli hip-hop artists occurs within the same imaginary framework, though the elements on which they hinge a constructed blackness differs. This is also true for Palestinian Israeli hip-hop group DAM in their efforts to position themselves in the international arena as the only real "blacks" (in other words, the underdogs) of Israel.

Starting from the mid 2000s, a few Ethiopian rappers began to emerge from neighborhoods with a high concentration of Ethiopian Israelis, such as Jeremy Cool Habash, Tzevet Ha-Bunker (the Bunker Team), Kalkidan, Ha Brinks, Café Shakhor Khazak (Strong Black Coffee), Blackout, etc.[74] In 2008, a community center organized a hip-hop workshop led by an Ethiopian Israeli rapper. Kids learned how to write and record their own music. Generally, the music produced locally is done by computer, mostly at youth centers or a friend's house equipped with the necessary software for recording. Ethiopian Israeli rap has spread through internet sites and YouTube videos, offering an inclusive, safe virtual space where fans can connect with one another.[75]

5.5 Ethiopian Jews and Blackness: In the Media

In Israel, journalists and academics often frame their writings about Ethiopians in terms of social problems (suicides, uxoricides, school drop out rates, gangs, drug problems,

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[74] Some of these groups no longer exist.
[75] Websites that cater to Ethiopian Israelis that I accessed during my fieldwork, some of which no longer exist, include the following: http://www.yopi.co.il/, http://www.zazpo.co.il/, http://www.2all.co.il/Web/Sites/ethiopsite/FORUM1.asp, http://www.ethiostruggle.com/,http://www.ethstud.com/, http://youngethiopianstudents.wordpress.com/, http://www.beteisrael.co.il.

criminality, alcoholism, AIDS/HIV, etc.).[76] The opposite, however, is also true. The Israeli media and public, including Ethiopians themselves, are infatuated by the "firsts": the first "Ethiopian" pilot, the first "Ethiopian" in the government, the first "Ethiopian" PhD graduate, doctor, lawyer, army chief, etc. These Israeli-made "success stories" reinforce the idea of "exceptions" that confirm the "rule" – i.e. that most Ethiopian Jews are not integrated or that they cause problems. It underscores the extent to which Ethiopians are treated with exceptionalism and highlights their difference in regards to "internally Othered" Jewish groups like Mizrahim. Moreover, it reveals the low expectations that the general Israeli public has of Ethiopians. While drugs and such issues exist among other Israelis as well, the intense media focus that scrutinizes the failures (and successes) of Ethiopians are consumed in a way that illustrates how their integration – or perceived lack thereof – is a question of public curiosity and national interest.

In the framework of tense race relations between Jews and blacks in the United States, the arrival of Ethiopian Jews provided embodied proof that race is not a factor that determines inclusion among the Jewish people (Salamon 2001). This proof also discredits the old adage of "Zionism is racism" (Salamon 2003). In the same vein, the visible identification that teenage Ethiopian Israelis draw from hip-hop and reggae is presented as a cultural tendency exclusive to them. One academic proposes that hip-hop is really about protesting – a counter-culture used to denounce their plight in Israel (see Ben-Eliezer 2004). From this viewpoint, hip-hop is presented as a strategy of exclusion to face their alienation (Shabtay 2003).

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76 The general academic literature reviewed is in English and French. Newspaper and internet-based articles consulted were in Hebrew, English and French.

Contrary to this interpretation, black racial consciousness among Ethiopians and its expression in the discourse of American hip-hop cannot be regarded only in terms of a resistive reaction to marginalization. Anteby-Yemini's observation underscores this well:

> […] Ces jeunes rêvent d'être inclus dans cette société, comme le montre leur motivation élevée pour servir dans l'armée, y compris dans des unités de combat […] Aussi, l'adoption d'un style «black» devrait être analysé non comme moyen de s'exclure de la société d'accueil, mais plutôt de s'inclure dans une culture occidentale de jeunesse globale, dominée certes par des Noirs, *mais qui diffère peu de celles des autres jeunes Israéliens qui l'adoptent eux aussi*. (2004b: 502, italics added)

Their efforts towards *inclusion* are also true when considering that African-Americans are an essential part of American culture and national identity. Achieving a similar position would imply that Ethiopian Israelis are woven into the fabric of the Israeli nation, and vital to it in ways they don't seem to be at this moment.

Contrary to what Anteby-Yemini states, however, I argue that the appropriation of a "black style" by Ethiopian Jews is not the same as the appropriation of this style by other (non-Ethiopian/non-black) Jewish Israelis. Stemming from the musical success associated with Afro-Americans, by appropriating hip-hop culture Ethiopian Israelis experience a sense of collective and racial empowerment at an emotional level, which adds positive value to their own blackness. This emotional connection is made in a society where the politics of race and religious authenticity occupy the heart of the nation. Moreover, American blackness reconfigured in the Israeli space allows them to instrumentalize their most distinctive features – race and skin color – which represent the basis of the discourses used to negotiate their differences and the inequalities they face vis-à-vis other Israeli Jews. It transforms Ethiopians' blackness into a racial capital and links them to the situation in the United States where poor, marginalized "blacks" struggle in a "white" society (see also Shabtay 2003) – "white" Jewish society in the case of Ethiopian Jews in Israel. To

paraphrase a young Ethiopian Israeli singer in her mid 20s, the aliyah of Ethiopians brought the "real cushis" to Israel as opposed to ("fake?") Mizrahi "cushis" who were the main targets of discrimination before Ethiopians arrived.

While the fixity of blackness continues to differentiate Ethiopians from the Mizrahim who partially whitened, however problematic the concept of whiteness in Israel, it also serves to situate Ethiopians not only in the local Israeli sphere but in the global arena as well (Anteby-Yemini 2003). The African-American discourse of race relations allows Ethiopian youths to partake in debates about who is a Jew on their own terms. Salamon (2001b) claims that for Ethiopian Israeli youths being black is a more powerful reference of identification than religion. Ben-David and Ben-Ari (1997) believe that Ethiopians are now more mindful of their racial difference, having internalized it in a way that allows them a modicum of control over negative reactions emanating from their environment. The journey of becoming black in Israel is thus born from Ethiopians' encounter with the politics of race in Israel, and the outside influences emanating from the United States and the black diaspora.

However, my position as a "Christian" observer harked back to the centrality of an underlying worldview omitted from Salamon's observation. While race is the most easily observable reference for outsiders, *their identity as Jews racially speaking is the platform on which Ethiopians' somatic blackness gains traction*. The children's reaction to the fact that I was Christian in the excerpt above illustrates this. To be sure, older Ethiopian Israelis I spoke with are indeed aware that neither Haile Selassie, Tupac or Bob Marley were Jewish. I asked Baruch, a young Ethiopian Israeli musician in his mid-20s who has traveled the world,

to give some details about the link between kids in his community and black music (May 5, 2009, Ashdod):

> A: Somewhere, it gives them a sense of belonging, to feel pride about their skin color, I think so. When I see someone black singing music, when I was a kid I used to say "Wow I can also get there." Like, he is here, where he is. [They provide] a kind of an example, like, they are looking. [Baruch uses the male gender in Hebrew to speak of a black person singing music.]
>
> Q: There is no example here in Israel?
>
> A: Who? From a white Israeli singer? They do not communicate [with him, they don't identify with him] they do not connect with him.
>
> Q: Not only a singer, I don't know, more like…
>
> A: What, an Ethiopian in Israel who is an example to the youngsters? […] I personally think there are none.

As we will see in the following chapter, unlike the young kids and teenagers he is talking about, adults Baruch's age are cognizant of the particularities that set them apart from African-Americans. Awareness of tangible differences between both groups, however, does not diminish the interest they have in black music or the inspiration they draw from US blacks.

The development of a racial consciousness among Ethiopian Israelis takes many forms. In this chapter I discussed one in particular, albeit the more popular and easily observable model. It is important to deconstruct the "naturalized" connection between hip-hop and young Ethiopian Israelis in order to integrate other references operationalized by this group. Other key references are Ethiopian pop music, and to a lesser extent, traditional folkloric music. Superstar Ethiopian singers such as Teddy Afro, Asther, and others have a significant following in Israel, even among young Ethiopians. This is evident from the enthusiastic reaction of the crowd in Ethiopian clubs when one popular song in particular, "Abebbaye" from Teddy Afro, starts blasting through the speakers. The numerous concerts

headlining Ethiopian singers brought over indicate that Israel is one of the stops along the international circuit of exchanges between Ethiopia and its diaspora. Some important Ethiopian Jewish musicians who made aliyah are pivotal in this circuit, and play a key role in transferring the distinct style of Ethiopian music to the younger generation.

Currently, the international poster boy for world music coming out of Israel is a dreadlocked Israeli of Eastern European origin, Idan Raichel, who heads the "Idan Raichel Project." One journalist dubbed him the "Pale Dreadlock Sabra" and the "ambassador of Ethiopian music to Israel."[77] Having worked in a boarding school with Ethiopian immigrants, Idan was inspired by the music that some of his students were listening to. One of the main singers in the Project is an Ethiopian Israeli woman. In 2006 they were both featured in the documentary "Black Over White" which chronicled their performance in Ethiopia.[78] Idan's sound is a fusion of many musical traditions, including Ethiopian, Middle Eastern, Latin American and African.

Figure 12: Image from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Idan_Raichel[79]

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[77] Jordana Horn, "Pale Dreadlock Sabra", published in the on-line magazine *Forward The Jewish Daily* on March 20, 2009: http://forward.com/articles/104147/pale-dreadlock-sabra/. The title of the article is a play on the Bob Marley song "Buffalo Soldiers" where he tells the story of a "dreadlock rasta."
[78] Heymann, Tomer, 2007, "Black Over White," Heymann Brothers Films, 54 mins.
[79] "Idan Raichel," *Wikipedia*, last modified November 18, 2014.

Interestingly, Raichel's popularity in Israel and across the world has facilitated the promotion of Ethiopian music and musicians. While his musical style is influenced by all kinds of "ethnic" music and not only Ethiopian, it took an Israeli of Ashkenazi origin to commodify and promote the presence of Ethiopian Israelis and their musical culture to the world at large. Locally in Israel, however, none of the Ethiopians I interacted with ever mentioned this artist or seemed remotely interested in his music. I also did not hear his songs, mostly sung in Hebrew, during observations at Ethiopian clubs. He did, however, perform at the "100 Years of Zion" event mentioned above.

The aliyah of Ethiopian Jews and Israel's role in bringing poor, starving black Africans – not as slaves but as fellow Jews – to Israel was hailed as proof that Zionism is not racism. It coincided with a tenuous time in the relationship between American Jews and blacks in the United States. Radu Mihaleanu, who produced the documentary "*Opération Moïse"* ("Operation Moses") in 2007 and the hit movie "*Va, Vis et Deviens"*[80] ("Live and Become"), also underscores this. The synposis of the documentary explains that: "Jusque-là, le monde 'civilisé' avait déplacé en masse des Africains pour les rendre esclaves, jamais pour les sauver. Cet incroyable exode et sa complexe préparation demeurent jusqu'à ce jour inconnus du grand public."[81] The rhetoric of a color-blind pan-Jewishness, however, did not signal the absence of the idea of race working behind the scenes. As Kaplan demonstrates, the basis of Ethiopians' aliyah is premised on the idea of a Jewish race and on Ethiopians' belonging to that bloodline. "Arabs" stand in stark opposition to them not only in terms of

[80] Mihaileanu, Radu, 2005, "*Va, Vis et Deviens*," Elzevir Films, 140 mins.
[81] Mihaileanu, Radu, 2007, "*Opération Moïse*," Elzevir Films, 95 mins.

the threat they represent to the Israeli nation-state, but also in regards to their "different" internal make-up.

The struggle of Ethiopian Jews, expressed via the rhetoric of American hip-hop, is based on their desire to be accepted and assimilated at all levels into a modern Israeli Jewish life. Thus, their very real experience of racism and discrimination as well as the racialized discourse they put forth places them inside the hegemonic Jewish sphere of Israel, however low and controversial their status as Jews may be.

The struggle put forth by DAM consists of auto-affirmative acts of resistance and distanciation from the hegemonic Jewish population, rather than integration as in the case of Ethiopian Jews. The arrival of Ethiopian Jews to Israel restructured the intra-Jewish ethno-racial hierarchy without necessarily altering the main dividing line between "Arabs" and "Jews." Kaplan writes: "Who then, in the Israeli context, are the blacks and who are the whites? It is hard to escape the conclusion that Ethiopian Israelis are (on a symbolic level) at least 'whiter' than Israeli Arabs" (1999: 548).

Thus, claims of blackness as status made by some Ethiopian Israelis or on behalf of this group marketed as the "underdogs" of Israel, are elicited in reference to the same classification system in which they wish to be included, without disrupting the fundamental division between "Jews" and "Arabs" in Israel (*ibid.*). Want of inclusion within this system does not preclude the fact that Ethiopian Jews are also victims of practices of exclusion at the hands of other Israeli Jews.

30 years after their migration, Ethiopians continue to be stigmatized by a physical distinction charged with symbolic connotations. The color of their skin, the cultural practices of the elderly, and the low socio-economic status of the community have revived

discourses of race and intra-Jewish racism in Israel. Race and blackness, however, also play out in unexpected ways. For example, Yityish Aynaw, a 21-year-old first generation Ethiopian immigrant, was voted as "Miss Israel" in 2013. She was subsequently honored with an invitation to meet with American president Barack Obama at a gala dinner in Israel, following a request by the White House.[82] The way in which Ethiopian women are being exoticized and are seen as desirable by non-Ethiopian Israelis, as in Aynaw's case, will be further discussed in the following chapters.

[82] "Israel's Ethiopian-born beauty queen Yityish Aynaw," CNN African Voices – Ethiotube video, 21:50, June 2013, http://www.ethiotube.net/video/26453/CNN-African-Voices--Israels-Ethiopian-born-beauty-queen-Yityish-Aynaw--June-2013.

Chapter 6

SKIN DEEP BLOOD BROTHERS

6.1 THE FIXITY OF CHANGING STIGMAS

Ascribing Ethiopian Israelis' racial identity as genealogically Jewish gave way to their insertion into the Jewish nation as somatically black citizens of Israel. Blackness as a stigmatized attribute is unambiguously and unanimously cast over the Ethiopian population as a whole. At the same time, the Mizrahim continue to straddle across the internal Jewish black/white divide.

For Ethiopian Jews, their most distinctive feature (somatic blackness) works through contrasts. As a result, other Jewish Israelis, including the Mizrahi, are thus considered "whites" (Salamon 2003). While volunteering at an Ethiopian youth center, I had an interesting conversation with the director, Roshit, who is of Yemenite descent: "Before I started working here, I thought that I was black. *I'm* the cushit [cushi in feminine]. And then I come here and all the kids think of me as white, and it's like, I'm Yemenite! *I'm* black! But not here" (Observation notes, March 11, 2009, Jerusalem). Blackness, like whiteness, is an active social construct. In Israel, these labels emerged through the contact between new and former immigrants.

Ethiopian Jews' somatic blackness carries significant implications. Primarily, exterior features such as hair texture, facial features and skin tone are stigmatized emblems. Visible markers of blackness cue the Ethiopians' distance from the ideal, normative white Jew. Race as a physical feature is inescapably inscribed on the exterior of their bodies, in other words, the epidermis. It is the membrane that constitutes the interface between

themselves and the outside world. Being "overdetermined from without" (Fanon 1990:112) means that from the perspective of research participants, there is nothing ambiguous, constructed or fluid about the stigma associated with Jewish blackness/Ethiopianness.

Stigmas of Israeli Jewish Blackness/Ethiopianness

Blackness as stigma never stands alone. Rather, prejudices relating to socio-economic status, level of education and perceived intelligence, origin, cultural and religious practices, etc., take on racial tropes. Stereotypical interpretations of Ethiopian Jewish blackness in Israel represent a case in point. Discrimination against the group can be categorized according to four stereotypes. Firstly, discrimination stems from a perceived level of inferiority in regards to civilization (being "backward"). Ever since contacts between the Beta Israel and Euro-American Jews intensified during the twentieth century, the Beta Israel have been conceived as culturally and religiously inept construction sites. A condescending attitude whereby Israelis and other Jewish donors abroad "made Ethiopians who they are" today (i.e. modern) is strongly ingrained in Israel. Anita, a petite young Ethiopian woman in her early 30s, recounts an incident:

> Anita: I was parking my car in Ashdod. I got out of the car and a man came up to me and said "Wow, look how far you've come!"
>
> GD: And what do you answer to that?
>
> Anita: I just smiled [as she said that she smiled sarcastically] and said thank you, I mean, what am I supposed to say??

This exchange illustrates well the subtle and not so subtle donor/recipient dynamics of patronage that exist in Israel. For this man, the fact that Anita can drive symbolized how effective reformative measures were in getting Ethiopian Jews to where they are today. I

question however, whether this gentleman would have allowed himself to make the same comment had Anita been a man. Looking at the intersection of gender and race points to how Ethiopian men and women are received and, in turn, perceived, differently by mainstream Israeli society.

Secondly, discrimination is based on the representation of Ethiopian Jews as a special group in constant need of state support. In different ways this point is a consequence of the first one in that Ethiopians are viewed as needing help to be made and remade into modern Jewish citizens of Israel. The Beta Israel emerged in the popular consciousness of Israelis as a charity case with colossal needs, not all of them "imagined," as I argued in previous chapters. Once the mediatized frenzy surrounding their aliyah cooled down and the integration process revealed major long-term hurdles, the foci of the Ethiopian Jewish aid industry shifted from organizing their migration to helping them cope with absorption. To this day, Ethiopian Jews are believed to be, and indeed some present themselves as, a group in perpetual need. The marketing scheme of the Ethiopian Jewish aid industry, as well as the availability of services they provide, are at the constant mercy of state funding and international Jewish donors.

Thirdly, Ethiopian Jews are discriminated against on the basis of their behavior as blacks. This is linked to the analogy that some academics, journalists, and laypeople in Israel make between Ethiopians and African-Americans in the US. Accordingly, negative stereotypes about Israel's version of "American blacks" are modeled on interpretations of the behavior of African-Americans. For Ethiopians, adjusting to life in Israel and to a low socio-economic status as blacks was not without its unique social challenges. Key turning

points like the Blood Scandal[83] (1996) sparked unprecedented mobilization and protest whereby grievances were explicitly expressed in terms of racial inequality. This event, a watershed in Ethiopian/non Ethiopian Jewish relations, sealed the racial divide between black and "white" Jews. The clustering effect of Ethiopians living in specific neighborhoods ("they live in ghettos"), in part as a result of state support, further reinforced this. The media's focus on youth gangs, suicides, cases of uxoricide, drug and alcohol use and incidents of violence in Ethiopian clubs solidified the stereotype that "Ethiopians" are the blacks (i.e. the unruly African-Americans) of Israel. Their behavior as blacks was "obvious" in the way that youths brought to life stereotypes about African-Americans through their delinquent behavior, musical tastes, dress, low socio-economic status, and as talented dancers and singers.

Fourthly, practices of race-based exclusion also derive from the lingering doubt about the authenticity and purity of their Jewish bloodline. The uncertainty revolving around their heritage harks back to claims of validity made in terms of their religious participation as Jews and their civil inclusion as Israelis.

These four stereotypes – uncivilized backwardness, poor Ethiopians in constant need, youths acting like US black "cushis," and doubts as to their racial/genealogical purity as Jews – cut across one another to form the core of the racial stigma of blackness with which Ethiopians, in particular men, negotiate their place as Jews in Israel. Racist incidents described in the following pages are explicit and implicit, informed by discrimination based

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[83] As a reminder to the reader, an article published on January 25, 1996 in a daily Hebrew newspaper reported that blood donated by Ethiopian Israelis was quietly discarded by the Israeli medical establishment (Seeman 1997) out of fear of HIV/AIDS contamination. Thousands of angered and discontented Ethiopians poured into the streets and mass demonstrations ensued in Jerusalem.

on cultural and religious factors. Somatic appearances of race – being black – are the primary and most accessible rubric under which other kinds of discrimination and ignorance are perceived (Salamon 2001).

The Construction of "Black" as a Racial Identity

I asked interviewees when they started to think of themselves as black. Through the comments and reactions expressed, it became obvious that the development of one's racial consciousness is neither evident nor linear. One person brought this home to me when they retorted: "Well, when did you start seeing yourself as white?" Though this question caused confusion for some, others understood the nuance I was clumsily attempting to underline:

> Q: When for the first time did you start seeing yourself as black? … Were you [considered] black in Ethiopia?
>
> A: Yes, exactly, but uuuh, meaning what? We knew that the ferenj used to come, I told you, tourists [to our villages in Ethiopia] […] and they would come to work on the roads, in all sorts of things. From the time you first know yourself, you know that the world is divided into a few colors, and that you are of the color black.

Ambessa's (34 year-old male) remark firmly indicates how the color line is a commonsensical matter rooted in factual evidence. The world is separated into a few colors, and Ethiopians fall under the category of black. Thus, it's not so much about feeling or subjectively perceiving one's self as black, but rather about being born into a world where the distinction between black and white is already made for you.

For research participants with lived memories of Ethiopia, racial consciousness developed not only according to the local Ethiopian ethno-racial and religious classification system. It was also cultivated in relation to outside forces that increasingly played an important part in the lives of some Beta Israel communities. Participants like Ambessa, who are old enough to remember life in Ethiopia, discovered the durability of this truth when

North American and European Jews visited his village in the Gondar area. Ethiopians' sense of racial affiliation (as Jews) and of racial somatic identification (as blacks) preceded their move to Israel. As Ambessa observed, the presence of foreigners in Ethiopia, which included Euro-American Jewish tourists and activists, among other whites, was central in this process.[84]

As I explained in Chapter Two, the awareness of racial difference among Ethiopian olim began to germinate in Ethiopia at the crossroads of two classification systems – one local and the other, European. In Ethiopia, ethno-religious communities occupied various positions in the local social hierarchy. Occupation and religion supplied the main fodder for the stigma used to discriminate against "Falashas." Religiously stigmatized as buda, in other words as holders of dangerous supernatural powers associated with blacksmithing, the Beta Israel looked otherwise similar to the dominant Christian Amharas in that they were considered racially red or reddish-brown (Salamon 2003; Kaplan 1999). "Falashas," much like Amharas and unlike groups such as the Afar or the Gurage, were believed to be descendants of a noble lineage (Queen of Sheba and King Solomon) that resonated with Ethiopia's Solomonic myth of the nation. This stood in contrast to other groups such as the derogatively named "Shankilla," who had darker skin, and who were considered less civilized and without history or roots according to Ethiopia's ethno-racial classification scheme.

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[84] For example, during the 1980s, Ethiopia's socialist government forged military ties with the Soviet block, which facilitated the arrival of people from the Soviet Union stationed in Ethiopia to build roads or provide military training ("Soviet Foreign Ministry Background Report on Soviet-Ethiopian Relations" April 03, 1978, History and Public Policy Program Digital Archive, TsKhSD, f. 5, op. 75, d. 1175, ll. 24-32; translation by Svetlana Savranskaya. http://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/document/110977).

Like many other African societies, the Ethiopian aristocracy traditionally favored light-colored skin and what people refer to as "semitic" facial features, considered more delicate than (sub-Saharan) "African" traits.[85] Ariella, a fairly light-skinned Ethiopian Israeli woman in her early 30s, told me a story about her grandmother in Ethiopia:

> A: My maternal grandmother is really light, you should hear my mother talk about her. When she was a child people would be fascinated by my grandmother because she was a big woman, a healthy woman, big breasts and, I don't know I think it symbolized fertility and mother earth and everything, and she was really fair compared to Ethiopians, and everybody would be AMAZED by her skin you know, it would shine and when she would go into the water, her skin would reflect in the water and people looked at her in awe.
>
> GD: So it's a positive thing?
>
> A: Yeah in a positive way.

The reaction to Ariella's grandmother's skin tone, the "awe" that light skin inspired among her kin in Ethiopia, indicates that it is not a common feature yet it stood out in a positive way. The positive valuation of light skin contrasts with what Ariella herself remembers growing up as a light-skinned Ethiopian Jew in Israel, where in-group color prejudice is now reversed:

> A: […] When I was younger I was lighter, lighter skinned, and even in my family, I was considered an exception. When I would lift my … [she lifted her pants to show me her legs, and they are as light as mine]. I never used to go around with short pants or skirts but when I would lift it people would say "Oh God you're so fair! You're so light skinned!"
>
> GD: As a good thing or a bad thing?
>
> A: Bad thing when I was a kid, with my family.
>
> GD: Why was it a bad thing? Your grandmother was just as light.
>
> A: Ehhh I don't know, it's too too light. Yeah but in Ethiopia, it was considered something better, I don't know.

[85] For example, Haile Selassie by all measures was a very light-skinned Ethiopian.

GD: And here they consider it …

A: But the kids, not the adults or my parents, the kids only.

Being a light-skinned, "healthy" – in other words, fat and big-breasted, woman was admired in Ethiopia ("her skin would *shine* and *reflect in the water*"). For the children who consider the tone of Ariella's legs "bad" because they are "too, too light," her skin color embodies a contradiction of sorts. How can one claim inclusion through blackness if a black person is indeed too light, in other words, too close to white for comfort? Interestingly, two of the three in the roster of black male role models discussed in Chapter Five, Tupac Shakur/Bob Marley/Haile Selassie, had very light complexions, whereas Tupac could also be described as having East African features. No mention of this was made by anyone I spoke with during fieldwork.

Migration and Initial Racialized Encounters in Israel

Avi: We started school in Ashkelon in 1987. There were a few Ethiopians in a classroom full of Israelis. But we did not bond right away [with other Israelis], we felt comfortable being with ourselves [among Ethiopians] because it was still fresh, people were still not familiar with Ethiopian Jews […] It's difficult to accept that there is a large amount of black Jews. […] There was a shock for me, suddenly I see a lot of whites and suddenly the food is different, I'm not used to it, a language I don't understand. Technical things like television and stove and so on, that can be learned, but what's more difficult is the people, how they accept you.

For research participants who remember their initial contact with Israeli society, the sight of white people everywhere compounded the increasing awareness through the logic of contrast that no other Jew looked like them. The culture shock Ethiopians themselves underwent upon discovering the extent of their difference (physical, linguistic, religious and cultural) was paralleled, as Avi consciously notes, by the culture shock experienced by

Israelis at the sight of black rural Ethiopians straight out of refugee camps streaming into Israel.

Contacts with white people in Ethiopia across Beta Israel communities in and around Gondar were sporadic and not evenly spread throughout the villages. Their arrival to Israel catapulted their sense of blackness into a generalized state of hyper self-consciousness on a collective level. This process homogenized a group of blacks and Ethiopians in Israel that was comprised of individuals who did not necessarily have contact with one another in Ethiopia. Addis and Ambessa, both young men in their early 30s, truly realized to what extent they embodied difference in their blackness only after making aliyah:

> Addis: When I made aliyah to the country, I saw that everyone is white, it was strange for me [GD laughs], I thought I would only see blacks.
>
> Ambessa: […] Of course when you make aliyah over here you see that the majority of Jews are white and everything, it gives more, let's say, meaning, to it [the racial difference as opposed to in Ethiopia].

Realizing the centuries-long dream of "returning" to Jerusalem stemmed from an idealistic image of their new home that was quickly shattered by the reality of life in Israel (Anteby-Yemini 2004a,c). Sharon, a halachically observant Ethiopian Israeli student in her mid 20s, recalls what it was like to discover that her parents' romanticized "Jerusalem" did not correspond to the reality of immigrating to an industrialized nation-state like Israel:

> It was really funny, [when we arrived] first of all we thought that everything is Jerusalem here, there's no Haifa, there's no this, really, that's what they used to tell us, that all of Israel is Jerusalem. There's no Israel, all we knew was Jerusalem and that everything is made of gold and there are lots of candy. And then you get here – [and there's like] nothing, what's nothing? Other than white Israelis, which was so weird to us. Really, it was strange and I remember all the injections and the check ups that we got, which was less fun [not making us happy], and I remember the demonstration that we did because there wasn't spiciness in the food, so we thought [laughing] they don't eat spicy, it was strange.

I asked Sharon when she realized that she looked different from other Israelis. Her father, who was keen on registering his children in a local secular school as opposed to the religious boarding schools that Ethiopian olim were usually sent to, wanted his children to integrate:

> [He believed that] we arrived to the country, we needed to be as Israeli as possible, and the first time I went to school, I was the only Ethiopian. Everyone was looking at me, they were really afraid of me. I saw it in their eyes. I was six or seven years old, and that was the first time that I felt that I'm different from them.

Aaron's initial interactions were particularly telling of the shock and ignorance of the local Israeli population:

> When we went to the beach in Ashkelon we didn't have cars, we would walk for kilometers by foot on Saturday for two-three hours. I had a cousin who is a good friend of mine and he was blacker [darker] than me, so many people would approach him doing like that [he rubs his skin with his fingers] and checking to see if the color comes off. […] People were passing by doing that to him on the beach because they thought that… someone painted his skin, they did not think that there are black people. This was in '86-'87. […] Even adults, not the young people. We were kids so we were like 'don't touch me' and we would laugh about that.

While the bulk of Ethiopian olim originated from rural areas and had sporadic contacts with outside foreigners, Ariella, much like Aaron, was raised in a large urban environment. This factor sets these two apart from the rest of the Ethiopian cohorts of the 1984 airlift in many ways, in that they had greater exposure to white foreigners while living in Ethiopia. Ariella is from a large city and was sent to a kindergarten with European students. Prior to that, she had been in regular contact with mostly North American pro-Falasha activists who spent time at her family's home. When I asked how she reacted to seeing so many white people in Israel, her reply contrasted strongly with the experience of rural-based Ethiopian immigrants, some of whom were as ignorant of white skin as the Israeli population was of black skin:

> I wasn't excited [by the sight of white Israelis]. It was regular [normal] for me, but for other Ethiopians? When they brought us to the hotel in Jerusalem [upon arrival to Israel], the Ethiopians held the ferinj's hand [she laughs] and looked, and they didn't understand how she could be white, and they would go like this [gesturing as though she is caressing the skin in awe]. "Wow! She is white, I wish, do it for me too so that I would be white!" [laughing]. My family and I sat on the side and we laughed at them. It was funny, like, "It's a joke? What, are you stupid?" It was a funny thing, in the hotel, there was a carpet on the floor so they took a match and wanted to make food there, poor them, and then the fire alarm went off.

Race and Prejudice Within: "Ethiopians are Freaks of Counting Generations!"

The ability to count back generations in order to locate one's ancestry is the basis for the social organization of Beta Israel villages in Ethiopia. The body of oral knowledge that determined who is barya*,* transmitted across generations, traveled with the elders of the community to Israel. As Avi mentioned during our interview, "Ethiopians," the older generation of parents and grandparents who came of age in Ethiopia, "are freaks of counting generations!"[86] For the younger generation, however, counting generations and the barya issue is a very sore point. Many young Ethiopian Israelis I spoke with operationalize race to bring their grievances to light. How can Ethiopians accuse Israeli society of racism when they themselves racialized former slaves as being darker, uncivilized and inferior, and who are treated so poorly within their own inner circle?

In general little is known about Ethiopians or Ethiopian culture among the Israeli public. While the barya question is not necessarily advertised nor made public (see Salamon 2003), it has been the subject of some articles published internally on Ethiopian Israeli websites and forums. These pieces evoke numerous comments and spark debates among

[86] Many interlocutors also underscored the parents' obsession with "counting generations" to ensure a degree of separation of ten generations between potential spouses. In Israel, however, elders have reduced the number of generations to seven or even four, in some cases. In other words, one cannot marry an individual unless there are four or seven generations that separate them, lest the union be considered taboo and shunned upon. This law is upheld by the elderly, who can count one's ancestors up to ten generations.

young Ethiopian Israelis. In Israel only a couple of researchers (Hagar Salamon and Steven Kaplan) have addressed the issue more generally in their work.

Each Ethiopian Israeli I interviewed knew something about barya. Generally, older people (25-35) were more knowledgeable than younger ones (18-25), who claimed to know nothing except that "it has to do with the parents, not with us." Many were surprised to find out that I was aware of the barya phenomenon, while others knew as little as I did. Almost everyone, however, expressed a deep discomfort with what they viewed as a contradiction to the claims of racism being leveled against Israeli state and society.

> Shoshi (owner of hair salon, mid 30s): Racism exists in this thing with the baryas, for me it's very hard to accept it, like, as an Ethiopian I tell myself... They're Ethiopian. […] It's forbidden [to marry a barya] because the parents don't accept it, they simply don't accept it, and me, as an Ethiopian, it's very hard for me to understand it, it doesn't sit well with me, it just doesn't sit well with me, he is Ethiopian, he is Jewish, so what if he was a slave in Ethiopia?
>
> Aaron (youth worker, early 30s): For me [the barya issue] it's a black stain [a sign of shame] on the Jewish Ethiopian community. Many Ethiopian olim... The audacity [laughs]! When they came to Israel they took the barya with them in order that she or he will continue to serve them here in Israel. It's such an audacity of the most extreme kind. It's audacious. So, many of the barya who came to Israel and saw this, they just left them and went on their own. And I know that many also progressed [developed] nicely, you know, many also married Israelis and not with Ethiopians because Ethiopians didn't want to accept them.
>
> Ilana (university student, early 30s): Here [in Israel], a person can reach something [a certain level of education, socio-economic status], what does it matter if his family were slaves or not? […] It's unacceptable to me. And all this I told you, again, it's with the elderly of the community because they can't change their mentality, they're like that, they had 20 cows so they think they're rich. The wealth was in cows, it's also very different from our world, you see?

That young Ethiopian Israelis themselves are struggling to cope with what they consider racism between members of their group led me to further probe the barya issue. While considered darker in skin tone (though not all barya descendants are necessarily so, I was informed), it remained unclear whether the prejudice stemmed from race, lineage or both.

"God Said Vengeance is Mine": Baryas' Upward Mobility

Moshe, a young entrepreneur is his early 30s, became very excited when I asked him about the situation of baryas in his community:

> The Ethiopians, those who complain about racism, ask them!! Ask them! How they treat the barya! And you know what's ironic? The so-called barya people are more successful than the Ethiopians! They get to marry white people! White people, yes!! It's ironic it's like Murphy's Law,[87] really! It's like the story of the ugly duck?[88] It's amazing.

Many participants echoed Ari's observations, equating the marriage of baryas to "white" Israelis as a way to circumvent and surpass their stifling legacy vis-à-vis the chewa. Interestingly, all interlocutors associated the baryas' practice of marrying "whites" as evidence of upward social mobility, the ultimate symbol of success and integration into the Israeli mainstream. Ari believes that "they're successful *because* people were bad to them and so they worked harder. I always think to myself, what a wonderful world, cause God said "vengeance is mine."" In his view, having supplanted the status of the chewa in Israeli society is the perfect example of how the Lord works to redeem those who have suffered at the hands of the unjust and powerful – in this case Ethiopian Jewish chewas.

The more I questioned friends and participants in order to understand what the stigma of being barya specifically implies, the more I realized that my attempt to reify this issue into an exclusively racial problem, as in one of color gradation and skin tone, was inaccurate. To be sure, a racial dimension remains prominent. However, the core of the stigma is not rooted in *skin color* but rather in primordialist concepts of *lineage* and *genealogy*

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[87] An adage in popular culture whereby things that can go wrong, will go wrong.
[88] The "ugly duck" Ari is speaking of is in reference to the popular children's short story called "The Ugly Duckling" written by Hans Christian Andersen, a Danish poet and author from the 19th century. It tells of an ugly duckling chastised by friends and neighbors, and who eventually grew up to be a beautiful swan in the end (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Ugly_Duckling).

expressed through *race* and *bloodline*. The race-based, as in blood-based (i.e. stemming from genealogical concerns), classification that determines who is included and who is excluded is premised on the same dual racial logic (Jew/non-Jew), according to which, Israel discriminates between potential citizens and illegal outsiders. Thus, the duality of the racial logic is not so much based on the logic between black/white or dark skin/light skin, but rather, defines the terms of inclusion/exclusion based on bloodline, in other words, the inner racial make-up of the individual.

Shay, himself a social scientist, explained the barya phenomenon to me in his words:

> Once I thought that it was associated only with skin color. Let's say my father can count orally, it's not written down anywhere, ten [generations back] in each side without any problems. There is something in the oral culture of actually reciting your generations. I think that on the one hand it's used as a kind of an insurance policy. Second thing is that it was an inseparable part of the group's identity. As a religious group as well, *you must know where you came from and where you are going*. So first of all, it had a kind of functional definition of, you know, to remember and to know. But secondly those who are called barya, originally those are people who don't belong to the Beta Israel group originally, and they also don't belong originally to the Ethiopians. It's like other groups inside Ethiopia. Ethiopians are not all Habasha. There are groups that are physically different than the Habashas, they are distinguishable, you can see and say "He's not a typical Habasha." Most likely in the time period when there was the slave trade or something like that, these were people who were simply being traded. With time they say that the barya, at least in our community, entered into the Jewish community. They have already lived for several generations with the community. You were brought as a [female] slave and you have children and your children's father is a Jew, but people will remember and will count back, and then they'll say "But we don't know who you are. And who your father is, and in terms of your origins you aren't Ethiopian, you have no history." So this actually is what works against you. A significant part of it is the issue of counting generations and going back. Once you don't have this [information] about your own history, it works against you. So you are detached from somewhere. This is the barya, this is the definition. [emphasis mine]

The legacy of the barya as a group without history, religion or lineage, that acquired civilization through their contact with chewa masters, is largely the concern of the older generation. It harks back to ideas of inferiority and stereotypes that Jewish religious authorities had of the Beta Israel themselves. Many young Ethiopian Israelis foresee that this body of knowledge and the prejudice it advocates will die with the elders in the span of

a generation. What can be summarized, however, based on definitions discussed during interviews, is the idea that baryas are 1) descendants of slaves and 2) phenotypically distinguishable from Habasha Ethiopians (Amharas and Tigres, Christian or Jewish) in that they are much darker, though this is not always true. Unlike the Beta Israel, baryas, I was told, resemble African-Americans. Yet darker skin tone as a featured stigma is in itself problematic in regards to the barya because as Ariella noted "you can be white white white [and still be barya]."

Later on during our conversation, Ariella brought up skin color and tone to explain why white Israelis were, in her opinion, highly attracted to the barya's complexion:

> Ariella: Oh, Israelis love them! They don't like us. [What's] my color? What am I? I'm Yemenite, I'm, what am I? I'm not black. They don't like my color, but in my mother's neighborhood, all of the barya married Ashkenazis, white, and they are ugly [female, referring to the barya women] but the whites LOVE them. For Ethiopians I'm [considered] pretty, I can walk by there [in the neighborhood] and they [white Israelis] won't look at me, but a barya?? They will say "She is beautiful, oooh." It's amazing!
>
> GD: Because for Ethiopians whenever it's darker, it's not good [not considered nice].
>
> Ariella: Yes, it's not good, but with them [with Israelis] it's good.

My conversation with Ariella underscores two key pieces for understanding how race works among Jews in Israel. There is an attraction to exotic newness embodied by dark-skinned baryas who are considered beautiful by the Ashkenazim who marry them. In other words, black is beautiful because it is exotic. The fetishized blackness of dark-skinned baryas is contrasted to the "normality" of Ariella's blackness, which she likens to the not so dark, and not so new, blackness of the Yemenites. The object of desire is determined not so much based on the gradation of skin color that would, say, differentiate a dark-skinned barya from a Yemenite, but rather because it represents a novelty in the landscape of Jewish Israeli blackness.

Throughout the year I spent in Israel, not a single person identified himself or herself as barya. However, some interlocutors informed me that "so and so" was one. Indeed, those individuals were married to "white" Israelis. It is important to note, however, that not all Ethiopian Israelis married to "white" Israelis were of barya descent. Though it is not at all a common practice, I did come across non-barya Ethiopians who had partnered with Jews outside of the Ethiopian community. In many cases these unions come with their own specific problems. In extremely rare cases I was told, Ethiopian parents opposed their child's union with a white person.

Daniella, a young Ethiopian filmmaker in her mid 20s, faced a similar situation when she announced to her parents that she was getting married to a white Israeli: "At the beginning for them it was a kind of a trauma. It was "How will they accept you?" Many times they thought there would be a fight and they [his family] wouldn't accept me because I'm black." Racial consciousness thus embodies the idea of inferiority and inadequacy. Not being the "right" color was a concern for Daniella's parents, who worried about how their daughter would be received by her in-laws.

Ariella's experience with her brother, however, clearly indicates that concerns about being the "right" color – each skin color being attached to specific positions in the socio-economic hierarchy of Israel – also concerns Ethiopian parents who would prefer that their children marry up the Israeli ethno-racial ladder, rather than down. At the beginning of our conversation, Ariella had defined Mizrahim as black. That was the case until she spoke of her brother's "white" Moroccan wife:

> Ariella: My brother is married to a white [female], a Moroccan.
>
> GD: Wait, now Moroccan is white?
>
> Ariella: A white Moroccan.

GD: But before you mentioned that Moroccans are black.

Ariella: She was black.

GD: Ok she's black, but for your parents [she is considered white].

Ariella: For the parents she's white, because she's white, she is white. They have children, half Moroccan and half Ethiopian, it's beautiful. And my mother doesn't eat at their place [the brother's], she's in a fight with him and they don't talk. My mother said "'If you marry someone white, at least marry an Ashkenazi, why marry a black one?" Do you understand? She [her daughter in law] is black, you [Ariella's mother] are black, there's racism towards her, and there's racism towards you too. My mother said "Marry someone from Ramat Aviv Gimel [the rich neighborhood in northern Tel Aviv], a rich man at least," do you understand?!?

However whitened Moroccans became with the advent of upward mobility and the arrival of Ethiopian Jews, in Ariella's mother's mind, they are nevertheless the blackest of "whites." Her thinking reflects the logic of Israel's social hierarchy. It unambiguously traces a linear connection between race/ethnic background and socio-economic status whereby the richer segment of Israeli society refers to Askhenazis and the lower echelons to the blacks/whites of Israel, the Mizrahim. Interestingly, whereas Ethiopian Israelis cannot be mistaken for anything other than black, racial flexibility has defined the status of the Mizrahim since the arrival of Ethiopian olim.

The bulk of Mizrahim still occupy the lower echelons of Jewish Israel, alongside Ethiopians. Thus, a white Ashkenazi from one of Tel Aviv's rich neighborhoods is a better choice for marriage in the eyes of Ariella's mom than a black/white Mizrahi from a poor development town. Ariella herself underscores a missed opportunity to mobilize both Ethiopians and Mizrahim as racialized and marginal Jewish Others in order to face racism with a common front.[89]

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[89] The only exception I observed during my stay in Israel was at a conference on "Racism in Israel" that took place in 2009 at The Suzanne Dellal Center for Dance and Theater. This event brought together representatives of various organizations (the Mizrahi Democratic Rainbow Coalition, the Israel Association

Being the targets of cushi racist stereotypes has not translated into a coalition between the two groups. In fact, as we will see in the next section, where I describe intra-Jewish relations between Ethiopians and other Jews in Israel, Mizrahim are as likely as Ashkenazim to judge Ethiopians as cushi – in other words, inferior blacks. As one Ethiopian Israeli woman explained to me, "the Mizrahim in particular are really racist, because once they were nothing here in Israel, and now that they have made a little bit of money, they think they are someone, and think they can treat the Ethiopians the way they do, like cushis."

6.2 Out-Group Interactions: Racism, Stigma and Cushi Stereotypes

> GD: Do you remember when you first heard the word cushi or made sense of what it meant?
>
> Daniella: The first time that I really thought about it consciously and really felt sad about it? Not because of me, because of the society I'm living in that enables it, was when I was in university [in Tel Aviv] and of course it was in a white neighborhood, upper class white neighborhood, I don't think they had ever seen Ethiopians, most of them, unless you know there were Ethiopians in the army or, at the time I don't think there were a lot of black illegal workers. I don't think they had ever met black people who were also Jewish. I was going from my school to the dorm, and I went through a public park and there was a small kid and she was with one of the parents, and she looked at me and she said "*Ima, tri, hiné cushi*!" (Mom look, there's a cushi!), you know, like, innocently, like it's the most natural thing to say! And she didn't even

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for Ethiopian Jews, The Palestinian Center for the Independence of the Judiciary and the Legal Profession Musawa, Tmura Center) that fight for minority rights in Israel. This event was organized in support of a book launch for "Racism in Israel," a volume edited by social scientists Yehouda Shenhav and Yossi Yonah (2008, in Hebrew).[6] Hailed as a rare focus of study in Israeli academia during the introduction of the event, presenters put forth discourses highlighting the grievances of their respective ethno-religious groups while making links with the larger topic of how accusations of racism made by one Jewish ethnic group toward another, are generally received in Israel. While there was an attempt to bind together a common front across minority groups (Mizrahim, "Arabs," Ethiopians, women), I question whether the Israeli environment is conducive to a transformative political practice that does justice to the ideological project presented during the conference. That the interpretation, expression, discourse and experience of racism in Israel cannot be understood without taking into consideration the arsenal of justifications used to deny it was brought home on numerous occasions during the conference. During the introduction, Yossi Yonah, one of the editors of the book, pointed out that "everything that exists and is claimed to be racist receives the response of 'come on, you compare this to Auschwitz?,'" thus rendering Auschwitz as the "the ultimate standard for comparison whether or not there's a phenomenon of racism" in Israel.

> realize what it means! I looked at her and for a moment and thought, maybe I should say something to her parents... Maybe the parent doesn't even realize what the kid is saying, what it means, but you know, I thought that … there's no point, because … It goes deeper than that.

Being light-skinned compared to other Ethiopians clearly did not exempt Daniella from being called a cushi. Many participants evoked incidents where they were stigmatized as cushi. These events work to reinforce the boundary of the Ethiopian Jewish community as outsiders within, and maintain the "black Jewish/white Jewish" dichotomy that defines the social world of Ethiopian Israelis.

Stereotypes of Ethiopian Israelis operate in key sites of socialization, namely the neighborhood, army, and educational institutions, as well as on the job market, in the nightlife scene and in various everyday exchanges. In 2009, the exclusion of Ethiopian children from religious schools in some neighborhoods received widespread coverage by Israeli and international media.[90] Additionally, the participation (or in other cases, the perceived lack thereof) of Ethiopians in the army has received academic (Shabtay 1995) and media attention. In fact, some have come to occupy high-ranking positions in the military.[91]

During fieldwork stories of research participants experiencing racism first hand or knowing of someone who did, abounded. Three locations – the neighborhood, the club scene and the job market – more or less corresponding to three key life stages for Ethiopian Jews I interviewed (childhood; adolescence and early adulthood; post-army and post-education adult life) – constitute salient spheres where stereotypes are brought to the fore. In

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[90] For example: Reuters. *Netanyahu slams Israeli school ban on Ethiopia Jews*, *August* 30, 2009, http://in.reuters.com/article/2009/08/30/idINIndia-42084820090830.
[91] Cohen, Gili and Yehudit Salem. "One in four Ethiopian Israelis winds up deserting IDF service," *Haaretz*, December 8, 2011, http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/features/one-in-four-ethiopian-israelis-winds-up-deserting-idf-service-1.400284.

these locations where racism exists, Ethiopians' sense of marginalization is made more tangible.

A) *Be Shchouna*: In the Neighborhood

Ethiopian olim from the cohorts of the early 80s and 90s eventually settled in peripheral development towns[92] and lower income neighborhoods in central Israel. This occurred under the administration of the Israeli government and the Jewish Agency, despite official policy calling for housing in central areas with strong infrastructures (Lazin 2000). For economic and pragmatic reasons, mortgage and rent subsidies provided to Ethiopians allowed them to purchase or rent homes in financially impoverished locations with high unemployment rates and inferior quality schooling. Immigrants' decision to remain in the vicinity of family networks also played a key role in establishing what Holt (1995) refers to as the "cluster effect": the social and spatial (and hence, racial) segregation of Ethiopians.

Later waves of *aliyot* (aliyah in plural form) from Ethiopia consolidated this trend, further destabilizing the dynamics between Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian neighbors. In Kyriat Moshe for example, a low-income neighborhood consisting of a concrete urban sprawl in the city of Rehovot, 65% of the population is of Ethiopian descent. In June 2008, the neighborhood's *Mercaz Kehilati Etiopit* (Ethiopian Community Center) hosted a public event that featured Ethiopian culture. Kiosks selling everything from make-up for dark skin to Ethiopian-made clay figurines were displayed along a fence. A teenage Ethiopian hip-hop

[92] As explained in previous chapters, development towns are generally associated with weak immigrant populations settled there, initially the Mizrahim. Fewer economic opportunities, low infrastructure, poor quality schools as well as inadequate services led to the spatial segregation of Mizrahim and other weak immigrant populations, including Romanians (Lazin 2000), Ethiopians, and Soviet Jews (Khazzoom 2005, Holt 1995, Goldberg 1984).

group performed on a small stage. Visually, the white garbs of elderly men and women dominated the landscape and the smell of *wot* [an Ethiopian stew] and injera wafted through the air.

Close by, the stereotypical view of Ethiopian boys hanging out in groups on street corners drinking beer contrasted with the older and more ambitious Ethiopian Israelis with whom I was mostly in touch. Most of the Ethiopians I surrounded myself with during fieldwork were independent artists, self-employed business people and university students or graduates in their 20s and 30s who held jobs. Indeed, they do not correspond to the image of the dangerous "ghetto" Ethiopian male associated with intra-group youth violence, drugs and alcohol abuse. To be sure, this portrayal is not simply an "image." It mirrors the lived reality of a segment of Ethiopian youths born and raised in Israel.

Low-income neighborhoods inhabited by Ethiopians provide the backdrop where youth-related problems unfold. I asked Ilan, the 19-year old rapper, what he thinks is the biggest obstacle impeding the integration of Ethiopian Israelis:

> Maybe the fact that we live among ourselves? This is also a problem, of ours. That we live among ourselves, everyone lives in the same neighborhood. And we play the whole day in the neighborhood, learn in the neighborhood, like, everything is in the neighborhood. And then kids do not develop [they don't progress], do not go out, do not go out to the city center [as in the center of town where everyone meets or the center of the country where more is going on]. Let's say that also in school, they prefer to send the kids to schools where there is a majority of Ethiopians and then you don't see that integration. Like, you do not sit in class next to a white child or things like that, so there is no integration.

Intra-neighborhood tensions between Ethiopians and Mizrahim and/or new immigrants from the former Soviet Union are well established in areas with weak populations. Offer (2007) has documented the phenomena of "white flight," based on the American version of the concept whereby non-Ethiopians (i.e. "white" Israeli Jews) abandon their neighborhoods due to the arrival of Ethiopian immigrants. The presence of

Ethiopians signals a decrease in property value. Or, a young Ethiopian Israeli university student in her mid 20s who came to Israel as an infant with Operation Moses in 1984, was describing an event that is all too common in her neighborhood of Rishon LeZion:

> Last week my sister and I were on the bus in Rishon. I had my iPod on, listening to music and couldn't hear what was going on around me. Two women sitting right in front of us were talking about how Ethiopians ruined their neighborhood, how things got worse after they came. My sister was listening and said to them "Excuse me, I can hear what you're saying." The woman flipped out on her! I guess she was keeping all the anger and then it exploded on my sister, and they started fighting, and the woman physically hit her! The bus driver stopped the bus, there was a big commotion. The woman was saying how it's all the Ethiopians' fault, etc. I was not only mad at the woman, but at the Ethiopians too! [ad verbatim]

She accurately pinpoints the complexity and interplay between the layers of a seemingly racist comment like the one made by the old Moroccan lady on the bus in Rishon LeZion. Or acknowledges the fact that Ethiopians received substantial aid integrating into Israeli society not afforded to the Mizrahim. Witnessing the mobilization of both government and community-based organizations to aid Ethiopians reveals antagonistic feelings for those who, in the past, were neglected and abused by the state.

This woman explicitly blamed the downfall of her neighborhood's quality of life on the influx of Ethiopians, a xenophobic remark that associates trouble with "the blacks." Or herself expresses frustration over the behavior of new Ethiopian olim, which gives credence to the lady's perception ("… I was not only mad at the woman, but at the Ethiopians too!"). I asked Or what that incident revealed to her in terms of what is going on with Ethiopians in general:

> Or: I think that the main problem in the absorption of the new Ethiopian immigrants [not her cohort, but those who arrived recently] here is that they put all the Ethiopians together, it's not that they put them all together, but the Ethiopians decided to do it too because they want to live with all their friends and families and what happened is that there are ghettos in every city where most of the people are Ethiopian.

GD: What do you mean by ghetto, just a place where there's a lot of black people or ghetto in the sense like in the United States, of violence, gang, drugs, etc.?

Or: It started with the neighborhood with a lot of Ethiopians and then it starts because it's not like it's a beautiful neighborhood. They're getting bored, they don't know what to do, so they start to drink and then the problem starts…. And then the people that live there, not the Ethiopians, are starting to feel frustrated. The value of the apartments [real estate] is going down, and they're starting to feel angry, and they don't know what to blame so they blame the Ethiopians.

GD: Why do you think so? There are other new immigrants, like the Russians.

Or: I can tell you that in my neighborhood, what happens is that every month now there are Ethiopians that still come to Israel, it's not only the old cohorts [vatikim] who live there [such as herself]. So what happened now in Rishon is that a lot of the Ethiopians are new immigrants, they are still coming in. All the problems [are with them], ehhh they don't know how to act, doing stuff that we, the older cohort [of Ethiopians] are not doing anymore.

GD: Like what?

Or: Sitting in big groups in the middle of the neighborhood, the elders and the youngsters drinking, all of them! They sit and it's chaos, and you eat outside, and, you know? Stuff we did before but that now we know [not to do] … It makes me angry too because *I'M* afraid to go walk in my neighborhood!! […] They sit around, like 10 boys, drinking, youths, they are drunk, one of them tells you something, if you say something back you can hurt yourself … It's not nice … I can't say that it's right that they're blaming the Ethiopians, because they need to blame the country, but the Ethiopians with the small subsidy can't buy apartments in good areas … And a lot of the people that live in our neighborhood are Moroccans, Yemenites they came here in the 50s and they had it worse than us. I think a lot of times they're mad, yeah, they're mad. They're angry, why didn't we receive what you're getting? Like you're acting like the way you're acting right now … So a lot of them, like the lady on the bus was Moroccan [laughing] and it's funny because you know how it is when people hate, when people think that they are better than you, you know how it is so how can you act the way you do?

GD: She's giving back the anger that she received in the past?

Or: Yes, it's exactly that.

Once again, her frustration over not being able to feel safe while walking in her own neighborhood is directed towards Ethiopians (" …it makes me angry too because *I'M* afraid to go walk in my neighborhood!!"). As a young woman, Or feels uncomfortable to go about freely among young boys and men sitting on the street corners drinking beer in Rishon. Like many Ethiopian vatikim, she notices a cultural difference between her cohort and the latest

arrivals from Ethiopia ("… a lot of the Ethiopians are new immigrants … they don't know how to act, doing stuff that we, the older cohort are not doing").

B) Night Life: The Club Scene

Like many teenagers and young adults, clubbing represents an outlet for Ethiopian youths to decompress, hang out and have fun. However, unlike other Israeli *edot* (Jewish ethnic groups in plural), the presence of large groups of Ethiopians in local clubs is seen as problematic. The Hebrew word *selectzia* refers to the act of selecting. Applied to the clubbing world, it describes the practice of discriminating against those allowed into a nightclub and others who are barred from entering (for racialized barring of entry in clubs in other countries, see for example Golash-Boza 2010).

In the heart of Tel Aviv, *Ha Masger* street is home to a number of Ethiopian clubs that accommodate the musical tastes of Ethiopian youths. Ethiopian clubs circumvent the selectzia that keeps Ethiopians, particularly men, from entering mainstream clubs. Aaron, a young Ethiopian businessman in his early 30s and co-owner of one of the popular Ethiopian clubs, sat with me on a sunny afternoon in Tel Aviv with Miriam, a good friend of his:

> GD: Why are there clubs that cater specifically to Ethiopians?
>
> Miriam: [Because of the] music […] Music, first, and second there is you know, in those clubs there is a selectzia.
>
> Aaron: There is a lot of selectzia.
>
> Miriam: Ehhh, "You look good, you don't, you, yes, you no, you, yes."
>
> Aaron: Blacks are allowed in less.
>
> Miriam: Ethiopians are allowed in, [they're] let in less […] Mostly boys, girls are let in [laughs]. Boys are not let in. So Ethiopians prefer to go to a club where they will be allowed to enter.

Aaron: Where they're respected. At my club, those who come […] I say, wait a second, I want him to come next week, I respect him, I make him feel good. Everyone knows me in the club, they feel good and are coming again and again. In other clubs there is really the issue of selectzia, me it happened to me several times that I went to clubs but wasn't let in, and to Miriam's brother too.

Miriam: My brother .. he is …

Aaron: Very, very intelligent. He is a man who participated in the pilots' course in the army [in the air force, one of the most prestigious statuses in the Israeli military].

Miriam: This is the highest course in the army. […] He was in the army for three years in a prime unit, really [working] for the country, for the country he worked eight years all his life. One day he goes to a club and he's not allowed in because he's black, then he sued them but, like he went to court, he did it … he got money.

Aaron: You know what that did to him?

Miriam: But in his heart he didn't feel good.

Aaron: He was hurt! He was hurt very very badly. Very bad! It's like ...

Miriam: He gave his best years for this country […] and this country doesn't really care.

Aaron: […] Fine he was paid a compensation of NIS 20,000. But what is that? It's nothing. There is something here that was hurt inside, [he] won't get [it] back, he does not believe in the country anymore, he said … "I already don't love the country so much anymore because look… Who is the country, those are the people and ...They don't want to let me in the club?!" So this is the worst feeling ever, you see? And her brother is really an intelligent guy, attractive.

GD: But this is not considered to be important, it's because he is Ethiopian?

Aaron: [Because] he is black ... yes!

As mentioned in the Introduction, early on during fieldwork, I shifted my initial focus from youths and adolescents to older Ethiopian Israelis. While I spent hours in Ethiopian nightclubs, mainly in Tel Aviv, I did so with an older crowd and not the age group usually associated with the problems that arise when alcohol mixes with adolescent hormones and frustrations. During the whole year I was in Israel, not once did I witness a fight or a brawl in a club. I attribute this to the fact that I was essentially hanging out with an older crowd that would consciously avoid going to clubs on nights when it was filled with "kids," as they would say, in other words, teenagers.

That I did not witness any violence in Ethiopian nightclubs does not preclude the fact that a real problem exists. A small segment of Ethiopian Israelis, mainly boys, are involved in violent and criminal-related activities. Racial profiling and police brutality directed toward Ethiopian male youths are also common occurrences. During our interview, Ilan (male rapper) described how some Ethiopian youths are not integrating. I asked what problems boys face in particular:

> Ilan: For me and from my point of view? Ehh … Alcohol. Yes, there is a lot of alcohol with us [among Ethiopian boys]. We/they drink a lot.
>
> GD: But don't all the kids drink, I mean, isn't it a normal problem?
>
> Ilan: But with us, it's drinking diluted with anger and nerves. You don't drink for fun, like party and celebrate life and things like that. It's the opposite. There's fun drinking when you celebrate life, but most of the time it's a matter of like, come on, what a bad day, what a shitty situation, let's go and drink a bottle [let's go and drink our sorrows], things like that. So yes, [we drink] like any other teenager but for another reason, you drink for another reason. […] Also, the drinking is more aggressive with us. We drink a lot, really a lot. But me. like, I'm saying it from my experience, but I know that it's like that in every city. Most of the Ethiopians will tell you "No, no way, we don't drink much," and so on. But I'm real, and I tell you yes, we/they drink a lot, there is such a big problem with alcohol. But this is not something that is a problem [the problem is not with drinking per se], the problem is with us.

I witnessed this reality that concerns a portion of Ethiopian youths only indirectly, through stories I heard from friends and read in newspaper articles. The older group that constituted the bulk of research participants by and large went to clubs to enjoy a few drinks, meet up with friends, and dance to a mix of Ethiopian pop and American hip-hop music unavailable in other clubs where they were denied entry. However, the stereotype of the troublesome young Ethiopian male does not discriminate. Whether one is educated and well behaved, non-violent and "kosher," so to speak, and professionally established or not, does not matter. Almost every male research participant had experienced the sting of selectzia.

Ethiopian clubs represent a space for people to get together and socialize, away from the potential embarrassment of being denied entry. An Ethiopian journalist for Yedioth Aharonot, a mainstream Israeli newspaper, organized a launch party for an Ethiopian news website he established at one of the clubs in Tel Aviv (2009).[93] Many familiar faces appeared in the dark through the thick fog of cigarette smoke. The crowd was on a high and the music was pumping loud. Along with American chart toppers, hip-hop, and reggae music, Ethiopian pop songs were on the playlist in every club I went to. One musician in particular, Teddy Afro, elicits as much excitement as Bob Marley or Tupac.

Teddy Afro is one of the most popular singers to come out of Ethiopia in recent years. His songs have become anthems for Ethiopian unity and pride. He also criticizes the current Ethiopian government and his message has spread to various Ethiopian diasporas in North America and elsewhere. In the Ethiopian nightclubs of Tel Aviv, his song "Abebayehosh," written for the Ethiopian Millennium celebrated in 2007, rings like an anthem for young Ethiopian adults in Israel. During the launch of the website, the crowd went wild at the introduction of the song, jumping up and down in unity while others did the traditional Ethiopian shoulder dance.

The role of Ethiopian music in the lives of Israelis of Ethiopian descent has been by and large ignored by academia. While it is not my purpose here to fill this lacuna, it is important to highlight the potential for Ethiopian pop and traditional music to serve as a conduit for the connection between Ethiopian Israelis and the re-invention of an emerging Ethiopian identity, as I discussed in Chapter Five. For instance, thematic evenings featuring local Ethiopian Israeli singers and musicians, storytellers, dance and theater groups were

[93] http://www.beteisrael.co.il/.

present at every single event I attended organized by E-Good, the Ethiopian Students' Association (summer 2007, 2008-2009).[94] The influx of Christian and Muslim Eritrean and Ethiopian migrant workers to Israel, as well as the aliyah of an established Ethiopian Jewish musician, have made Tel Aviv one of the hubs for the dissemination and consumption of Ethiopian music in the diaspora.

C) Stereotypes: Stigma at Work

For many Ethiopians, mixing with people outside of their community occurs during their military service and entry into the workforce. Stories of encounters with non-Ethiopian Israelis in the context of the labor market reveal much about the stereotypes circulating about Ethiopians. One can easily point the finger to the lack of vocational, professional, technological and linguistic know-how to explain why older Ethiopians ended up employed in menial labor as cleaners, factory workers and security guards. However, this explanation is problematic when it comes to their Israeli-educated children. The question as to why an Ethiopian Jewish underclass is perpetuated well into the second and third generations of Ethiopian olim who are now vatikim (veteran Israelis), is thus left unanswered. This section addresses this issue.

Here are some common situations that are telling of the stigma and challenges of being black and professional in Israel.

> Yohan (stand-up comedian and actor, early 30s): Once I was at a play in Herzeliya. I went to the washroom and an older white woman tells me "The washroom isn't clean." She doesn't know she came to watch me [perform]. So I was rushing, 1,2,3,4,5 I do like this fast [he's gesturing as though he's cleaning]. She thought I was crazy. And then where did she sit [during my show]? Second row, and the whole

[94] http://www.ethstud.com/.

time she was looking at me. At the end of the play she came over and she told me "I'm sorry!" There's a stigma, do you know what a stigma is? Yes, stigma. The Ethiopians are uneducated, wild [in terms of behavior], alcoholics. The Moroccans are like that, the Yemenites are like this [etc.]

Amy (social worker, late 20s): I went to the hospital to visit my client and a worker there said, "It's good you're here for the Ethiopians." I said "I'm not here only for the Ethiopians I'm here for everyone." He said, "No but it's good you're here for the Ethiopians." "I'm here for everyone, not only for the Ethiopians, I'm Israeli and I'm here for everyone, not just the Ethiopians," I replied. He said, "You're not Israeli, you're Ethiopian, your skin color 'catches up' with you."

Or (25 year old university student, female): After the army I lived on a kibbutz for a year and worked there as a waitress at the traffic junction [*be tsomet*]. There were a lot of kibbutzim near the coffee shop. In one of them there was a boarding school with a lot of Ethiopian students, but it wasn't really a good school so the stigma about the Ethiopians was they're causing trouble, they're doing bad things etc. When I got to the kibbutz, a lot of the kibbutzniks at first made me feel like I'm not good enough, the older [people] not the young people, until I really talked [and they got to know me]. And they didn't have any shame. They're not ashamed [to say things directly] like "WHA! You speak [Hebrew] so well!" [in an exaggerated voice, laughing]. I've lived here all my life! They think that only because you're Ethiopian you need to explain to them what the Ethiopians think about this and that. What, just because I'm black it means that I know what all the Ethiopians are thinking, like? [Questions like] why is there a problem with the Falash Mura, etc. It's not that they asked me if I want to answer [their questions], it's like, explain it to me now! So each time I had arguments, and I said to my boss "If I don't go home now, I'm going to get into a fight with them, I have no energy, I'm leaving!"

Eileen (22 year old university student): I want to be a psychologist […] not necessarily for Ethiopians.

GD: But I see that all the Ethiopian social workers work with Ethiopians, are there Ethiopian social workers who work with people who aren't Ethiopian?

Eileen: It's hard to find, it's not only social workers, it's everything, whoever has a degree, a teacher, even lawyers, everyone takes care of the issue of Ethiopians, because whoever gives them the job wants them to take care [of that community] like, they'll understand so it's preferable that you go take care of what you're familiar with, in your population, instead of taking them to the Israeli society and mixing them together. No, they are taken back to the same place. It's in all the fields not just in social work. Why do they think that they [will] solve the problem like this? I don't believe it's working.

In an article in Haaretz, June 3, 2005: "In 1998, Yitzhak Dessie became the first Ethiopian immigrant to pass the Israeli bar. During his seven years as a lawyer, Dessie has repeatedly encountered incredulity from veteran Israelis. "I frequently hear from people the statement, 'Say, are you really a lawyer?' Even now, when people see me at the supermarket wearing a white shirt and black trousers, they're certain I'm the security guard.""[95]

[95] Amiram Barkat, "For Ethiopian-Israelis, the problem isn't school, it's work," *Haaretz*, June 3, 2005. http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/news/for-ethiopian-israelis-the-problem-isn-t-school-it-s-work-1.160333

There is no shortage of stories like these circulating. One incident in particular was brought to my attention numerous times by different people. It was about a young lawyer with an Ethiopian name who applied for a job and was told that it was no longer available. He changed his surname to sound more Israeli and sent his CV again. He was called in for an interview for the same position. The message behind the telling and re-telling of this incident is that education alone will not propel Ethiopian Jews out of poverty and into the mainstream, nor is it the beacon of hope for successful integration. Many highly educated individuals I encountered learned this the hard way. This is true not only for graduates from law school, but particularly for those who studied in fields with few job opportunities such as social sciences, arts or literature.

These stereotypes convey the image of Ethiopians as professionally inept and incapable of high achievement and performance. Eileen remarked that those who work in social services (teacher, social worker, etc.) are "led" back to where they started: their own vulnerable population rather than the Israeli public at large. The logic at work subtly reinforces boundaries whereby Ethiopians are indirectly told to remain within their own community and not step outside of it. This further solidifies the stereotype of the Ethiopian as a *receiver* of help. It stands in opposition to the idea that they can give back and contribute to Israeli society at large.

Another important logic at play is *incredulity*. How can a community plucked out of the jungles of Africa come so far in such little time ("are you *really* a lawyer?")? Batsheva recalls an incident when someone turned around on a bus and told her how well she spoke Hebrew. He went on to say that, if he hadn't seen that she was a new immigrant (in other words, Ethiopian) he would have never thought of her as an Ethiopian. Being branded a

"new immigrant" is quite telling considering that her family moved to Israel in the late 1970s:

> In his clumsy way he meant to compliment me. Because he has in his mind an image of an Ethiopian with a very specific accent, with much lower verbal ability, meaning, he compliments me exactly from the place he comes from. So when I sit in front of someone, then I actually, he already arrives with some set of qualities [characteristics] that he attributes to me, and either I refute it [prove the contrary] or I reinforce it. So if for example a person who arrives at a work place or at another place, then his skin color first of all has a very big part, much bigger than it should have in a social encounter, it already fulfills a role. […] So it already gives them a kind of a feeling that because of my skin color, I have this burden that I have to cope with, and it is a given so there is nowhere to escape. You need to cope with it, but it's not pleasant.

In the last few pages, I looked at interactions where racism and stigma were attributed from the outside. The last part of this chapter turns to the various ways in which Ethiopian interviewees are turning race on its head and using it for creative projects and for "coping," with their marginalized social status as Batsheva alluded to above.

6.3 Coping with Stigmas

Many scholars successfully argue that the act of attributing labels such as "black" to certain populations is indeed a historical product embedded in naturalized logics working to classify the world according to color and behavior (Smedley 2007; Harrison 1995). These insights, which can be categorized as an overarching academic and historical outlook on race, do not provide tools or strategies to cope with the experience of racialization for those who are and will remain black.

The difference between the discourse of older research participants (20s and 30s) and younger teenagers in regards to how they feel and appropriate blackness is striking. In their narratives, those from the first group often call upon the notion of *self-esteem* about their skin

color as the harbinger of effective strategies that help them face the negative messages about blackness and Ethiopianness to which they are exposed on a daily basis. For Flora and Shana, it was a process of coming to terms with, and eventually embracing their skin color:

> Flora (coordinator of youth activities, mid 30s): When I was little it influenced me more, the color thing, like, wow, I'm different. But once I integrated, it didn't influence me as much, just a little, and with time, you integrate more. It's a course [a process] and somewhere you start to accept it, to live in peace with it, and even to love it. Today it became more special, more beautiful, it depends also how you look at it. Now my perception has changed and I'm connected to the color, connected to everything, I flow better with it.
>
> Shana (worker in a hair salon, mid 20s): At the beginning [of the interview] I said to you, here and there it may have bothered me but in the end you accept it and I even feel good with it now, pleased with it and proud of it.

Moreover, coping mechanisms and comfort level about being black vary depending on one's age, experience, and outlook. Ariella's insights place individual belief about one's self worth as the pivotal element that defines how racist messages are filtered:

> It's something that I strongly believe, that racism is also something that you can, that the way you think and feel about it can prevent or encourage racism. Because if you feel that you're a poor Ethiopian girl or boy, people would react to you in the same way [as how you feel], not that it excuses their behavior. And I believe that if you feel that you are worthy, that you are equal to whoever, no matter what his skin color is, then people will react to you in the same way. Not always, because some people are racist no matter what you do or however you feel about yourself, but it does affect [the situation].

In Ariella's narrative the onus of change to counter racism and ignorance lies within the individual. Some described how they "don't take anything personally" and put up "a mental barrier." Others came to the conclusion that "at some point in my life I realized that I'm black, I'm Ethiopian whether I like it or not, so I might as well get used to it and see the positive side of it, feel good about myself." One person answered: "I do not let this situation make me feel bad, because I know what I am, and nobody can take self-confidence away from me."

When faced with explicit racism, I identified four main coping strategies discussed by older research participants. The first lies in the person's ability to rely on their strong Ethiopian heritage as a source of inspiration and self-confidence. It is important to note that only those with a lived memory of life in Ethiopia or with positive feelings towards their Ethiopian background can apply this strategy: "Let's say I'm standing in line and someone calls you cushi or says "who brought you here?" [i.e., to the country]. Or someone […] tells me "go back to Ethiopia where you came from." Well I know where I came from, I do have respect for the place I came from, so he can't hurt me this way."

Secondly, some purported that they simply no longer notice racists because they do not focus on them. As Addisa got older, she developed a way for blocking out insults about her skin tone: "I have to tell you that if years back I used to get offended by Israelis about my color, now? I don't see them! I don't see them!! They do not exist for me, these racist people don't exist. I'm too immune [to it]." Others take the approach of color blindness: "Look, I don't see unusual things, I don't see myself in front of a person and think "I'm black, you're white." I'm a human being, that's what I am […] I, myself demanded [of myself to believe] that I'm ok, and that I'm good, and that everything is fine with me and that there's no need to look at my skin color." By adopting a color-blind approach, Aviva consciously minimizes the power that race and skin color have over her interactions. If taken to the extreme, this approach has the potential to erase race as a primary component of the discrimination Ethiopian Israelis experience.

Thirdly, many participants explained their philosophy about race and racism using universalistic tropes of equality and sameness ("no matter what our skin color we are all the same"). Such an outlook neutralizes their stigmatized blackness. This issue may also be

potentially dangerous for those who choose to ignore racism completely rather than engage with it directly: "I prefer to ignore it, and believe me, it helps me more that I'm not [giving attention to] this, because if you look for it you'll always find it. There are always people who don't always love the one who is different, that will always be [there], I just don't give it any attention."

The fourth strategy is to answer back. Addissa describes a crafty tactic she developed to answer back to people who call her cushi. By turning the logic of the insult back on the person, she empowers herself and draws on Ethiopian constructs of race:

> Sometimes if someone tells me "Hey cushit!" [cushi, feminine] I will say *bula*! Bula [in Amharic] it's like ashes, when it's white, not nice, like a white without color. It's not nice, it's like if I have a driver, a whitie? This person suddenly hears something that he doesn't know? And he wants to know what I called him! He's like "What? What did you say?" "I said bula!" .. "What's bula?" And now he forgets about cushi and he wants to know what name I called him you know? [smiling wryly]. This way I can show people that I also have a name for you. I don't get offended, I say this to them and I just leave.

I asked Shana, a hairdresser who owns her own salon, how she reacts when someone calls her cushi: "I grew up like an Israeli, whoever tells me (cushit) will get smacked, that's how I behave." Yonah also engages with the name caller but through dialogue peppered with humor and intelligence:

> When they would say to me "black, cushi", I would tell them "At least on Shabbat I rest at home and you go to get a tan to get more color," and then he says, "Really, you're right!" [both of us are laughing]. Me, I have responses for this issue. When someone says this [cushi] I sit and explain to them, without letting him go. Once I was at the beach and some guy called me "cushi." I told him "Do you have time to sit with me over a cup of coffee?" So I invited him for coffee, we sat, we drank, we talked about everything. At the end I asked him "Do you know what the word cushi is?" He tells me "black." I said "You're wrong. Cushi is a slave, did you ever see me as a slave?" He says "No, who even thought about it? Forget about all this, let's drink." [laughing] I explained to him and he said "Wow, I swear on my life I didn't know what it was, I just said cushi like that [without a reason]." Then I asked him "What are you doing at the beach?" He said "I came to tan, to get color." I said "You do this in order to get some color [to get darker] - and you swear/call names!?" He fell to the floor laughing!

In Chapter Six, I explored the thinking behind the stereotypes that stigmatize Ethiopian Israelis. I also highlighted the ways in which the idea of race operates in the racial thinking prevalent in Israeli society. Racism or skin-color based discrimination, loaded with the negative stigma of being Ethiopian, influences the integration process of Ethiopian Israelis. In the following chapter I argue that there are multiple ways in which Ethiopian adults engage with blackness without necessarily appropriating globalized symbols of American culture.

Chapter 7

IN LIGHT OF RACE:

THE BUSINESS OF BEING BLACK, MODERN, AND JEWISH IN ISRAEL

Ethiopian Jews are carving their place in Israel through blackness. Blackness takes on a variety of forms and engagements. In Chapter Five, I explored how hip-hop, rap and reggae music have come to stand for modern Jewish blackness. Chapter Six explained the dynamics of exclusion at play in the lives of Ethiopian Israelis. In the following pages I look at how blackness is mobilized through business and artistic ventures. The ethnography I present shows that there are alternative ways to connect to the experience of African-Americans and their musical/artistic productions. Young Ethiopian adults are more critical of this connection. They are nevertheless inspired by African-Americans and use it to construct more locally relevant venues for expressing pride in blackness. The emergence of two make-up companies for dark-skinned women established by two Ethiopian Jews signals how blackness is being reworked to be more fashionable and modern. In their case, blackness has the potential to lead to a certain sense of economic and moral success. It could be argued that an Ethiopian Jewish middle class is emerging in Israel in the midst of various business engagements that capitalize on blackness.

7.1 TAKING BLACKNESS INTO YOUR OWN HANDS

Y.E.S. (Young Ethiopian Students) is the acronym of a blog established seven years ago by a group of Ethiopian Israeli graduate students who offer a "shelter for a critical

writing FROM BELOW on Ethiopian-Israeli related issues such as History, Culture and Politics"[96] (original in English, emphasis in original). In an article posted on October 15, 2009[97] entitled "Ethiopians Congratulate Obama, Why?," the author responds to a letter written by Tabeka, an association that offers legal services to the Ethiopian community to the then newly-elected president of the United States, in the name of all "Ethiopians [Jews] in Israel"[98]:

> [...] [I]t would have been better had the letter not been sent at all. And if a letter was to be sent to the president, it would have been preferable had it been sent on behalf of the senders, i.e., the managers of the two organizations and not on behalf of the Ethiopian Jews. And if indeed the two organization managers felt a strong urge to write a letter to the president, it would have been better had they written something serious, something with a general insight stemming from Obama's election.
>
> Instead, the two individuals chose to pay attention in the letter to the most superficial issue, to the common denominator the two writers share with Obama - their blackness.
>
> For example, it would have been desirable to relate to Obama's excellence, which has brought him to where he is today - the president of the United States. But instead they chose to tie themselves to the curly hair of the elected president, that is, the most superficial/shallow thing.
>
> In my opinion, the two individuals were also wrong in seeing a need to connect the history of the blacks in the US and the Ethiopian Jews.
>
> It may be that the understanding of the differences between the two histories of the two people is an exaggerated request on my behalf. Indeed, they themselves do not know the recent history of their community - in their lamentation to Obama they write that the Ethiopian Jews have been present in Israel for 23 years. What did they mean by that? Did the immigration of the Ethiopian Jews start in 1984? [...]
>
> [...] Only people who are not afraid of their being black, only people who do not see their skin color as a matter for discussion, only they will be able to reach higher and further - only in this way can one resemble president Barack Obama.

The author expresses discomfort with the pigment-centric focus on race and blackness as the sole premise for praise. He or she equally evokes historical discontinuity

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[96] http://youngethiopianstudents.wordpress.com/
[97] Blog entry by username Hannibal Ante Portas, October 15, 2009, http://youngethiopianstudents.wordpress.com/hannibal-ante-portas-2/. The article is in Hebrew.
[98] http://www.kan-naim.co.il/artical.asp?id=13687&cid=536. The article is in Hebrew.

about race and the oft-assumed natural connection between black Ethiopian Israelis and black African-Americans. Such a worldview of race, one that separates Ethiopians from American descendants of the African slave trade, resonates with older generations of Ethiopian Israelis. For this age group, the commonality of a shared skin tone and place of origin in the African continent does not preclude sameness. This perspective contrasts with adolescent Ethiopian Israeli hip-hop adepts presented in Chapter Five. The argument in the response article proposes that an approach whereby race, in other words somatic blackness, is made irrelevant for measuring one's success, would allow Ethiopians to progress the way that Obama has.

Connecting the Dots Through Black Music: What Ethiopian Adults Have to Say

Ethiopian Israeli research participants in their 20s and 30s unambiguously distinguished themselves and their reality in Israel from that of African-Americans. They did, however, acknowledge two realms where the latter groups' contribution is a continued source of inspiration: the production of meaningful music and the ability to progress in a racist "white" society. African-American's ability to further themselves economically by way of the music industry amidst the everyday violence of racism is upheld as an emblem of hope. The influence of black music on Ethiopian kids in Israel was explained by the older adult interviewees in terms of a racial model in regards to phenotypic similarities. Having a black model to look up to was viewed as a positive thing.

According to Norma, an Ethiopian woman in her early 30s, black music has a positive hold on Ethiopian teenagers. Like Norma, many reiterated the fact that African-

Americans, personified by their music, can teach Ethiopians a thing or two about living in a "white" society:

> [It's] a positive influence [...], connecting them to their identity as Ethiopians, because Ethiopians are black, originally from Africa, Ethiopia being in Africa, so [...] you have to deal with being a black person in a country where most of its citizens are white, and see it as a source of pride, strength, because WOW! Look at them, they've suffered more than 400 years of racism and inequality but they've made it, and we can also do it, we can do it also even though we've been here for 20-30 years.

Joshua, however, expressed the potentially negative impact that American hip-hop culture can have on social cohesion and on the integration of Ethiopians into Israeli society. His concern was based on the ideological history of rap as a movement of resistance against the status quo maintained by powerful institutions such as the government and the police:

> We [Ethiopians] take in the singing, everything that belongs to the streets and everything that belongs to an anti-establishment attitude, it's not right. I think it doesn't connect us with Israeli society and with the Land of Israel [haaretz] that our forefathers dreamt of. If someone comes, some ferenj [white Israeli] tells me "Go [back] to Ethiopia" or something, I tell him "YOU leave, it's my country and it's what we have dreamt of." And it's really, like, we kept our unity zealously. I think that the youth is missing this unique thing.

Joshua's last comment implies that the youth is invested in sustaining intra-Jewish racialized divisions rather than coming together to strengthen the bond between Jews. He also proudly retorts to naysayers that Ethiopians have as much right to live in Israel as any other Jewish person.

In Joshua's interpretation, the youths' fixation on race distracts them from participating in the larger Jewish family. Belonging to this family sets them apart from other blacks, including African-Americans. For many Ethiopian youngsters however, black music becomes the tool par excellence to draw symbolic boundaries between black (Jewish) Ethiopian kids and "white" (Jewish) Israeli society.

According to Sean, an entrepreneur in his 30s who published a small magazine:

> [Black music is] called the music of simple folks, the inferior people there [in the United States] and people [Ethiopian youths] try to be like them because they have a lot of money, they look at that, they connect to that, like, really, "I'm black" ... Treat me this way, and I can't find a job, I do drugs and I do this and that, it's like they try somehow to be with them. And there are many people who really, all the respect [to them], they took the good side of it [black music], meaning the singing, you know, to sing, and they go with the beat of the song, and there are those who go with the drug thing and there are those who go with crime, you see?

Sean draws a clear distinction between two kinds of messages passed down through black music: one positive and the other negative. In the first instance, he recognizes the liberating creativity of black music (.... "the good side of black music, meaning the singing, ... the beat of the song"). The effect of music is empowering for the individual consumer ("many people, *all the respect to them*, took the good side of it"). However, Sean also takes care to distinguish this group of people from youths and teenagers who attempt to emulate the stereotype of African American life in the ghettos, a portrayal that is present in commercial American hip-hop. Some Ethiopian teenagers actively shape their behavior to bring to life the stereotypes that associate black (male) youths with drugs and crime. The distinction Sean draws in terms of the ways one can consume black music can also be read as drawing class differences among consumers. Rather than take the good from black music and use it to "look up," according to Sean's observations, some lower their social positioning by engaging in delinquent behavior.

Emulating the crime and violence that the original African American rappers intended to denounce is the business of a portion of Ethiopian kids who work hard to fit the stereotype of the disenfranchised black (male) living in the ghetto. They generally consist of Ethiopian boys and teenagers who hang out in their neighborhoods, are uninterested by school or the army, and are involved with drugs, alcohol, violence and petty crimes. The

more drastic reproduction of the African-American male stereotype translates into rare incidents of intra-gang murders, gunfights and knifings among Ethiopian gang members. The behavior of these kids and the disenfranchisement they experience is a major concern for the older adults I interviewed.[99]

It is important to keep in mind, however, that mirroring the stereotype of life in the ghetto is but one way that some young Ethiopian boys express their infatuation with black America. It is not a general state of affairs that applies to Ethiopian youths as a whole, and it is even less common among girls. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics in Israel, only around 1.6% of approximately 35,000 pupils of Ethiopian origin who began grades 1-12 in schools under the supervision of the Ministry of Education in the 2010/11 school year dropped out by the following academic year (Report "The Ethiopian Community in Israel," 2012).[100] One can compare this to the 1.49% drop out rate for that period in the general Hebrew education system (*ibid.*).

Traveling: New York and Ethiopia

A lot of adults I interviewed had traveled to the heart of African-American life in the United States. During our conversation in 2009, I asked Marco, an Ethiopian youth worker in his mid 30s, where he had lived in the United States: "Harlem, where else?" Marco sought to reinforce his attraction to African-Americans by actually living in Harlem and putting his imagined link to the test. For others, such as Dror, a photographer who worked

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[99] They are also considered an important target of intervention on behalf of several Ethiopian associations who attempt to keep children busy after school hours and offer tutorial services.
[100] Central Bureau of Statistics, State of Israel, "The Ethiopian Community in Israel", Press release published on November 12, 2012, Jerusalem (http://www.enp.org.il/pics/database/more_data/4_file.pdf).

as a security agent in 2009, traveling to the United States further reinforced differences between Ethiopian Jews and African-Americans.

Dror mentioned that one in every four or five men in the Ethiopian community visits New York. He himself was drawn to the city and lived there with a group of friends for about a year and a half in 2000: "At that time, we simply wanted to be there, to be in the music, the enjoyment [the fun]." He also draws a distinction between the traveling preferences of Ethiopian Israelis from the 1984 and 1991 cohorts. The latter group, having left directly from Addis Abeba, prefers to return to Ethiopia since they still maintain close ties with friends and family there. For his immigration cohort (1984), the most important travel destination is "more or less New York." Unlike others I spoke to, Dror did not feel a strong connection with African-Americans before he lived in the United States, nor after.

Dror highlighted differences between the way that African-American music is being consumed by his generation (older adults between 25-35) and by adolescents born in Israel. While his peers tuned in to the message and the content, he feels that youth today are mostly interested in superficially identifying with artists on the basis of their skin color and power status. In this process, he believes that youths are missing out on the depth of the messages the music conveys. He also points out that teenagers today have a much harder time coming of age as Israeli-born Ethiopians than did people of his generation.

The Art of Ethiopian Blackness

As a photographer, Dror has taken the issue of black and beautiful to heart. Though the subjects of his photography vary widely, in the numerous Ethiopian community events

where I saw his pictures, I noticed a recurring theme: the black body. During our interview, he specified that those pictures are "more for the community," and went on to explain why:

> Most of my subjects are with dark pigments, dark skinned [people] in order to show guys/girls and the people that this thing is a pure thing, it's a beautiful thing […] the skin color, yes? Because there are people who feel embarrassed. I even go to levels [I even challenge this further] and take nude pictures of myself, and to show, because it also gives people inspiration [to do something] that was forbidden in Ethiopia. It was forbidden, but why?

Artistic coping mechanisms to counter the message that black is undesirable inspire the work of many Ethiopian Israeli artists. Through photography, theater, dance, comedy or movies, they attempt to relay a more positive message about blackness and Ethiopianness. Others Ethiopian entrepreneurs do so through business ventures, such as opening Ethiopian clubs, make-up companies or hair salons. All of these individuals are turning race and marginality on their heads from an empowered position that is telling of their personal transformative journeys into adulthood.

Dror often exhibited his photographs at Ethiopian cultural events that I attended between 2007 and 2009. In simple yet poetic form, his images intertwine elements of nature with the black Ethiopian body, highlighting dark pigmentation through contrast and lighting. I inquired as to why he works with the Ethiopian black body:

> The truth is, I have everything [I take all kinds of pictures]. Most of the photos that you have seen are in exhibitions that are for the [Ethiopian] community. [...] Why do I put most of my pictures that have subjects with dark pigments, dark skinned [at these events]? This is in order to show [Ethiopian] guys and girls and the people that this thing [dark skin] is a pure thing, it's a beautiful thing, because there are people who feel embarrassed [...]."

Through his art, Dror aims to shoot images that expose Ethiopians to the beauty of blackness of the Ethiopian body. He also pushes the envelope of what is acceptable in Ethiopian culture by taking nude pictures of himself or his subjects.

The idea of educating the larger Ethiopian and Israeli public through art and creativity was also a concern for Abraham, an Ethiopian stand-up comedian and writer in his 30s. Abraham performs for all ages and groups across Israel. Like Dror, he often presented a skit or two during Ethiopian events I observed. In our interview, he spoke about his experience of doing a show in 2009 with a group of children where, as he put it, "everyone was white":

> [...] [T]here's a part [in my stand up show] where I tell the audience about my mother, that she got married at the age of nine, and then they say "Stop, really? It's impossible," it's true, they think it's not true, it's true. There's a part where I tell them about my mother, that she works as a washroom cleaner. She's [been] working there for ten years, she feels like a manager, she says "I'm a Dr." [We both laugh]. We come home and I tell her "I'll wash the washroom," and she says: "No, it's my job!" [laughing], you see? All sorts of funny things like that, and then when they leave they say "Really? Your mother works as a washroom cleaner for real?"... It's like … You pass on both laughter and education, you want to say what's in your heart in a way so that they'll think about it, and also [pass on] a bit of criticism, like, to say to the Israeli society "You're not ok, why does my mother work there?" All sorts of things like that… It's fun.

The stigma of Ethiopian Jewish blackness is inseparable from the socio-economic position they hold as the lowest class in the echelon of Jewish Israeli society. Abraham believes that the stigma of Ethiopian blackness is associated with a lack of education and a penchant for alcohol. Cases of Ethiopian youths causing trouble in one form or another receive important media attention. The mediascape (Appadurai 1996), by way of art, creativity and entrepreneurship, is where filmmakers such as Noah, a 33 year-old Ethiopian woman, are challenging these stereotypes. Her work presents the reality of Ethiopian life in Israel "from below."

Produced in the mid 2000s, Noah's documentary won many prizes. It was viewed in Ethiopia, North America and Europe. In Israel, it became a source of pride for Ethiopians because, according to Noah, it brought Ethiopians into the local "cultural discussion." As a

consequence, Ethiopians are not being "ignored as much as before." She believes that "though you do not see Ethiopians during prime-time [television] unless something [bad] happened," the movie got exposure and conveyed "something that is positive and good, and Ethiopians liked it a lot."

Digital Dialogues

The internet plays an integral part in Ethiopians' participation in the local media space. Shlomo, an ambitious entrepreneur in his 30s who was previously employed by a large insurance company, realized the need for a web-based information forum for Ethiopians in Israel. The idea occurred to him in 2005, when his then-girlfriend could not find relevant information for a university research paper on Ethiopians: "I told her, if there isn't anything [any information], then I will be the first one [to put it out there]." He started a portal for Ethiopian Israelis from scratch, and taught himself everything in the process:

> I really didn't know anything about the internet, nothing nothing nothing - not even what a domain is, what Google is, I didn't know it as well as I know today. I didn't know ANYthing anything anything, [...] so I studied, what is a domain, what is hosting, website hosting, I learned everything from the start, and I checked how to build websites, who you have to pay [for the] "design," etc."

As a way to catch peoples' interest in his new project, Shlomo met with the owners of Ethiopian clubs in Tel Aviv. He proposed taking pictures of their clientele and post them on the website. The objective was to create a buzz that would direct traffic not only towards the website, but to the clubs as well. As of our interview in 2009, there were over 5,000 hits on his website each day. A year after founding the portal, Shlomo left his job at the insurance company and traveled to Ethiopia. Having arrived as a 3 year-old boy via Sudan, he had never taken interest in anything "ethnic" and cultural – in other words, Ethiopian.

During much of his upbringing he focused on building his identity as an "Israeli." His parents, both highly educated, spoke exclusively in Hebrew at home[101] and raised their children "first and foremost to be Israeli." Shlomo grew up as an Israeli, far from Ethiopian community centers and cultural events, save for Ethiopian friends he kept from childhood.

The success of his website and positive response it received prompted Shlomo to look back and explore what makes him Ethiopian. As a result, he sought to "understand my roots and also to get into the [Ethiopian] community and to know more, how, what, who, etc." Until that point, the thought of going back to Ethiopia had not crossed his mind. Shlomo believes that his disinterest in Ethiopian culture was not based on shame or denial. Rather he was simply focused on the dominant Israeli culture around him:

> [...] [Ethiopian] tradition, culture, it didn't interest me, it never interested me, I'm 100% Israeli. I never thought about who my father is, why does he do this [why he behaves the way he does]? Why does grandpa talk like this? Why does grandpa wear this? No, I never thought about that ... No, because I've been here since the age of three, I'm "like" sabra, I have no interest [in these things]. It was only in the army that I started eating injera at home, before the army I [would tell me mom] "Mom, no, I want Israeli food, schnitzel, and falafel, and shawarma." But today if I go home to my mother it's only injera [that I want], I eat only injera [...].
>
> We, at home, had a good education so I never thought "I should go back to my roots, to learn [about the] culture, tradition." What tradition? Who needs tradition? I'm here in Israel, I need here, and I didn't have here, I had Ethiopian friends of course. All my childhood friends are mainly Ethiopian, but I spent most of my time with sabras, with Israelis, also the Ethiopians amongst us we didn't speak Amharic, because we made aliyah together in '84 and these were friends, a group of friends. After, more [people] came in '91. Close friends with whom we really grew up together, we all spoke Hebrew, until today, fluent Hebrew, and I had no interest in the culture, tradition, injera, no. And the website took me back, it told me, like, all the time it was telling me "you are doing something big, you have to learn about where you came from."

[101] This is very uncommon.

The few weeks Shlomo spent in Ethiopia transformed his connection to Ethiopian culture and his family. One evening in Ethiopia, his friends suggested they go see an Ethiopian singer. That night, Shlomo experienced a kind of a cultural revival:

> We went to see a show and I, ehh it's in the stomach, you feel that it belongs to you, even though I didn't listen to Ethiopian music before. People would talk about all sorts of singers, for example, Tilahun Gessesse [a very famous Ethiopian singer from the 1960s] [...]. All my friends knew who Tilahun Gessesse was, and I would say, "What is that? Is that a swear word?" I didn't know [who he was], and slowly, slowly, I got to know who it was. In the car I would put on a CD, and on the internet I would download a song in Amharic, slowly, slowly. And also the trip to Ethiopia, and eating injera at home. Also because of my work, the website, so you have to know EVERYTHING."

Feeling the music alludes to experiencing a primordial connection to his Ethiopianness during the show. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the stomach is a pivotal site for Ethiopian understandings of emotions and affectivity. Shlomo's interests shifted at a pivotal time in his life when he was encouraged, through his newfound professional career, to explore and define what it means to be Ethiopian in Israel. This new cultural reality is centered on food (eating injera), traveling to Ethiopia, and consuming popular Ethiopian music. Tilahun Gessesse was a famous singer from the 1960s who popularized Ethiopian music around the world. Shlomo had become so up to date with news from Ethiopia that during our interview, he informed me that Gessesse had passed away that very same day.

Shlomo's interest in his roots hinges mostly on a cultural rather than a racial component:

> I got very connected [very involved in Ethiopian life in Israel] because it's my work and also because it's …. It's something that exists in me, in every Ethiopian. No matter where he'll be hanging out, no matter where he'll go, in the end he is an Ethiopian. It's like a Jew, a Jew, it doesn't matter where he goes in the world, a Jew is a Jew, it's the same with Ethiopians. Ethiopians, you'll go to Germany, you'll go to Canada, you'll go even to China, an Ethiopian in the end he is an Ethiopian. [O]ther than the way he looks, he has the little things in common which make him Ethiopian.

Shlomo worked hard to infuse a new dynamic to Ethiopian life in Israel, particularly among the club-going age group (18-35), with his website and by disseminating Ethiopian music as well. In 2009 he organized an evening at a local Ethiopian club where musicians performed live Ethiopian pop music. Unfortunately, the shows did not become as successful as he had hoped and were eventually cancelled.

The pull that many Ethiopian Israelis of his generation feel towards popular Ethiopian music is not to be underestimated. Based on my observations in Ethiopian nightclubs, for Shlomo's age group, it is as strong a connection as the link between Ethiopian teenagers and hip-hop. Yet, some academics highlight Ethiopians' fascination with black America to the detriment of downplaying and, more often than not, completely ignoring their bond with Ethiopian culture in the form of popular Ethiopian music (see for example Shabtay).

The return to roots is also at work in the decision that some Ethiopians make to forego their institutionally attributed Israeli names and re-appropriate their original Ethiopian names. For Shlomo, this goes hand in hand with the increasing popularity of Ethiopian music among his generation due largely to the music of Teddy Afro (mentioned in Chapter Five). For many, the "switch" that lights up and leads them to reconnect to Ethiopian culture occurs upon hearing the catchy and culturally relevant rhythms of Teddy Afro's music at weddings, bar mitzvahs, in clubs, or through friends. Anita, another documentary filmmaker, explains: "Teddy Afro came at a point in time that is more relevant [...] for a return to the [Ethiopian] culture, so, it's as if there's something here that is both young and also a [good] voice. And he has cool music." Teddy Afro infuses Ethiopian musical beats with reggae, thus combining "black music" with Ethiopian music.

7.2 Black Dis-Connections

For all the imagined linkages forged between young Ethiopian Israeli adults and Ethiopian culture, or between teenagers and African-Americans, the circuits of racial blackness and cultural Ethiopianness are not randomly drawn. Moreover, they do not exist outside of the religious and political configurations of the Israeli nation-state. This was made obvious on more than one occasion during conversations I had with African migrant workers in 2008-2009.

Speaking with a Nigerian man in his early 30s, I clearly felt his frustration toward the racist treatment the Israeli authorities and public reserved for people like him. When I asked if this was also the case for Ethiopian Israelis, he retorted, "Ethiopians call the Africans cushi. Do you know what that word means?" He angrily repeated the question three times and informed me that it is "not a nice word." The hurt in this man's eyes reminded me that the basis for choosing race, as in skin color, as a connective signifier is indeed not necessarily based on "race" in terms of bloodline and genealogy.

Waiting for a bus in a suburb about an hour away from Tel Aviv, I overheard two young African migrant workers speaking French. They were devising a strategy for how best to approach me in their attempt to pick me up. When one of them addressed me in broken English, I switched to French and a long conversation ensued. Both men, Muslims originally from the Ivory Coast, had lots to share about their time in Israel and the racism they faced as non-Jewish, migrant African workers. I asked if they had any racist encounters with Ethiopian Israelis, and they answered that they were just as racist towards them as other Israelis:

Q: Mais ils sont Africains aussi, non?

A: Ouil ils sont Africains, mais ils ont oublié d'où ils viennent.

This powerful statement turns race on its head and complicates what is often assumed to be a commonsensical connection among blacks, such as the connection between Ethiopian Jews and African-Americans.

Though small in numbers, there are other black populations residing in Israel, including (non-Jewish) Ethiopian and Eritrean labor migrants in Tel Aviv, as well as an established community of African-Americans who are members of the Black Hebrews. While Ethiopian Jewish Israelis might encounter (non-Jewish) Eritrean and Ethiopian workers in Ethiopian clubs in Tel Aviv, not one single teenager or young adult I interviewed mentioned their existence.[102] As non-Jewish labor migrants, they belong to the realm of the invisible in areas where most Ethiopian Jews live. This can in part be attributed to life in a society that puts continuous pressure to prove and perform Jewishness as a stamp of merit to be eligible for the care regime Israel offers to Jews. Another plausible reason for this is the memories that Ethiopian Jews hold of discrimination they suffered as "Falashas" at the hands of their Christian neighbors while in Ethiopia. Ethiopian Jews who associate themselves with labor migrants, even from their own country of origin, who are "illegal" and are simply "passing through" Israel, are thus uncommon. To my knowledge, there is almost no connection between Ethiopian Israelis in the south of Israel and the community of Black Hebrews who live in Dimona, also in the south. From a purely bureaucratic standpoint, the Black Hebrews have been incorporated into the body of the Israeli Jewish

[102] There was one exception. An older Ethiopian Israeli acquaintance was in contact with an Ethiopian labor migrant.

nation-state. They serve in the army. However, they are not considered nor accepted as Jews by the public. It is not surprising therefore, that Ethiopians, whose confrontation with the state over religious purity, and who work ceaselessly to re-invent themselves as authentic Jews, have not forged any ties with the Black Hebrews on the basis of race, skin color, or Jewishness.

Very few Ethiopian Israelis that I spoke with expressed dislike towards African-Americans. Out of everyone I spoke to, only two people explicitly verbalized hatred and fear of blacks in North America, or Africans in Israel and Africa. One Ethiopian Israeli, a young man in his 20s (Eric), had traveled to Montreal, Canada, in 2009 while I was in Israel. When I asked how the trip went, he expressed fear, as a Jew, of what he called the "black Muslim" taxi drivers. Eric was probably referring to black men of Haitian origin, many of whom work as taxi drivers in Montreal. That he racialized and embedded the taxi drivers' blackness into his fear of "Muslims" when the drivers are, in fact, Christian, speaks volumes about the perspective through which some Ethiopians such as himself live their blackness. His perspective is thus deeply embedded within a Jewish Israeli point of view. In other words, he spoke from the subject position of a "white" Israeli who has been indoctrinated with a set of ideas entrenched in the local Israeli landscape in relation to Muslims and to black people as well.

On another occasion, Sharon, an Ethiopian Israeli acquaintance who does braids and dreadlocks at a hair salon in Jerusalem, explained that she "does not like African-

Americans" because "she disapproves of their lifestyle" and the fact that they are "rude and aggressive."[103] I pressed on to see what had led her to make these assumptions:

> Q: Where do you see how they [African-Americans] are [how they live]? On TV?
>
> A: Also, there are in the country [in Israel].
>
> Q: Oh really?
>
> A: Yes, there are in Dimona.
>
> Q: And do you have Afro-American clients?
>
> A: Yes and [I see them] in the clubs. I don't like them.
>
> Q: They are aggressive?
>
> A: Very.
>
> Q: Both guys and girls?
>
> A: Yes. They don't know how to hit on a woman, first of all, always "ahahah" [gesturing aggressively], I don't like it.

Racial stereotypes about black men (both the taxi driver in Montreal and those who hit on Sharon) were evoked only by these two individuals. In fact, when discussing the stereotype of the "young black male" in Jewish Israel, interlocutors refer to members of their own group – young Ethiopians boys – as discussed above, and not to other Africans or North American blacks.

7.3 Capitalizing on Blackness: Ethiopian Israeli Women and African Beauty

Walking through Tel Aviv, African and dreadlock hair salons are easy to spot. Most employees in these shops consist of young Ethiopian Israeli women, a few of whom own

[103] Compared to everyone else I spoke with, this individual was equally vocal and unabashed about her hatred of "Arabs."

their own salon. Clients can buy hair extensions, popular among Ethiopian Israeli women, or get their hair twisted into colorful dreadlocks, or *rastot* in Hebrew (plural for rasta). As discussed in Chapter Five, rastot are popular among non-Ethiopian Israeli. This phenomenon, a by-product of the popularity of reggae music in Israel, provides a steady stream of clients to Ethiopian-owned hair salons. I was told that after completing the army service, many Israelis travel and live abroad (Noy & Cohen 2005). India and South America are popular destinations, where they turn into hippies for a period of time, take drugs and grow rastot.

Dreadlocks are thus quite popular among Israeli youths. Pictures I took from a video called "Israelis Wear Dreadlocks" uploaded on YouTube in 2011 show images of non-Ethiopian Israelis sporting the hairstyle.[104] It includes shots of two Ethiopian Israeli women happily twisting white hair.

Figure 13 and 14: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c8nPY5LQ0zg

In the image on the right (Figure 14), the imperial flag of Ethiopia adorned with the Lion of Judah, previously the official flag of the country until Haile Selassie's departure in 1974, proudly hangs on the wall. Its presence reinforces the commodification of black

[104] "Israelis Wear Dreadlocks," YouTube video, 2:25, posted by "wzo," June 7, 2011, http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c8nPY5LQ0zg.

Atlantic symbols like the Rastafari and its idealization of Ethiopia. However, the flag should not be read as proof that Ethiopian Israelis adhere to the belief system it purports, or to the idea of being part of one large black family. However isolated Sharon's comments among the Ethiopians I spoke with in Israel, they stood in contradiction to her work in the hair salon. It is also striking considering the diverse clientele she deals with, which includes non-Ethiopian Israelis, tourists, African migrant workers, Black Hebrews, etc.

I asked Sharon how she ended up working with African hair:

> I wanted to do something that has to do with my [ethnic, i.e. Ethiopian] community, because I won't get some degree and it won't be satisfying for me. I wanted it to touch everybody's head. Most of my clients are not even Ethiopians [...]. And that's the goal, that whoever does it [has rastot done] will say somewhere "Yeah, I got dreadlocks, I got braids," [then] somehow his view of life is different from others who didn't [who don't get them done] and didn't experience [that]. Because once a person does something [like that], somehow he has a connection, even if he was racist. If he walks in here then he's no longer racist, he'll see it differently, do you understand what I'm saying?

Sharon seems to be implying that as a hairdresser who has the knowledge and the racial background (i.e. being black), she plays an important role in making an impact on someone's mind and body. She believes that having rastot displays open-mindedness and a non-racist moral stance through the sharing of elements from a presumed blackness. She sees her role as being the conduit that transfers blackness and openness to others, through her skills as a hairdresser. Sharon's excerpt also points to the cultural capital of blackness embodied by Ethiopian Israelis, whereby non-blacks can become somewhat "blacker" than they were without the rastot.[105]

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[105] Commodifying African hair is not lost on artists and musicians in Israel. As mentioned in Chapter Five, Idan Raichel, the poster child of world music coming out of Israel, serves as a primary example of Israelis who have a fascination with dreadlocks.

Aesthetics of the Black Body: "Black is Beautiful!"

Ethiopian Israeli women are at the forefront of promoting the black (Ethiopian) Jewish body. In the process, they make African consumer products available to non-Ethiopians, as in the case of dreadlocks. This is also true for both make-up companies established by Ethiopian Israelis (one by a man, "Omri," and another by a woman, "Linda," both in their mid to late 30s) that cater to darker-skinned people living in Israel. In the past few years, Ethiopian involvement in the rise of African hair businesses has occurred in tandem with the establishment of Ethiopian modeling agencies and the emergence of two make-up companies.

In the last section of this chapter, I discuss how the intersection between beauty and the black body is capitalized on as a coping mechanism that inspired business ventures. These endeavors work to highlight and display blackness and attempt to challenge mainstream Israeli notions of beauty and skin color. The cosmetics companies founded by Omri and Linda bear witness to the growing interest in the business of black aesthetics. Their products target a niche Israeli market that has never been tapped into. The first and larger company, "Beauty,"[106] occupies a large store in Tel Aviv, selling everything from hair extensions to a wide variety of make-up for dark skin. The other company, "Yelanit," now defunct, was smaller and run mainly out of Linda's home. Linda, the owner of Yelanit,

> [Saw] a need and I saw the business potential, and you know it's something new, something refreshing. It's funny because the Yemenites have been here from 56' or something, the Indians since the 1950s or so? None of the [make-up] companies said "We have make-up for dark skin." None of them. After I started with this idea, I see now they're talking about it, there are courses for [putting on] dark skin make-up, there are products and everybody wants to be a part of it.

[106] Both company names are pseudonyms.

Omri is the owner of "Beauty," the first make-up company to offer cosmetics for dark skin in Israel. I asked how he got started:

> In the beginning it was only wigs and hair extensions, and then step by step [the inventory grew]... There was a need and I went out to supply that need. [...] I talked to people [Ethiopians], I saw the need and, lately there is a tendency for Ethiopian youth to go to the States after the army service. There they get familiar with cosmetics because the black community there already took care of themselves, and we're almost the same shade you know, so they bought their products there and brought them here [to Israel]. Once it was over [the products almost finished] they said, "Could you please bring this product? It's a very good product you'll make a lot of money, just bring me that color, I need it so much." Then I went to speak with other girls, in the beginning it was very hard for me. I went to many Israeli factories and they didn't want to produce my order since my order at that time it was relatively small [quantities] for their terms and then I had to fly to [location *X*] to get containers for the cosmetics.

Linda, on the other hand, remembers seeing her friend's wedding picture and cringing at the sight of her face caked with a light shade of foundation. Her friend looked like she had white ashes on her face, which contrasted with her body.

> There are two companies in Israel [aside from hers and Omri's] that make make-up for darker people but it's not their priority and they do it on the side. And I don't believe that the Ethiopian girl should spend 200-300 NIS to buy make-up that is right for her. I don't want to do it [this business] on the side. I want the black woman to be the center, I want her to model, give her advice, not be a side product. There's demand, it took time to see that there's demand. [...] Yemenites, Indians, Arabs, these people have been here much longer than the Ethiopians. And it took time to make make-up that suits their skin. Only in the past five years did the demand come up and the big companies looked into it. They never thought of it before, that the dark-skinned woman would need specific make-up.

Both Omri and Linda passed through the Sudan as children (ages two and seven) and came to Israel as refugees. Omri never finished high school or served in the army. He was troubled growing up, left his family home in the suburbs at an early age, and was subsequently homeless:

> I can say that, since I was young I was determined, I liked to do the hard stuff, I'm still a hard worker, well I think maybe it's because I'm ambitious. I had the need to prove that I can [do it]. I used to sleep in this central bus station now I have a store here, do you believe that? [...] I used to sleep outside in the streets, I mean, really living here in Tel Aviv, like a homeless person. [...] It was cold as hell, it wasn't a piece of cake for me, it wasn't new for me, I had a pretty shitty life.

Later on he adds:

> And that's why I don't like favors from anybody I like to produce my own things, I don't like to be dependent, that's the reason I do, and I go, you know I'm a go getter, I go out and ladies tell me, "Omri we don't have make-up for our skin, if you bring it you will be good business." I check every way I check my sources I check the feasibility the financial feasibility you know if it's good, and then I go and get it, you know? That's it! Go and get it, don't tell excuses, for example, I need to get the license, you know? Before I went out and import this cosmetics I waited for one year, you know but I did, I almost gave up but I didn't give up, I'm stubborn, for good and for bad.

When I asked Omri about the difference I saw between him and the younger generation of Ethiopian Israelis who identify with African-Americans, this is what he said:

> Q: Did you feel a connection with African-Americans?
>
> A: No I didn't, in fact ehhh … Maybe I was thinking for business wise, not for, offering them my make-up, they're still black! Some business ambitions, I don't feel any special ehhh … I admire some of them as role models for business, but that's where the similarity ends, I like their music, like Stevie Wonder, I like Ray Charles, Marvin Gay, Barry White, old school for some reason.
>
> A: How do you explain the difference between you and some of the kids I volunteer with, who feel so bad about being black.
>
> Q: How old are they?
>
> A: 16-17.
>
> Q: Well they're kids, they're going to have their down. Like most of the kids here, they're just confused like I was, I'm confused!

Growing up, Omri and Linda lived through confusing periods in their lives. Both left Israel and traveled abroad to figure out who they are and where they belong. According to Omri, today's Ethiopian kids are looking to American black culture as part of their struggle to come-of-age as they navigate the difficulties they face:

> There's nobody to blame, the parents are doing their best, seven kids with two parents, nine people living in a three-room apartment, multiply this with 50 families living in the same ghetto, you can imagine the rest so ... […]. I like Israel you know, whatever I'll say about Israel, whatever my anger against Israel, I don't know anything else, like most of the kids here, they're just confused like I was, I'm confused! So you can see their anxiety, why do you think they look to their brothers in the States, they're not their brothers they have nothing to do with each other nothing, one is living in Israel and is Jewish, and the other lives there and he was a

> slave, we were never slaves. If there is something that Ethiopians are proud of, is that they were never captured, never colonized and in fact they fought back and they won! And they [young Ethiopians] look at Afro-American people, they use their terms of racism, they mix it [with what is] here, with the social antagonism here. You can hear also the social antagonism here about the Russian people, about the Moroccan. One group is racist against the other, racist, as in being bad to you, you can see the ignorance. [...] It's a mixed feeling, you don't know what you are ... Are you supposed to be Ethiopian now or Israeli? … It's a process, [a] learning [process].

Interestingly, it was not until the arrival of Ethiopians that dark-skinned Jewish Israelis, Palestinians and Bedouins living in Israel, as well as non-Jewish migrant workers, became a potential target of commercial aspirations. Linda hosted make-up parties with non-Jewish audiences. She was surprised to see the extent to which black Bedouins go to lighten their skin. According to her, their discomfort about being black was far more intense compared to what some Ethiopian women expressed.

> A: […] You know it's funny [because] although there is this issue of black and white [among the Ethiopian girls, but] if I compare it to the Bedouins? I'm very proud to be Ethiopian [laughing]. Because Ethiopians are looking for make-up - but still, if she's dark and she doesn't like her [skin] color, she [still] will not buy make-up that makes her look white, or like ashes. She will buy a make-up that matches her color, yeah? That's when she accepts her color. When I went to the Bedouins? I told them [they have to buy make-up that matches their skin tone]. You will see the pictures there, oh my God! They told me, they don't AT ALL like to buy make-up in their color [that matches their skin tone]. They want to be white! It's a big issue especially in the Arab [culture].
>
> Q: But there are Bedouins who are black.
>
> A: Yeah yeah, they're black black black. They don't like to buy make-up that fits their skin color. Not only they will buy two or three shades lighter, especially for their weddings, [but it's like] white, white! I mean not white like you, I mean white like [it looks like] ashes, which is disgusting, you know? So I think in a way [at least] the Ethiopians want to get make-up that fits their color, not lighter.

While working with other dark-skinned people in Israel like black Bedouins (see Beckerleg 2007), Linda reassesses Ethiopian Israeli women's self-confidence issues about their skin color. The underlying implication is that Ethiopians generally feel good in their skin and about their skin color, and that they do not necessarily want to look different (i.e. more "white"). At stake in this process is the introduction of an Ethiopian-centered

definition of Israeli beauty that challenges the image of European white women. As mentioned at the end of Chapter Five, in 2013 Yityish Aynaw became the first Ethiopian woman to win the Miss Israel competition.[107]

I followed Linda to one of her make-up parties at a friend's place in a poor neighborhood outside of Tel Aviv. Like North American "Tupperware Parties," she went around to demonstrate her products in peoples' home. Young teenage girls, not older than 15 or 16, had come over to see what she had to offer. They tried on the make-up and looked at the hair extensions on display. Though skeptical at first, they ended up buying some products. One of the girls asked Linda if she had make-up to make her skin white. I turned to Linda's friend, an Ethiopian woman in her mid 20s, and asked if she would also want to buy make-up that turns her into a white. With a disgusted look on her face, she said "NOOOO! I'm beautiful like this! I *love* my color!" The young teenager who requested the whitening make-up was indeed darker than the average Ethiopian, and it is quite possible that she wished to become lighter rather than actually turn her skin white. Either way, a discomfort with being dark and black was clearly manifested in her request.

In the span of seconds I had witnessed two extreme reactions to one's own blackness. Speaking with the owners of both make-up companies it became clear that this teenager's request is fairly uncommon. Of course, the teenage years are particularly tumultuous for most children growing up in societies like Israel, especially if they belong to a marginalized population. However, what is unique in this girl's experience is the place where her ill is

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[107] http://www.ethiotube.net/video/26453/CNN-African-Voices--Israels-Ethiopian-born-beauty-queen-Yityish-Aynaw--June-2013. White House officials invited her, on behalf of Barack and Michelle Obama, to the gala dinner held in Israel during their state visit to Israel in March 2013.

located – her skin color. While other teenagers might worry about their hair or their clothes, some Ethiopian girls are preoccupied with skin tone as well.

The low level of self-esteem among both boys and girls was palpable in numerous encounters I had during fieldwork. Once again, this is not an uncommon feature of teenagers regardless of class, race or ethnic background (Robins and Trzesniewski 2005; Rumbaut 1994). However, what is particular to Ethiopian Israeli experiences of teenagehood and what differentiates them from others their age is a combination of the racial, cultural and religious distance that sets them apart from other Jewish groups in Israel.

Linda recalls a conversation she had with her friend Talia, a "white" Israeli, and her daughter Yasmine:

> I was with Talia, I mean how black can her daughter be? [smiling] We were driving in the car and her daughter who is seven years old said, "Mom I don't want to be dark!" I asked her "Why don't you want to be dark?" She answered "It's not beautiful, I don't want to be black." I was like, if YOU [are uncomfortable with this], like, she's Israeli, she's white. My friend Talia is white and her daughter is white but she doesn't want to be dark cause it's not nice. I said, "Yasmine, do you think I'm beautiful?" She said, "Yes I think you're beautiful." So I said, "But you see I'm black!" Yasmine said "Yeah, but I don't want to be." I tried to explain to Talia why [her daughter thinks this way], because the environment, the fashion world, is only thinking blond, white. This is considered beautiful. Have you heard of the sentence "White is beautiful?" It's BLACK is beautiful, like FUCK I need to, you know? These things come from somewhere and I'm trying to explain this to Talia but she didn't understand me. Talia said "No, everyone is going through this in their identity, I'm not full of self esteem either I think I'm fat and etc." I told her, "This is something that is going on between you and yourself. I however always have to fight the environment cause the environment is always telling me 'You're not beautiful you're not beautiful you're not beautiful.'" I'm beautiful because I'm beautiful, I'm not beautiful because I'm black. I think it's also age, everybody goes through these steps.

Linda's answer demonstrates how racial dynamics can easily be concealed and viewed as part of other processes more common to the general population. While Linda herself acknowledges that self-esteem issues are more prominent at a young age, she nevertheless makes a clear distinction between her experience as a black Jewish Israeli and

Talia's issues with her body. Talia's problems with weight and body image are experienced from the standpoint of an accepted white Jewish body, as opposed to a contested black one. While society gives negative messages about body shape and fat, Talia does not experience them within the stigma of being black. Young Ethiopians like Linda deal with these issues from the position of a primary stigma from which other body-image issues, more common among all teenagers, stem. The primary stigma therefore, is what differentiates Ethiopians from the more common and normal phenomena associated with youth and being a teenager.

The Ethiopian Black Female Body: Fetish and Desire

During fieldwork, I noticed that modeling agencies had started to capitalize on what is seen as the exquisite beauty of Ethiopian women. At times fashion shows were held in various Ethiopian locations (clubs, cultural centers, etc.). The beauty of Ethiopian women was brought to my attention many times by non-Ethiopians. Many non-Ethiopian Israeli men, upon finding out what I was doing in Israel, asked if I could find them an "Ethiopian girlfriend." Linda also had similar requests from her non-Ethiopian male friends:

> A: I think it's part of the way they [Ethiopian women] look, and also Ethiopian women are much more …
>
> Q: Self-confident?
>
> A: Yeah it's self-confidence but also [about being] aware … [...] If you go to [Ethiopian] clubs it's so difficult to find somebody [Ethiopian men] who's [snapping her figures, is snappy, snazzy] cool and you know, dressed up nicely and you know, most of them look shitty. They don't know anything about fashion. I think the women are much more fashion [oriented], and they take care of themselves, hair and make-up. They are much much more aware of themselves and confident so I think this is part of [why] Israelis are accepting the [Ethiopian] girls more [than Ethiopian guys]. I know it's a fetish to go out with Ethiopians [women]. Do you know how many guys [non-Ethiopian Israelis] ask me to find them an Ethiopian woman?

Interest in Ethiopian women expressed by Israeli men and the larger public has made women's integration easier, to some extent, than men's. The gender-based favoritism

premised on black American racial stereotypes was brought home to me when a middle-class Israeli friend, who is half Ashkenazi and half Mizrahi, asked me: "The [Ethiopian] girls are so beautiful, but couldn't the guys be a bit taller so we could have a good basketball team?" In the journey toward integration and acceptance, transition and renewal, Ethiopian women have an advantage over their male counterparts. This friend's comment also underscores the idea that Ethiopians are Israel's version of American blacks. Israel "owns" them to some extent, and it is in fact only natural that they be of service to the state of Israel in shaping its image abroad through sports ("why can't the guys be taller so we could have a good basketball team?").

Within the group of 20- and 30- something ambitious Ethiopian Israelis I spent time with, Trey, an Ethiopian Israeli man, was in the midst of setting up a modeling agency featuring Ethiopian women:

> One of the reasons I decided to start a modeling agency is because we have such beautiful girls and there is nobody who will represent them properly, or if they are in some agency they fool them because there is no parent who is supporting or a brother who is supporting. So I came to the conclusion that I want to show to the Israelis that there's someone from the [Ethiopian] community who is capable of also doing something big. So this is a very big step and a competitive step, but I'm taking a risk and trying, to be a little known in the Israeli society.

Looking out for the girls like a "brother" or a "parent" points to the sense of responsibility Trey feels as a male protector. This project also hints at the process of taking back and re-building a new Ethiopian masculinity in a professional context. He also wishes to promote and represent his "community" to the larger Israeli public, who remains unaware of the talent and potential that lie internally.

In this chapter, I drew a wide-ranging portrait of the various ways in which Ethiopian Israeli young adults engage with blackness, race and skin color. Ethiopian Israelis

are making a slow but positive impact on the image of Jewish beauty in Israel. From entrepreneurs and artists to models, hairdressers and stand-up comedians, the young adults I interviewed are focused on educating members of their own ethnic group and taking a moral stance against what they perceive to be a threat to the betterment of their lives as a community (for example drugs, juvenile delinquency, lack of education, crime). At times this process takes on tones of moralistic criticism. Most Ethiopians, however, who commented on internal Ethiopian issues, were not moralistic or judgmental. For instance, in Dror's case, he uses photography to promote blackness by showing Ethiopian Israelis a clear image of how beautiful the black body is in its natural state. Similarly Shlomo, through his recent discovery of his Ethiopian roots, has given a digital platform for bringing together Ethiopian Israelis on the internet.

On another level, educational aspirations through stand-up comedy, for example, demystify and destigmatize Ethiopian families, culture, and socio-economic marginalization. Not only are they working to fine tune their image among the non-Ethiopian Jewish public, but they are also capitalizing on their cultural capital as holders and disseminators, so to speak, of (Israeli Jewish) gobalized blackness in terms of a commodity that can be (partially) shared by "whites," as in the case of the rastot hair salons. In the process, these entrepreneurs are giving rise, slowly but surely, to an Ethiopian Israeli middle-class.

Chapter 8

CONCLUSION

My goal in this dissertation was to look at the ways in which race is articulated among Ethiopian Jews. In Chapter Two, I discussed how the Beta Israel transformed themselves into Ethiopian Israelis, and compared their integration to the experience of Mizrahi immigrants before them. Chapter Three looked at the racial ascription of their status as Jews from a historical perspective, and how current issues Ethiopian Jews face today can be traced to their past in Ethiopia. Goffman's concept of stigma provided a conceptual framework for understanding the changing processes of exclusion that have targeted the Beta Israel in the past, and Ethiopian Israelis today: the stigma of being "Falasha" in the first case, and of being black (Jews) in the second. In Chapter Four I provided a general description of Ethiopian Jewish life in current-day Israel by looking at the dynamics within the "Ethiopian community" through the optic of the changing Ethiopian family unit and two other sites of post-aliyah transformation: gender and generational relations. The expression of modernity and blackness through the trope of hip-hop and reggae was detailed in Chapter Five. In Chapter Six I discussed various forms of racial exclusion that keep Ethiopian Jews in a subordinate position in Israel, and identified four main stereotypes at work in this process. In Chapter Seven I presented a variety of expressions of Ethiopian Israeli blackness.

Thirty years after the initial airlift that brought the first large group of Ethiopian Jews to Israel, how is race made relevant to them today? The stories I relate in this thesis clearly demonstrate the centrality of race and the role of practices of inclusion and exclusion in shaping the lives of Ethiopian Jews coming of age in Israel. I showed how the historical

construction of Ethiopians' racial labeling as blacks makes it difficult to speak of their blackness as a natural extension of their physical features. A key element further renders the association between somatic blackness and their racial identification as black Ethiopian Israelis more complex: their racial ascription, however tenuous, as Jews in regards to bloodline and genealogy.

Today there remains a discrepancy, however, between their official status as Jews and their experiences with segregation, marginalization and racism in Israel. Ethiopian Jews have equality of rights in major spheres of life. A host of policies have been devised in fields such as culture, education, housing and health that favour them over previously racialized Jews like Mizrahim. Positive discrimination, however, works in parallel with other policies and social practices that marginalize them. The operational node upon which dynamics of inclusion and dynamics of exclusion hinge upon is based on meanings, attributes and practices that revolve around the notion of race.

In this dissertation I sought to unpack the concept of race and bring its concreteness to the fore, as experienced by those who are racialized as black. Based on the ethnographic data I gathered, I devised two working notions of race, which, I argue, were central to the formation of Ethiopian Jews as both black and Jewish. Firstly, when I talked about race, I referred to race as somatic blackness located on the epidermis. Ethiopian Jews' somatic blackness carries significant implications because visible markers such as texture of hair, skin tone and facial features, cue the Ethiopians' distance from the ideal, normative white Jew.

Secondly, the formation of Ethiopian Jews as both black and Jewish stems from the concept of race as genealogy or bloodlines. Contrary to race as somatic blackness, race as

genealogy, traced through bloodlines, constitutes the very premise of their inclusion as Jews from the perspective of Jewish religious law. The Rabbinate's official recognition of Ethiopian Israelis as the descendants of the lost Israelite tribe of Dan gave way to their current position as internal Jewish others.

Ethiopian Jews' everyday experiences with stigmatization do not differentiate between exclusion based on doubts about their purity as Jews, and exclusion based on their somatic blackness. Rather, they both intermingle with one another under the umbrella of blackness. In this process, physical markers of differences come to stand together with other references of stigma to the extent that the racial dimension can overshadow them and come to stand for them in practices of exclusion.

Ethiopian racial constructs merged with Euro-American race models in the Israeli environment in regards to Ethiopian Israeli understandings of race. As described in Chapter Two, this is complicated by the muted understanding that the very *raison d'être* of Ethiopians in Israel as Jews hinges upon the "proof" of their belonging to the Jewish race. Therefore, as discussed in Chapter Four, intra-Jewish racism in Israel and the rhetoric of African-American race relations adopted by some teenagers are premised on the assertion of seeking full and unequivocal acceptance into Israel's dominant Jewish society.

The tension between race as epidermis and race as bloodline (in the sense of belonging to the Jewish people genealogically) is embodied by Ethiopian Israelis and represents the vector of their racialized experiences of integration to Israel. The ethnography I unpacked in this dissertation represents a contradiction of sorts. On the one hand, the whitening of the Mizrahi and their ensuing racial flexibility as the blackest of Jewish "whites" point to the circumstantial aspect of ascribing racial labels. On the other hand, it is

important to account for the fact that race labels are also resilient, fixed and immutable, as in the case of Ethiopian Jews. What does this contradiction say about race relations in Israel? First, it points to a leeway that allowed Mizrahim to attain a position – albeit a low one – in the sphere of Jewish Israeli "whiteness." Second, it inscribes Ethiopians within the sphere of (black) Jewishness without granting them the possibility of claiming a space in the higher echelon of Jewish whiteness. While race is the most easily observable reference for outsiders, *racially speaking, their identity as Jews is the platform on which Ethiopians' somatic blackness gains traction*. In other words, their identity as Jewish Israelis is the framework in which their blackness is articulated.

In Ethiopia, Beta Israel did not consider themselves black; this racial identity was reserved for the barya. From the standpoint of elderly Ethiopian Jews, they are different shades of reddish-brown skin that index their status according to an emic system of racial classification most Israelis have never heard of. I looked at race and racism not only according to intra-Jewish ethnic relations in Israel, but also in relation to an internal Ethiopian racial classification system.

The ascription of Beta Israel as Jews heralded their inclusion into the national project of modern Israel. This process necessitated achieving modernity as black Jewish citizens, an identity to which a host of stigmas, as related in Chapter Six, are associated. This is further complicated by the fact that in Israel, race and racism are not only inscribed in obvious places such as the relationship between Ashkenazim and Mizrahim, black Ethiopian Jews and "white" Israeli Jews, or even amongst "Jews" and "Arabs." Internally within the Ethiopian Jewish community, the barya issue holds currency in regards to practices of exclusion within their own group.

Many Ethiopian Israelis recounted the painful alienation of what it is like to hit the invisible ceiling of Israeli "absorption." For an outside observer such as myself, it can be easy to lose footing and cave in to the facile conclusion that Ethiopian Jews are the blacks (comparable to African-Americans, or in other words, former slaves) of Israel. This perspective, which in my view lacks important caveats, is co-opted and put to use for a variety of ideological and political agendas that have little to do with the actual experiences of Ethiopian Israelis. Their situation in Israel is far more complicated than a simplistic explanation associating them, without scrutiny, to the process of ghettoization as it pertains to some segments of African-Americans in the United States.

The position from which Ethiopian Israelis operate and make claims of inclusion, or experience forms of exclusion, however, automatically places them *within*, and not *without*, the dominant sphere of Jewish power in Israel. The fight is not against Israel and its institutions; rather, it is for honest and full participation in the polity as Jews whose looks, rural origins, and past traditional religious behavior substantially distanced them from other Jews. While it does not render less real the patronizing racism they live with, nor easier to swallow their infantilizing treatment as culturally and religiously inept "children" in need of intervention, the ascription of the status "Jew" recognized by the government and rabbinate automatically places them in a far more privileged position from which to demand rights than for Palestinians living in Israel or labor migrants from Asia, Latin America, and Africa. The contribution I make to the study of race in Israel stems from my approach whereby I account for the lived experiences of those who are racialized along with the social, material, and institutional costs that their racialization incurs. Accordingly, I highlight the stark difference between the position of Ethiopian Jews as (Jewish) blacks *in* Israel, albeit without

denying or muting the real pain of racism and stigmatization that they compose with daily, to the position of Palestinian citizens of Israel who, symbolically speaking, occupy, the position of "the blacks *of* Israel."

Realizing the extent of agency that Ethiopian Israelis carry in their own lives does not negate the existence of outside forces like racism, statism, and paternalism; rather, it reveals the possibility of addressing them from an empowered position, as some Ethiopian Israelis are doing. Ethiopian Israelis actively participate in Israeli society on their own terms and in a way that highlights blackness. The positive valuation of blackness that individuals in their 20s are 30s who participated in this research are working toward, transforms their marginalization into creative projects such as: photography, filmmaking, stand-up comedies, one-person theater shows, dance groups that combine traditional Ethiopian music and dance with modern choreography, rap workshops for at-risk youths, businesses, innovative educational institutions, etc. These individuals are leaving a positive trail for the following generations.

Ethiopian Jews are a product of two diaspora networks (Jewish and Ethiopian), and have turned to the widely circulated cultural artifacts of a third one (African diaspora) to make sense of their evolving selves as black Jews. Their recent migratory experience, and the various ways in which they re-turn to Ethiopia via travel, media, digital networks, etc., demonstrate that living in a globalized world refers to the dual process of coming apart *and* coming together. Ethiopian aliyah is not only about "saving" destitute and desperate migrants, but also about incalculable loss. Researching the "cost of aliyah" would provide an interesting opportunity to delve into the memories of the older generation, and to document the narratives of those who left Ethiopia as adults.

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