Ethiopian Jews in Israel

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OF THE MANY DIASPORA JEWISH communities, none has undergone more dramatic change in recent years than the Beta Israel (Falashas).[1] Prior to 1977 all but a handful of Beta Israel lived in Ethiopia. During the 1980s, almost half the community emigrated to Israel, and the center of Beta Israel life shifted from Ethiopia to Israel. In 1991, "Operation Solomon" put an end to the Beta Israel as an active and living Diaspora community, and by the end of 1993 virtually all Beta Israel were in Israel.

This article describes and analyzes the process of their immigration (*aliyah*) to, and absorption (*klitah*) in, Israel. Although every attempt has been made to provide as much quantitative statistical data as possible, significant gaps remain. Most of the research undertaken on the Ethiopians in Israel has been qualitative in nature. Even in those cases where attempts have been made to carry out precise surveys of immigrants, the results have not always been satisfactory.[2] Since Ethiopian immigrants usually arrived in Israel with few official documents, basic "facts" such as age and family status were often unverifiable, and immigrants were registered on the basis of their own or family members' testimony. Once they were settled in the country, the multiplicity of agencies dealing with the immigrants further complicated the process of compiling comprehensive and authoritative information.[3]

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[1]In Ethiopia, the members of the group usually referred to themselves as Beta Israel (the House of Israel) or simply Israel. They were more widely known as "Falashas." Today, they prefer to be called Ethiopian Jews.

[2]The Israel Ministry of Absorption has, for example, released several sets of figures concerning the number of Ethiopian immigrants that have arrived in Israel. In some cases the number said to have arrived in a given year has varied by as much as 25 percent!

[3]The bibliographic references contained in this article have been prepared with a primarily English-reading audience in mind. Only the most essential sources in other languages have been cited. This has resulted in an unfortunate, but inevitable, neglect of the vast and growing Hebrew literature concerning Ethiopian Jews in Israel. Every attempt has been made to summarize the major findings of that literature in the appropriate sections. Two extremely useful bibliographies containing Hebrew material have been published in recent years. They can be obtained by contacting Betachin, R. Yafo 101, Jerusalem 94342, and the Henrietta Szold Institute, 9 Columbia St., Jerusalem 96583.

BACKGROUND

The history of the Beta Israel did not, of course, begin with their arrival in Israel. Long before their encounter with world Jewry, the Beta Israel worshiped and created, struggled and fought, all within the context of the wider stream of Ethiopian history. Although some aspects of this history, particularly the question of "Falasha origins," have provoked considerable controversy in recent years, events prior to the late 19th or early 20th century are of little relevance to our concerns in this article.[4]

More recent events form the starting point for our discussion. For almost a century and a half prior to their *aliyah*, the Beta Israel were exposed to outside influences that slowly altered their religious life, social norms, and self-image. While none of the changes from this period had as immediate and overwhelming an impact as emigration from Ethiopia and immigration to Israel, neither can they be ignored. It is only possible to report the effects of the move to Israel faithfully if we begin with an accurate picture of what existed before.[5]

The modern history of the Beta Israel began in 1859 with the establishment in their midst of a Protestant mission under the auspices of the London Society for Promoting Christianity Among the Jews. It was the mission's activities more than anything else in the period before the 20th century that made these isolated Jews aware of the existence of a more universal form of Jewish identity and brought them to the attention of world Jewry.[6]

In response to the missionary threat, a number of prominent Jewish leaders began to lobby for aid to be sent to the Beta Israel. In 1867, Joseph Halévy was sent to Ethiopia as the emissary of the Alliance Israélite Universelle.[7] Despite Halévy's unequivocal confirmation of the Beta Israel's Jewishness, and his enthusiastic support for the establishment of institutions to

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[4]One of the central ironies of recent years is that only during the period of their emigration from Ethiopia has their history in that country begun to be clearly understood. See in particular Kay Kaufman Shelemay, *Music, Ritual and Falasha History* (East Lansing, Mich., 1989); James Arthur Quirin, *The Evolution of the Ethiopian Jews* (Philadelphia, 1992); and Steven Kaplan, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia: From Earliest Times to the Twentieth Century* (New York, 1992).

[5]Steven Kaplan and Chaim Rosen, "Ethiopian Immigrants in Israel: Between Preservation of Culture and Invention of Tradition," *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 35, no. 1, June 1993, pp. 35–48.

[6]On the activities of this mission, see Kaplan, *Beta Israel*, pp. 116–42, and Quirin, *Ethiopian Jews*, pp. 179–91.

[7]On Halévy's visit and its significance, see Kaplan, *Beta Israel*, pp. 138–42. For Halévy's account of his journey, see Joseph Halévy, "Travels in Abyssinia," tr. James Picciotto, in A. Levy, *Miscellany of Hebrew Literature* (London, 1877).

assist them, no action was taken for almost 40 years, when Halévy's pupil Jacques (Ya'acov) Faitlovitch journeyed to Ethiopia in 1904. Faitlovitch, who dedicated his life to the cause of Ethiopian Jewry, was responsible more than any other single person for their entry into Jewish history and consciousness. The common thread that ran through all aspects of his program on their behalf was the attempt to bring them closer to other Jewish communities. To this end, he sought to raise their standards of education and created a Western-educated elite capable of interacting with their foreign Jewish counterparts. He also attempted to reform Beta Israel religion to bring it closer to "normative" Judaism. Among the innovations he introduced were the lighting of Sabbath candles, the recitation of Hebrew prayers, the use of the Star of David, and the observance of holidays such as Simhat Torah. Faitlovitch worked on behalf of Ethiopian Jewry until his death in 1955.[8]

During the years immediately following the establishment of the State of Israel, no attempt was made to bring the Beta Israel on *aliyah*. Lingering questions concerning their Jewishness, as well as social, medical, and political considerations, all convinced successive Israeli governments to defer any decisive action. Efforts were made, however, by the Jewish Agency and other organizations to strengthen their ties to world Jewry and Israel. From 1953 to 1958, representatives of the Jewish Agency's Department for Torah Education in the Diaspora were active in Ethiopia. Two groups totaling 27 Ethiopian youngsters were also brought to the Kfar Batya Youth Aliyah village in Israel to be trained as teachers and future leaders of their fellow Ethiopians. Eventually a network of schools was established throughout the Gondar region, which at its peak served hundreds of students. The impact of their efforts was not felt evenly among all sectors of the population. Some communities, particularly those in peripheral regions, remained largely unaffected. Others, in or near villages in which schools were established, underwent a more dramatic transformation as they were exposed to rabbinic Judaism, Zionism, and modernization.[9] Israel and Jerusalem, which had existed mainly as symbols of a lost biblical period, began to be perceived as living realities and for some a goal to be struggled toward. Not surpris-

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[8]Unfortunately, we lack a detailed study of Faitlovitch's life and works. See, however, Simon D. Messing, *The Story of the Falashas: "Black Jews" of Ethiopia* (Brooklyn, 1982), pp. 62–79; Itzhak Grinfeld, "Jacques Faitlovitch—'Father' of the Falashas," in *The Jews of Ethiopia—A Community in Transition*, ed. Yossi Avner et al. (Tel Aviv, 1986), pp. 30–35; and especially Faitlovitch's article in AJYB 1920–21, vol. 22, pp. 80–100.

[9]The best discussion of these issues in English is G. Jan Abbink, "The Falashas in Ethiopia and Israel: The Problem of Ethnic Assimilation," in *Nijmegen Sociaal Anthropologische Cahiers*, vol. 15, 1984. This work also contains a useful, albeit dated, discussion of Ethiopian Jewish absorption in Israel.

ingly, youngsters tended to adopt new ideas more quickly than their elders, and in some cases generational tensions developed.[10]

Such intergenerational tensions were further exacerbated following the Ethiopian revolution of 1974, which led to the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie and the institution of a military Marxist regime.[11] Young people exposed to secular education and political indoctrination rejected the ways of their elders as old-fashioned. Contacts with non-Beta Israel increased significantly as young people joined political organizations, were conscripted into the security forces, or simply sought the professional and educational opportunities available in urban areas.

A Tale of Three Aliyot

While the significance of such changes should not be minimized, they pale in comparison to what happened from 1977 onward. At the beginning of 1977, fewer than 100 Ethiopian Jews had been grudgingly allowed—by either Ethiopian or Israeli authorities—to settle in Israel. By the end of 1993 the number of immigrants had risen to nearly 45,000! This mass migration took place over a relatively short period, not as a single event but rather in a series of waves, each of which had its own special characteristics.

Although it was generally not realized at the time, 1973 was a crucial year in the history of the Beta Israel. Early that year, Ovadia Yosef, the Sephardi chief rabbi of Israel, issued a religious ruling recognizing the Falashas as Jews. Citing rabbinic opinions from more than 400 years earlier, he stated that they were descendants of the lost tribe of Dan.[12] Rabbi Yosef's pronouncement brought no immediate change in the fortunes of Ethiopian Jewry. Indeed, the breaking off of diplomatic relations between Ethiopia and Israel in the wake of the Yom Kippur War in October 1973 if anything increased their isolation. His decision did, however, remove most doubts concerning the Jewishness of the Beta Israel, and thus made it possible for Jews in Israel and the Diaspora to agitate on their behalf. Slowly, their

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[10]This was especially the case following the return of the Ethiopian youngsters who had studied at the Kfar Batya Youth Aliyah village.

[11]Galia Sabar Friedman, "Religion and the Marxist State of Ethiopia: The Case of the Ethiopian Jews," *Religion in Communist Lands* 17, no. 3, 1989, pp. 247–56.

[12]The best English discussion of the halakhic status of Ethiopian Jews is by (former Israeli Supreme Court justice) Menachem Elon, "The Ethiopian Jews: A Case Study in the Functioning of the Jewish Legal System," *New York University Journal of International Law and Politics* 19, 1986–87, pp. 535–63. Hebrew volumes include: (Rabbi) Menachem Waldman, *Beyond the Rivers of Ethiopia: The Jews of Ethiopia and the Jewish People* (Tel Aviv, 1989); idem, *From Ethiopia to Jerusalem: Ethiopian Jewry in the Modern Era* (Jerusalem, 1991); (Rabbi) David Chelouche, *The Exiles of Israel Will Be Gathered* (Jerusalem, 1988); and (Attorney) Michael Corinaldi, *Ethiopian Jewry: Identity and Tradition* (Jerusalem, 1989).

controversial and sometimes confrontational tactics bore fruit. The issue of Ethiopian Jewry began to appear on the agenda of more and more Jewish organizations, and pressure grew for Israel to act on their behalf.[13]

From 1977 onward, successive Israeli governments began to turn their attention to the issue of Ethiopian Jewry. In that year, 121 Ethiopian Jews were brought to Israel as part of an "arms for Jews" deal between the Israelis and the Ethiopians. Unfortunately, in February of 1978, Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan revealed the military side of the agreement, and an embarrassed Ethiopian government terminated the arrangement.

Although promises of land reform and freedom of worship led many to hope that Ethiopia's Marxist rulers would ameliorate the situation of the Beta Israel, this did not prove to be the case. While seldom victims of organized persecution, they suffered all the tribulations inflicted on the general population as well as those reserved for a particularly weak and vulnerable minority group. As conditions in Ethiopia deteriorated, their religious devotion to Jerusalem began to be transformed into an active desire to emigrate.

Rather surprisingly, the first significant wave of Beta Israel to leave Ethiopia did not include those who had had the most contact with foreign Jews and Israelis.[14] Starting in 1980, Jews from the relatively isolated regions of Tigre and Walqayit began to journey to the Sudan and to settle in refugee camps. Some were to wait there for as long as two or three years before being taken to Israel. Although Sudan was officially opposed to the emigration of these Jews, several Sudanese government officials agreed to allow their removal in exchange for large bribes and on condition of confidentiality. By the end of 1983, over 4,000 Beta Israel, virtually the entire Jewish population of Tigre and Walqayit, had reached Israel.

The Sudanese camps, however, far from emptying out, became home to an ever increasing number of refugees. Most were fleeing yet another famine in war-torn Ethiopia. A small number, Beta Israel from the Gondar region, were driven not by the search for food, but by their desire to reach Israel.

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[13]Rabbi Yosef's decision also paved the way for the granting of citizenship to the handful of Ethiopian Jews already in the country. For a recent study focusing on the American efforts on behalf of Ethiopian Jewry, see Jeffery A. Kaye, "On the Wings of Eagles: A History and Analysis of the Movement to Rescue Ethiopian Jewry" (M.A. thesis, HUC-JIR, Cincinnati, 1993). Among the most significant groups active in these efforts were the American Association for Ethiopian Jews (AAEJ), the Canadian Association for Ethiopian Jews (CAEJ), the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry (NACOEJ), and in England the Falasha Welfare Association (FWA).

[14]This is not to say that these Tigrean Jews had been completely cut off from Jewish contacts. Cf. G.J. Abbink, "An Ethiopian Jewish 'Missionary' as Cultural Broker," in *Ethiopian Jews and Israel*, ed. Michael Ashkenazi and Alex Weingrod (New Brunswick, N.J., 1988), pp. 21–32.

Despite many obstacles, what had hitherto been a trickle of Jewish emigrants from Gondar became a flood in 1984, and by the middle of the year, close to 10,000 additional Ethiopian Jews had crossed the border into the Sudan. As the situation in the refugee camps deteriorated and the mortality rate rose, the Israeli government decided to abandon its policy of gradual immigration in favor of a more ambitious policy. During a period of less than two months, starting in mid-November 1984, more than 6,700 Ethiopian Jews were airlifted to Israel in what became known as Operation Moses.[15]

Almost from the start, Operation Moses was an open secret, as hundreds of Israelis struggled to accommodate the new arrivals. Although strict censorship was imposed in Israel, this did not prevent several foreign papers from carrying reports on the airlift accredited to reporters outside Israel. Despite the fears of Israeli authorities, the Sudanese government ignored these stories and allowed the operation to continue. On January 3, 1985, representatives of the Jewish Agency, the Foreign Ministry, and the Ministry of Immigrant Absorption, in an apparent attempt to divert media attention from the airlift and toward those Ethiopians already in Israel, gave a detailed briefing to the local and foreign press. On January 5, the Sudanese government suspended the airlift.

The untimely disruption of Operation Moses left several hundred Jews stranded in the Sudan. The U.S. and Israeli governments immediately formulated plans to rescue them. A few months later, a further 648 Beta Israel were removed from the Sudan in a CIA-sponsored airlift variously labeled Operation Sheba or Operation Joshua.

The trek to the Sudan and the ensuing sojourn in Sudanese refugee camps had a devastating effect on Ethiopian family life. Almost every Ethiopian who reached Israel during this period had both lost family members and left others behind in Ethiopia.[16] Scarcely a single family survived intact. For

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[15]Although a number of books were published on Operation Moses, they were intended as popular, not scholarly, works. They include: Tudor Parfitt, *Operation Moses* (London, 1985); Louis Rapoport, *Redemption Song: The Story of Operation Moses* (New York, 1986); Claire Safran, *Secret Exodus* (New York, 1987); Ruth Gruber, *Rescue: The Exodus of the Ethiopian Jews* (New York, 1987). Vastly different in tone and more scholarly in intent are two recent articles: Ahmed Karadawi, "The Smuggling of the Ethiopian Falasha to Israel Through Sudan," *African Affairs* 90, no. 358, Jan. 1991, pp. 23–50; and Teshome Wagaw, "The International Political Ramifications of Falasha Emigration," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 29, no. 4, 1991, pp. 557–81. Only one book has been published to date about Operation Solomon: Ya'acov Friedmann, *Operation Solomon: One Year and Thirty-One Hours* (in Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1992). Books are also being prepared by former Israeli ambassador to Ethiopia Asher Naim and by journalist Charles Hoffmann.

[16]Although no exact figures exist for the number of Ethiopian Jews who perished, community members often speak of 4,000. For some sample figures and the psychological impact of these difficulties, see our discussion of mental health below, especially note 90.

many, moreover, loss and separation were accompanied by uncertainty, as the fate of at least one family member remained unclear. Family reunification became the watchword of the Ethiopian community in Israel.

During the period from August 1985 until the end of 1989, about 2,500 additional immigrants managed to reach Israel—either directly from Addis Ababa or in small groups from the Sudan. The reestablishment of diplomatic relations between Ethiopia and Israel in the fall of 1989 opened the possibility of a renewal of the *aliyah* movement, this time openly and in a manner agreed upon by both sides. Although immigration from Ethiopia was limited at first, the Ethiopian government allowed small numbers of Beta Israel to leave on a regular basis. This fueled the expectations of others, who were encouraged by representatives of the American Association for Ethiopian Jews to migrate to the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa. By the summer of 1990, over 20,000 Ethiopian Jews had traveled to Addis Ababa in the hope of receiving exit visas. Jewish Agency and Israeli government officials, who had had no hand in the migration, were caught unprepared. Thus, the conditions initially encountered by the migrants were extremely difficult. Malnutrition, inadequate housing, and disease all threatened the Beta Israel.

Responding to the crisis, the combined efforts of the Israeli embassy, Jewish Agency, Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), and other organizations, most notably the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry, ensured that the basic needs of the refugees were met, thus avoiding the catastrophic mortality rates associated with Operation Moses.[17] The city, however, held dangers of a new and different kind. Traditional patterns of communal village life deteriorated as Jews settled in shantytowns throughout the urban sprawl of the Ethiopian capital. Families, customarily the ultimate refuge and source of security in times of crises, found themselves completely incapable of providing for their members' most basic needs. Removed from their traditional occupational setting, many settled into a pattern of lethargy and dependence, living off the stipends and other assistance provided by the Jewish organizations working in Addis.

Meanwhile, Ethiopia's Marxist regime continued its struggle against regionally based opposition groups. In the northern province of Eritrea, rebels seeking independence from Ethiopia had fought a bloody civil war for several decades. A little further south, in Tigre province, forces opposed to the regime hoped to defeat president Mengistu Haile Mariam and gain control of the entire country. In the early 1990s, rebels from both provinces joined forces and began marching south in the hope of conquering Addis Ababa and toppling the Mengistu regime.

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[17]On the medical aspects of these efforts, see note 81 below.

Throughout the first months of 1991, as the internal political situation in Ethiopia continued to decline, Israeli negotiators laid the groundwork for a rescue operation; at the same time, American officials attempted to put together a deal that would both secure the safety of the Beta Israel and limit bloodshed. In the middle of May, as rebel forces closed in on Addis Ababa, President Mengistu fled to Zimbabwe. Fears grew that the Beta Israel would be trapped in what threatened to be a bitter struggle.

During a period of 36 hours spanning May 24 and 25, over 14,000 Beta Israel were airlifted to Israel in a mission code-named Operation Solomon. On the most basic level, this massive undertaking was vastly successful in ending the problem of family disintegration. With the *aliyah* of over 90 percent of all Beta Israel—almost 45,000 immigrants—only a relatively small number of family members remained in Ethiopia.

Still, the total number of immigrants must be considered incomplete. Small groups of Jews as well as individuals interested in making *aliyah* continue to be discovered in remote areas, or areas previously thought to be without Jews, such as Gojjam province. There is also the as yet unresolved issue of the Christianized Jewish population, specifically the group referred to as the Falas Mura. An estimated 4,000–5,000 are in Addis Ababa (including 2,800 who have been there since before Operation Solomon), expecting to emigrate. In addition, estimates have been made of anywhere from 25,000 to 250,000 more who are waiting to see the fate of their kinfolk before they, too, demand to emigrate in accordance with the Law of Return, as former Jews, or to achieve unification with family members who have already reached Israel during previous operations.

The Falas Mura Controversy

Supporters of Ethiopian *aliyah* both in Israel and abroad had always stressed the steadfastness with which the Beta Israel clung to their Judaism. At the time of the Ethiopians' initial confrontation with the rabbinate, moreover, it had been argued that anyone who had even passing contact with non-Jews risked exclusion from the Jewish community in Ethiopia. It came as something of a shock, therefore, when several thousand Falashas who had lived as Christians joined in the migration to Addis Ababa in 1991 and demanded to be taken to Israel. Known by a number of names, including *Maryam Wodet* (Lovers of Mary) or *Falas/Faras Mura*,[18] these Falasha Christians posed an unprecedented challenge to Israeli and Jewish organizations in Ethiopia.

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[18]This name has been popularly interpreted as *falas* (Falasha), *Mura* (converts, from the Hebrew term: *hamarat dat*, conversion). There is no basis for this interpretation. Other no less problematic interpretations rely on the word *faras* (horse) and translate the term as a lone horse or part of the horse's digestive system.

So long as immigration from Ethiopia continued at a rate of several hundred or even a thousand a month, a final decision on the Falas Mura could be delayed. After consultation with members of the community, Israeli authorities decided that the Falas Mura would be taken to Israel only after those judged to be bona fide Jews had been removed. The events leading up to Operation Solomon upset this thinking, and it was decided to leave the known Falas Mura behind, while the airlift took place.

The government's decision to leave converts of Jewish descent in Ethiopia focused unprecedented public and media attention on these "Falasha Christians." As in most matters relating to the Beta Israel, strong positions have been taken on both sides of the issue. Those advocating *aliyah* for the Falas Mura claim that the converts constitute a clearly defined community, limited to 25,000 individuals, who have never married non-Falas Mura and who basically have never ceased to be Jewish. They also put forth various, sometimes contradictory, explanations of the group's origins, claiming that they are "Marranos" forced to convert during times of persecution, secularized Jews who had never converted to Christianity, or disappointed Zionists dismayed by Israel's refusal to rescue the Falashas for more than 30 years. The decision not to bring them to Israel, some charge, was based on racism and counter to all legal and humanitarian norms.

Many experts on Ethiopian history and society see the picture as far more complex.[19] On the subject of numbers, they claim that the Falas Mura now found in the vicinity of the Israeli embassy in Addis Ababa represent only a fraction of the possible descendants of Beta Israel, whose total number could reach tens of thousands of potential emigrants, and even, as some Ethiopian government officials have claimed, reach into the hundreds of thousands.[20]

Contrary to what is often suggested, this school of thought claims that neither coercion nor direct financial inducements appears to have played a major role in enticing Beta Israel to join the mission. Rather, the offer of educational opportunities, social advancement, and the possibility of gaining rights to own land were the crucial factors drawing Ethiopian Jews away from their villages and their ancestral religion. Over time there arose a broad spectrum of converted Falashas, ranging from active disciples of the missionaries, who sought to convert others as well, to ostensible Christians for whom a formal Christian identity was just another of the trappings of high office and elite status. While some identified with Protestant sects, the

[19]Steven Kaplan, "Falasha Christians: A Brief History," *Midstream*, Jan. 1993, pp. 20–21.

[20]In the summer of 1993, an Ethiopian political activist living in Switzerland requested that "the Semitic Tribes of the Gihon," who, he claimed, numbered several million, be recognized as Jews. This previously unheard-of group does not appear to have any chance of being recognized by Israeli authorities.

vast majority followed the Hebraic-biblical norms of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church.

However, the Falas Mura did not simply disappear into the larger society. For one thing, despite their willingness to be practicing Christians, many of these converts were only partially successful in changing their affiliation and achieving the goals they had set for themselves. In many cases, they retained their involvement in the low-status crafts, such as potting and smithing, that marked the Beta Israel as a despised semicaste within the broader Ethiopian society and often continued to be labeled as "Falasha" on an ethnic basis.[21] Perhaps most importantly, despite communal norms dictating that such converts be excluded from the "*Oritawi Falasha*" (Old Testament Falasha) community, many of them continued to retain contacts with family members and even to attend Jewish religious celebrations. Whatever their outward appearance or the attitude of the community at large, their relatives often remained convinced that "inside" they were still Jews.

So long as *aliyah* to Israel remained only a dream for the Jews of Ethiopia, the benefits in assuming and maintaining a Christian identity were usually quite obvious. Events from 1977 onward, however, dramatically changed this situation. Already today, the 45,000 figure for Ethiopian immigrants in Israel greatly exceeds the 28,000 identified as "practicing" in 1976. High birthrates and previously overlooked villages notwithstanding, this number undoubtedly reflects the presence of an estimated 5,000 Falas Mura or genuine Christians (spouses of Jews) already in the country.

An interministerial committee convened in the fall of 1992 by Absorption Minister Yair Tsaban heard testimony and recommendations from scholars, rabbis, jurists, diplomats, Ethiopian religious and political leaders, Falas Mura activists, and Falas Mura already in Israel. Early in 1993 the committee presented its recommendation that only a limited number of Falas Mura be allowed to come to Israel, as part of a family reunification program based on humanitarian considerations, rather than as immigrants under the Law of Return. Although the recommendations of the Tsaban committee were adopted by the Israeli cabinet, Falas Mura activists—among them a number of prominent figures from across the Israeli political and religious spectrum—have continued to oppose them.

Ethiopian immigrants in Israel are themselves divided as to the best way to handle the problem of the Falas Mura. While those with relatives still in Ethiopia obviously wish for them to be brought to Israel, and many are sympathetic to their plight, others are less enthusiastic and in some cases

[21]While their adherence to such biblically sanctioned observances as circumcision and abstinence from pork might lead those not familiar with Ethiopian culture to label them as Marranos, these customs are, in fact, an intrinsic part of Ethiopian Christianity.

even opposed to their *aliyah*. Only a handful of the 60–70 *qessotch* (religious leaders) in Israel, for example, agreed to sign a letter calling for the *aliyah* of the Falas Mura or have appeared in public on their behalf.

By the time the Tsaban committee concluded its hearings, more than 20 months had passed since Operation Solomon. Another half year was to pass before the first Falas Mura were brought to Israel under the family reunification plan. By the fall of 1993, many of those in Addis Ababa had been there, waiting to be taken to Israel, for more than two years. During this period, the approximately 3,000 under the direct care of the JDC and the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jewry (NACOEJ) were receiving instruction in Jewish and Israeli culture. This activity, too, sparked considerable controversy, with some charging that it was a calculated attempt to "Judaize" the Falas Mura and thus make it harder for the Israeli government to refuse to bring them to Israel. Ethiopian government officials, who had always viewed the Falas Mura campaign as an unwanted intervention in their internal matters, viewed such Jewish "missionary" activity with particular concern. In July of 1993, they expelled eight Jewish teachers brought to Ethiopia by NACOEJ, along with the organization's resident director.

As of this writing, no speedy end to the Falas Mura controversy appears in sight. Although the Ethiopian government will probably continue to allow small numbers of Falas Mura who meet the criteria set by the Israeli government to emigrate,[22] this will neither satisfy nor silence those who wish to see all Falas Mura brought to Israel.

THE DEMOGRAPHY OF THE ETHIOPIAN COMMUNITY

As noted above, nearly 45,000 Beta Israel came to Israel between 1972 and 1993 (table 1). During the period from 1977 to 1992, 8,200 Ethiopian children were born in Israel. Thus, even if the exact number born in 1993 is not known, it is clear that well over 50,000 Ethiopians were living in Israel by the end of 1993.[23]

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[22]As of November 1993, 260 individuals from 50 families had been granted the right to emigrate.

[23]These figures are a composite of statistics compiled from monthly and yearly internal reports issued by the Ministry of Absorption and the Central Bureau of Statistics. The figure on births in Israel was contributed by Danny Budowski, who obtained them from the Israel Central Bureau of Statistics.

TABLE 1. ETHIOPIAN JEWISH IMMIGRATION TO ISRAEL, 1972–1993

1972–1976	91
1977	125
1978	3
1979	30
1980	258
1981	601
1982	528
1983	2,192
1984	8,240
1985	1,763
1986	209
1987	252
1988	603
1989	1,334
1990	4,121
1991	20,026
1992	3,538
1993	700
Total	44,614

Gender and Age

It is notoriously difficult to compile accurate demographic data on Ethiopian immigrants, as virtually every category except gender is subject to cultural confusion and situational redefinition. According to figures from the Israel Ministry of Immigrant Absorption, from 1977 to 1993, 22,541 Ethiopian males and 22,996 females arrived in the country.[24] With regard to age (table 2), the Ethiopian immigrant population appears highly weighted toward youth, with almost 46 percent of the population aged 0–18, 36 percent aged 19–44, 11 percent aged 45–64, and 7 percent aged 65 and older.[25]

These figures must, however, be viewed with a certain degree of caution.

[24]No breakdown of immigrants who arrived before 1977 is available. They were, however, in the main, young men in their late teens or early twenties.

[25]These figures are based on data from the Ministry of Absorption. Among those who arrived (mainly through the Sudan) until mid-1985, 52.2 percent were 0–18 years of age, and only 5.9 percent were over age 60.

TABLE 2. AGE DISTRIBUTION

Age	Male	Female
0–2	338	316
3–5	1,628	2,490
6–9	2,490	2,254
10–14	3,734	3,338
15–18	2,505	2,389
19–24	2,789	2,767
25–34	3,010	3,244
35–44	1,968	2,237
45–49	804	784
50–59	1,122	1,135
60–64	421	641
65–74	1,189	1,006
75–84	439	306
85+	104	89

Since most immigrants had no independent documentation regarding their date of birth, officials have been forced to rely on oral testimony. The ages (and marital status) claimed have often been dependent on the immigrants' perceptions as to what ages or status will confer the most benefits in Israel. Requests to "correct" such information are common. For example, a young man in his twenties may claim to be only 15 in order to be assigned to a boarding school, rather than a job training program, while older immigrants may seek to add to their age in order to qualify as pensioners.

Family Structure

Similarly, differences between Ethiopian and Israeli concepts of "family" have created problems for demographers and absorption workers alike.

For the Beta Israel, social life was traditionally organized around the flexible and often overlapping concepts of the extended family (*zamad*) and the household (*beta sa'ab*). *Zamad* is a term whose precise meaning varies according to the circumstances and context. Thus, *zamad* is most frequently used to refer to an extended family (as opposed to strangers), but it may also be used to distinguish blood relations from in-laws.[26] In Ethiopia, within the borders of the *zamad*, little attention was paid to the "real"

[26]When searching for a spouse for a son or daughter, parents would automatically exclude anyone in their *zamad*, counting back seven generations.

relationships between members. Thus, according to the circumstances, grandparents, uncles, or older siblings might function like a child's "parents." A person's "children" might easily include nieces, nephews, stepchildren, and younger siblings.

In contrast to the geographically dispersed *zamad*, the *beta sa'ab* (household) was a residential unit whose membership changed over time. Although often composed around a core nuclear family, widowed parents, divorced siblings, elderly relatives, various children, and even servants were often vital parts of a single *beta sa'ab*. At any given moment, the precise configuration of the *beta sa'ab* was determined by an assortment of personal preferences and economic needs, and it would change as these changed.

In light of the above, it is often difficult to determine the precise biological relationships that exist among a group of Ethiopians sharing a residence.

TABLE 3. HOUSEHOLD STRUCTURE

One-Parent	2,667
Single (Nonelderly)	3,945
Single (Elderly)	960
Couples (Nonelderly)	858
Couples (Elderly)	296
Couples with 1–3 children	2,845
Couples with 4 children or more	2,655
Other	162
Total households:	14,388

TABLE 4. HOUSEHOLD SIZE

Single	4,905
2 persons	2,369
3 persons	1,665
4 persons	1,449
5 persons	1,161
6 persons	1,012
7 persons	784
8 persons	536
9 or more	544

These household units are, moreover, fluid and subject to frequent restructuring. The figures given in tables 3 and 4 are, therefore, a useful guide rather than a definitive picture.

No aspect of Ethiopian family life in Israel has aroused more comment among absorption workers and other professionals than the large number of one-parent families. Approximately a third of all Ethiopian children live in one-parent households. This compares with less than 9 percent among the rest of the Israeli population.

This relatively high figure can be attributed to several factors. Such families were created, for example, when couples made *aliyah* at different times, or when one of the partners died on the way to Israel. In Israel itself, the redefinition of gender roles, conflicts over personal goals, and sharp differences between husbands and wives in their rates of adjustment to new conditions contribute to the breakup of two-parent units. To this must be added such "universal" factors as disagreements over child rearing and tensions created by crowded housing and economic difficulties.

Although no precise statistics exist, many children in Ethiopia apparently lived with only one of their parents. However, the safety net provided by an extended family as well as the fluid character of household units meant that few children lived in one-*adult* households.[27]

THE ABSORPTION PROCESS: RELIGION AND COMMUNAL ORGANIZATION

The Ethiopians and the Rabbis

As noted above, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef's decision to recognize the Jewishness of the "Falashas" was a turning point in their history.[28] His pronouncement, however, not only opened the doors to a more active policy in favor of Ethiopian immigration, it also placed those Ethiopian Jews who did arrive—together with all other Jews in Israel—under the religious jurisdiction of the Chief Rabbinate. Although the chief rabbis had affirmed the *communal* status of the Ethiopians as Jews, they continued to express reservations concerning the *personal* status of individuals. In particular, they voiced their concern that the Ethiopians' ignorance of rabbinic law (Halakhah) had rendered divorces and conversions, performed by *qessotch*

[27]Shalva Weil, *Ethiopian One-Parent Families in Israel* (Hebrew with English abstract) (Jerusalem, Hebrew University, 1991); Ruth Westheimer and Steven Kaplan, *Surviving Salvation: The Ethiopian Jewish Family in Transition* (New York, 1992), pp. 105–09.

[28]See note 12 for a bibliography on the halakhic status of the Ethiopians.

("priests," the religious leaders of the Beta Israel in Ethiopia) for centuries in Ethiopia, invalid. According to the Chief Rabbinate, as a result of nonhalakhic conversions, hundreds of individuals whose status as Jews was questionable had immigrated from Ethiopia. And nonhalakhic divorces, they claimed, had raised considerable questions about the danger of *mamzerut* (illegitimacy) among the Ethiopians.[29] In either case, grave difficulties existed with regard to a simple and immediate integration of the Ethiopians into the general Jewish population. Ethiopian immigrants strongly rejected both claims.

Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s, the Chief Rabbinate required Ethiopian immigrants to undergo a modified conversion ceremony consisting of ritual immersion, a declaration accepting rabbinic law, and, in the case of men, a symbolic recircumcision. Although initially applied to all Ethiopians, the requirement was eventually limited to those wishing to marry. Toward the end of 1984, the demand for recircumcision was dropped.[30]

During the period from 1972 to 1984, several thousand Ethiopian immigrants, from Tigre, Walqayit, and Gondar submitted to the demands of the rabbinate. From 1985 onward, however, organized resistance to what was labeled "forced conversion" became increasingly apparent. One particular group of young men, members of a newly formed organization called Beta Israel, organized a systematic campaign in all the absorption centers against any cooperation with rabbis. Recently arrived immigrants, acting on the advice of these more experienced Ethiopians, refused to cooperate with the rabbinate. Their resistance culminated in a month-long protest opposite the Chief Rabbinate headquarters in the fall of 1985.[31]

In April 1986, in an attempt to circumvent the rabbinate's marriage requirements, 15 Ethiopian couples were brought together in a Tel Aviv wedding hall to be married in a "traditional ceremony" conducted by four of the *qessotch* who had participated in the strike. Such marriages, which would have been completely valid in Ethiopia, had no legal status in Israel and were not accepted by Interior Ministry authorities. Couples married by

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[29]According to Jewish law, the child of an adulterous sexual relationship is a *mamzer*. In the case of the Ethiopians, the rabbinate argued that if their divorces were indeed invalid according to Jewish law, subsequent remarriages were adulterous, producing offspring who were illegitimate, who in turn passed this status down to their offspring for centuries.

[30]Changes in rabbinic policies were the result of a number of factors, including a significant rise in the rate at which immigrants were arriving, pressure exerted by those already in the country, and an improved understanding on the part of the rabbinate of circumcision as practiced by the Ethiopians.

[31]Steven Kaplan, "The Beta Israel and the Rabbinate: Law, Politics and Ritual," *Social Science Information* 27, no. 3 (Sept. 1988), pp. 357–70.

qessotch could, however, by visiting a notary, gain recognition of their union as a common-law marriage. This assured them of being treated as a couple for certain civil purposes, such as public housing. From a religious point of view, such marriages created enormous halakhic problems. If, for instance, a woman had not been officially certified as divorced or widowed—which would be the case if she had been divorced in Ethiopia or if her husband had died in the Sudan, but she had no proof of his death—then all of her children born in Israel would automatically be considered *mamzerim* (illegitimate).

The number of "*qes* marriages" dropped significantly following the appointment of Rabbi David Chelouche of Netanya, a prominent supporter of the Ethiopians, as the sole official marriage registrar for the entire community. Under this compromise, sanctioned by the Israeli Supreme Court in June 1989, any Ethiopian in the country could travel to Rabbi Chelouche to register to be married.

While the appointment of Rabbi Chelouche provided a solution that preserved both the Ethiopians' dignity and the rabbinate's sovereignty, bitterness over the dispute lingered. Active protests concerning the issue seemed on the wane until, in early 1991, several months prior to Operation Solomon, a well-known elderly *qes*, *Qes* Menashe, was brought to Israel. He immediately aligned himself with the opponents of the Supreme Court decision, against Rabbi Chelouche and against any compromise with the Chief Rabbinate. These *qessotch* demanded full recognition of themselves as "rabbis," qualified without any additional training to perform all ceremonies for their community, just as they had done in Ethiopia.

Their pleas went largely unheeded until early in 1992. Then a newly formed group of activists seized upon the issue of the lack of respect given their *qessotch*. These young, mainly secular, men organized strikes and incited violent demonstrations (something that had not previously been part of Ethiopian protests), demanding that the *qessotch*, or rather those associated with *Qes* Menashe, be certified by the Chief Rabbinate to be the sole arbiters of religious ceremonies for their community. The *qessotch*'s case received widespread media coverage, especially when their ranks were swelled by almost 80 elderly men (most of whom had arrived in Operation Solomon), all clad in white turbans and black capes, the external signs of *qes* status.

Once again the chief rabbis reiterated their position that without training in those aspects of Jewish law required to perform a marriage ceremony or write a divorce writ, it would be impossible to permit the *qessotch* to do these things. They pointed out that, if they were to grant them the right to conduct marriage ceremonies, the result would be a Karaite-like status, in

effect separating the Ethiopians from the rest of Jewry and prejudicing their full acceptance as equals among all other Jews.

In November 1992, a special interministerial committee recommended that all the *qessotch* be given paid positions on the religious councils that exist in every municipality. They urged the *qessotch* to attend special courses, so that they could serve, ultimately, as official rabbis (presumably for anyone who approached them, not just Ethiopians). Even though *qessotch* who had been among the demonstrators were members of the committee, and signed their names to the list of recommendations, their young activist supporters threatened to organize renewed demonstrations unless all of the original demands were met in full.

In the meantime, an attempt has been made by those *qessotch* who have been attending classes and learning the basics of Jewish law to bring about a reconciliation, first of all between the group supporting the Chief Rabbinate and that opposing it (both of whose members are from the Gondar region, the Tigrean *qessotch* having remained aloof from all such "political" frays), and then between all the *qessotch* and the Chief Rabbinate. Attempts have been made to include *qessotch* on religious councils in areas that have a sizable Ethiopian population. In some cases, the local councils have objected that the *qessotch* appointed lack sufficient knowledge; in others, Ethiopian activists have objected to the specific *qessotch* named to the council. Nevertheless, the number of *qessotch* on such councils continues to grow. As these Ethiopian religious leaders come into more regular contact with local rabbis and begin (albeit on a limited basis) to once again meet their community's religious needs, the tensions between them and the Israeli religious establishment may diminish.

During the past decade a number of *qessotch* have been studying at Makhon Meir, a yeshivah in Jerusalem. The same institution also runs a special program that prepares young Ethiopians for rabbinic ordination. The first graduates of this program, about a dozen in number, were expected to be ordained in 1994.[32] It is hoped that their presence will increase the awareness and understanding of rabbinic Judaism in the Ethiopian community and pave the way for a rapprochement between community elders and the Chief Rabbinate.

Other Religious Matters

The Ethiopians have been confronted with a number of other issues relating to Jewish observance. In Ethiopia, the Beta Israel had survived by

[32]There is, to date, only one Ethiopian rabbi in Israel, Rabbi Yosef Hadane. He, however, was trained and ordained prior to the start of large-scale immigration from Ethiopia.

clinging tenaciously to their Jewish identity and to distinctive practices including purity rituals and the isolation of women when menstruating and after giving birth.

The transition to Israeli observances and customs since *aliyah* has not been easy. For the Beta Israel, who had no fires on the Sabbath and hence no hot food, the custom of eating *cholent* and other dishes kept warm throughout the day appears to be a violation of strict observance. Although both Ethiopians and Israeli Orthodox Jews share a concern for ritual purity, the former believe that immersion must take place in a river or stream and have been reluctant to accept the *mikveh*, ritual bath, as a substitute.

In the past, immigrants to Israel have tended to establish their own synagogues, which preserve distinctive ethnic practices and forms. Thus far, however, the Ethiopians have only partially conformed to this pattern. Beersheba, for example, has long had an Ethiopian *minyan*, and there is soon to be an Ethiopian synagogue. There are thriving Ethiopian congregations in both Ashdod and Lod. In other cases, however, it has not proven easy to make the transition from one religious system to another. Prayers in Ge'ez recited by the *qes* in Ethiopia are not easily replaced by a Hebrew liturgy led by a rabbi. Indeed, many Ethiopians find little familiar in the worship of their local synagogues beside the use of "amen."

Efforts have been made to adapt some Beta Israel traditional practices to fit in with the conditions of their new homeland. They have, for instance, transformed one of their primary festivals, known as Sigd—a commemoration of the return from exile described in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah—into a holiday which they can celebrate in Jerusalem. They have even sought to interest other Israelis in their unique holiday, so that the Sigd can, like well-known Moroccan and Kurdish festivals, be of more than just parochial interest.[33]

Communal Organization and Leadership

As indicated by the discussion of relations with the rabbinate, Ethiopian immigrants in Israel have shown considerable political initiative since their arrival in the country. No community in Israel has demonstrated as pronounced a proclivity to take to the streets in protest or to form organizations ostensibly intended to promote the interests of their members.

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[33]G.J. Abbink, "*Seged* Celebration in Ethiopia and Israel: Continuity and Change of a Falasha Religious Holiday," *Anthropos* 78, 1983, pp. 789–810; S. Ben-Dor, "The Sigd of Beta-Israel: Testimony to a Community in Transition," in Ashkenazi and Weingrod, *Ethiopian Jews*, pp. 140–59; Emmanuel Grupper and Anita Nudelman, "Cross-Cultural Pluralism in Action: The Case of 'Seged' Celebration of Ethiopian Jews in Youth Aliyah Institutions," in *Between Africa and Zion: Proceedings of the First International Congress of the Society for the Study of Ethiopian Jewry* (Ben Zvi Institute, Jerusalem, forthcoming).

In part, at least, this decentralized form of organization can be seen as a continuation of patterns of communal organization found in Ethiopia. The Beta Israel "community" was actually a loosely connected network of villages and local communities linked by religious, cultural, and marital ties, but lacking any centralized political authority. Even on the local level, political authority was exercised by a variety of figures who acted through consensus building rather than the use of coercive power or through reliance on state institutions.[34]

This tendency to decentralization has been exacerbated by the increasing interaction with world Jewry, which has introduced a variety of external patrons to the community, enabling each faction to draw support from the wide range of Jewish and Israeli interest groups. Thus, the Reform and Conservative movements and secularist groups are prepared to support almost all demonstrations against the Chief Rabbinate, while several prominent members of Gush Emunim have taken up the cause of the Falas Mura.

The move to Israel has also disrupted traditional patterns of leadership. The deterioration in the position of the *qessotch* has been discussed above. Similarly, the community elders (*shmagilotch*), who were the main representatives of their people in nonreligious, official matters in Ethiopia, have not been able to function effectively as leaders in Israel. Their "wisdom" no longer captures anyone's attention and seems to be of no practical value, particularly when it relates to making one's way in Israel. By contrast, the youngsters, primarily due to their quicker grasp of Hebrew and of the Israeli mentality, have forged ahead of their parents and are less willing to ask for, let alone abide by, their parents' advice than they had been in the past.

This role diminution is to some extent inevitable, but it is felt particularly acutely by the Ethiopians. In contrast to the avowedly child- and youth-centered norms of Israeli society, the Beta Israel of Ethiopia respected and honored the elderly and aged. As a man grew older, his personal status grew. If he was well thought of and behaved honorably, he would be considered a *shmagile* (elder) by the time he reached his late thirties or early forties. People came to him with their problems and asked for his advice. Although the *shmagilotch* (elders) were exclusively men, older women also had an important role to play. A senior woman, known as a *baaltet*, would be consulted on issues relating to women, including childbirth, illness, and disputes between younger women.

Although the status of parents and elders in Ethiopia had begun to decline even before the revolution of 1974, they were able to retain a

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[34]Steven Kaplan, "Leadership and Communal Organization Among the Beta Israel: An Historical Study," *Encyclopaedia Judaica Year Book 1986/1987* (Jerusalem, 1987), pp. 154–63; Shalva Weil, "Leadership Among Ethiopian Jews in Israel," in *Between Africa and Zion* (forthcoming).

modicum of authority so long as the Beta Israel remained in Ethiopia. Their experience in handling the day-to-day problems of village life remained a valuable commodity. Once they reached Israel, however, their situation deteriorated rapidly. Faced with unprecedented challenges in a strange new society, their years of accumulated wisdom suddenly seemed irrelevant. Settled haphazardly around the country, the reputation for sound judgment they had earned through years of shrewd arbitration on a village level appeared to evaporate. Immigration agencies, moreover, saw the elderly as neither a source of wisdom nor an object of veneration, but a problematic "generation of the wilderness" that could never be successfully integrated into their new society.

The peripheralization of the *shmagilotch* was significant, not only for its impact on the elders themselves but also for its effect on the community as a whole. At precisely the time when the Ethiopian community was experiencing some of its greatest difficulties, one of its most important institutions for dealing with crises was in ruins. Fortunately, attempts have been made by some organizations in recent years to consult and mobilize the *shmagilotch*.[35]

Successive waves of *aliyah* have produced divisions within the immigrant community between newcomers and oldtimers, veterans with establishment positions and young Turks. Since the early 1980s, the community has been rife with factions. The first serious conflict to emerge erupted between Tigreans and Gondaris in 1981. Although the site of this conflict was the absorption center in Beersheba,[36] its ramifications spread, so that even today relations between members of these two groups are often far from cordial.[37] Disagreements on how best to further the cause of immigration and the reunification of families have also led to altercations between individuals and within families. In the absence of any procedures for electing representatives, there has been a tendency for talented individuals to assert that they are leaders, whether or not they have any significant backing from anyone outside of their immediate families.

For a time, two secular groups composed predominantly of young people competed with each other as to which could best claim to be the legitimate

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[35]In the most ambitious such project, *Betachin* (Amharic: Our House), an organization sponsored by the JDC, employs a number of Ethiopian staffers, including laymen and *qessotch* as mediators and counselors to help Ethiopian families resolve problems. They have also published a number of Hebrew pamphlets on issues of family life, mediation, and conflict.

[36]Abbink, "Falashas . . . Ethnic Assimilation," pp. 174–88, 293–314.

[37]Ibid., pp. 277–78. See also Michael Ashkenazi, "Political Organization and Resources Among Ethiopian Immigrants," *Social Science Information* 17, no. 3, 1988, pp. 371–89. On Tigrean and Gondari contrasts, see Chaim Rosen, "The Many Ways of Ethiopian Jews: Similarities and Differences Between Beta Israel from Gondar and Tigre" (in Hebrew), *Pe'amim* 33, 1988, pp. 93–108.

voice of the people. Both were composed exclusively of Gondaris and had little connection with the Tigrean and Walqayit segments of the community. The organizers of both groups acquired their basic political experience through involvement in opposition political groups in Ethiopia prior to their flight to Israel.

In 1987 an attempt was made to bring these two groups together around the issue of family reunification. When this proved impossible, a third group, known as the Rescue Committee, was formed. It captured public attention by organizing a six-week sit-in outside the Knesset to highlight the reunification issue. This was followed by a large rally in Jerusalem's Binyanei Ha-umah (Convention Center), which was attended by prominent Israeli politicians and international human-rights activists.

The unity displayed in the calls for family reunification was, however, only superficial, and new organizations sprang up in rapid succession. Several leaders of the Rescue Committee created yet another organization, which they named after the "father of Ethiopian Jewry," Jacques Faitlovitch. A short time later the Ethiopian Students' Organization, composed of students in institutions of higher education, was formed. The National Committee for Ethiopian Jewry, which had been dormant for some years, was also resuscitated.

In 1990, following a year or so of bickering and mutual recrimination, the leaders of seven organizations agreed to set their differences aside and unite in the Umbrella Organization of Ethiopian Jewish Organizations. This move was warmly applauded by top Jewish Agency figures, who promptly rewarded the leaders of the group with large sums of money to support their new venture. Despite the Israeli media's tendency to portray the Umbrella Organization as *the* representative of Ethiopian Jewry, one large Ethiopian organization refused to operate under its auspices, and various additional factions continued to emerge. The former, in particular, made constant attacks on the small group of individuals who, in addition to dominating the Umbrella Organization, controlled the Amharic radio program and published the only regular Ethiopian-language magazine in the country.[38]

In the aftermath of Operation Solomon, two additional groups emerged. The Zionist Movement for the Cause of Ethiopian Jewry has taken over the battle for the recognition of the *qessotch*; the South Wing to Zion lobbies for the immediate immigration to Israel of the Falas Mura.

As of this writing, the community is badly divided. *Qessotch* are at odds with one another. The group that is critical of the rabbinate refuses to eat meat slaughtered by the *qessotch* who have studied ritual slaughtering at Makhon Meir, a Jerusalem yeshivah. Young activists denounce each other,

[38]See "*Kesef Shahor*" (Black Money), *Ha'olam Ha'zeh*, Aug. 3, 1992, pp. 18–21.

passing out flyers at every public gathering, depicting their rivals as corrupt and incompetent.

Such divisions have a clearly deleterious effect on the Ethiopians' overall integration. The political influence that they would normally have acquired as a rapidly growing ethnic group is being severely dissipated. Each group's leadership insists that it speaks for the majority of the community, yet the reality of mutual recriminations and accusations weakens all of them. It may well be that only the next generation will see the emergence of young leaders capable of forging a truly unified, community-oriented leadership, one that can become a significant factor in the Israeli political arena.[39]

THE ABSORPTION PROCESS: HOUSING, EDUCATION, EMPLOYMENT, HEALTH

Housing and Residential Distribution

Of all the challenges facing the Israeli immigration authorities, none has proven more complex and fraught with difficulties than settling the Ethiopians in permanent housing. Unlike language courses, job-training programs, health facilities, and many other services offered to new *olim* (immigrants), apartments cannot be easily produced in response to a sudden rise in demand. If vacancies exist, they are usually in less desirable areas, which are the least equipped to deal with a large influx of newcomers. Settling too many immigrants in a single location can lead to their being ghettoized; settling too few can leave them isolated and make it difficult for helping agencies to reach them. Housing decisions are among those with the broadest impact, for they affect educational opportunities, employment prospects, and social integration. Housing mistakes are also among the hardest to correct, for rebuilding is usually impractical, and repeated moves are almost always disruptive.

Throughout most of 1984 all Ethiopian immigrants were temporarily housed in absorption centers before being moved into permanent housing.[40] Such centers did not have sufficient space, however, to handle the large

[39]A discussion of problems facing the present activist leaders, plus a survey of the large number of major and minor organizations within the community, can be found in *Ha'aretz*, July 27, 1992, where an unpublished report written by Dr. Shalva Weil is extensively quoted.

[40]Absorption centers are designed to house immigrants temporarily and to ease their initial adjustment to their new surroundings. By concentrating immigrants in separate buildings or housing projects, absorption authorities are able to exercise better control over their access to government services, Hebrew instruction, job information, etc. Initially established in 1969 to assist Western immigrants during their first six months in Israel, they have since been used in the absorption of other immigrants. For a critical view of this process, see Michael Ashkenazi and Alex Weingrod, *Ethiopian Immigrants in Beersheba* (Highland Park, Ill., 1984);

influx of immigrants from Operation Moses. Accordingly, about one-third of the 6,700 immigrants who arrived at the end of 1984 were placed in ten hotels rented by the Jewish Agency. They lived for over a year in these hotels in what can best be described as a hothouse atmosphere; they were fed in dining halls and had almost all their needs met by outsiders. Hotel residents were, not surprisingly, relatively slow to develop even the minimum skills required for leading an independent life in Israel.

Only in 1986, after much wrangling between absorption agencies, were all Ethiopian immigrants removed from hotels. Since only a few were judged to be ready to live on their own in apartments, the majority were transferred to regular absorption centers, where they joined hundreds of other immigrants from various countries.

In general, the longer the Ethiopians were in the country, the more specific their housing preferences became, and the harder it was to move them out of the centers. Most wished to live close to family members already settled in permanent housing. Others were guided by their perceptions of employment opportunities in different regions. As a result, too, of interministerial squabbling over how to deal with them, the Ethiopians' temporary sojourn in absorption centers stretched on for years. At the end of 1987, almost 40 percent of those who arrived in Operation Moses had still not been resettled. In some cases, absorption officials, rather than moving the Ethiopians into permanent housing, left the immigrants in place and simply changed the status of absorption centers by removing the services they had provided. Nine absorption centers—former apartment complexes designed to accommodate people on a short-term basis—were decreed overnight to be permanent homes, whose residents had to pay rent, utilities, taxes, and so on. Ethiopian residents of these converted centers complained bitterly, feeling that they had been deprived of the opportunity to choose where to live.

On a larger scale, this decision resulted in the instant "ghettoization" of many immigrants. Despite explicit recommendations that no apartment building house more than 3–4 Ethiopian families, some blocks suddenly had over 50 and many others more than 15. Moreover, despite vague promises to the contrary, these families had almost no chance of moving into other apartments, since all available public housing was required for those still living in more cramped absorption centers.

Another housing problem developed when several hundred families were placed in previously abandoned mobile homes (*caravanim*) located at the edge of small towns and cities. In a short time, newspaper reports and even documentary films appeared showing the crumbling walls, unsanitary facili-

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see also Esther Hertzog, "The Israeli Absorption Bureaucracy and the Ethiopian Immigrants," in *Between Africa and Zion* (forthcoming).

ties, and hazardous living conditions in these *caravanim*. Nevertheless, it took almost four years to find better housing for these immigrants. Even after Operation Solomon, at least 200 families from the time of Operation Moses were still living in absorption facilities of one type or another.

The lessons learned from the experience of housing the Operation Moses immigrants were quite clear and were reflected in the Ministry of Absorption's *Master Plan, Second Stage*, which was published in April 1991. Based on the assumption that Ethiopian immigrants would continue to arrive in Israel at a rate of 500–800 a month throughout 1991 and 1992, it focused on "direct absorption" in apartments made available when they immigrated. The arrival of more than 14,000 immigrants during Operation Solomon completely undermined these assumptions. In seeking an instant emergency solution for this large group, the Jewish Agency was forced to fill every available hotel, residence house, rest home, and established mobile-home site.[41]

Immediately after Operation Solomon, Minister of Housing Ariel Sharon promised that all Ethiopian immigrants would be in permanent apartments within one year. Despite his promises, not only did few families find permanent housing, new ones kept arriving to join those already in the various absorption facilities. By June 1992, a total of almost 24,000 Ethiopians were living in absorption facilities. Sharon's major response, which was immediately implemented by the Jewish Agency (which had to pay $13,500 a year for each Ethiopian living in a hotel), was to revive the previously failed policy of placing the Ethiopians "temporarily" in mobile homes.

Between June and September 1992, thousands of Ethiopians were transferred out of their hotels and other residential facilities into caravan sites scattered throughout the country. Despite the drawbacks of life in a tiny mobile home, this arrangement at least gave the Ethiopians more control over their lives than they had in the hotels. At a number of absorption centers and hotels the Ethiopians mounted protests demanding permanent apartments in public housing, rather than being transferred to yet another form of temporary residence. Sharon met with the Ethiopian protesters and once again promised that all Ethiopians would be in permanent housing within a year, by July 1993. A few weeks later, however, national elections were held, and Sharon was no longer in office. His successor, Binyamin Ben-Eliezer, immediately abrogated all commitments that had been made to the Ethiopians.

In November 1992, the government announced that it would take three to four years before all of the caravan sites could be evacuated. In order to achieve this target date, 6,000 apartments would have to be acquired for

[41]During 1991–92, only 150 families, as an experiment, were offered direct absorption, being placed in apartments in Ofakim, Arad, and Dimona.

Ethiopian immigrants. Starting in April 1993, Ethiopian immigrants were offered special conditions for purchasing an apartment; these include a direct grant of $80,000 as well as interest-free loans. Thus, a family with four or more children receives as much as $110,000 toward the purchase of an apartment in any of 52 authorized locations in the center of the country. These unprecedented terms, which may cover as much as 99 percent of the total cost of an apartment, are far better than those available to any other group of either immigrants or veteran Israelis.

Despite their initial skepticism, some 1,750 families out of 5,961 took advantage of this offer during the first six months of the campaign. Most Ethiopian immigrants, however, view the entire idea of home-purchase with suspicion. They fear that such large grants will carry hidden payments, or that the government will one day come to reclaim apartments. In order to alleviate such fears and to relieve the crush of the caravan camps, a carefully designed information campaign for the Ethiopians has been undertaken.

As noted above, the primary problem with the mobile homes at the time of Operation Moses was their physical deterioration. The problem today is their uncanny resemblance to the segregated tent camps (*ma'abarot*) that were used to house immigrants in the 1950s. Huge mobile-home towns have been erected, usually in isolated open areas where Ethiopians are segregated from the general Israeli population.[42]

As of December 1993, 21 caravan sites (in which some 16,000 Ethiopians were living) were operating under the supervision of the Ministry of Absorption. In addition, 6,200 Ethiopians were still living in 27 absorption centers and 3 hotels. Thus, by the end of 1993, about half of the entire Ethiopian immigrant population was still in temporary housing, receiving either government or Jewish Agency subsidies. As a result of the mortgage campaign, it was projected that, by the end of 1994, the majority of families would either have purchased apartments or be eligible for public housing.

PERMANENT HOUSING

At least in part, the Ethiopians' housing preferences are based on pragmatic considerations they share with most groups in the population: the availability of work, the suitability of the climate, and the centrality of the location. Thus, despite their age-old dream of living in Jerusalem, few Ethiopians have decided to do so, because the work opportunities are limited and the climate is too cold. Their aversion to living on the West Bank has stemmed not from political considerations but from its relative isolation.

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[42]As of Sept. 1993, 70 percent of those living in mobile homes were Ethiopian immigrants. Most immigrants from the former Soviet Union refused to live in mobile homes, unless faced with homelessness.

TABLE 5. REGIONAL DISTRIBUTION OF ETHIOPIAN HOUSEHOLDS AND INDIVIDUALS

Region	Households	Individuals
North	5,103	15,704
Tel Aviv	1,741	5,028
Negev	2,234	7,962
Jerusalem	2,522	7,733
Center	2,787	8,002

TABLE 6. MAJOR CENTERS OF ETHIOPIAN IMMIGRANT RESIDENCE, OCTOBER 1993

Afikim	893
Afula	1,113
Ashdod	1,266
Ashkelon	2,531
Barutayim	786*
Beersheba	3,249
Beit Hatzor	1,012*
Gedera	763
Hadera	1,286
Haifa	1,723
Hatzrot Yesef	1,763*
Hulda	1,023*
Jerusalem	1,156
Kadourie	825*
Kiryat Gat	1,548
Kiryat Yam	1,203
Ma'agalim	765*
Mevo'im	839*
Nazareth	1,154
Netanya	2,259
Ramle	770
Safed	1,066
Tiberias	974

*Caravan sites; other settlements include both permanent and temporary housing.

In general, however, the primary factor influencing Ethiopians' choice of housing has been their desire to live near close relatives. Although most prefer not to live in a building occupied only by Ethiopians, they do favor neighborhoods that have many related families within easy walking distance. Since many of the first Ethiopians to find permanent housing were sent to towns around Tel Aviv such as Bat Yam, Holon, and Netanya, or neighborhoods in Beersheba, many subsequent immigrants expressed a preference for these locales. Thus, despite plans calling for a dispersion of the Ethiopians in order to avoid ghettoization, their own inclination was to live together in extended family groups.[43]

Another important factor shaping preferences in a manner not anticipated by absorption planners is the Ethiopians' perspective on the job market. Here, too, the greater Tel Aviv area enjoys a good reputation among Ethiopian immigrants. Not only did they find ready employment in the factories of the region, they also discovered that the salaries they received were better than those for comparable jobs in, for example, Jerusalem. The more the Ethiopians received apartments in towns like Bat Yam, Holon, Rishon LeZion, and Petah Tikvah, the greater the demand for apartments in these places among those remaining in absorption centers. As the supply of public apartments available for Ethiopian immigrants in these cities dwindled, a slow process began of redefining "close to Tel Aviv." From 1988 on, there was a growing interest in a second tier of towns, including Rehovot, Nes Ziona, Ramle, and, more recently, Yavneh, Lod, Ashdod, and Ashkelon.[44] (See tables 5 and 6.)

Education

Since approximately 60 percent of the Ethiopian immigrants were under age 24 at the time of their arrival in Israel, providing appropriate educational programs has been one of the greatest challenges facing absorption authorities.[45]

When Ethiopian immigrants first began arriving in Israel, it was decided

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[43]This conflict between the Ethiopians' preferences and the government's desire to avoid concentrating too many in one place has led to some towns being "closed" to Ethiopians. An appeal challenging this policy was filed with the Supreme Court, but it was dismissed.

[44]For the distribution of Ethiopians in Israel in permanent housing in August 1985 and August 1988, see S. Kaplan, *Les Beta Israel (Falashas)* (Turnhout, Belgium, 1990), pp. 170–73.

[45]See V. Netzer, R. Elazar, and S. Ben-Dor, eds., *Saga of Aliyah: The Jews of Ethiopia: Aspects of Their Linguistic and Educational Absorption* (Jerusalem, 1990), for background on the approaches to education followed in Israel, and G. Ben-Ezer, *K'mo ohr be'kad* (Like Light in a Jug) (Jerusalem, 1992), for an account of the psychological aspects of Youth Aliyah's educational programs.

that all Ethiopian children would be sent to state religious schools during their first year in Israel.[46] This policy, based on the assumption that it would ease the transition for immigrants from a traditional religious background, was applied not only in elementary schools but in Youth Aliyah secondary-level boarding schools as well. Thus, all Ethiopian youngsters absorbed by Youth Aliyah were registered in religious schools. Although parents were permitted to transfer a child to any school after the first year, in practice this seldom occurred. A 1988 study revealed that of the 3,500 Ethiopian students then learning in elementary schools, only about 280, or 8 percent, were in secular schools.[47]

Whatever the political and social considerations behind the decision to send Ethiopians to religious schools, it significantly limited the options available to ministry officials. On the one hand, a large portion of the educational system was deprived of any contact with the Ethiopian students; on the other, certain schools and areas were called upon to assume a considerable burden. Schools of the right size, serving the right age groups, and with the necessary facilities were not always available in proximity to immigrant housing or absorption centers. In some cases, classes suddenly had a large percentage of Ethiopian students, and some schools found themselves with a student body that was 60–70 percent Ethiopian.[48]

Immediately after Operation Solomon, a major effort was made to find suitable schools for the Ethiopian children who had arrived. When arrangements were finally made for them, they were often placed in "special" classes with only Ethiopian children. In some cases they were taught by young women doing national service or other nonprofessional teachers who were unprepared for the challenge of handling so many newcomers who could not read or write their native Amharic, let alone Hebrew.

At the start of the 1993–94 school year, more than two years after Operation Solomon, some 4,000 Ethiopian children were registered in elementary schools. Although most Ethiopian children had been in school for over a year, and were thus no longer required to attend a religious school,

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[46]According to the State Education Law of 1953, Israeli schools are divided into two trends: state (secular) education and state religious education. This law also allows for "recognized" schools, such as those run by the ultra-Orthodox, which are not state schools. Approximately 60 percent of Jewish children attend secular schools, 30 percent religious schools, and 10 percent independent recognized schools. Youth Aliyah is a department of the Jewish Agency that operates a network of secondary boarding schools as well as urban day centers. The boarding schools are also either religious or secular.

[47]Shalva Weil, *Emunot veminhagim dati'im shel yehudei etiyopia be-yisrael* (Beliefs and Religious Customs of Ethiopian Jews in Israel; Hebrew with English abstract) (Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 124–41.

[48]For a critique of the decision to send Ethiopian immigrants to religious schools, as well as a general discussion of their education in the mid-1980s, see Teshome G. Wagaw, *For Our Soul: Ethiopian Jews in Israel* (Detroit, 1993).

the community was not, as a whole, interested in placing its children in other schools. In fact, despite the efforts of the Ministry of Absorption, Ethiopian organizations, and other activists to promote secular schools, the percentage of students in nonreligious schools actually declined, from 8 percent in 1988 to 5 percent (approximately 200) in 1993.[49] In effect, most Ethiopian parents seem to be more concerned that their children receive a religious education than with the academic standards of the institutions in question.

Thus, there was still a great need to find religious schools capable of handling so large an influx of students. Since few religious schools were situated near caravan sites, young children were often being bused up to one or one-and-a-half hours in order to attend an appropriate elementary school. Needless to say, in such cases, even the most concerned parents could have little if any contact with their children's school or teachers. Although one early study found that about 20 percent of the Ethiopian children in the elementary schools were having learning problems, which was approximately the same percentage as for the general population,[50] more recent reports indicate that the situation has deteriorated.

PARENTS AND CHILDREN

The decision to send Ethiopian students to religious schools was actually one of the few educational policy decisions made during the period prior to and through Operation Moses. Indeed, as the Israel State Comptroller noted in his report of 1986, thousands of Ethiopian students had already entered the school system by the time planning began on appropriate educational programs. "[The Ministry of Education] began to prepare itself—with regard to preparing cadres of teachers, curricula, and syllabi, and drawing up an overall policy—very late, after the [Ethiopian] children were attending school. Even then, the pace was very slow."[51]

One direct consequence of this lapse was that most Ethiopian parents sent their children off to school with little sense of the norms or expectations of the school system. For their part, the teachers and school staff had little sense of what needed to be explained. Tardiness, inadequate dress, unkempt appearance, a lack of supplies (pencils, notebooks), and insufficient lunches were only a few of the problems that developed at the outset. Ultimately,

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[49]This decline is evident even if one counts an additional 70 Ethiopian students placed in special programs for gifted students in secular schools.

[50]Penina Golan-Kook, Tamar Horowitz, and Leah Shaftiah, *Histaglut Hatalmidim Ha'olim Me'etiyopia Lemisgeret Beit-Hasefer* (The Adaptation of Ethiopian Immigrant Children to the School Framework) (Jerusalem, 1987).

[51]*Israel State Comptroller's Report* 36, 1986, pp. 693–94, quoted in Steven Kaplan, "Beta Israel," *Encyclopaedia Judaica Year Book 1986–87* (Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 214–16.

however, the "mechanical" aspects of school attendance were no harder to learn than the use of unfamiliar objects like refrigerators, flush toilets, and toasters. Such problems rarely persisted for long. Once in the classroom, Ethiopian students tended to be well behaved and highly motivated.

Other difficulties have been harder to resolve. Even when Ethiopian parents understand the purpose and organization of school work, few are capable of helping their children study or prepare assignments. Indeed, from the Ethiopian parents' perspective, formal education is noteworthy for the manner in which it reduces the child's link to his or her family. For the first time in living memory, children's daily lives no longer revolve around their household and kin. Much of their time is spent in school, in a world both physically and culturally distant from that of their parents.[52] Here they are exposed to models of behavior greatly at odds with those of Ethiopia and their parents. Frequently, this places them in a terrible bind: the more successfully they pursue their natural desire to integrate and become like their non-Ethiopian friends and classmates, the greater the distance between them and their parents. While some strive and even manage to achieve a precarious balance, acting Israeli in the street and Ethiopian at home, others find themselves torn between two sets of seemingly irreconcilable cultural norms.

Among Ethiopians in Israel, as among most immigrant groups, children tend to adapt more quickly and completely than their parents.[53] Accordingly, while young Ethiopians have generally learned Hebrew with alacrity and have quickly grasped the workings of Israeli society, their elders have often gained only the most minimal skills in the new language and remain mystified by the world around them.[54] In some cases, traditional roles are almost completely reversed as children assume the primary responsibility for representing the family to the outside world and serve as translators and mediators.

YOUTH ALIYAH

Youth Aliyah (*Aliyat Hanoar*), founded in 1932 by Henrietta Szold, accepted its first group of parentless children from Germany in 1933. Many others were to follow, and the organization established a network of boarding secondary schools (youth villages) that sought to provide a standard

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[52]While this is the case for all school students, it is particularly true for those who live in Youth Aliyah villages (see below) and see their parents on an irregular basis.

[53]Tsili Doleve-Gandelman, *Ethiopian Jews in Israel, Family Portraits: A Multi-Faceted Approach* (Hebrew) (Jerusalem, 1989). See also Westheimer and Kaplan, *Surviving Salvation*, pp. 59–78.

[54]Tsili Doleve-Gandelman, " 'Ulpan Is Not Berlitz': Adult Education and the Ethiopian Jews in Israel," *Social Science Information* 28, no. 1, 1989, pp. 4–24.

education, as well as to offer emotional support and inculcate Jewish and Israeli culture. During the period of the massive *aliyah* from the Middle East and North Africa in the 1950s, most of the the immigrant children placed in Youth Aliyah institutions had parents in the country but were removed from their homes to speed their acculturation.

Although misgivings developed during the 1980s over policies that separated immigrant youths from their parents, over 96 percent of Ethiopian immigrants aged 13–18 were placed in youth villages.[55] What began as an effort to care for the many youngsters who had arrived without their parents in the early 1980s became the standard track for nearly every Ethiopian teenager. As a result, Ethiopians came to be a disproportionately large part of the villages' population. In 1993 Ethiopian students accounted for 37 percent of those learning throughout the entire system,[56] but they were 65 percent of the students in religious villages. The fact that some of the system's weakest schools are in religious institutions severely limits chances for widespread scholastic achievement and social integration. At the same time, Ethiopians' achievements at some of the system's stronger schools, such as Yemin Orde and Kfar Batya (both religious), have been quite impressive.

Recent studies of the educational record of Youth Aliyah graduates show that Ethiopian immigrants have overwhelmingly been sent to vocational, rather than academic, programs. Thus, in 1992–93 only 27 percent of those Ethiopians completing the 12th grade were prepared to take *bagrut* (university matriculation) exams; and only a small percentage of these achieved results that would have permitted them to pursue university or college studies.[57] For their part, according to press accounts, those in the vocational track often expressed dissatisfaction with the limited occupational choices available in most schools.

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[55]See the special issues of *Alim*, a Youth Aliyah publication in Hebrew devoted to this subject: Summer 1983; Spring 1985; Tamar Dothan, "Diagnosing Ethiopian Immigrant Youth," in *The Integration of Immigrant Adolescents* (Youth Aliyah, Jerusalem, 1984), pp. 69–81; Nisan Kouri, "Vocational-Technological Training in Youth Aliyah," *Youth Aliyah Bulletin*, Summer 1987, pp. 65–72; Rivka Hanegbi and Sara Itziksohn Menuchin, "Problems of Cultural and Development Passages for Ethiopian-Jewish Adolescents in an Israeli Environment," in *Cultural Transition: The Case of Immigrant Youth* (Jerusalem, 1988), pp. 140–49; Anita Nudelman, "Understanding Immigrant Adolescents," *Practicing Anthropology* 15, no. 2 (Spring 1993), pp. 13–15.

[56]The percentage of Ethiopian youngsters in Youth Aliyah rose from 24 percent in 1991, to 35 percent in 1992, to 37 percent in 1993.

[57]Rachel Gindin, "Aliyat Hanoar Graduates of Ethiopian Origin 1992–93" (in Hebrew), Ministry of Immigrant Absorption, Oct. 1993. A total of 125 students (72 boys and 53 girls) completed the program designed to prepare them for matriculation exams. Even these students had particular problems with English and mathematics, and many of them did not take the matriculation exams in these subjects.

Even under the best of circumstances, the Youth Aliyah option remains problematic. While no one questions the short-term benefits for many children, the long-term implications of a policy that removes children from their families during their teens remains the subject of much controversy. In the light of past experiences with earlier immigrants from Asia and Africa, it seems likely that the widespread use of boarding schools may once again produce a generation of immigrant youth with few links to the local population and no family roots.

COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

For those young people who managed to go to secondary school in Ethiopia, or even to college, the Student Administration, funded by both the Jewish Agency and the Ministry of Absorption, assisted in setting up special preparatory courses in which those who seem qualified for higher education can have a chance to prove their competence. Although this type of program, or *mekhinah*, is normally one year for Israelis and other immigrants, it has at times been extended to two years for Ethiopians, so that some of the difficulties they encounter can be better handled through special courses. For example, since almost every Ethiopian student had trouble passing the national psychometric tests, special instruction was provided.[58] Although not all passed, this did not bar them from further study, since certain programs, as well as certain universities, place less importance on the test scores than others. Also, it has been found that, with help, many Ethiopian students succeed in university, even if their psychometric results remain below standard.[59]

In order to assist those Ethiopians who seek to study beyond high school, special "affirmative" conditions have been created that are unavailable to any other immigrant group. Beside the right to a second year of *mekhinah*, the Ethiopian student has the formal right to free higher education for as long as it takes him or her to complete a bachelor's degree. In contrast, a Russian immigrant student has the right to free education for only a two-year period.[60]

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[58]Psychometric exams are standardized tests designed to measure general academic ability and aptitude. Until recently, they were required of all Israeli high-school and *mekhinah* students who applied to a university. As in similar tests given in other countries, many of the questions are culturally bound. For Ethiopian students, moreover, the structure and form of the exam are also unfamiliar.

[59]Cf. the articles by Phyllis A. Rothman, "The Mathematics Program for Ethiopian Students," *Nitzanim*, Spring 1987, and Moshe Fasi and Debi Kohn, "Absorption of Students from Ethiopia in the Rothberg School," ibid.

[60]This was reported on in the newspaper *Ha'aretz* (July 27, 1992), under the heading "Positive Discrimination," in which it was also pointed out that from two-and-a-half to five

Despite these advantages, only 148 Ethiopian students attended university, college, or pre-academic *mekhinah* during the 1992–93 school year, a relatively modest figure. Included in this figure were 30 degree students at the Hebrew University, 3 of them working at the master's degree level; 18 at Bar-Ilan University, the majority in an ongoing special social-work program; 9 at Ben-Gurion University; 14 at Tel Aviv University; and 4 at the Haifa Technion. Thirty-five students were enrolled in the Technological College in Beersheba.

During the 1993–94 academic year, over 300 Ethiopians were studying in institutions of higher education. Of this number, 110 were registered in universities, colleges, and technical schools. In addition, over 200—including both those who had arrived in Operation Solomon and veterans who had attended Youth Aliyah schools without completing the necessary matriculation—were enrolled in a number of *mekhinot* and experimental programs. At the Hebrew University *mekhinah*, 20 students were registered; at Tel Aviv University, 31. A search that was made for newly arrived individuals who had had more than ten years of schooling in Ethiopia but were still not qualified for university or college-level programs produced 90 individuals. They were registered in technological and vocational training programs at the Western Galilee College, School of Technology, near Acre. Special courses have also been introduced to train Ethiopians to be teachers, dental technicians, and rabbis. A pretechnicians' course was established at the Hadassah Community College in Jerusalem for another 40. An experimental first-year program was set up at Haifa University for 60 Ethiopians who had arrived in Operation Solomon with 11–12 years of academic background. At the end of a year all but one had passed the course, and the majority were able to enter directly into academic or professional training programs. These and similar results in the *mekhinah* programs seem to indicate that policies that exclude Ethiopians from academic programs may be seriously underestimating their potential.

YOUTH PROJECT

Ethiopian immigrants between the ages of 18 and 28 who had either very limited prior schooling or none at all posed a special challenge for the educational system. Rather than ignore the needs of this age group, or simply push nearly 1,000 young people into unskilled work, the Ministry of Absorption, through its Student Administration, devised a special two-

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times more money is invested in the absorption of each Ethiopian immigrant than in a comparable immigrant from the former Soviet Union.

year intensive education program known as the Youth Project, which was inaugurated in July 1985.[61]

Working in cooperation with the Ministries of Education, Labor, and Religious Affairs, with help from the Jewish Agency and the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), the Student Administration contracted with some 20 institutions, including yeshivahs, vocational schools, and various comprehensive high schools. The Ethiopian students were taught half a day of academic subjects (primarily Hebrew, mathematics, civics, and Bible) and half a day of vocational courses (mainly welding, auto mechanics, carpentry, electricity, and printing for men; sewing, home economics, child care, and secretarial skills for women).

Thanks to generous funding, the Youth Project was able to mobilize the talents of highly qualified teachers and to bring young Ethiopians into some of the country's finest vocational schools. Unfortunately, the vocations offered were often of limited demand in the open job market. Nonetheless, it was evident after two years that the socialization experience alone, quite apart from actual skills learned, contributed to a marked improvement in most participants' ability to organize their time, plan their futures, and deal with the demands of Israeli society. Four years after the original Youth Project participants ended their study, a survey conducted by the JDC found that around 70 percent of project graduates were employed, although not necessarily in the area of their training.

In the meantime, the Youth Project was continued. All the young people between ages 18 and 28 who arrived in Operation Solomon with 0–9 years of previous education were placed in vocational training schools. As of October 1993, a thousand students were enrolled in this two-year program.

ARMY TRAINING

In the early years of the two-year Youth Project, all able-bodied men who completed it were placed in a specially designed pre-induction military training program. This intensive six-week course, called *Magen Tsion*, aimed at bridging the gap between the life experience of the Ethiopians and that of the Israeli youths with whom they were expected to serve in the Israel Defense Forces (IDF). Before this course was set up, the tendency was to excuse Ethiopians from any serious participation in military service and to direct them to courses in driving, mechanics, and cooking—something many youths did not want. The *Magen Tsion* program was subse-

[61] See Chaim Rosen's evaluation of this project: "*Proyekt Ha-Tse'irim: Olei Etiyopia Minekudat Mabat Tarbutit*" (The Youth Project: Ethiopian Immigrants from a Cultural Perspective), (Ministry of Absorption, Jerusalem, 1987).

quently discontinued in favor of more individual approaches. As many youths as possible are inducted and immediately integrated with other recruits. When deemed necessary, special preparatory courses that draw on the lessons learned in *Magen Tsion* are made available.

Often showing a flair for military endeavors and possessed of superb stamina, many young Ethiopians have deliberately chosen to serve in the ranks of the infantry, tank corps, paratroopers, and, when possible, in the elite combat units of the regular army. There is already a small but definitely growing cadre of Ethiopian officers, which is a clear indicator of their determination, as well as their ability to compete on an equal basis with other Israelis. As of 1993, more than 2,000 Ethiopian males had completed army training. In June 1993, 850 were in active service, including 17 officers and 16 career soldiers.[62]

Based on the numbers of graduates bound to come from Youth Aliyah in the years ahead, the contribution of Ethiopian Jews to the Israeli armed forces is likely to increase. Those who arrived in Operation Solomon have yet to be inducted (including 3,000 in Youth Aliyah and 1,000 in the Youth Project). Once they are eligible, they will swell the ranks of the Ethiopians doing military service.

Ethiopian women have been far slower than their male counterparts to enter the army. By 1992 only about two dozen women had entered the IDF. During the next year, however, their number doubled to about 50. In part, at least, this low figure is a natural result of the decision to send Ethiopians to religious boarding schools. Female students at such schools are often discouraged from entering the army, and in some cases are even asked to sign a document indicating that they will request a deferment on religious grounds. In addition, it must be said that most Ethiopian parents do not want their daughters to go into the army, where women are exposed to nontraditional behaviors and mores.

Employment

THE PROBLEM OF DEPENDENCE

For many Ethiopians, their sojourn in Israeli absorption centers and hotels continued a pattern of dependence that had begun either in the Sudan or Addis Ababa. For months or even years, they had lived as refugees and relied on the generosity of others for their survival. Although attempts were

[62]Malka Shabtay, "The Re-formation of Cultural Identity Among Ethiopian Immigrants to Israel," in *Between Africa and Zion* (forthcoming); idem, "Absorption of Ethiopians Through the Israeli Defense Forces," *Practicing Anthropology* 15, no. 2, Spring 1993, pp. 16–17.

made during the period prior to Operation Solomon to find meaningful work for as many Ethiopians as possible in Addis Ababa, both their numbers and the external conditions made this extremely difficult. In any event, such efforts came to an end as soon as they arrived in Israel and became involved in an absorption process designed to familiarize them as quickly as possible with the language, customs, and norms of their new homeland.

Many Ethiopians were, for a number of reasons, all too ready to accept the cocoon-like protection they were offered. In part, at least, their response to the assistance they were offered may have been modeled on common behavior patterns in Ethiopia, where the poor often fare better from charity than from striking out on their own.[63] In addition, not unlike refugees elsewhere in the world, Ethiopian immigrants arrived in Israel with a strong belief that, having found sanctuary, they would now be compensated for their suffering. As refugee expert Barry N. Stein has noted, refugees have a "strong belief that they are owed something by someone. Since their persecutors are unavailable, the refugees shift their demands to the government and helping agencies."[64] Moreover, as immigrants warmly welcomed and cared for by the Jewish state, they carried high expectations that all their needs would be met.

At first, this was indeed the case. Not only did the various absorption agencies provide the immigrants with housing, clothing, and food, but hundreds of Israelis came forward with gifts of clothing, toys, blankets, and anything else they could think of. This tremendous beneficence was, however, not without its darker side. In some instances, dramatic gestures of giving seemed designed more to satisfy the donor than to assist the recipient. While giving presents such as school supplies and toys directly to smiling Ethiopian children was immensely gratifying to both sides and provided excellent photo opportunities, it also reinforced the children's perception that, in their new home, outsiders, not parents, were the people to turn to for both satisfying needs and obtaining luxuries.

More generally, the longer the Ethiopians were helped because they were helpless, the more adept many of them became at displaying their need for charity.[65] Some grew quite accustomed to the role of indigent ward and came to view it as natural. Thus, they felt deeply wronged when immigrant benefits such as free housing and medical care were terminated after the end of the mandated period. They had been loyal and obedient, why were their

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[63]John Iliffe, *The African Poor: A History* (Cambridge, Eng., 1987), pp. 16–17.

[64]Barry N. Stein, "The Refugee Experience," *International Migration Review* 15, nos. 1–2, 1981, p. 327.

[65]Michael Ashkenazi, "Studying the Students: Information Exchange, Ethiopian Immigrants, Social Workers, and Visitors," in *Ethiopian Jews and Israel*, ed. Ashkenazi and Weingrod, pp. 85–96.

benefactors "punishing" them? Even programs that called for only a symbolic financial contribution from the *olim* were often resisted. In some cases, immigrant parents went on strike when it was suggested that they contribute toward the cost of their children's clothing, rather than simply taking clothes from a box of donated items. Others seemed to view individual initiative as something to be hidden. Students often attempted to conceal the fact that they had paying jobs, assuming that scholarships were given only to the truly needy and that they might be penalized for their enterprise. Thus, while most Ethiopians in Israel struggle for independence, eking out a living any way possible, some devote their energies to winning the favors of the absorption agencies and seemingly endless flow of charitable bodies, measuring their success by how much they can get from outsiders.

VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

Unlike almost all other immigrants to Israel, who seek jobs in their fields or register for retraining courses, the majority of the Ethiopian men, and practically all of the women, arrived with neither a vocation nor any readily marketable skills. The majority lived in rural villages, where their work experience included ox-plow farming, simple metalworking, weaving, and, for women, pottery making.

In order to facilitate their integration into a technological society, the Ministry of Absorption, in cooperation with the Ministry of Labor and experts from the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC), has endeavored to create meaningful vocational training programs. These have included specially adapted courses to prepare Ethiopians for such occupations as the building trades for men and jewelry making for women.

A survey of 2,800 Operation Moses immigrants, conducted by the Brookdale Institute in the summer of 1992, found that 85 percent of the men and 39 percent of the women had participated in at least one training program.[66] Among the most popular courses for men were auto mechanics (343), metalworking (202), building trades (100), carpentry (97), and auto electronics (92). Significant numbers of women had studied sewing (129), geriatric care (96), practical nursing (91),[67] and infant care (69).

During the period prior to Operation Solomon, finding employment did not seem to have been a problem for the Ethiopians. It is generally estimated—official figures were never made available—that about 80 percent of those eligible for work did find jobs.[68] Although at first there were fears

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[66]Gila Noam and Chen Lipschitz, "A Survey of Young Ethiopians from Ethiopia" (in Hebrew), unpublished manuscript (Brookdale Institute, Jerusalem, Aug. 1993).

[67]Forty-nine men also attended practical nursing courses. Once Russian immigrants began to arrive, among them an abundance of already trained people willing to work in this field, funds for training Ethiopians as nurses diminished.

[68]The Brookdale survey cited above found that 83 percent of the men and 43 percent of the

of the Ethiopian Jew being exploited to serve as unskilled "black labor," replacing Arab workers, this has not been common. The Ethiopians themselves have consistently refused menial work.[69] Once they left the protection of the absorption centers, most were quick to see the need to work hard in order to obtain an adequate income to cover all of the expenses of their new urban life. In Ethiopia, the Jews more than any other group had worked at a variety of occupations, usually simultaneously. A man would divide his day among two or three different activities, including farming, weaving, and blacksmithing. This model of multiple tasks has been translated by some industrious individuals into a willingness to work in factories that offer double shifts and the opportunity for overtime pay. This enables the Ethiopians to upgrade their salaries significantly and removes the stigma of having to apply every month to the National Insurance for supplementary salary payments.[70]

The employment situation for the latest arrivals has not been particularly impressive. In part the problem lies in where they are living: most of the caravan sites are far from the major employment centers. Then, too, the unemployment benefits they are eligible to receive are usually larger than whatever salaries they can earn. In addition, as noted above, their absorption situation has contributed to the feeling that there is no need to work hard, since the government will take care of them. A variety of new training programs have been established in which several thousand people have been involved. Job placement, so far, has been sporadic, and ongoing efforts are being made to integrate training with access to jobs.

WOMEN AT WORK

Ethiopian women in Israel are encouraged to assume a more important role in family life and to have greater autonomy in their dealings with the surrounding society. In Ethiopia, women traditionally deferred to men, who held all positions of authority. In Ethiopia, a woman's responsibilities were

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women sampled were either employed, serving in the army, or studying. More specifically, 68 percent of the men and 41 percent of the women were working. The State Comptroller's Report, 38, 1988, p. 499, noted that in July 1987, 73.5 percent of eligible Ethiopians were not permanently employed. The difference in these figures reflects the fact that the survey was limited to those under age 40, and that the comptroller did not count either seasonal workers or those in vocational courses as employed. A large number of Ethiopians are in both these categories. For a still useful earlier study of employment in Ethiopia and Israel, see R. Best, "Wirtschaftsweisen der Beta Israel in Athiopien (Geschichte und Darstellung) und Aspekte ihrer okonomischen Integration in Israel" (M.A. Johann Wolfgang Goethe Universitat, February 1988).

[69]The Brookdale survey found that 55 percent of women, but only 23 percent of men, were employed as unskilled labor.

[70]This applies chiefly to those residing in the Tel Aviv area, where most such factories are located.

generally limited to the domestic realm, as part of a rigid, gender-based division of labor. Women's activities included cleaning, cooking, embroidery, caring for young children, bringing water, washing clothes, making clay vessels for eating and cooking, and weaving straw baskets for storage. Men were responsible for building the family house, farming, smithing, weaving cloth, and any endeavor associated with the outside world.[71] The division was usually strictly observed, and it would be unthinkable for a woman to perform most male tasks or for a man to perform "woman's work."

Although the feminist movement has had far less influence in Israel than in the United States or Western Europe, the average Israeli's expectations of a woman's role differ enormously from those of Beta Israel society. Ethiopians first encounter Western-style women in the absorption bureaucracy; Hebrew teachers, social workers, and house mothers are particularly prominent.[72] These Israeli women are significant not only because they represent the unprecedented phenomenon of female authority figures, but also for the simple reason that they are working outside the home.

Initially, Ethiopian women brought to Israel were relieved of some of their domestic responsibilities. Hotels, in particular, assumed most of the work associated with the preparation of food. Even when they moved to mobile homes or permanent housing, many of their former chores—including making dishes and pots, fetching water, and weaving baskets—were suddenly obsolete. Nevertheless, the basic ethos remained the same: whatever was done in the house was considered the responsibility of the woman.

But while the domestic realm remained restricted to women, women were no longer restricted to the domestic realm. Indeed, both ideological and practical pressures were brought to bear on Ethiopian women to explore the options for work outside the house. Although it has often been suggested that the woman's decision to work outside the house is itself the cause of considerable tension and strife, this may be a case of the chicken and the egg. In some instances at least, women who view themselves as trapped in unsatisfactory marriages may seek outside work and the income it brings in order to gain independence. In such cases, the woman's work is not the problem, but (at least in her eyes) the solution. What is undeniable is the fact that, in Israel, a woman's options are far broader than they were in

[71]Although the distinctions drawn by the Beta Israel were essentially the same as those observed by their neighbors, there were some slight differences. In contrast to their Christian counterparts, Beta Israel women were known for making clay pots that were sold to outsiders. Symbolically, however, this form of work was associated with the domestic realm and the home.

[72]On these female authority figures and on women in general, see Westheimer and Kaplan, *Surviving Salvation*, pp. 79–102. See also Eva Leitman, "The Cultural Adaptation of Three Generations of Ethiopian Women," in *Between Africa and Zion* (forthcoming).

Ethiopia, and that many take advantage of this either within the framework of marriage or outside it.

The tensions between women's traditional roles and the opportunities offered in Israel are most clearly seen when the wife goes out to work while the husband remains unemployed. Although the overall unemployment rate among Ethiopian women appears to be higher than among men (see above), the phenomenon of unemployed husband–employed wife is common, largely because of disparity in ages. In Ethiopia, the husband was generally several years older than his wife. However, in some circumstances, such as second marriages, he might be 10, 20, even 25 years her senior. A 35-year-old woman will be offered more training programs and probably adapt more quickly than her 50-year-old husband. Indeed, at that age, unless he is part of the tiny minority of educated immigrants, he is unlikely to be seriously considered as a candidate for the workforce. Once the wife is working, not only does her income make her more independent, but her exposure to the world around her greatly accelerates her adaptation. While she confronts the daily challenges of working life—Hebrew conversation, bus routes and schedules, work relations, pay slips, etc.—the husband remains behind: isolated, confused, frustrated.

PENSIONERS

The one age group that has been the least productive in Israel is that of people over age 50.[73] Whereas in Ethiopia a man of this age and older would be very active in his fields and at his hearth, in Israel he suddenly finds himself a "pensioner." At the time of their initial adjustment to life in Israel, many distinguished elders found themselves with nothing to do and often with no one to talk to except other "old people," as everyone else was either learning or working.[74] For a while the oldsters simply enjoyed the miraculous "gift" of money they received each month for doing nothing. Gradually, at least some of these people—who, given the vagueness of age reckoning in Ethiopia, could well be younger than the "65 or over" they were registered as—began to suffer from constantly being at home.

For some, the solution has been to draw on a typical Ethiopian inclination to wander. They leave their homes and families and set out to visit relatives or to attend weddings and funerals, whenever they have the chance to do so. Others have realized that they need to be productive, and so have become "working pensioners," doing weaving in their homes, working as guards or checkers at supermarkets, or finding work in greenhouses or even factories. Those who do this have no trouble continuing to receive their

[73]On the general decline in the position and authority of "elders," see the discussion above.
[74]About 7 percent of the Ethiopian population receive pensions.

pensions along with their salaries.[75] The existence of working pensioners contradicts the oft-repeated claim that every Ethiopian over 45 is "over the hill" and will have great difficulty in finding a place for himself, or in learning Hebrew to any great extent. They usually gain remarkable fluency in Hebrew and continue to be influential in their community's affairs. In contrast, the "wanderers" seldom if ever progress with Hebrew or adjust to their new environment.

Health Issues

The arrival of the Ethiopian Jews in Israel has confronted the Israeli medical establishment with a variety of unprecedented challenges. Not only did many immigrants arrive with medical problems that were unfamiliar to Israeli authorities, but each successive wave of *olim* presented a slightly different health profile. Almost without exception, moreover, Ethiopian immigrants were unfamiliar with the vocabulary, technology, and underlying principles of Western medical practice.[76]

As noted above, the vast majority of Ethiopian immigrants who arrived prior to 1986 were illegal migrants who journeyed to the Sudan and spent extended periods in refugee camps before being airlifted to Israel. Although no exact figures exist, somewhere between 2,000 and 4,000 Ethiopian Jews died in or on their way to the Sudan.[77] Those who survived and reached Israel were generally in poor physical condition.[78] Between 32 and 52 per-

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[75]Since such working pensioners do not report that they are employed, they do not figure in government statistics, and it is impossible to determine their number.

[76]Two issues of the *Israel Journal of Medical Sciences* (*IJMS*), comprising a total of over 40 articles, have been devoted to health issues concerning Ethiopian immigrants: vol. 27, no. 5, May 1991, and vol. 29, nos. 6–7, June-July 1993. See below for references to specific articles.

[77]Tudor Parfitt, *Operation Moses*, p. 87. The Ethiopian community and Israeli officials consistently cite the higher figure in discussions of mortality during this period and at the annual memorial service held in Jerusalem.

[78]C. Hershko, G. Nesher, A.M. Yinnon, et al., "Medical Problems in Ethiopian Refugees Airlifted to Israel: Experiences of 131 Patients Admitted to a General Hospital," *Journal of Tropical Medicine and Hygiene* 89, 1986, pp. 107–11. This should not be confused, however, with certain positive elements in their health profile prior to their departure for the Sudan. Upon arrival in Israel, Ethiopian immigrants have low cholesterol levels and few dental caries. In Israel their diet tends to change and includes increased consumption of foods associated with higher blood pressure and heart disease. There is also evidence for an increase in dental cavities as a result of the consumption of sweets. Judith T. Shuval, *Social Dimensions of Health in Israel* (Westport, Conn., 1992), p. 127; U. Goldbourt, T. Rosenthal, and A. Rubinstein, "Trends in Weight and Blood Pressure in Ethiopian Immigrants During Their First Years in Israel . . . ," *IJMS* 27, no. 5, pp. 260–63; U. Goldbourt, M. Khoury, E. Landau, L.H. Reisin, and A. Rubinstein, "Blood Pressure in Ethiopian Immigrants . . . ," ibid., pp. 264–67; idem, "Blood Pressure and Body Mass Index in Ethiopian Immigrants: Comparisons of Operation Solomon and Moses," *IJMS* 29, nos. 6–7, pp. 360–63; S. Cohen, H. Sarnat, Z. Rakocs, and

cent of those who arrived during Operation Moses suffered from malnutrition, and over 80 percent tested positive for intestinal parasites.[79] A quarter of those who arrived between 1980 and 1988 were diagnosed as having malaria, while during the same period about 2 percent were identified as having tuberculosis.[80]

In contrast to this group, those who arrived in the 1990s, and particularly those who came after a clinic was established in Addis Ababa in July 1990 by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, were far healthier on their arrival in Israel.[81] The average weight of males who arrived prior to Operation Solomon was, for example, only 47.5 kilograms (about 105 pounds), while for those who arrived in Operation Solomon it was 58 kilograms (about 128 pounds).[82] Few required immediate hospitalization. Having avoided the rigors of the Sudan and/or received treatment for existing conditions, only a small number tested positive for malaria.[83] These improvements notwithstanding, parasitic infections and evidence of exposure to hepatitis B virus continued to be common among the new arrivals, and the incidence of tuberculosis remained disturbingly high.[84]

E. Amir, "Increased Caries Prevalence in Adolescents Who Immigrated from Ethiopia to Israel," *IJMS* 27, no. 5, pp. 297–99.

[79]Jacov Nahmias, Zalman Greenberg, Leo Djerras, and Leumit Giladi, "Mass Treatment of Intestinal Parasites Among Ethiopian Immigrants," *IJMS* 27, no. 5, pp. 278–83; Jacov Nahmias, Zalman Greenberg, et al., "Health Profile of Ethiopian Immigrants in Israel: An Overview," ibid., p. 339.

[80]P.E. Slater, C. Costin, and Z. Greenberg, "Malaria in Israel: The Ethiopian Connection," *IJMS* 27, no. 5, pp. 284–87; S.A. Wartski, "Tuberculosis in Ethiopian Immigrants," ibid., pp. 288–92. The prevalence rate of 1.9/100 compares to 4.5/100,000 in the general Israeli public. During the period immediately after Operation Moses (1985), Ethiopian immigrants accounted for slightly more than half of all cases of tuberculosis in Israel. This trend continued and even increased following Operation Solomon.

[81]J. Lachter, "Medicine and the Ethiopian Jews: Report and Analysis from Addis Ababa," *IJMS* 28, no. 1, 1992, pp. 43–46; Theodore M. Myers, "A Medical Care Program for Ethiopian Jewish Migrants in Addis Ababa," *IJMS* 29, nos. 6–7, pp. 334–37. When this clinic was established in July 1990, Ethiopian Jews in Addis Ababa were dying at a rate of almost 40 a month (a figure still slightly lower than comparable rates among the local population). During the period March–May 1991, only 12 deaths were reported.

[82]Nahmias, "Profile," p. 339.

[83]Paul Slater, Zalman Greenberg, and Corina Costin, "Imported Malaria from Ethiopia—End of an Era?" *IJMS* 29, nos. 6–7, pp. 383–84. Between May 1990 and May 1991, only 33 cases were found among the 19,614 immigrants who arrived.

[84]E. Ben-Porath, L. Hornstein, J. Zeldis, J. Nahmias, "Hepatitis B Virus Infection and Liver Disease in Ethiopian Immigrants to Israel," *Hepatology* 6, 1986, pp. 662–66; L. Hornstein, E. Ben-Porath, A. Cuzin, Z. Baharir, N. Rimon, J. Nahmias, "Hepatitis B Virus Infection in Ethiopian Immigrants," *IJMS* 27, no. 5, pp. 268–72; E. Flateau, O. Segol, A. Shneour, H. Tabenkin, R. Ras, "Prevalence of Markers of Infection with Hepatitis B and C Viruses in Immigrants of Operation Solomon," *IJMS* 29, nos. 6–7, pp. 387–89; R. Edman and Z. Greenberg, "Intestinal Parasitic Infection in Operation Solomon Immigrants," ibid., pp. 374–76. During the period 1989–1991, the rate of tuberculosis among Ethiopian immigrants

In one respect, at least, immigrants who arrived via Addis Ababa were at greater risk than those who had come through the Sudan. While the latter were not exposed to HIV/AIDS, which had yet to become widespread in Ethiopia, the former were. By the early 1990s, Addis Ababa was one of the mostly highly infected cities in the world.[85] Beta Israel males, dislocated from their traditional residences and occupations, with time on their hands and money (from Jewish welfare organizations) in their pockets, were able to visit local prostitutes, 60 percent of whom were infected with the HIV virus. Unprotected blood supplies and nonsterile needles (used medically) put others at risk. Since no testing was done for HIV in Ethiopia prior to immigration, those carrying the virus simply brought it to Israel. Thus, while none of a group of 1,439 Operation Moses immigrants tested HIV positive, 226 of approximately 10,000 immigrants (over 10 years old) who arrived in 1991 were found to be carriers.[86]

HEALTH EDUCATION

The challenge posed by cases of HIV/AIDS is perhaps the most vivid example of the problems relating to the medical status of Ethiopian immigrants in Israel. Although rare or unfamiliar diseases brought by the immigrants may have initially baffled Israeli medical personnel, in most cases these have yielded to treatment. A more complex challenge is the interaction with a population that has little or no familiarity with the Western biomedical model of healing: its terminology, technology, or assumptions. Most Ethiopian immigrants continue to hold, in whole or in part, to their traditional system of medical explanation, healing, and healers. Both secular healers (midwives, herbalists, uvula cutters, and "surgeons") and more religiously oriented specialists (*dabtara*, *tonkway*, *balazar*) continue to operate in Israel.[87] Immigrants turn to such healers both when they are dissat-

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declined from 1.9 percent to a still relatively high 1.3 percent. S.A. Wartski, "Tuberculosis Case Finding and Treatment in Ethiopian Immigrants to Israel, 1989–1991," ibid., pp. 376–80.

[85]Ethiopian Ministry of Health, "Report to W.H.O.: AIDS Control and Prevention Activities," Annual Report 1989.

[86]Shlomo Maayan, Nurit Vardinon, Rivka Yazkan, Erica Cohen, Flora Ben-Yshai, and Israeli Yust, "Lack of Exposure to HTLV1 Among Ethiopian Immigrants of Operation Solomon (1991) Arriving to the Jerusalem Area," *IJMS* 29, nos. 6–7, pp. 393–95. Among Ethiopian immigrants, the HIV virus appears to be most commonly transmitted by heterosexual contact, tattooing, bloodletting, and other traditional medical practices.

[87]On the traditional Ethiopian medical system in general, see Simon Messing, *The Target of Health in Ethiopia* (Information Corporation, New York, 1972). On Ethiopian immigrants in Israel, see Nudelman, "Immigrant Adolescents"; idem, "Health Behavior and Traditional Healing Among Ethiopian Immigrants in Israel," in *Between Africa and Zion* (forthcoming); and Richard M. Hodes and Befekade Teferedegne, "Traditional Ideas of Health and Disease Among Ethiopian Jews," in *Social Science and Medicine* (forthcoming). The term *tonkway* is often used as a generic term for all sorts of "sorcerers" or mystical healers. The *dabtara*

isfied with the treatment they have received from Western practitioners and as a supplement to ongoing treatment, which addresses social and spiritual aspects of illness usually ignored in the West.

Thus, medical interventions and health education inevitably involve a process of cultural translation for both health professionals and patients. How are apparently healthy individuals to be convinced that they need to refrain from certain behavior, subject themselves to a regimen of treatments, or regularly take specified medicine because "tests" reveal them to be infected with malaria, hepatitis, tuberculosis, or HIV? How are Israeli health professionals to interpret immigrants' descriptions of medical symptoms and to distinguish between different types of physical and psychological distress?

In response to these challenges, health educators, doctors, and anthropologists have trained Ethiopian immigrants to serve as cultural mediators between immigrant patients and Israeli medical personnel.[88] Innovative health education programs have been developed to bridge the gap between the different medical systems. These have included such subjects as nutrition, personal hygiene, the use of the health system, preventive medicine, sex education and birth control, sexually transmitted diseases, including HIV/AIDS, and first aid.[89]

MENTAL HEALTH

No aspect of medical care for Ethiopian immigrants has proven more complex than that of mental health care. No "wonder drug" exists to treat the many cases of posttraumatic stress disorder, depression, culture shock, somatization, and suicide that have emerged in Israel in recent years. In no area, moreover, is the contrast between the Ethiopian and Western medical systems more striking.

One does not have to look far to understand the etiology of many of these

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is a learned man who makes use of books and writing to heal. The *balazar* heals through a cult associated with spirit (*zar*) possession. This cult will be discussed in greater detail below.

[88]Shabtay, "Defense Forces," p. 17; Nudelman, "Immigrant Adolescents," p. 14.

[89]Nudelman, "Immigrant Adolescents," p. 14; Diane Levin-Zamir, Dina Lipsky, Ellen Goldberg, and Zipora Melamed, "Health Education for Ethiopian Immigrants in Israel, 1991–2," *IJMS* 29, nos. 6–7, pp. 422–28; Tsipora Bental, Rina Gersten and Michael Alkan, "Health Education for the Ethiopian Community in the Negev," ibid., pp. 429–37; Michael Alkan, Tsipora Bental, and Rina Gersten, "Health Education in the Ethiopian Community in the Negev Region," *Family Physician* 18, 1990, pp. 159–62; Daniel Chemtov, Haim (Chaim) Rosen, Ronny Shtarkshall, and Varda Soskolne, "A Culturally Specific Educational Program to Reduce the Risk of HIV and HBV Transmission Among Ethiopian Immigrants to Israel: A Preliminary Report on Training Veteran Immigrants as Health Educators," ibid., pp. 437–42; Daniel Chemtov and Haim (Chaim) Rosen, *Be "Gobez" for the Sake of Your Health* (Jerusalem, Multiagency Committee for Education and Information on HIV Infection and Related Diseases, 1992).

problems. Almost every area discussed above carries with it immense psychological stress and the seeds of potential disorders. For some Ethiopians it is the trauma of the *aliyah* process itself, during which they were threatened by arrest, robbery, rape, illness, and starvation.[90] Those who survived often suffered the loss of loved ones and were usually separated from close family members still in Ethiopia.[91] Almost all experienced a sudden and dramatic change in lifestyle as they entered a highly urbanized Western country and confronted a strange language, new foods and clothing, a foreign economic system, and a sometimes hostile religious establishment. Changing gender roles and the removal of children from the home for educational purposes put additional strain on the family unit and added to the sense of extreme disorientation felt by many.

Many of the symptoms displayed by Ethiopian psychiatric patients, including anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, and somatization are all too familiar to Israeli mental health officials. Trancelike states and dissociative disorders pose a more unusual challenge. Although such phenomena were not considered "normal" in Ethiopia, they were a familiar and widely understood part of life. They were understood, however, not as the result of internal conflicts and disturbances, but as the product of a type of spirit known as *zar*.[92] A woman, or much more rarely a man, who was possessed

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[90]Gadi Ben-Ezer is currently completing a dissertation that examines psychosocial aspects of Ethiopian immigrants' accounts of their emigration and *aliyah*. Recent research has found a clear correlation between the seriousness of traumas suffered on the way to Israel and extent of psychological difficulties in Israel. See Ariel Arieli, "Persecutory Experience and Post-traumatic Stress Disorders Among Ethiopian Immigrants," in *Grief and Bereavement in Contemporary Society* III, ed. Emanuel Chigier (London, 1988), pp. 70–76; and Ariel Arieli and Seffefe Ayche, "Psychopathological Aspects of the Ethiopian Immigration," *IJMS* 29, nos. 6–7, pp. 411–18. For a study of children in Addis Ababa, see Gadi Ben-Ezer and Haim Peri, *Displaced Children: A Report of the Condition of Displaced Jewish Children in Addis Ababa* (Israel Section of Defence for Children International, Jerusalem, 1991).

[91]Ben-Ezer and Peri, *Displaced Children*, p. 415. Among 87 Ethiopian immigrants treated by a mental health center in Netanya, 35 percent had lost one family member, 30 percent had lost more than one member; 40 percent were forced to bury their dead without conducting religious ceremonies, and 56 percent had arrived in Israel without any other family member. See also Sara Minuchen Itziksohn and Rivka Hanegbi, "Loss and Mourning in the Ethiopian Community: An Anthropological-Psychological Approach," in *Grief and Bereavement in Contemporary Society* III, ed. Emanuel Chigier.

[92]On the *zar* in Ethiopia and Israel, see Yael Kahana, "The Zar Spirits: A Category of Magic in the System of Mental Health in Ethiopia," *International Journal of Social Psychiatry* 31, 1985, pp. 125–43; Alan Young, "Why Amhara Get *kurenya*: Sickness and Possession in an Ethiopian Zar Cult," *American Ethnologist* 14, 1975, pp. 245–65; G. Ratzoni, R. Blumensohn, A. Apter, and S. Tyano, "Psychopathology and Management of Hospitalized Suicidal Ethiopian Adolescents in Israel," *IJMS* 27, no. 5, pp. 293–96; G. Ratzoni, A. Apter, R. Blumensohn, and S. Tyano, "Psychopathology and Management of Hospitalized Ethiopian Immigrant Adolescents in Israel," *Journal of Adolescence* 11, no. 3, 1988, pp. 231–36; G. Ratzoni, Isabel Ben Amo, Tal Weizman, Ronit Weizman, Ilan Modai, and Alan Apter, "Psychiatric Diag-

by a *zar* would behave in a bizarre fashion until put under the care of a *balazar* (literally, the owner of a *zar*), a healer who had him/herself been possessed. Thereafter, she would belong to a cult group and would meet with others who had themselves been possessed by *zar* spirits.

Israeli health practitioners quickly discovered that diagnosis and treatment of patients in a dissociative state often required them to become familiar with the context of traditional healing. Often their patients had visited or were continuing to visit a *balazar* at the same time as they received Western treatment. In some cases, "second opinions" from and "referrals" to traditional healers were even initiated by the Israeli doctors.

By far the most troubling feature of the Ethiopians' psychological adjustment to Israel has been the comparatively large number of suicides. In 1985, the suicide rate among Ethiopian immigrants was six times that found among veteran Israelis.[93] Although the rate has declined somewhat over the years, it still remains significantly higher than that found among the bulk of the population.

Under the best of circumstances, it is difficult to state unequivocally why a particular person commits suicide and another in similar circumstances does not. In the case of Ethiopian immigrants in Israel the problem is complicated by recurrent attempts to politicize the phenomenon. Thus, painful personal and family tragedies are exploited to score points in ongoing political debates. During the conflict with the rabbinate, for example, suicides were said to have resulted from the inability of Ethiopians to marry legally, but in discussions concerning university studies, the same cases were attributed to having been refused admission. While the suicides following Operation Moses were often attributed to the trauma of *aliyah*, the guilt of "survivors' syndrome," and concern for relatives in Ethiopia, the massive family reunification of Operation Solomon, far from putting an end to such tragedies, produced a new wave of deaths.[94] An editorial published on December 20, 1991, in the *Jerusalem Post* argued (apparently on the basis of a single case) that Ethiopian suicides in Israel were not connected to difficulties in the absorption process, but were directly attributable to the failure to bring the Falas Mura, Beta Israel who had converted to Christianity, to Israel.

The attempts of the *Post* and others notwithstanding, any attempt to find a single cause and a simple solution to the problem of Ethiopian suicides in Israel appears doomed to failure. Suicide does not appear to have been

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noses in Hospitalized Adolescent and Adult Ethiopian Immigrants in Israel," *IJMS* 29, nos. 6–7, pp. 419–21.

[93]Arieli and Ayche, "Psychopathological Aspects," p. 412; Ratzoni et al., "Psychopathology and Management . . . Suicidal"; Westheimer and Kaplan, *Surviving Salvation*, pp. 113–17.

[94]Arieli and Ayche, "Psychopathological Aspects," pp. 417–18.

common among the Beta Israel in Ethiopia. This does not mean, however, that it is the result of any one feature of their experience in Israel. Reports concerning Ethiopian refugees in the United States, Germany, Canada, and resettlement camps in Ethiopia itself all mention a disturbingly high rate of suicide. Given the vast differences that separate these countries and their refugee programs, it seems unlikely that a common denominator will be found on this level.

Analysis of a few of the suicides that have occurred since Operation Moses seems to support the link between at least some of these incidents and the kinds of absorption difficulties discussed above. On December 14, 1991, for example, a Christian Ethiopian who feared he would be returned to Ethiopia if his Beta Israel wife carried out her threat to divorce him, murdered her and then committed suicide. Later the same month, an Ethiopian Jew engaged in a violent quarrel with his wife struck her, knocking her unconscious. Fearing that he had killed her, the man himself committed suicide.[95] Other cases earlier the same year included a father of eight who killed himself following an extended period of unemployment, and another whose suicide appears to have been connected to having tested positive for HIV.

One theme that emerges in many cases is the feeling the victims had of being trapped and powerless. Unable to live in an honorable fashion in a country whose rules and customs remain unfamiliar, the Ethiopian seeks to exert at least a measure of control by dying with honor. In contrast to the usual norm by which attempted suicides outnumber deaths by nearly ten to one, among Ethiopians the proportion narrows to two or three to one. The teen suicides found in many Western countries are also comparatively rare among the Ethiopians. It is the older generation, and for reasons we have discussed above, particularly the men, who are most vulnerable to the loss of hope and honor.

Finally, it must be remembered that suicides are both a symptom of difficulties and a cause of difficulties. Viewed from the perspective of the family, suicide is like a stone thrown into a pond, leaving in its wake orphans, widows and widowers, one-parent families, and bereaved elders. It produces yet one more chink in the fragile structure of Ethiopian family life.

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[95]On violence within Ethiopian families, see Westheimer and Kaplan, *Surviving Salvation*, pp. 109–13.

CONCLUSIONS

Major efforts have been made to facilitate the speedy integration of the Ethiopians into Israeli society. In some matters their adjustments have come easily, while in others, traditional preferences remain strong. So, for example, women are not averse to relinquishing their familiar leather baby carriers, worn on their backs, for strollers, but they generally insist on preparing *enjera*, the Ethiopian pancake bread, rather than go over to pitas, as have so many of the other ethnic groups in Israel.[96] In religious matters they have generally been ambivalent. Youngsters have been eager to learn about Jewish customs and observances—*tefillin*, *mezuzot*, Hanukkah—with which they were previously unfamiliar, but have been reluctant to incorporate them into their daily lives. Their fathers have assiduously avoided taking on many new practices.

Despite the fact that the vast majority of Ethiopian children study in the national religious school system, a notable process of secularization seems to be taking place among the younger generation of Ethiopians. Even as many resist the acceptance of new practices as taught in school, they simultaneously reject the ways of their fathers, which may seem outdated. This tendency toward secularization is often accelerated when they serve in the army, and many young men remove their *kippot* for good at this stage.

The dilemmas faced by Ethiopian Jews in the religious realm are further complicated by the challenges to their traditional social structure and patterns of family life. Almost everyone who has met or worked with Beta Israel immigrants has commented on the upheavals they have weathered in their domestic lives.[97] The changes undergone by Ethiopian families in Israel—as couples divorce and remarry, children assert an unprecedented degree of independence, and women redefine their roles—lie at the heart of the Ethiopian experience in Israel. Moreover, the Ethiopians' move to Israel has not only redefined roles within the family but has also radically altered the family's relationship with the surrounding society. In Ethiopia, the Beta Israel were united by a shared faith and a broad network of kinship ties. Families and households were the foundation of rural communal society and played a far greater role in the life of the individual than they do in most industrial societies. Families served as schools, workshops, clinics, reformatories, and credit organizations. In Israel most of these functions have

[96]Cf. Tsili Doleve-Gandelman, "The Role of Ethiopian Women in the Production of the Ethnic Identity of Their Immigrant Group in Israel," in *Other Perspectives in Gender and Culture: Rewriting Women and the Symbolic*, ed. J.F. MacCannell (New York and Oxford, 1990), pp. 242–57.

[97]For a more detailed discussion of these issues, see Westheimer and Kaplan, *Surviving Salvation*.

become the primary responsibility of other institutions. Families that have been forced to give up many functions must adjust themselves to a new position in the wider community.

At this point in their absorption process, a tension continues to exist between the deep-rooted sentiments that still tie the newcomers to their former way of life in Ethiopia and their frequently stated desire to be like other Israelis. At one extreme of the tension is the specter of their becoming a totally separate group, isolated and ostracized.[98] At the other end is the fear that the Ethiopians will renounce all of their traditions and become—except, of course, for color—indistinguishable as a group from the majority of other Israelis.[99] While there is little consensus in Israel as to what the precise outlines of a successful absorption would be, there can be little disagreement that either of these extremes would represent a dangerous and costly failure.

Looking back at the decade since Operation Moses, it can be seen that many of the immigrants who arrived with or prior to that airlift have made significant progress. Their success was to some extent overshadowed in the immediate aftermath of Operation Solomon, when the issues of crowded housing, inadequate educational facilities, and high unemployment once again made headlines. Amid a spate of hunger strikes, protest marches, and violent demonstrations, past achievements were quickly forgotten. Dire predictions were made that the caravan sites would become explosive slums, racial powder kegs with no precedent in the history of the State of Israel.[100]

On the whole, these pessimistic forecasts have not been borne out. Many of the problems that surfaced immediately after Operation Solomon were the almost inevitable result of so large an influx and the short-term problems it produced. While hardly conforming to a utopian vision of the ingathering of the exiles, the absorption of Ethiopian immigrants has had its successes. Ethiopian immigrants are today no longer viewed as a curiosity, but as a familiar part of Israel's ethnic mosaic. They have been accepted in cities and towns throughout the country and contribute in growing numbers to the Israel Defense Forces. Government policies designed to move immigrants from caravan sites to permanent housing have succeeded in part.

As of January 1994, most Ethiopian immigrants had been in Israel less

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[98]On the "marginalization" of the Beta Israel, see Alex Weingrod, "The Context of Ethiopian Jews in Israel: Immigrants, Israelis, Ethiopian Jews," in *Between Africa and Zion* (forthcoming).

[99]In Ethiopia the Beta Israel were highly acculturated but had not socially assimilated. The challenge facing them in Israel is to assimilate without completely acculturating.

[100]See, for example an interview (in Hebrew) in *Yediot Aharonot*, June 3, 1992, with Uri Gordon, head of the Immigration Department of the Jewish Agency and former head of Youth Aliyah, entitled "Are We Setting Up for the Ethiopians the *Ma'abarot* [camps] of the Year 2,000?"

than three years. Thus, it is still too early to predict the outcome of their integration into their new homeland (a process that will continue for years if not decades). The questions of whether the Ethiopians will achieve their goals by dint of their long-standing, characteristic patience or their newly emergent violence, or whether they will be left adrift regardless of what kinds of actions they take, stand as a concluding reminder that much is yet to be accomplished before one can speak with satisfaction about the ingathering of the Jews of Ethiopia in the land of Israel.