2m11. 3013.3

Université de Montréal

Memory and Migration : Ethiopian Jews in Montreal

par
Gabriella Djerrahian

Département d'anthropologie
Faculté des arts et des sciences

Mémoire présenté à la Faculté des études supérieures
en vue de l'obtention du grade de
Maître ès sciences (M.Sc.)
en anthropologie

décembre, 2001

© Gabriella Djerrahian, 2001

GN
4
N54
2002
v.021

Université de Montréal
Faculté des études supérieures

Ce mémoire intitulé :

Memory and Migration :
Ethiopian Jews in Montreal

présenté par :

Gabriella Djerrahian

a été évalué par un jury composé des personnes suivantes :

Gilles Bibeau
président-rapporteur

Deirdre Meintel
directeur de recherche

Maria Mamfredis
membre du jury

Résumé

L'objectif principal de ce mémoire est d'examiner de façon critique l'émigration, la migration et l'immigration des Juifs éthiopiens établis au Canada dans le contexte montréalais. Je considère les trajectoires personnelles des informateurs Juifs éthiopiens, ainsi que le milieu communautaire dans lequel ils furent accueillis. Le projet d'immigration canadien, développé dans les années 1980 pour venir en aide aux Juifs éthiopiens, est étudié dans le cadre des efforts internationaux déployés par les organisations juives en vue d'assister l'émigration du groupe de l'Afrique.

En ce qui concerne des données, je me base sur le matériel d'entrevue avec les informateurs Juifs éthiopiens et non-Éthiopiens, ainsi que sur les sources documentaires telles les communiqués de presse, les articles dans les journaux, et la litérature académique et populaire concernant le groupe.

Je défends l'idée qu'initialement, la migration juive éthiopienne s'est concrétisée selon deux références : l'Éthiopie en tant que pays producteur de réfugiés, ainsi que l'affiliation contemporaine des Juifs éthiopiens vis-à-vis à la communauté juive mondiale.

En Amérique du Nord, le travail humanitaire et politique des groupes de pression pro-Falasha ont joué un rôle important dans la création d'une représentation spécifique des Juifs éthiopiens. Ce portrait, esquissé en des termes Euro- et Americo-centriques, expose une interprétation tordue du milieu et de l'histoire éthiopienne.

J'analyse comment l'interaction publique entre les immigrants et la communauté juive montréalaise fut définie partiellement par la projection d'une identité juive idéalisée. Certains orateurs publics Juifs éthiopiens, comme la communauté d'accueil, ont appuyé une représentation collective qui diffère de l'expérience personnelle vécue par les informateurs Juifs éthiopiens. À travers l'étude des récits de vie des informateurs Juifs éthiopiens, je démontre que cette image est en contraste à leur vécu personnel.

Mots clés: .
Juifs éthiopiens – Montréal – migration – réfugiés – activités politiques – histoire.

Abstract

The main objective of this thesis is to critically examine the emigration of Ethiopian Jews and the process of their resettlement in Montreal. I take into account personal experiences of the Ethiopian Jewish informants, as well as the Montreal context in which they were received. I examine the Ethiopian Jewish migration project to Canada within the framework of the larger rescue programs operating in the early 1980's by various Jewish organizations.

Data was gathered from interview narratives with Ethiopian Jewish and (non-Ethiopian) Jewish informants, and from documentary sources such as newspaper clippings, press releases, and from academic as well as "popular" literature about the group.

I argue that initial waves of Ethiopian Jewish migration must be viewed in relation to two elements: Ethiopia as a refugee-producing country, and the changing character of Ethiopian Jew's affiliation to the global Jewish community.

I show that, in lobbying for support, efforts made by Canadian Jewish organizations to assist Ethiopian Jews created a group portrayal framed in Euro- and Americo-centric terms, foreign to the Ethiopian context. I show that the dynamics of the immigrants' public interactions with Jewish Montrealers were partly influenced by the portrayal of an idealized Jewish identity. Some Ethiopian Jewish public speakers, as did the host community in Montreal, played an important role in reinforcing such representations. I show how such images contrast with lived experience by analysing the narratives of Ethiopian Jewish informants.

Key words:
Ethiopian Jewish – Montreal – migration – refugees – political activities – history.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Identification of the jury	ii
Résumé	iii
Abstract	iv
Table of contents	v
Abbreviations	viii
Dedication	ix
Acknowledgments	x

CHAPTER ONE :

INTRODUCTION	1
Naming the Group: Jews, Beta Israel, Falasha, Ethiopian Jews and Ethiopian-Israeli	4
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE	6
Ethnicity and Ethnic Identity, Boundaries and Belonging	6
Migration	9
Migration Processes and the Family	11
Refugee Migration	12
Thinking About Memory	14
Social Memory	15
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY	17
Memory in This Research	19
GATHERING DATA	21
The Interview Process: Refusing	21
The Interview Process: Accepting	23

CHAPTER 2:

IN AFRICA	26
Ethiopia: The Country	27
The Ethiopian "Culture Core"	28
The Dominant Group : Language, Politics and Power	29
Defining 'Other' in Ethiopia	30

***THE BETA ISRAEL*: Occupational "Caste" and Religious Group** 32
Group Image 35
The Beta Israel : Constructing a Religious Identity 40

CHAPTER THREE:

THE BETA ISRAEL AND THEIR MIGRATION: THE AFRICAN CONTEXT 46
The Modern Ethiopian "Nation" 47
"Ethiopian Tikdem" 48
Ethiopian Forced Migration 52

***THE BETA ISRAEL*: Creating Awareness and A Way Out** 53
Getting to the Sudan: Who is a Refugee? 57
Refugees: Where Do They Go? 62
Emigration: Getting to Israel 63

An Alternative for Ethiopian Jews: The Montreal Jewish Community 65

CHAPTER FOUR:

BETWEEN AFRICA AND NORTH AMERICA 67
Falasha Interest and Ethiopian Jewish Migration to Canada 67
Canadian Migration Project for Ethiopian Jews 72

Migration to Canada: Canadian Refugee Policy 76
The Emigration Process 77
Providing "Exit Documents" 78
Entering Canada 79

Who Came to Canada 80

CHAPTER FIVE:

POLITICAL ACTIVISM AND IMAGE: CREATING A DISCOURSE 84
Salvation Through Migration: Constructing "Falasha" Image 84
Visual Imagery 91
Debating Information and the Media 93

Living the Image: Beyond the Media 95
Staying in Montreal: An Issue 97
Ethiopian Jewish Community: Activities in Montreal 99

CHAPTER SIX:

PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE: ETHIOPIA, CANADA AND ISRAEL 101
"I Love my Country, I Don't Like Politics" 102
Marriage and the Family 106
Family to Education: A Primary Value 107

Settling and Displacement: Starting Over In Canada 109
In the Communities: Jewish, Ethiopian and Ethiopian Jewish 110
Between Canada and Israel 112

Negotiating Identity Within Identities: Belonging Somewhere 117

CHAPTER SEVEN:

CONLCUSION 124

BIBLIOGRAPHY 127

Appendix I : Pictures of Ethiopian Jewish Figurines xii

Appendix II : Map of Arabia and the Horn of Africa xv

Appendix III : Letter from Louise Gagné, December 6, 1982 xvii

Appendix IV : Number of Ethiopian Jews in Canada xix

Appendix V : Hillel Leaflet Distributed in Montreal, 1983 xxi

Appendix VI : Documents and Newspaper Articles xxiii

Appendix VII : Glossary xxvi

ABBREVIATIONS

AAEJ:	American Association for Ethiopian Jews
BGU:	Ben-Gurion University of the Negev
CAEJ:	Canadian Association for Ethiopian Jews
CEGEP:	Collège d'Enseignement Général et Professionnel
CIJR:	Canadian Institute for Jewish Research
CJC:	Canadian Jewish Congress
CJCCEJ:	Canadian Jewish Congress Committee for Ethiopian Jewry
Federation CJA:	Federation Combined Jewish Appeal
HIAS:	Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society
JFS:	Jewish Family Services
JIAS:	Jewish Immigrant Aid Services of Canada
OAU:	Organization of African Unity
PMAC:	Provisional Military Administrative Council (in Ethiopia, under Mengistu's chairmanship)
UN:	United Nations
UNHCR:	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
YM-YWHA:	Young Men's and Young Women's Hebrew Association

To my grandfathers:

Who,
In narrating the Past,
Captured my heart
With their shining eyes

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

A heartfelt thank you to the "Club Optimiste B.I.P." and its director, Madame Anne-Marie Dorchies, for financially assisting part of my studies. Madame Madone Tcholkayan kindly aided me during the application process. I would also like to thank Sophie Limoges, assistant in charge of the *collection ethnographique*, Département d'anthropolgie de l'Université de Montréal.

The issues explored in this thesis and the people it represents have occupied my mind and heart long before my entry to the graduate program. Though I am solely responsible for the outcome of the material presented here, this work would not have been possible first and foremost without the participation of the informants. I am indebted towards each and every one of you - you all know who you are: Almaz, Niko, Bezunesh, Rudy, Dion, Teshome, Sara, Jeremy and Suzan. Thank you for sharing your thoughts and ideas, experiences and emotions. You all allowed me to gain a better insight on events more than two decades old. I have learnt a great deal from all of you.

I am equally obliged towards two professors who encouraged and guided me throughout this research, Kenneth Antanaitis-Jacobs and Deirdre Meintel. Both provided a stimulating intellectual milieu, patiently answering my numerous inquiries and offering much needed assistance. Ken, *toda raba* for your support, and for helping me begin out of a confusing start; the end result is marked by your presence. Deirdre, I cannot thank you enough for your help and encouragement. Your sharp insight, passion and critical approach to anthropology is a driving force for me. The environment you provide students with during class discussions is the backbone of this project. I equally benefited from many of Dr. Meintel's students' feedback, particularly Sylvie Fortin (grazie tanti!). Dr. Maria Mamfredis of Concordia University also contributed to the development of this research. I greatly appreciate your support, Maria, thank you for all your help!

When I reached Israel in the summer of 1999, right after graduation, I stumbled into Dr. Donald Seeman's office at the Hebrew University. Graciously, he met with an eager and not too well-informed student, who was curious about the Ethiopians in Israel. Tolerantly he shared his perspectives and offered access to his course on Ethiopian Jews, giving contacts of students and well-known scholars working with the group in Israel. Dr. Seeman, I am grateful for your readiness to assist an unknown student in a way not enough professors do. Thank you.

Finally, I cannot conclude without a word on the support I received from a few others. My family: Mariolina, Vartan, Aline and Mark, thank you for being who you are, and for putting up with me during a confusing period in my life. I could not have done this without each and every one of you, I love you all very much. Mélanie Hobalala, your support is an incredible source of strength for me. I cannot thank Ken enough for introducing me to you! Last but not least, I thank everyone who kindly lend an important hand during the correction process: Narod, Ara, Armenito, Aline, Vartan, Steve, Chrissy, and especially Deirdre!

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Some twenty years ago, Montreal received its first Ethiopian Jewish immigrants. From the newcomers' entry to Canada stemmed a migration project involving major Canadian-Jewish institutions, and both federal (Canadian) and provincial (Quebec) governments. Subsequently, trickles of Ethiopian Jews made their way to Montreal in the framework of a Canadian migratory project. Corroborated by Immigration Canada, each new case helped sketch the contour of what progressed into a migration program.

Since then, the heart of Ethiopian Jewish life moved from Ethiopia to Israel, and, to a much lesser extent, Canada. In the wake of this collective geographical shift (not to mention cultural, linguistic, religious, political ones, etc.) an unprecedented amount of contemporary literature has been produced in the past ten years about the group, mainly by scholars in Israel (Kaplan 1995:11). Authors have favored a few popular themes, mostly addressing Ethiopian Jews' historical past in Africa and their post-migratory experience in Israel, while other sub-fields remain largely unexplored (Weil 1995).

The search for better understanding Ethiopian Jewish history was directly or indirectly linked to decisive questions as to their "origins" and "Jewishness" that were seen to bear on Ethiopian Jews' right to settle in Israel. These issues have been far from neutral in the midst of the struggle for recognition of the Beta Israel[1] as full members of the larger Jewish community. Rather, the political context surrounding the Beta Israel's plight prior and during migration was loaded with religious and nationalist overtones.

In their specific ways, those who produced written works on the Beta Israel (scholars, religious authorities, political activists and others) provided information about the Beta Israel/Ethiopian Jewish past and present. These works were written for different purposes and at different times. In the early 1980's, when researchers were not yet completely immersed in the wave of interest for the Beta Israel, political activists and organizations in North America began campaigning within Diaspora Jewish

---

[1]"Beta Israel" is a term used in the literature in reference to the group's Ethiopian environment. For an interesting anecdote on the adoption of this term, see Weil 1995:29.

communities. Their mission: to better the situation of the Beta Israel by saving the group from suffering and persecution. This endeavor, however, required educating the larger public about an unknown group (the Beta Israel) and their situation in Ethiopia. Hence, the primary task of activists working to save the Beta Israel entailed creating awareness by introducing the group to the Jewish and the general public. From the start, the Beta Israel were represented in the context of a highly charged political mission.

While successfully undertaking a serious humanitarian effort, groups working on behalf of the Beta Israel disseminated a particular collective representation of the people they sought to help. Dr. Faitlovitch (1881-1955), a devoted Polish-born French Jewish scholar who contributed his life to unifying the Beta Israel with other Jews, initially outlined Beta Israel group image (Shabtay 1999:4) to Westerners during the period of his activities. Depicted within "Euro- and Americo-centric" grids of perception (to make use of Pankhurst's (1995:1) term), subsequent representations of the Beta Israel grafted onto this initial portrait, still popular today.

This thesis presents a microcosmic view of how migration, political activism and representation surfaced and came together locally in Montreal in reference to Ethiopian Jewish immigrants. I attempt to present the experience of Ethiopian Jewish immigrants rather than a pieced-together migration project or a constructed political objective, with the larger context juxtaposed to the informants' personal experience. In the process, I take into account Seeman's critique: "Too often, academic discourse has ignored the lived experiences of the people it represents [...]" (1997:11).

What it means for this research is to consider that the informants' experiences as immigrants is in conjunction to two realms: their personal lives before, during and after migration, and the milieu within which they were received. On the one hand, I explore the two geographical sites where their experiences are embedded: in Ethiopia (sending end) and Montreal (receiving end). The rest of the material includes personal memories and impressions of the Ethiopian Jewish informants' social setting in Ethiopia, their

experience of Canada, and, in the case of refugees who passed through the Sudan, of their journey linking both continents.

This study is not about all Ethiopian Jews in Montreal. Rather, it is focused on those who participated in the research and shared their personal life narratives. This work does, however, seeks to demonstrate how this tiny cohort came to be part of the larger Jewish population of Montreal and Canada. To this end, I explore the beginning and the initial integration of Ethiopian Jews in Montreal, who started to arrive in the 1980's. Since then, some of its members have moved to other Canadian cities or to Israel; a small number identify as "Beta Israel Pentecostals"; others have died; and recently, a few Israeli families of Ethiopian origin have joined the group in Canada.

Today, the community in Montreal to which the immigrants I studied belong to is no longer exclusively comprised of "Ethiopian Jews", because of a new and changing Ethiopian Jewish social, religious and national reality. These evolving 'ways of being' draw mainly from, and are linked to the larger category of "Ethiopian Jewish" (Seeman 1997), associated with their experience of migration. The scope of my research does not do justice to the flexibility and dynamics of "Ethiopian Jewish/Beta Israel Pentecostal/ Ethiopian-Israeli" Canadian experience. It does, however, take a close look at the small group that gave rise to a community that now includes individuals who identify as Beta Isreal Pentecostals and Ethiopian-Israelis in Montreal. Also, the research points out that even the most "basic" classification ("Ethiopian Jews") in reference to the initial immigrants in Montreal points to a broad, divers experiential reality.

This research is divided into seven chapters. The present chapter provides the conceptual framework of the thesis and presents my theoretical approach to terms such as 'ethnicity' and 'identity'. Drawing from a constructivist viewpoint, I also explore notions of 'memory' and 'migration'. The last section of this chapter outlines the research methodology used for gathering data, and closely examines the interview process.

The following chapter presents the social setting of Ethiopia, and places the Beta Israel in their historical surroundings during the time of increasing contact with Europeans, including Western Jews. Chapter Three reviews contemporary events in Ethiopia and their impact on the Beta Israel, taking into account the Ethiopian nationalist discourse before and after the socialist revolution. The emergence of the Beta Israel as an ethno-religious minority and their link to Israel, I argue, must be viewed within this context. I also examine the emergence of political advocacy within Diaspora Jewish groups on behalf of the Beta Israel, particularly in North America, and its link to the Montreal Jewish community.

Chapter Four analyzes political activism around the migration of Ethiopian Jews in Montreal and the development of a migration project for the group with the collaboration of Immigration Canada. The following chapter (Chapter Five) portrays the collective Beta Israel representation introduced in Montreal by political activists and other parties involved in aiding Ethiopian Jews. I argue that it had an effect on the way some immigrants presented themselves to the larger Montreal Jewish community, and influenced how the host community perceived them. In Chapter Six I outline themes and issues that arose in the interviews with Ethiopian Jewish informants, such as 'family', 'education', and 'nationality'. To my knowledge, national affiliation to Ethiopia has been unaccounted for in general researches on Ethiopian-Israelis and Ethiopian Jews. The conclusion offers a general overview of the thesis and raises new questions for future research.

Naming the Group: Jews, Beta Israel, Falasha, Ethiopian Jews and Ethiopian-Israelis

> Yet the question remains whether the word is chosen to describe a collectivity one willingly participates in oneself, or a stereotype of uniform commonality projected upon others on the sole basis of their ascribed ethnic identity (Baumann 1996:15).

Rudy and Bezunesh, two Ethiopian Jewish informants who had returned to Ethiopia since their arrival to Canada, remarked, "People in Ethiopia don't know what Jews are". Authors such as Weil (1995:28), Kaplan and Quirin (the latter two are leading historians of the Beta Israel) expound that the term "*ayhud*" ("Jews" or "Jewish group"

(Quirin 1992:14, 202) is an historically problematic term in Ethiopia, since it "rarely, if ever, can it be shown to designate Jews, in the more universally accepted sense of the term" (Kaplan 1992:9), and can refer to groups other than the Beta Israel.

"Beta Israel" (House of Israel) is, according to Weil (1995:30-31), the most neutral designation and self-reference pertaining to the group's Ethiopian context, and has gained much prominence in academic literature in the past decade. "Falasha[2]" (to exile, separate, in ancient Ethiopian (Weil 1995:29), a derogatory ethnonym labeled by people outside of the group, was the dominant term used by non-members and members alike well until the 1980's, prior to the application of the term "Beta Israel" (*ibid.*:30-33). In the wake of their emigration and mass settlement in Israel (*ibid.*), group members chose not to be associated with the status and identity encompassed by the term "Falasha" (Seeman 1997:3, Weil 1995:29), preferring the identification "Ethiopian Jewish".

"Ethiopian Jew" is a contemporary appellation in reference to the group's experience of migration and *aliyah*. This nomenclature reflects important changes and transitions lived by the Beta Israels in the past twenty years. It refers to a different religious and social reality centered no longer in their historical African setting.

In his Ph.D. dissertation, Seeman argues that today, "Ethiopian Jew" is a bureaucratic category more than a religious one (See Seeman 1997, and Hertzog 1999, for dynamics between designations, Israeli bureaucracy and public policy). Moreover, it does not accommodate for other contemporary groups from Ethiopia living in Israel, such as the Feres Mura (former Beta Israel Christians who have returned or wish to return to Judaism) or Beta Israel Pentecostals. The scholar invented the expression "Ethiopian-Israeli", accounting for all Israelis of Ethiopian origin living in Israel and their descendants. In speaking of the group in Israel, I have adopted this appellation since it encompasses a wider scope of social and religious experiences than designations such as "Beta Israel" and "Ethiopian Jewish".

---

[2] This term became exclusive to those practicing an identifiable form of Judaism once influential contacts between the group and Western Jews were established in the early 1900's (Weil 1995: 36).

These numerous appellations reflect different historical periods, social settings and geographical spaces. In speaking of the group in Ethiopia, I have chosen the designation "Beta Israel". As for advocacy groups, "pro-Falasha" referes to Jewish institutions, political organizations or agencies who, since the 1900's, worked on behalf of Ethiopian Jews. Since no Ethiopian-Israelis or Beta Israel Pentecostal living in Montreal participated in this research, I make use of the term "Ethiopian Jewish" to designate the informants in Montreal.

All Ethiopian Jewish informants referred to themselves as "Jew" or "Jewish" when speaking of their lives in Ethiopia (i.e. "My family were the only Jews in the area") alternately with "Beta Israel" and, to a lesser extent, "Falasha". In reading these interview excerpts, I would like to underline that what is commonly understood by the appellation "Jew" in Western terms is not applicable to the Ethiopian setting (Kaplan 1992, Quirin 1992, Pankhurst 1995). In other words, "Jew" in Ethiopia does not designate what we know as "Jew" in Europe, North America or Israel.

THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

Inevitably, issues explored in the interviews treat more than 'How they lived and how they got out'. All the Ethiopian Jewish informants, if only superficially, discuss what it was like to be a minority in Ethiopia, a black person in the Canadian Jewish community, and part of several cultural and religious spheres (Ethiopian and Jewish) in North America. In order to present the scope of their experiences, I draw from key notions such as 'ethnicity', 'identity', 'migration' and 'memory' to form the conceptual grid of this research.

Ethnicity and Ethnic Identity, Boundaries and Belonging

Definitions in regards to the terms 'ethnicity' and 'ethnic identity' are often unclear in anthropological and sociological writings (Henze 1995). According to Oriol (1985), "identity" in general is as a "*norme d'appartenance*", in other words a reference point affiliating individuals with a given collectivity. More specifically, Meintel ascribes

"ethnic identity" to the personal and subjective realm, highlighting the experiential quality of *belonging* as a unifying factor where individuals from a common past are propelled towards a shared future (1992:1). According to the author, 'ethnicity' is a wider concept than 'ethnic identity'; it includes:

> les modèles culturels qui caractérisent le groupe –certains d'entre eux servant à le délimiter -, les systèmes sociaux, les institutions, les organisations, les activités collectives et les intérêts communs, économiques et politiques, qui peuvent amener une *catégorie sociale* à devenir un groupe ethnique (1993:10, emphasis mine).

Meintel's definition considers ethnic identity as a component of ethnicity. In regard to the Ethiopian Jews in Montreal, the concept of 'ethnicity' as the larger element that binds the 'ethnic group' diminishes the complexity and variation of a particularly multi-layered cohort, as it suggests a homogeneity of traits. Being born in Ethiopia, identifying with Judaism and emigrating to Canada, I will argue, means that the category 'Ethiopian Jewish' may refer to a number of different identifications. As we shall see, region of origin in Ethiopia, religious identification, age, gender, and migratory experience all help to form components of identity, albeit in varying ways and degrees.

Drawing from the informants' narratives and Grunau's (1995: 5) work on Ethiopian Jewish identity in Montreal, I will rely on 'ethnic identity' as the basic analytical tool in regards to the Ethiopian Jewish experiences presented here, since the term recognizes more than a single way of being. In regard to the Ethiopian context, I will consider the Beta Israel a *social category* marked by an ethno-religious difference, and not as a homogenous ethnic group. The Beta Israel were neither politically, nor culturally, religiously or linguistically homogenous prior to recent events marking the course of their history (see Abbink, 1985, Shelemay, 1989, Quirin, 1992, and Kaplan, 1992, and other sources discussed in chapters Four and Five).

In order to explain the 'making' of this group, Ethiopian Jewish, the starting point of my theoretical discussion concerns the dynamics and fluidity of two operational terms: ethnic identity and their boundaries. The approach to identity as a constituent element of social cohesion and a "social construct" (Moussa 1993:28) is drawn from the constructivist theory. According to this approach (Poutignat and Streiff-Fenart 1993,

Meintel 1993), ethnic identity operates at the intersection of external (*outside* of the group) and internal (*inside* the group) forces, a fact that contributes to the fluidity and continuity between the two spheres (Oriol 1979).

Drawing from the boundaries defining our identification, ethnic identity is presented as a social phenomenon, born of the perpetual interaction between groups and their surroundings. Devereux presents this clearly in "Ethnopsychanalyse complémentariste", claiming that "même l'identité ethnique « pure » ne peut se développer qu'à partir d'une confrontation *avec* les « autres » et d'une différenciation *des* autres" (1972: 139, emphasis his), once again alluding to the permeability of boundaries as a primary informant to ethnic identity.

As presented in contemporary anthropological theory by Barth (1995), boundaries are informed primarily by the milieu, which sculpts and influences the dynamics of a shared identity within the larger social context. In other words, zones in between boundaries are malleable, and represent for Barth (1969) that which determines and directs strategic identitary references :

> Dans la mesure où l'existence des groupes ethniques dépend de l'entretien de leurs frontières, la question est de savoir comment les dichotomisations entre membres et *outsiders* sont produites et maintenues et de discerner leur effet propre sur les comportements effectif (Poutignat and Streiff-Fenart, 1995 : 123, emphasis his).

At the same time, non-members also play an active role in reinforcing affiliation of a given individual to the group. *Outsiders* partially define the circle to which *insiders* identify themselves to by influencing criterias of inclusion. Meintel (1993) mentions how Italians, affiliated to regions in Italy as opposed to the country as a whole, were termed and identified as "Italians" only after their arrival to North America. This example underlines how identification is a two-way process that involves negotiation between definitions by *outsiders* and *insiders* in the course of creating collective designations and their boundaries (Gallissot 1987:17).

The Beta Israel's case supports this point since the appellation "Ethiopian Jewish" does not pre-date their immigration to Israel. It is a contemporary reference to immigrant

Jews from Ethiopia and their descendants settled mainly in Israel and North America. As Grunau points out, this term developed out of a particular political and religious context: "… The people identified as "Ethiopia Jews" … are a group who do not necessarily pre-exist the status ascribed to them by Israeli Rabbinical officials as "Ethiopian Jews" in 1975" (1995:3).

The acknowledgment of the Beta Israel as Jews by the Chief Rabbinate in the 1970's was the basis of their migration out of Africa and entry to Israel during the following decade. By this token, the disparate boundaries of regionally and linguistically diverse Beta Israel populations in Ethiopia were associated with a shared social status, now an umbrella term ("Ethiopian Jewish") that relates them to other Jewish populations. Regardless of intra-Beta Israel diversity, the common experience of leaving Africa en masse is a critical point in the lives of those who migrated.

Migration

Migration as a life transition event is, in its strictest form, the experience of moving through geographical space (Kearney 1986). Displacement entails replacing one's familiar environment with an unknown setting. In keeping with constructivist theory which holds that group boundaries are not static, I propose that drastic changes in one's surrounding and space gives rise to new identities and their collective expressions. During the process of migration, one's familiar milieu is replaced by an unrecognisable environment where the individual's "*normes d'appartenances*", in other words, referents of belonging, are re-negotiated, in some cases radically.

Traditionally, migration has been represented as a one-way event. Authors have focused primarily on integrative and adaptive mechanisms developed by immigrants once in their host societies. In re-conceptualising human movement across borders, changing migratory trends since the 1970's have posed a theoretical challenge to the bipolar immigration/assimilation model. Migration behaviour of the past three decades has propelled a shift towards a more contemporary focus of study, among other themes, on

the migrant's relation to spaces of departure, journey and arrival (Tarrius 1996, in Dorai, Hily and Ma Mung: 1998: 80, Boyd 1990: 640).

In her work on Hutu refugees in Tanzania, Malkki documents how identities shift during an event of "changing bases" (1995), and examines the dynamics between people and places in light of displacement. She successfully demonstrates how identity is constructed by one's experience of displacement and exile, embedded in social memory and passed down as a reference of collective identification for subsequent generations.

In the past, scientists generally conceptualized the process of migration in terms of the push-pull model. Economic or labour migrants would be (voluntarily) enticed by the opportunity to better their economic comfort, hence being pulled towards the realization of this ideal. Or, on the other hand, political and socio-economical upheavals and their consequences, along with fear of persecution, thrust the migrants out of their native context and push them to seek security and refuge (Rose 1981; Stein 1986; cf. Milburn and Watman 1981, in Rumbaut 1991:383).

Contrary to the push-pull model which essentially views displacement as a one-way journey, migration systems theory incorporates labour and economy as an underlying force that may provoke *return* migration. This approach situates human movement in a dynamic system within larger socio-economical and familial networks, where ties and links are articulated between different spaces (Boyd 1990).

In a context where receiving countries become sending countries and vice-versa, migration systems theory postulates that flow and counter-flow produced by contemporary migratory trends imply journ***eys***, not one single journey, as the focus of study. This approach seeks to account for human *circulation* rather than a movement to a final place of insertion (*ibid.*). This viewpoint disputes the traditional immigrant image as a one-time settler or situational victim of political and economical distress, as it relies primarily on meso- and micro-levelled dynamics of migration (*ibid.*). The paradigm has

shifted from seeing the migrant as a product of uncontrollable circumstances toward one where the individual is an active decision-maker.

Nonetheless, a few scientists such as Massey (1993) and Simmons (1989) criticize migration systems theory since, according to these authors, it mutes the impact of structural (i.e. political and socio-cultural) factors linked to displacement (cited by Dorai, Hily and Ma Mung 1998). While keeping in mind this pertinent criticism, I draw from the systems theory, as it sheds light on the cyclical pattern of migration and its impact on familial and social networks.

Faist presents a model that takes into account all these significant factors. He enunciates three levels of analysis in considering international migration (1997, in Dorai, Hily and Ma Mung 1998): 1) "macro-level" ("*macro-niveau*"), including economical, political and cultural structures of the country of departure and arrival. 2) The "meso-level" ("*meso-niveau*" or "*niveau relationnel*") includes links and relations embodied in a network system composed of migrants and non-migrants, their families and social ties. 3) The "micro-level" ("*micro-niveau*") pertains to the individual as a decision-making actor who determines a migratory circuit in accordance with his/her personal interests.

Unlike the systems approach and the push-pull theoretical framework where one facet of migration is examined while leaving out other important factors, I will draw from Faist's multi-levelled concept of migration. As I will demonstrate in this thesis, Ethiopian Jewish migration did not take place in a vacuum. It emerged out of a specific political, military, social and religious setting. Leaving out any of these components may neglect the impact of macro-level causes.

Migration Processes and The Family

In studying migratory processes of immigrant groups in Quebec, Meintel demonstrates how different trajectories entail specific impacts on the individual, the family and the ethnic group (1991:214). As for Hareven (1978), she relies on the life course approach to analyse how kinship systems are marked by social change. The author

analyzes two sets of interactions in examining this process: those between the individual and his/her family unit, and the family dynamic in regards to social transitions.

Historical events (that is "macro-level" factors) embedded in a broader social context are viewed as important external factors that re-configure the family unit. Migration punctuates and re-routes the conditions of family continuity across space. The individual's experience of geographic transition, along with family and group projects, imply "exposure to events by class and community background within each cohort", entailing differences between migrants within a specific cultural or ethnic group (Hareven 1978:102).

Numerous factors account for leaving one's homeland. At the outset, migratory processes may be organized in two general types. In some cases migration is a planned departure in junction to individual, familial and marital projects. These include family-chain economic and "classical" migrations (Meintel 1991:207). Contrary to this, exile is a "non-normative" event marked by disruption and discontinuity due to the unprepared nature of departure, and the charged political and/or military context that made flight necessary.

Refugee Migration

The theme of forced or "involuntary" migration (what is widely known as refugee movements) has received much attention in contemporary social scientific literature. Generally, two factors contribute to differentiating refugee movements from economic/labour or "voluntary" migration: motives for departure and experience of flight, which in the former case pertains to a larger sense of loss, trauma and displacement (Meintel 1991, Rumbaut 1991: 392).

In conceptualising this type of migration, I do not rely on the reductive voluntary/involuntary model of refugee movement. As Rumbaut put it, "The distinction is in fact much more problematic than it seems, since so-called migrations are not exactly as voluntary or planned as is claimed [...]" (1991). On the other hand, migration

literature rarely accounts for the planning, however minimal, involved in refugee movements. The data presented in Chapter Three explores the narratives of two Ethiopian Jewish refugees who do not present their migration as a last-minute decision.

A recurrent theme in refugee research is the impact of exile on mental health. Migration does not automatically entail psychological distress; however, certain types of migrations present a higher risk to mental health (Beiser 1991: 428). More than other migrants, refugees "must cope with a significant amount of life change ... [and] tend to experience more undesirable change, a greater degree of danger, and a lesser degree of control, particularly with respect to the event defining war-torn contexts of exit", hence regarded as a potentially higher source of stress (Rumbaut 1991: 383-84). Once in a secure environment, energy previously directed towards 'surviving' and 'making it' translate into worries for family left behind, the uncertainty of the future and the slow process of finding oneself in an alien environment. Given that experience of flight and settlement in refugee camps are often traumatic, Sorenson remarks on how extreme circumstances also induce creativity in some cases (1994).

Though refugees are generally depicted as a-historical beings moving across space (Malkki 1995), the migration stories presented in this research are embedded in notions of past experiences and their representations. In other words, the 'starting point' of their narratives precedes their exit from Ethiopia. Data for this study was gathered on the premise that there *was* life for the newcomers prior to migration. From this viewpoint, *living* in Africa was given just as much importance as *leaving* it. How individuals attribute meaning and continuity to major life transitions and events is part of "narrative production", to borrow Malkki's term. In this thesis I represent these productions and the larger setting in which they emerged. On point of fact, all the informants, Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian Jews, elaborated generally about their experiences as colored by visions of their *past* and a potential direction for their *future*.

Thinking About Memory

> « Sans doute est-ce précisément cet oubli qui provoque une certaine tristesse, un manque d'assurance, une inquiétude, un certain désir du passé venant ternir le présent. Et pourtant, ce désir est un élément important de la vitalité, ou peut-être la vitalité elle-même. »
>
> -Franz Kafka, *Préparatifs de Noce à la Campagne*, p.469.

As first year anthropology undergraduate student, I was taught that one should "study the past in order to understand the present and direct the future". This phrase evokes two aspects of chronology. First, the linearity of time whereby what *was*, what *is* and what *will be* constitute a sequence. Second, it highlights how these three dimensions dynamically interact with one another. Nowhere is the complexity of this web more striking than in narratives where the past is evoked in the present.

Although it is difficult to determine boundaries of temporal dimension and their interplay, few would disagree that the present is formed by memories of the past, and that memories of the past are formed by the present. Moreover, present and past are not simply interrelated; rather, "present factors tend to influence –some might want to say distort- our recollections of the past, ... [and] past factors tend to influence, or distort, our experiences of the present" (Connerton 1989:7). Hence, both leave their imprint on and mold one another.

Today, years after I was told that as anthropologists, we need to "study the past in order to understand the present and direct the future", I am in disagreement with the notion of the past as an absolute and fixed loci. Rather, the "past", I would argue, pertains only to what is *uncovered* or *retained* and *transmitted*, that is, judged significant enough to be remembered and communicated. The past, as Terdiman puts it, i.e. "-the practices, the habits, the dates and facts and places, the very furniture of our existences- is an *artifice*, and one susceptible to the most varied and sometimes the most culpable manipulations" (1993:31, emphasis mine). Memory, by the author's definition, is "the modality of our relation to the past" *(ibid.* :7).

Representing the past through what is remembered inevitably leads us to consider "the forgotten" (Lucas 1997:8-9). In his essay, "L'impossible oubli", Vattimo draws a parallel between Nietzsche's "historical malady" and Heidegger's "*l'oubli de l'être*". Weighed down by excessive "knowledge" and "historical consciousness", 19th century man suffers from a malaise that impedes the process of "being" and "creating history" (1998:77, my translations). The inevitable outcome is what Heidegger terms "*l'oubli de l'être*", or the annihilation of the individual. For these philosophers then, "active forgetfulness" (in Megill 1998:49) is a primary healthy aspect of our existence and relation to the past. The nature of remembering and thus of memory necessarily implies partial ignorance (Terdiman 1993:22).

However, as dichotomous as they might seem, forgetting and remembering are not opposing processes since it is in the interaction between the two that memory exists (Todorov 1995:14). What memory represents then is highly subjective. In reference to Fabian's work, Megill states that "...we do not remember the past. Rather, what we remember is the present: that is, we 'remember' that which, *from* the past, continues to live within our situation now (Fabian 1996, in 1998:51, emphasis his). The author demonstrates the selective nature of memory whereby we routinely classify information through culturally and socially defined processes. Forgetting then, helps to create order by differentiating between what is essential to keep, and what is not worthy of retention (Jeudy 1995:65).

Social Memory

Before elaborating on collective and social memory as manifested in notions of 'common origins', 'tradition' and a 'shared past', a distinction should be made between types of memories. Memories, according to Halbwachs (1950[1980]:50-55), cover two temporal areas. The first, whereby an individual recollects what was experienced with his/her own senses, pertains to actual lived events. Halbwachs and Bloch refer to this as "autobiographical memory" (1996:61). In these remembrances, space and place are occupied by the individual's presence in it and experience of it. On the other hand, we draw from memories that lie beyond what we have physically seen, done or lived, that

have been produced in a time or place outside our experience. We learn of these symbolically charged memories through other individuals. As part of our identity and attachment to a specific group, and contrary to autobiographical memories, temporal location of the second type usually stretches back in time, beyond our life span. The latter type of memory is variously termed "semantic", "historico-semantic" or "historic memory" by Bloch (1996) and "historical memory" by Halbwachs ([1950] 1980).

What is sometimes loosely referred to as collective memory in anthropological and sociological literature; i.e., acquired knowledge pertaining to a group's past (Grosser 1996:50), entails a semantic challenge that further complicates its study. Some authors suggest that the concept's use is limited, for it can represent a reified group history (Candau 1996 and Olazabal in Olazabal 1999:23). On the other hand, Seeman, an anthropologist who has worked with Ethiopian-Israelis, presents collective memory as "[…] large chunks of *partially shared symbols*, experiences, affective strategies, etc.", (2000, personal communication via e-mail, emphasis mine), an approach that allows for differential reception of core identity symbols transmitted through memory. This definition corresponds in fact to my understanding of 'social memory', rather than for 'collective memory', which can be perceived as a totalizing notion.

Halbwachs recognized early on that memories, even the most personal and individual recollections, emerge from interaction: "… "The starting points", or the elements of these personal remembrances that seem to be uniquely our own, can easily be found preserved in definite social milieus"(1980 [1950]:47). The framework that produces personal thoughts and memories is what the author calls "*les cadres sociaux de la mémoire*", a concept of memory as a social construct, transmitted through and created within a shared frame of reference.

Remembrances then, are not isolated or removed from the milieu that produces and defines them. Individual (*ibid.*) and collective memory (Namer 1993) both unfold within "*les cadres sociaux*" of remembrances, localized in what Nora identifies as "*lieux de mémoire*" :

> … Qui n'est pas forcément un territoire physique, […] [et] agit en tant que générateur, en actualisant les expériences antérieures, dans la reconnaissance de l'ordre du monde, à l'intérieur d'une supra-collectivité formée par de multiples réseaux, chacun doté de sa mémoire propre […] (Nora 1992, 1984 in Olazabal 1999:16).

This definition accounts for groups of individuals sharing symbolic and affective realms, informed by that which binds them together. Group identity essentially draws from the matrix of a shared past, where transmission of core references pertaining to former times and a common future creates continuity.

However problematic, memory occupies a central role in a country's national and political sphere. Nations consistently rely on group memory epitomized by a "common heritage" so as to organize people, and to create and maintain solidarity. Grosser mentions how "L'évocation et l'invocation du passé jouent un rôle considérable dans les relations entre groupes humains, surtout au niveau national […]"(1996:509-511). Thus, exactly what is evoked and invoked about the past on a national scale is of political concern, and much less of historical accuracy (*ibid.*). I show in the next chapter how a particular version of social memory is perpetuated in the country's national discourse to the detriment of all others, with repression of 'non-national' and unrecognized histories used as a tool of political control.

Historians of the Beta Israel have time and time again commented on the gap between "historical accuracy" and the representation of the group's past (historical and more recent) as depicted by the Chief Rabbinate and pro-Falasha political organizations. In this regard, Kaplan, one of the leading historians of the Beta Israel, wrote:

> Both my own experience and that of other writers had demonstrated that "pro-Ethiopian" organizations had little concern for the niceties of academic freedom when their most cherished myths were being challenged (1992:11).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This thesis draws from two types of sources: documentary and human. The written sources can be categorized into two sections. Firstly, academic works include literature on Ethiopian Jewish history, culture and society in Ethiopia, Israel and Canada.

The second type consists of "popular works[3]", to use Rosen's term (1985:58), written documents produced by pro-Falasha activists for the purpose of educating the public, as well as articles that appeared in widely diffused newspapers in North America and Israel. I have analyzed a number of the articles published in the North American press (Jewish and non-Jewish) as part of the documentary sources, in order to reconstruct the Ethiopian Jewish image that was presented to the North American public in the 1980's.

Archival research was done at the Canadian Jewish Congress where, besides newspaper articles, important documents concerning the Ethiopian Jewish immigrants' departure from socialist Ethiopia, entry into Canada and community life in Montreal are available. Mark Zarecki, ex-director of Hillel[4] at the height of the Ethiopian Jewish immigration to Canada and Israel, graciously provided documents relating to the development and implementation of the Canadian migration project. I have also used information about the Sudanese refugee camps found in the records of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugee.

In the summer of 1998, I spent two months working as an educator with Ethiopian-Israeli children in the city of Beer Sheva, northern Israel. Even though my aim was to get acquainted with the community without a research agenda, this trip ultimately allowed me to add an experiential quality to my readings concerning the group. Upon my return to Montreal, I got in touch with a social worker handling the 'Ethiopian cases' at the Jewish Family Services, and through her, with a member of the Ethiopian Jewish community.

There was no contact with any Ethiopian Jewish informants until the following winter (December 1999), at which point I started conducting interviews. Altogether, six Ethiopian Jewish informants living in Montreal participated in this research, as did three Jewish (non-Ethiopian) individuals who had key roles, along with many others, in

[3] Amongst others: "Secret Exodus: The Untold Story of How Operation Moses Saved the Lost Tribe of Ethiopian Jews" (Safran 1987), "Rescue the Ethiopian Jews! A Memoir, 1955-1995" (Berger 1996).
[4] Hillel is an international Jewish student's organization active in major cities, including Montreal.)

organizing the immigrant's journey to and settlement in the city. The interview process is analyzed more closely in the last few pages of this chapter.

Memory in This Research

Memories of the Ethiopian Jewish informants elicited in the interviews are autobiographical in nature, and concern only what they actually lived and experienced. As Halbwachs suggests, these remembrances are not isolated from the "*cadres sociaux*" that nourish individual memory. At the same time, I situate them in their macro-level setting, formed by determining events marking the informant's lives, such as migration. What was conveyed to me, however, were not memories as such, but a constructed narrative (Lambek 1996: 242-243) drawn from the speaker's memory range and communicated in a particular social environment. The implications of this are twofold.

Firstly, what I was told does not encompass all that is remembered about the temporal and spatial frame of inquiry (Bloch 1996:62). In other words, the participant's memories of their lived past are more extensive than what was brought to my attention. What was transmitted to me is a *configuration* of historical events through the narrator's personal experience, "transform[ing] the succession of events into one meaningful whole which is the correlate of the act of assembling the events together and which make the story followable" (Ricoeur 1984, originally 1983: 67). Ricoeur's "narrative identity" (1985, 1988 in Meintel 1999:2) posits the individual as an active attributor of meaning to his/her "episodic dimension" through what he names the "configuration act" or "productive imagination". In presenting the informant's narratives, I take this process into account.

This is not to imply that informants and their narrators do not convey what they really lived. On the contrary, it reinforces the idea of memory as a *re*-representation of events as opposed to an actual recording of the original incident. In the process of re-imagining and re-representing (Ricoeur's "configuration act"), history's episodic dimension is enmeshed with, and some would say distorted by (in reference to Megill 1998), the "productive imagination", which changes, adds or subtracts from the narrator's

story. I take into account the combination of historical and "produced" imagination insofar as these are intertwined in a symbolically charged narrative.

As Jeudy states in his article, "Palinodie", "Je n'ai aucun souci de rechercher une vérité cachée [...]" (1995:66). It is not my intention to distinguish between the different versions of narrative production and judge them as true or false. However, it is important to keep in mind that what was evoked in the context of interviews were not only historical facts, but remembrances of what was experienced autobiographically in a specific historical, social and political setting. In analyzing the informant's accounts, I rely on the concept of narration as a communicative tool navigating across boundaries of different times and places, where experience is presented in a sequential and meaningful production (Seremetakis 1993:6, Peressini 1991:233).

Moreover, what was brought to the fore during interviews was partially and indirectly in response to *who* was asking *which* questions and *how* (1991:231). I assume that '*who*', however minimally, forms and influences the direction of interviews. Taking this into account, we see that the context and social milieu of the encounters are non-neutral stimuli for the interviewer and interviewee (Bloch 1996:65).

For example, migration narratives presented in an administrative context with an official government employee will differ (sometimes completely) from what the informant might evoke in a setting that has no determination on her or his future. In this sense, narration is not only a story about the past, but "une histoire élaborée en vue de résultats à venir" (Delvecchio Good and al. & Good 1994, in Meintel 1999:14). This definition illustrates how narratives and their constructions can and are used as powerful tools for mobilizing certain resources. Fortunately, the interviews conducted for this research did not determine the future of the informants as in the preceding example. Nevertheless, this does not diminish the slight but significant implication of *who*, *what* and *how* as factors shaping the interview ambiance.

Anthropological approach to ethnicities and ethnic identity suggests that the research process may help to create that which it seeks to uncover (Meintel 1993:14). In order to focus on the global identity of the Ethiopian Jewish informant and not only on what is considered ethnic, I avoided questions such as "What was it like to be a Jew in Ethiopia?". Instead, I opted for Peressini's approach to gathering life histories, where he asks the informants to tell him about their life (1991:232). Moreover, I introduced a specific spatial and temporal setting to the informants, and asked in the beginning: "Starting from your *childhood*, tell me about your life in *Ethiopia*". It was my intention to let the informant lead, as much as possible, the direction of their narratives by not imposing restrictive thematic schemes such as 'ethnic identity', 'religion' or 'migration'. These topics, after all, were not experienced in isolated spheres but rather on a temporal continuum. Instead of ascribing identification *x* to the Ethiopian Jewish informants, it was my primary goal to let them express as freely as possible, within those parameters, whatever they wished to communicate about their lives.

GATHERING DATA

The Interview Process: Refusing

To facilitate contacts with Ethiopian Jewish informants, three individuals kindly provided names and telephone numbers for me, and worked hard to help me get in touch with as many informants as possible. While I was presenting myself to these three sources, my last name caught their attention. Two of them asked if I was Jewish, and I replied "no". Inevitably, being in a multi-ethnic context such as Montreal, the following question was "Where are you from?". I informed them that I was born in Ethiopia but raised in Montreal. "So you're Ethiopian?" they rightfully assumed. Well, not exactly: I clarified that I am of Armenian origin, born in Ethiopia.

Interestingly, most of the eleven Ethiopian Jews I contacted through these individuals remarked upon the fact that someone from Ethiopia is doing a paper on the Ethiopian Jewish community here. The first interview I conducted, that lasted for four hours, illustrates this quite accurately. The Ethiopian Jewish informant confided that she

did not know whether to look for a white girl or a black girl upon entering the coffee shop: "I thought you were Ethiopian", she said. Almost all of those who did not already know "where I came from" prior to our initial contact inquired about my background. In other words, almost everyone was aware of where I was born. For better or worse, the interviewer (*who*) was indirectly associated with the political, national and social context of the informant's birth country.

Of the eleven Ethiopian Jews contacted for this research, two had lived in Israel and had recently immigrated to Canada; the other nine, of whom four were from Gondar province and five from Addis Abeba, had not lived in Israel prior to settling in Canada. Only one individual did not identify himself as Ethiopian Jewish, and considered himself "Beta Israel Pentecostal". As was mentioned in the first part of this section, six Ethiopian Jewish informants out of the eleven contacted partook in this research. Relying on Moussa's methodology of "resistance to the interview process as a source of data" (1993:39), I believe this is a point worth discussing.

Asking an individual to share information about their personal life naturally implies the right to refuse without explanation. Generally, I was confronted with two reactions from those who chose not to participate: a categorical "no" or a reluctant "yes". It occurred twice where, the day before a scheduled interview, the informant cancelled explaining that they would "call you back to find a better time to meet", or "had to talk with their husbands then call you back". Neither ever did, though I left messages two weeks after their cancellation. I then understood that a reluctant "yes" was a polite and indirect way of saying "no".

One individual, who barely spoke English, misinterpreted what I said during our initial phone conversation, and instead understood that I would translate the driver's license book into Amharic for them. I informed them, much to their dismay, that I did not speak Amharic. Needless to say, he never called back. Even though this was a single case, it illustrates the difficulties of communication associated with language barriers.

Most of the eleven individuals were able to express themselves relatively well in English, but for others such as the person in this example, it was a demanding task.

Others who refused from the beginning presented two reasons: they had already participated in previous researches on Montreal's Ethiopian Jewish community, or their work/school or family schedule did not permit them to meet. Indeed, I later found out that university students from Israel had conducted interviews in Montreal with Ethiopian Jews on their religious customs as they were practiced in Ethiopia.

The time frame of my study covers Ethiopia's darkest political events of the twenty-first century. The informants' narratives reveal a variety of intense experiences related to political events. None of the Ethiopian Jewish informants mentioned personal experiences of torture and imprisonment, tactics commonly used by Ethiopia's revolutionary government. However, I recognize that it is not necessary for one to have been directly and physically a victim in order to be affected by past political issues in the context of a repressive and secretive socialist regime, as was Ethiopia during the exodus of its inhabitants. Though Ethiopian Jews in Canada are free to discuss such topics, it is quite understandable why many would refuse an invitation to talk about Ethiopia as they experienced it, especially when the individual probing is associated with a "*lieu de mémoire*" which has not produced the most positive of memories for some.

The Interview Process: Accepting

I started conducting interviews at the beginning of December 2000, and met with the last informant at the end of March 2001. In addition to official interviews with the three (non-Ethiopian) Jews involved in the Ethiopian Jewish migration project, numerous phone conversations and meetings (at the individual's home or in a public place) took place with people working at Jewish institutions (such as the Young Men's-Young Women's Hebrew Association (YM-YWHA), the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC), the Jewish Family Services (JFS), the Jewish Immigrant Aid Service (JIAS), the Montreal Holocaust Memorial Centre and the Hillel Jewish Student Centre). Though I do not consider these unrecorded calls official interviews, notes of what was said during such

conversations are part of the material presented in this research; they are paraphrased in the text and sources identified where pertinent.

In interviews with non-Ethiopian members of the Jewish community, I investigated their role in bringing Ethiopian Jews to Montreal or elsewhere (such as Israel), what they remember from this experience and the events around it, as well as their links with Ethiopian Jewish Canadians today. The three meetings, which lasted an average of two hours, were recorded and conducted at the informant's home, work place, or in a public setting.

Of the Ethiopian Jewish informants, four women and two men accepted to participate in the research. Age of departure from Ethiopia ranged from the pre-teenage years to the thirties, most often in the late teens. Two informants had passed through a Sudanese refugee camp while others had arrived in Canada from Ethiopia via a European country. None of the informants whom I interviewed had lived in Israel prior to coming to Canada, nor did they identify with Pentecostalism, which has gained converts among a few Ethiopian-Israelis. Half the interviews were recorded. For the others, notes were recorded either during or immediately after the meeting, in verbatim notes and/or tape recorded comments. These encounters ranged from one hour to four hours and a half in duration. Most lasted about two and a half to three hours and took place in a public setting, while the others were conducted in the informants' homes.

Gathering and interpreting data about people's personal lives means being aware of what Moussa terms the "politics of research" (1993). Following her example in her work on Ethiopian and Eritrean refugee women, I will not include any profiles or background information about the individuals who participated in this research. In such a tiny community where I discovered that *everyone* is related directly or indirectly to one another, anonymity is of central concern in presenting narratives. For this reason, I may alter the informants' personal characteristics, as well as those of their family members when this does not hinder comprehension.

At the end of our meeting, I asked all nine informants (Ethiopian Jewish and non-Ethiopian) to choose a pseudonym. The names Bezunesh (female), Teshome (male), Sarah (female), Rudy (female), Jeremy (male) and Almaz (female) appearing throughout the chapters refer to the Ethiopian Jewish participants. On two occasions, in discussing issues that I believe deserve as much anonymity as possible, I present quotes from one of the Ethiopian Jewish informants under the pseudonym "Shay".

As for the other three (non-Ethiopian) informants, two were willing to have their real names used. I decided, however, to present their narratives under the pseudonyms Dion (male), Suzan (female) and Niko (male). Names of community leaders and directors available in archival documents and newspaper articles are cited as found.

Though the six Ethiopian Jews interviewed have greatly differing experiences, some important similarities should be noted: (1) all were born in Amharic-speaking regions of Ethiopia in an economically stable environment (relative to Ethiopia) where they received some education; (2) they identify, albeit differently, to Judaism; (3) in coming to Canada, most left their immediate families behind; (4) the majority of the latter presently live in Israel; (5) all six informants arrived to Montreal in the 1980's as part of a special migration project conceived and implemented by Immigration Canada and the Jewish Immigrant Aid Services (JIAS).

Naturally, these similarities are affected by age, gender, migratory experience, region of origin in Ethiopia, social status in the country of birth, etc. Such heterogeneity can easily be reduced and clouded by generalizations if diversity is not taken into account. It is this range I seek to present throughout this thesis, while addressing events and experiences which have marked all the informant's lives.

CHAPTER 2: IN AFRICA

In order to contextualise significant events addressed in this thesis and referred to by the informants, the next few pages explore the Ethiopian socio-political and religious setting where the group known today as Ethiopian Jews emerged (Kaplan 1992, 1990; Quirin 1992, Shelemay 1986; Grunau 1995). Drawing from the approach of the leading modern scholars of Beta Israel history (Quirin 1992, Kaplan 1992), I shall present the cultural and social setting of the informants' African surrounding, taking into account Ethiopia's "narrative construction of history" (Sorenson 1993:43). Questions of Ethiopian nationalism in regard to minorities, particularly the Beta Israel, are equally explored.

Generally, literature on Ethiopian history pertains to the development of mainly one particular group, that is the ruling northern highlanders, or Abyssinians, as they are known historically (Tibebu 1995:xxiii, Gebregergis 1990:68, Lata 1999). However, contemporary studies focusing on minority groups in Ethiopia shed light on histories generally unrecognized in previous writings, and reveal the place of peripheral peoples in the larger society. Moreover, such works (Sorenson 1993, Kaplan 1992, Quirin 1992, Shelemay 1989) give account of the *dynamic* and *interactive* relation between minority groups and the society in which they are embedded.

As I explained in the previous chapter, group boundaries are neither impermeable nor static. Both Quirin and Kaplan illustrate this in their work, underlining how the Beta Israel's environment helped shape and define its boundaries, culture and religion (see also Shelemay 1988; Grunau 1995).

To varying degrees, Ethiopian Jewish informants evoke explicit remembrances about their lives in Ethiopia. Graciously, they have provided an opening where one could catch a glimpse of their experiences of growing up in rural and urban parts of the country. Deeply woven familial and social networks figure in every narrative, subtly exposing political and national aspects of life in Ethiopia. This section will portray the context where early remembrances of the informants were formed.

Ethiopia: The Country

Situated in the Horn of Africa, Ethiopia's topographic diversity is a reflection of the social, cultural, as well as religious, heterogeneity of its population. The military triumphs of Emperor Menelik II of Shoa province during the late 19th century (Donham 1986:3, Moussa 1993:73) consolidated power and rule over a decentralized territory, tracing the boundaries of modern Ethiopia (including present-day Eritrea until 1991). Within these parameters is found what Conti Rossini titled a *museo di popolo* (in Ullendorf 1960: 23), referring to the historical existence of at least seven main ethnic groupings, over seventy languages and four major religions[1] (Christianity, Islam, Judaism and animism) among a population of approximately 62 908 000 (État du monde 2002:166).

Though it is reductionist to emphasize only variety, representing Ethiopia as a "microcosm of Africa" (Tibebu 1995:xi) gives a valid reflection of its well-documented human diversity. However, historical and some contemporary accounts of Ethiopia are plagued by essentialized descriptions, which can (and do) obscure the intricacies of the country's social and national construction. Historically, Ethiopian society is conceived of different religious, national, linguistic and ethnic affiliations stretching across two poles: the dominant culture and those who surround it. This is exemplified by Selassie: "The central theme of Ethiopian history ... has been the maintenance of a culture core which has adapted itself to the exigencies of time and place, assimilating diverse peoples" (in Tibebu 1995: 13).

In his 1992 book "The Evolution of the Ethiopian Jews: A History of the Beta Israel (Falasha) to 1920", Quirin warns readers not to perceive Beta Israel history exclusively through an "assimilationist" perspective, epitomized by Selassie's abovementioned claim. According to Quirin, this approach is misleading in that it ignores the path of assimilated "people's separate history before, during and after its incorporation into a larger unit" (*ibid.*: xii). Quirin's caution does not dismiss the

---

[1] In terms of religious beliefs, there is a gray zone between the monotheistic religions and the more 'indigenous' and 'supernatural' belief systems, such as the *zar* cult practiced by Amhara Christians (Young 1975) and Beta Israel alike (Pankhurst 1995:8), also see Salamon 1999, Chapter 3.

existence of an Ethiopian cultural, linguistic and religious center. It does, however, underline that, as much as the majority influences the development of minority groups, a study of the dominant culture would be incomplete if "an internal analysis of assimilated people and the outlying regions" is not accounted for (*ibid.*: xi).

The history and culture of minority groups such as the Beta Israel existed alongside with Ethiopia's static national description of its people. Sorenson interprets the "Ethiopian narrative construction of history" as a "fixed transhistorical identity" (1997:44) "with its rhetorical emphasis on continuity, essence, and use of the remote past as validation of the present" (*ibid.*: 43). Keeping in mind Quirin's review, I will make use, albeit cautiously, of the expression "culture core". This term underscores the rigidity of Ethiopia's nationalist interpretation of identity. My use of "culture core" refers to the social, religious, linguistic, and institutional systems that have shaped dominant national traditions in Ethiopia. To denote this specific use of the concept, I place "culture core" in brackets whenever applied.

The Ethiopian "Culture Core"

The notion of an authentic culture
as an autonomous internally coherent
universe no longer seems tenable,
except perhaps as a "useful fiction"
or a revealing distortion.

- Rosaldo 1989:217 (quoted in Baumann 1996:13).

Historically dominant cultural traits in Ethiopia are drawn from what Tibebu labels "the Aksumite paradigm" in reference to Aksum, the first ancient kingdom in northern Ethiopia (100 B.C.E. to 900 C.E.) (Quirin 1992: 15). Christianity[2], the religion of all subsequent monarchs, was adopted during the same era (Kaplan 1988: 16).

[2] Viewed from a Semitic panorama, Ethiopia's symbolic link to Jerusalem and the Christian Orthodox church's penchant towards Hebraic elements have been recognized by numerous scholars such as Ullendorf (1968), Kaplan (1988, 1990) and Quirin (1992).

According to the Aksumite paradigm, epitomized by the Ge'ez[3] civilization, the beginning of Ethiopian history starts with the Solomonic dynasty (Tibebu 1995:12).

In the Ethiopian national myth, Aksum exemplifies the ancestral and legendary link to King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba (Sorenson 1993:40), from which all succeeding emperors traditionally descended (the last one dethroned in 1973). This "official state mythology", to use Clapham's term (1988:20), crystallized in 1270 with the rise of a new dynasty tracing its origins to the Aksumite kingdom, and reinforced the link between the royal lineage and an Israelite heritage (Kaplan 1990:23). The Aksumite complex of traits constitutes the focal point from which dominant Ethiopian national and historical symbols emerged.

The Dominant Group: Language, Politics and Power

The process of consolidating power by Christian rulers during Ethiopia's history resulted in the expansion of the Amharic language. As Donham points out, "Because it was mainly Amharic speaking people that directed and accomplished Abyssinian expansion from the thirteenth century, the category of Amhara naturally took on high prestige" (Donham 1986: 12). Chauvin shows that Amharic was a "*langue d'empire*" (1977:436, italics his) that has dominated the administrative and political sphere in Ethiopia since the 14th century, extended throughout the territories due to military conquest.

Amharic speakers have occupied the highland plateau in Ethiopia, in northern and central parts of the country (Young 1975:59). The group "Amhara" refers to the dominant circle in Ethiopia who speaks Amharic. "Amhara", however, is a socio-political rather than an ethnic term (Tibebu 1995: 45). Donham similarly emphasizes that "'Amhara' is *not* a traditional tribal identity that depends primarily upon descent" (1986:12, emphasis his). In agreement with these authors, Quirin states that neither "Amhara" nor "Abyssinian" designates a particular descent-based group; rather, historically people in

[3] Ge'ez, or ancient Ethiopian, is the liturgical language of Ethiopia's Christian church. Religious Beta Israel texts were also written in Ge'ez.

Ethiopia became Amhara, and thereby obtain land-use rights in the ambilineal descent system (1992:28). Historically, adopting the ruling elite's religion (Christianity) and language (Amharic), subsequently with military prowess (Donham 1986: 7), became a means of social mobility for those outside of the dominant Amhara sphere (Sorenson 1993:69). In other words, Amhara identity or social status is not defined by a fixed nor essentially ethnic category (Clapham 1988:24).

The Ethiopian "culture core", that is the Christian Amhara elite[4], is the governing (culturally, religiously and linguistically[5]) polity composed of individuals from diverse backgrounds, forming the "core element of a multi-ethnic state" (Kaplan: 22). Though Christian Amharas[6] account for less than forty percent (40%) of the population (Shelemay 1991:111), they formed the political nexus of the country and its dominant national and religious symbols. Peripheral groups who did not affiliate with these referents were regarded as a direct threat to Ethiopia's official national identity, or at least as inferiors (Sorenson 1993:2). As Bulcha states:

> Much of the myth about Ethiopia is not about the 42 million people who live within its boundaries but about a tiny ruling class and the nation (Amhara-Tigre) from which this class originates (1988:33).

Defining 'Other' in Ethiopia

According to Tibebu (1995:17), the two main protagonists of the Ge'ez civilization are the Amharas on one hand, and the Oromo and Muslim on the other, whereas Sorenson speaks of Eritrean and Oromo nationalism as the antithesis to Amhara national identity (1993:5). Though the Oromo and the Eritreans were the largest minorities (Eritrea has been officially independent since 1993), all peripheral groups were considered in relation to the Amharas, from which non-dominant minorities under their authority were perceived. While Ethiopian nationalist history represents the dominant

---

[4] Though the complex social system within the dominant category is not addressed here, social hierarchy permeated Ethiopia's Amhara Christian sphere as well. Historically, however, even an "uncivilized" Amhara was construed as superior to any non-Christian "Other" (Tibebu 1995:17).

[5] According to Donham, speakers of Semitic languages (1988:42), mainly Amharic and Tigrinya (Ullendorff 1960:116)

[6] There are, to a lesser extent, the Tigrayans of the highland: both group constitute the broadest historical divisions within the "culture core" (Hailu, Wolde-Georgis and Vans Arsdale 1994:27), combined together they are historical Abyssinians.

cultural and religious group of the society, others in Ethiopia and Eritrea did not identify religiously, culturally, linguistically or physically with the Amharas (1995:28).

Outside the dominant nucleus, what defines a group as 'Other' is comprised of various elements. For example, in describing Ethiopia's lowland Muslims and their exclusion from the country's political life, Clapham emphasizes factors such as "lifestyle [...] and simple physical distance" (1988:25), as well as religion. For Lipsky, the key determinants are manifold:

> The place of a particular ethnic group in the national social, economic, and political structure is based upon a *complex set of variables*, including physical appearance, occupation, status when conquered, method of incorporation into the Empire, religion, and current government policy (1962 : 67, emphasis mine).

Many authors explore phenotypical differences between Amhara/Tigrayans of the highland plateau and other populations in Ethiopia (Lipsky 1962: 39, Donham 1986:12). The highlander's "... Straight noses, thin lips, attenuated body structure, and olive skin" (Rosenfeld 1986: xii quoted in Tibebu 1993 :xx) contrasted with the physical appearance of groups such as the pejoratively termed 'Shankilla', historically associated with 'slaves' and 'slavery' (*ibid.*) in southern Ethiopia. Abyssinians' attitudes towards southerners regarded them as conquered people, inferiors (Lipsky 1962:36,39) and racially different. However, I will argue in the next section that phenotype in itself is but one marker of several associated with status and social position (Tareke in Tibebu 1993:45).

Boundaries were also marked by economic roles. According to Tibebu, the practice of despised economic tasks[7] (such as hunting, pottery-making, tanning, smithing, weaving and fishing) transcended religion, social status and ethnic background or social barriers (1993:97). The stigma attached to occupational minorities is negatively associated with sorcery and the evil eye or *buda* (Tibebu 69-70). Such distinctions are also applied within a particular social group, including the Amhara Christians[8].

[7] Contrary to Tibebu, most authors refer to these groups as "castes" or "semi-castes" (Kaplan, Quirin, Moussa).

[8] Interestingly enough, Tibebu mentions the Christian Gojjams also categorized as *budas*, but who do not practice the despised occupations mentioned above.

Landlessness is often associated with low status: "We frequently find that despised classes are forbidden to own land, or have anything to do with agricultural activities, or with cattle." (Hallpike 1968, cited in Tibebu 1993:67). Thus, groups such as the Fuga among the Gurage, the *watta* among the Oromo and the Wayto within the Muslims (Quirin and Tibebu) were compelled to manufacture and produce the agricultural and military tools and other objects used by the larger society. Regardless of their economic contribution, such occupational minorities are stigmatized as carriers of supernatural powers that reinforced their peripheral and despised status (Wagaw 1993:20).

THE BETA ISRAEL: Occupational "Caste" and Religious Group

Accordinig to Lipsky (1962), the Ethiopian population in 1960 was 35% Moslem, 35 % Ethiopian Orthodox, 25% animist and 5 % 'other'; with the Beta Israel numbering to about 25,000. Though population statistics in Ethiopia are a source of much debate (this was especially problematic during Beta Israel migration (Grunau 1995:39), it is clear that the group was, demographically speaking, a weak minority in a sea of different faiths and cultures[9]. However, certain particularities set the Beta Israel apart from other minorities.

In contrast to some minority groups in Ethiopia, phenotype and physical appearance did not constitute a marker of difference for the Beta Israel (Kaplan 1993:111, Salamon 1999:23; see also Pankhurst 1995). Lipsky mentions that though "physically indistinguishable from Amharas", the Beta Israel are "recognized and discriminated against in the areas where they live" (1962:67). He attributes the group's liminal position to their specialization in blacksmithing and ironworking, the two most despised occupations in Ethiopian society, according to the author.

---

[9] Bezunesh, an Ethiopian Jewish informant pointed out: "Getting back to the Ethiopian Jews, that I was aware of, that in any way they were not a topic of, they were really nothing, they were just a little group of many little groups. Ethiopia has like 80 languages spoken so it's not like… (silence)".

Since being conquered between the 14th and 17th century (Quirin 1992:32), the Beta Israel's land-use rights were revoked. This had the effect of limiting the economic activities of the group. Many turned to the despised occupations referred above (Kaplan 1993:157). Some of those interviewed for this research were exceptions, since their families owned land. Such cases, apparently unrepresentative of the group in general, are mentioned only briefly in the literature.

For example, Salamon[10] emphasizes that some "Jews *did* own land" in the Tigre and Wolqait region of Ethiopia (1999:32, italics hers). Based on her interviews with Ethiopian Jews in Israel, she explores situations where Beta Israel landowners experienced problems with their Christian neighbors. The author, however, does not allude to Beta Israel who owned land, and who did not experience "Christian attempts to strip them of these plots" (*ibid.*: 33).

Contrary to most Beta Israel who emigrated to Israel, three out of six informants were born and raised on land owned by their families in Gondar province. When Almaz mentioned that her father, a farmer and weaver, owned land, I naively asked how that was possible, since most of the literature about Beta Israel land-use rights states otherwise. To this she replied:

> That's not true, that's really not true [...]. We had- because my great great grandfather, we had big big, like, you know the whole section. [...] But, you see some people they say you are not allowed to have land, I mean the Jewish people. It's not true. [...] so many of my brothers are very strong, my cousins, my uncle and my dad. You know, they fought for their land. [...]I heard somewhere that Ethiopian Jew was not allowed to have land. [...]I think it was in The Gazette or, I don't know. I wanted to call them and say it is not true, but then who am I going to tell? I said (she starts laughing). It's hard. But generally people would say you are not allowed to have land- it's not true.

When I asked how her father became a land-owner while most Beta Israel were tenants, she went on to say that:

> Because in the beginning they did not inherit or did not declare their own land, you see? [...] My mom's brother fought for the independence of Ethiopia during the Italian colonization. So after that, they had land. If you were a warrior or a soldier, I don't know what you call it at that time, anyways, even that time, they had enough, you know? You fight for your country, you get a piece.

---

[10] Interestingly, Salamon applies the term "Jew" interchangeably with "Beta Israel" throughout her book to speak of the Beta Israel in Ethiopia, thus presenting the informant's narratives through a "Jew" versus "Christian" dichotomy. This is contrast to the work of many authors (Kaplan 1992, Quirin 1992, Weil 1995, Pankhurst 1995, Abbink 1985).

Some of the informants in Salamon's research support this data, mentioning that Beta Israel who assisted the Ethiopian government during the Italian occupation were rewarded by land (*ibid.*: 130 Chapter 2, note 12).

Generally, however, the Beta Israel in Ethiopia were known as weavers, blacksmiths, ironworkers and pottery-makers (Kaplan 1992:68). All of the Ethiopian Jewish informants who lived outside of Addis Abeba mentioned weaving, pottery-making and smithing as part of their parent's source of income, along with other occupations such as farming and embroidery.

Contrary to Lipsky's account, which places economic activities as a primary factor in Beta Israel marginality, Grunau (1995:23) argues that marginality was also voluntary and sustained by religious practices. Thus, the foundation of Beta Israel group boundaries were historically shaped at the intersection of two key factors, besides engagement in despised crafts: a political/military past reducing them to the position of a conquered people, and a developing religious specificity. Economic specialization (imposed from the outside) reinforced boundaries determined by the Beta Israel's own elaborate purity laws in regard to interaction with non-members, such that theirs was "more of a religious than occupational segregation" (Tibebu 1993:69).

Beta Israel attitudes toward outsiders exacerbated suspicion towards them: "… [They] practiced their own occupational minority-like segregation against all those who were not one of them" (Quirin 1977, quoted in Tibebu 1993:69). Religious precepts regulated internal and external interactions, carefully distinguishing between pure and impure[11] exchange, for example, separation of the women during the menses and childbirth; in mortuary rituals; and when in contact with non-Beta Israel. (See Leslau 1957 : 72-73, 91-92, and Salamon 1998, Chapter 5 and 10). From this perspective, the Beta Israel actively shaped and maintained group boundaries, excluding others with *atinkugn* "touch-me-not" mentality (Wagaw 1993:13, Quirin 1992:160).

---

[11] In describing relations between Beta Israel and those converted to Christianity in the 19th century, Kaplan (1992:135) contends that the pure/impure determinant was not essentially religious but pertained equally to ethnic identification.

The Beta Israel were not the only minority to practice despised occupations associated with sorcery and the evil eye. Moreover, other religious minorities were systematically discriminated against by the dominant Orthodox Christians. Yet, the repercussions of occupying a despised category in the Ethiopian social and religious context were amplified for the Beta Israel. Wagaw suggests that "perhaps because the Beta Israel had lived in Ethiopia longer, were fewer in number, and were more strict in their observances of exclusion, the intensity of suspicion and mistrust that led to animosity and persecution was stronger" (1993:13).

As we have seen, the Beta Israel's 'Otherness' is not based solely on occupation or religion but on both factors together; as well as their own exclusion of 'others' (Quirin 1992). While Orthodox Christians in Ethiopia considered themselves the "chosen people" (Lipsky 1962:106), the Beta Israel believed in their religious superiority over the dominant group (Quirin 1992:31, Grunau 1995), and were a disliked and feared 'Other' (Tibebu 1993:13).

Group Image

When critical encounters between European Jews and the Beta Israel took place in the 19th century to counter protestant missionary activity, the latter were a "despised semi-caste group" (Kaplan 1992:154), viewed as "morally repugnant and feared as *buda*" (Quirin 1992: 31). Terms associated with the group, such as *buda*, *taib* and *kayla* (defined below) denoted supernatural powers that made them potential threats to non-members.

Possessing *buda*, however, was not exclusive to the Beta Israel (Tibebu 1993:69,Wagaw 1993:21). According to Shelemay "Any Ethiopian who performs manual crafts, particularly a metalworker, is thought to be *buda*, a carrier of the evil eye" (1991:32). Still, both Kaplan (1992:109) and Quirin (1992:5) acknowledge that the association with *buda* was stronger for the Beta Israel than for other minorities.

Buda entails the power to cause harm, such that possessors were believed to have the ability to transform themselves into hyenas at night, sucking the blood of their

victims. The literal meaning of *kayla* is unknown (Quirin 1992:13). It is a word of Agaw origin (an indigenous Ethiopian language) synonymous with the group (Salamon 1999:22). For the Beta Israel living in the Gondar area, *kayla* was not a pejorative term (Quirin 1992:13). However, outside of that region, it is considered derogatory (*ibid.*). Though connoting wisdom and talent, *taiba* carried implications of either good or evil supernatural powers directed towards those outside the group (Wagaw 1993:20).

Repercussions of *buda* accusations intensified during the 19th century, when caste-formation process of the Beta Israel almost entirely concretized. Suspicion and mistrust were heightened, along with discrimination and persecution. In an environment where the existence of influential metaphysical beings are not in contradiction to Christianity, Islam or Judaism, those supposedly endowed with the potential to harm beauty, health and wealth were feared.

Though Beta Israel identity was clearly defined, observances of religious laws were not uniform in the dispersed communities of northern Ethiopia. In speaking of the similarities and differences between the Beta Israel and their Christian neighbors, Pankhurst warns that :

> It would be a mistake to concentrate only on the purely religious side of Christian/Béta Esra'él life, for the religious represented only a partial, and perhaps not the most important, segment of their total lives (1995:1).

I should mention that none of the informants' narratives explore purity laws or the *atinkugn* ("touch-me-not") mentality. Though purity rituals were important to the group's "*idéal communautaire*", they were fully respected only by Beta Israel monks (Kaplan 1990:142).

Yet, some authors over-emphasize the role of religious tenets in the lives of the Beta Israel. Corinaldi, for example, holds that "these norms of purity were extremely severe, and they led, even in recent times to the virtual isolation of the Falasha" (1998:71). My own informants, as does Kaplan's work, lead me to believe that purity laws were not always applied as strictly as some authors suggest. Only one informant, Teshome, obliquely mentioned purity laws, this in reference to food consumption while

hosting non-Beta Israel guests. Only one Ethiopian Jew, Sarah, spoke of her religion in Ethiopia in terms of practice and education. She did so after I asked a direct question if there were differences between the Judaism that her son is learning here and the religious education she received in Ethiopia by her grandmother[12].

Leniency of religious observances in regard to *atinkugn* allowed for certain families to live in predominantly Christian areas and in proximity to more urbanized zones such as Gondar city and Addis Abeba. Three of the informants had roots in rural areas near the city where the Beta Israel were few in numbers.

> Teshome: (speaking of his mother's family) They lived in a Christian area. They are in one area but they are surrounded by Christians. It's like us, like we were surrounded by Christians, it was the city. [...] The whole area was Christian. We are in the middle. But we never had ehh, even though we - I know we... [...] In life, you will always have someone jealous of you and, you know they always want to get rid of you in that area. But, as long as you are strong [...].

All of the informants from these areas spoke of close personal contacts with Christian neighbors and friends. As Ashkenazi expounds, "Even in Ethiopia, where the Beta Israel's status was very low, there were ongoing and apparently satisfying social relations with their non-Jewish neighbors" (376:1988). Almaz, who was raised five km from Gondar city, spoke the most about these relations:

> I was so open, because I had so many good friends, Christian friends, students [...]. [If anyone commented] they would say 'What are you talking? She is my friend!' Because we sleep together, you know, when we have, like, have a party in the house, I would go there and sleep. [...] And sometimes when we were going to the backyard, we had sugar cane... We had fun! (she starts to laugh). Especially at the New Year time: New Year is in September, so that time, we had so much fun.

According to Almaz, her religious affiliation was not a secret in school.

> Q- Did they teach religion [in school]?
>
> A-No, no religion in the public school.
>
> Q- So was it mixed or-
>
> A- Totally mixed! [...] Everybody in the school knows that I'm a Jew. So even if they hate me, you know if I'm a Jew, you know there are some people, there are some students that they don't like [Jews]. But if they say it in front of me then I would say it to them right away. There were that said 'Ah you are a Jew, you are so smart, that's why you know, you get high marks, you get this

[12] To the question Sarah replied: "No no! It's the same thing, if anything, the religion we had there is more real because here, there is only the Shabat that they really celebrate, but there, every Shabat the family would go to my grandma's house, she was a very religious woman."

> and ...'. I said "I have nothing special, my mind is like you". I said 'Do you see any difference, the feature? I'm the same like you'.

Though four out of six tell of name-calling they experienced, none of their narratives reflected any identification to a minority based on occupation. In predominantly Christian areas, once their ethno-religious background was exposed, they were labeled as *kaylas* and *budas* and associated with flesh eaters, sorcerers, and holders of evil supernatural powers. Sarah mentioned how, when people found out about her religious background, she was stigmatized, "not even considered human". Almaz first denied that she had experienced name-calling, but then added:

> [Some] would say 'Ah, that person', referring to me, 'that's *kayla*! You see that student, she is *kayla*!' (she starts to laugh). If they said it to me I say 'Ok, I'm *kayla*, so what! What did I do? You say I eat you? No! I don't eat the human meat!'

According to her, the "real trouble" came after she graduated high school, while she was participating in a literacy program for the village kids in remote areas of Gondar province.

> There I had the, oooff!- the worst three Christian students.[...] It was very hard there because, one of, you see, the problem is, when you are a Jew, and you don't want to be known as a Jew, that's when the, those people make trouble. You know why I say? This girl, she was a Jew, and her parents were converted for, you know, economic reason. They got the money from [...] [the] Protestants. They came before and converted too many Jews to Christianity. She came there just for one night [to] our teaching camp. So she came and she told them, she said [that I was] '*kayla*'. And the next morning they were burning plastic, and then when I walked into the house I said 'What is this?!" They said 'Oh, there is somebody here with *kayla*'. WHAT?? (laughing). So what? I'm *kayla* I'm a Jew so what? I tell them. Who told you this one, so what?'. She left the next morning to the next camp. [...] She told. I wanted to kill her. But I don't forget, now she's in Jerusalem, she's in Israel (laughing)! She's in Israel! The whole family left from the Sudan. You see that's what I'm saying. For their advantage [...], they destroy other lives.

As for Muslim students working at her literacy camp, Almaz explains:

> Because the Jewish and the Muslim are not the same. The Jewish are more, ehh, hated by the Christian, I don't know why. Because the Muslim I think, they are more population, [there are more] Muslim than Jews? Jews are very small if you compare with Muslim. I think that's why. But in the city where we lived, we didn't have any problems with the population, the Christian population in [names town of origin]. They have all the people from the different groups. It is very rare that you will be, [...] hated by someone else, by Christians.

Sarah mentioned how people who were aware of her Beta Israel identity called her "things" like "hyena, *kayla*, *buda*, donkey". Though this does not seem to have tarnished the image she kept of her town of origin, she qualifies these experiences as "very bad".

Without exception, all six informants alluded to secrecy about their ethno-religious identity as means of protection for themselves and/or their family. The consequences of revealing Beta Israel identity were more than for passing as a Christian, as all of the informants did at some point. In some cases, their parents had not revealed their background so as to shelter them from potential discrimination. Two informants believed they were Christian like all their schoolmates, and only learned otherwise after their arrival in Canada. When I inquired about her religious education, Rudy recounted:

> Growing up I didn't know we were Jewish, I only found out we were Jewish when we came here. [...] My family sort of [...] passed [...] as Christians, [...] but at the same time we weren't active [...]. I remember asking my mom questions 'Well, how come we can't do this?' [in regards to Christian practices] and she said like 'Don't ask questions!' [...] Myself and my younger brother were like sort of baptized because my family had to do it for the neighbors, [...] they had to fit with the neighbors and in order to do that they had to be Christian, or live a Christian lifestyle of some sort [...].

Shay was aware that he was not like everyone else and thought he was "more kind of nothing, but predominantly Christian", not knowing that all his paternal family were Beta Israel. He reluctantly informed me about the confusion he experienced about his religious identity and his relation to Christianity only a few minutes into the interview:

> Q- Did they [people at school] know that you weren't Catholic or Christian?
>
> A- No, but I used to tell people that I wasn't then they would be shocked so I had to change my mind [...] it was ok to be Catholic, [...] it's like, not being Christian was the big deal.
>
> Q- So you had to hide it, basically, keep it very low key.
>
> A- Yeah, but I didn't know much about Judaism anyway, so.
>
> Q- How was it when your friends found out that you weren't Christian ?
>
> A- Like I never thought, I guess, you know if they found out then or ... [...] It wasn't like I revealed it or ...
>
> Q- Not even to close friends?
>
> A- Yeah, like to me it wasn't important.
>
> Q- Everyone was Ethiopian like you.
>
> A- Yeah like there wasn't much of a difference, actually we thought you know, we thought we were Christian.
>
> Q- Until, so when you were at school you thought you were Christian.
>
> A- Like we knew we weren't, but it kind of, [...] I guess we were confused, more or less.

The few Christian holidays he celebrated were the only religious education transmitted by the family, according to Shay, though his mother was not a religious woman and would often "get bored" with church ceremonies. Shay's religious identity was not clearly defined before he came to Canada.

Sarah explains that any non-Christian had to "keep religion a secret" in the town where she was raised.

> Where we lived, you don't tell people your religion. Nobody know I was Falasha, except for the family's close neighbors, but apart from that, religion was a secret. [...] This was the cases for everybody who wasn't Christian, if you're Muslim or Falasha, it's always the same thing. I have my religion inside, the most important place, not outside (noted by verbatim).

The Beta Israel: Constructing a Religious Identity

As I argued above, historically, Beta Israel religious identity developed in connection to that of the Amhara Christians. Starting from the late 19th century, slowly and progressively, a crucial shift occurred: the Beta Israel, historically isolated from other Jewish communities (Grunau 1995:29), began to redefine their religious identity in relation to a different group, that is Diaspora Jews.

In her thesis, Grunau explores how "Diaspora World Jewry" forms the modern Ethiopian Jewish identity. She argues that "Contrary to the notion of a Diaspora community, an exiled people who preserve and evolve a group identity, the Ethiopian Jews are a *product of the Jewish Diaspora itself*" (1995:2 emphasis added).

The past century witnessed an eventful change, whereby the group's cultural and religious center shifted from Ethiopia to Israel, and their identity from that of Falasha/Beta Israel to Ethiopian Jews (Weil 1995: 25-40). This transfer is linked to their official recognition by the Jewish religious institution of Israel, and allowed the Beta Israel to participate as members of the Diaspora Jewish community. Bridging the historical, cultural and religious gap between other Jews and the Beta Israel by raising awareness of the group's existence was primarily the mission of Joseph Halevy and his disciple, the driven Polish-French Jewish scholar, Jacques Faitlovitch (1881-1955).

According to Shelemay, "The subsequent century [after Halevy's arrival in 1860] of increasingly close contact greatly altered the Beta Israel's self-perception" (1991:146).

Shelemay sees Faitlovitch's efforts as twofold: "A near sacred mission, charged with the paradoxical aim of both rescuing these people and transforming their tradition" (1991: 36). Indeed, his arrival marked the process of realigning Beta Israel Judaism with Rabbinical and Talmudic traditions. Faitlovitch created their image as a pre-Talmudic lost tribe, an historical interpretation still popular today (Shabtay 1999:4). In parallel to reforming Beta Israel religion, Faitlovitch undertook the task of sensitising Jews around the globe about the plight of the Beta Israel, collecting money, setting up schools and assisting some of the communities in Ethiopia.

Adopted over the course of the next few decades, the religious and cultural reforms inspired by Faitlovitch's work were not accepted uniformly throughout local Beta Israel communities. These changes were further encouraged and perpetuated by some of Faitlovitch's Ethiopian students, who were sent abroad to study. Upon return, "indigenous change agents", to borrow Abbink's (1985) term, pursued Faitlovitch's vocation of reforming Beta Israel Judaism in order to facilitate their integration into the Jewish mainstream (*ibid.*).

Hence, long before their migration, pressures impacting religion, practice and identity among the Beta Israel were introduced by "non-indigenous" *and* "indigenous" change agents. As Abbink demonstrates, not all segments of the group were exposed and influenced equally. (Regarding religious differences among Beta Israel in Ethiopia, see Messing 1999:61-69.) The Beta Israel of the Tigray region were religiously more traditional and benefited to a much lesser extent from efforts of Jewish groups than those in Gondar (Corinaldi 1998:181), who were exposed much longer to "pan-Jewish" references (Shelemay 1977:21 in 1985:25). By the time of their emigration to Israel, this division accentuated long-standing regional and linguistic differences between the two groups. Moreover, as Corinaldi shows, the students educated in Faitlovitch's program were "a tiny group of urbanized educated Beta Israel [who] came to be seen as the

community's representatives, whilst in rural Ethiopia the priests and elders continued to dominate village life and the decentralized pattern of communal organization persisted" (1998:177).

However intermittent these encounters and their influences may have been, the process of refusing, accepting and applying some of the reforms brought about by "culture brokers" starting at the beginning of the century (Messing 1982:54) shows that the Beta Israel were less passive than what is generally suggested in the literature. Rather, through their resistance or acceptance of foreign intervention, the Beta Israel were active constructors of their own history.

From the viewpoint of contemporary Judaism, Beta Israel religious ideology, practices and beliefs were divided into two distinct categories. The first set includes traits that were perceived as a confirmation of the group's affiliation to Judaism, such as Mosaic and pre-Rabbinical practice and ideology[13]. The second includes behaviors that were irreconcilably distant from contemporary Judaism, and were interpreted as potential obstacles to their full participation in the global Jewish community. The ideology of the latter category is connected with beliefs in magical spirits and divination, in regard to traditional healing and religious practices (Abbink 1985).

Though the first set of traits encouraged, among other factors, the construction of the Beta Israel as devotees of an ancient Jewish religion 'stuck in time', Mosaic and pre-Rabbinical practices testified to the authenticity of significant historical documents showing links between Jews and the Beta Israel. These "written productions", pertaining to contacts between the group in Ethiopia and Jews from abroad, particularly the Radbaz's[14] responsum, "are the most important of any Jewish documents ever written about the Jews of Ethiopia and are a vital element in the construction of their identity as a part of the Jewish people" (Kaplan 1995:18). They were pivotal for the halakhic (i.e.

[13] This tendancy is also manifested in scholarly writings. Kaplan writes: "The virtual obsession with demonstrating the similarities and alleged historical links between the Beta Israel beliefs and rituals and those of ancient Jewish groups, important in its times appears to have run its course" (19: 1995).
[14] Radbaz (1479-1573): chief Rabbi of Egypt.

according to Jewish law) recognition of a shared *point of origin* and *continuity* defined by the Sephardi Chief Rabbi Ovadia Yosef in 1973 and the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi Shlomo Goren in 1975 (Grunau 1995:17).

On the other hand, culture brokers and change agents discouraged 'indigenous' and 'traditional' practices perceived as 'primitive'. As Grunau points out, "in order to gain acceptance among World Jewry and with the encouragement of Jewish organizations, the Beta Israel eliminated certain practices not held in common with the Jewish mainstream" (Shelemay 1986, in 1995:29). Though some Beta Israel traditions that were practiced in the past and/or still today are discussed by scholars, for example purity laws in regards to women's seclusion during the menses (see amongst others: Leslau 1957: 91, Corinaldi 1995, Salamon 1999) others remain significantly less explored.

Zar possession cults (Young 1975, Kaplan 1990:58, Shelemay 1991:30-31, Nudelman 1999), infibulation (Moussa 1993, Grunau 1995), body tattoos (Seeman 1999:29), beliefs in amulets and supernatural powers (Anteby 1999), all sensitive issues in Ethiopia, have received little attention from researchers. None of these are mentioned, for example, in Corinaldi's chapter on Beta Israel customs in Ethiopia (*Jewish Identity: The Case of Ethiopian Jewry*,1998, Chapter 4: The Customs of the Beta Israel), supporting Kaplan's article titled "History, *Halakha* and Identity: The Beta Israel and World Jewry". The scholar analyzes the work of three authors who wrote about Ethiopian Jews, including Corinaldi's *Ethiopian Jewry: Identity and Tradition* (1988). Kaplan argues that "whatever contribution these books make to our knowledge of Ethiopian Jewry, they are better understood as important primary sources for the understanding of a portion of the absorbing [Israeli] population", stating that "that none of these books [including Corinaldi, 1988] is about the Beta Israel *per se*" (1995:13-14).

In fieldwork for her doctoral thesis done in a Beta Israel village during the 1970's, Shelemay's inquiries about nightly drumming at *zar* rituals were met with secretive, superficial explanations such as "The children are just playing outside" (1991:30-31).

Secrecy about such practices characterized other Ethiopians as well (*ibid.*: 1990:134). According to the author, expert amulet writers for protection against evil spirits or *debteras* (who were also known as scribes) had largely disappeared from Beta Israel communities by the 1970's. However, Anteby speaks of amulet-writing as an important practice for healing amongst some Ethiopian-Israelis today (1999: 201-208; see also Nudelman 1995).

Contacts leading to cultural and religious exchanges between the Beta Israel and Diaspora Jews in the 20th century were far from egalitarian. Though the encounter occurred within a 'common' religious realm, in some works, this affinity seems to overshadow the impact of a Western culture meeting the Ethiopian rural world. In "Songs of Longing", Shelemay declares:

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

Some authors would argue that historically, Beta Israel Judaism, which developed in isolation from other Jewish circles, was not national in character (Leslau in Grunau 1995:21). Nevertheless, contacts between the two groups led to a profound shift in Beta Israel identity and provided the framework of Ethiopian Jewish migration. Though their liturgy focused on Jerusalem before the contacts that marked the twentieth century, this religious "*lieu de mémoire*" became politically charged with nationalist connotation at a time when living conditions in Ethiopia were in constant deterioration (Kaplan 1996). To this, Abbink (1985:22) remarks:

> It is not to be denied that the Beta Israel had a deep and remarkable, religiously expressed attachment to the 'Land of the Fathers' (invariably called 'Yerusalem' in their own tradition), but the actual movement for return to the land which began only in the 1960's and 1970's, was precipitated by social and economic problems, inter-ethnic tensions (and in the recent years, civil war, drought and famine).

As Corinaldi states, "in modern terms, this [whereby "the Torah and Israel are one"] means that the term "Jew" involves both a religious and a national connotation: inseparable and indivisible" (1998:27). The "land of milk and honey" became more than

an ideological and religious site: with the Rabbinate's recognition, as well as changes in the international political context, Israel became accessible not only in prayers but physically as well.

Aliyah, or immigration to Israel, was legalized for the Beta Israel in 1975. This newly acquired religious right and the involvement of international Jewish organizations were perceived as a threat by Ethiopia's revolutionary government, which sought Ethiopian national unity. The following chapter will explore how the socialist revolution in Ethiopia that began in the 1970's produced one of the largest refugee populations in Africa. By the same token, it laid the groundwork for Beta Israel *aliyah* and departure from Ethiopia.

CHAPTER 3: THE BETA ISRAEL AND THEIR MIGRATION: THE AFRICAN CONTEXT

> "But in certain areas, there will be in certain periods, practices and meanings which are not reached for. There will be areas of practice and meaning which, almost by definition from its own limited character, or in its profound deformation, the dominant culture is unable in any real terms to recognise"
>
> –Edward Said 1983 (quoted in Bhahba 1990; Chapter 16).

The previous chapter began by exploring the ideological construction of Ethiopia in regard to the country's minorities, particularly the Beta Israel. In this chapter I sketch contemporary politics in Ethiopia and show how the many changes that swept Ethiopia beginning from the early 1970's on led to the mass departure of thousands of Ethiopians and Eritreans, including the Beta Israel. The denouement of the revolution led to the fall of the imperial monarchy and propelled an unprecedented migratory wave. I consider migration a focal experience in contemporary Ethiopian history. Migration under the revolutionary government did not know linguistic, religious, national or ethnic distinctions. The second section explores more closely the literature and theory on refugee studies in reference to Ethiopian emigration.

Generally, migration theories do not account for the experience of mass departure, nor of *aliyah*, though both constitute "migrations" in the strictest sense (i.e. movement across geographic space). In examining Beta Israel migration to Canada and Israel, I look at the Ethiopian political and economical framework as well as the interest in the Beta Israel among World Jewish groups. I also take into consideration the Rabbinate's recognition and the State of Israel as fundamental factors that provided backing for Beta Israel emigration.

Under Ethiopia's imperial regime non-Ethiopian groups, such as Afar, Tigray, Eritrean, and Oromo, became the object of repressive military and governmental policies. As Ottaway states:

> [Ethiopia] was not a nation-state, characterized by a high degree of ethnic, linguistic and cultural homogeneity. Rather, it remained a diverse "empire-state", held together by a common authority at the top, but not by a commitment to unity on the part of the population (1987:26).

Historically, the country's acknowledged national identity, tracing its heritage to the Solomonic "myth of the nation" (Brennan 1990), was the skeleton for Ethiopian political affairs. Minority groups exerted little political power, if any at all. Power-holders and those who sought to change the political unbalance clashed in negotiating differences of national, religious, ethnic, and regional identities. Conflicts arising from the lack of minority recognition, alongside a worsening economy, provoked a sequence of events that shaped contemporary Ethiopian history.

A thorough look into Ethiopia's revolution would be beyond the scope of this chapter. Here, I will examine circumstances leading to the events of 1973-74 that helped generate refugee movement from Ethiopia. This violent turning point gave rise to Ethiopian Jewish migration, which coincided with (general) Ethiopian and Eritrean emigration.

<u>The Modern Ethiopian "Nation"</u>

On September 12, 1974, Ethiopia's 225th descendant from the Solomonic royal lineage was placed under arrest. A military junta identifying themselves as the Derg, or council in Ge'ez, deposed the Emperor Haile Selassie, ruler for fifty-eight years (Moussa 1993: 53). The end of the "creeping coup" between September 1974 and March 1975, during which military control increased, was the beginning of the end for Ethiopia's imperial regime (Cohen, Goldsmith & Mellor, 1976:10).

Though the Emperor had attempted to modernize and develop Ethiopia, it remained a severely underdeveloped country with one of the lowest per capita income levels in the world[1] in the mid-seventies (*ibid.*: 2). According to the authors, a military stalemate in the Eritrean civil war, drought, famine, world-wide inflation, urban unrest,

---

[1] Agriculture is the means of subsistence for 85% of the population; literacy rate is 10%; there was one doctor or health officer for approximately 75 000 people (Cohen, Goldsmith & Mellor 1976).

and military pay mutinies fueled Selassie's overthrow (*ibid.*: 8). The revolutionaries seized a primarily rural country, plagued by conditions of extreme famine and poverty in certain areas, social upset and political turmoil.

Faceless and anonymous, the Derg remained secretive about its membership and strategies. Prior to the coup, it promised to reshape Ethiopia without bloodshed while staying committed to the monarchy (Shelemay 1990:103). This commitment was renounced when the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC), the Derg's increasingly politicized military branch, took charge of the government in September of 1974. It was only in the following January that an ideological position was proclaimed; then the Derg revealed its intent to transform Ethiopia into a socialist country (Ottaway 1987:27). At its head was Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam who assumed undisputed chairmanship of the PMAC in March 1977 (Rahmato 1987:161). Soon after, the confident political atmosphere that the Derg had inspired by promises of change and improvement, turned sour.

Crucial changes were implemented, such as the *Zemecha* campaign against illiteracy, the nationalization of large industrial enterprises, companies, and financial institutions, along with urban and land reforms. With the latter, all land became state property without compensation to owners. Any individual who wished to cultivate received ten hectares, and for every 800 hectares a *kebele*, or association of farmers, was formed. *Zemecha*, a development campaign, required students and teachers in grade ten, twelve and university who spent a year in rural areas to give literacy classes, organize peasant *kebeles* and explain the Derg's "philosophy of *Ethiopia Tikdem*" or "Ethiopia First" (Rahmato 1987:158), which by late 1975 had come to stand for "Ethiopian Socialism" (Cohen, Goldsmith & Mellor, 1976:21).

"Ethiopia Tikdem"

In a country where mainly one social category enjoyed the privilege of accessing the political life (Donham 1986:34), Ethiopia's governing apparatus was far from accommodating towards cultural, religious and linguistic diversity. Rather, new priorities

guided the Derg's ideology: self-reliance at the local level, national unity in the development process, a systematic attack on poverty and inequality, and nondiscrimination on the basis of religion, ethnicity, or sex (Cohen, Goldsmith and Mellor 1976:28).

With socialism came a re-definition of the tension between ethnic and national identities. As Donham puts it,

> Paradoxically, the military exacerbated ethnic feelings by seeking to put all ethnic and religious groups on an equal footing. Ethnic consciousness blossomed, and the government was soon talking about the 'nationalities problem' and discussing means to solve it (1999: 33).

Attempting to centralize power, the Derg's national discourse implied unification and collectivization over a scattered population by promoting Ethiopian unity. The socialist national illusion of "friendship of people" was imposed upon a centuries-old social framework that had not changed with the introduction of socialist ideology. Moreover, the socialist notion of equality in Ethiopia nurtured action by politicized ethnic groups, which became a prime military target by the new government, as in the case of Eritrean and Oromo nationalists.

Incidentally, Mengistu's own background gave credence to a superficial discourse of ethnic equality. His negroid racial features gave rise to rumors of an impoverished childhood and possible slave origin ('*barya*') from a southern Amhara lord (*ibid.*:129). The mythical narrative surrounding Mengistu's origin, linked to slavery, and his succession to power constituted a source of pride for marginal groups in Ethiopia (*ibid.*).

Though "everything closed" when Mengistu took over, Sarah holds that "He was good for the Falashas, good for the minorities.[…] Mengistu was very dark in skin color, and in Amharic they call it '*barya*', it's like 'Shanquilla', he looked very African" (noted by verbatim). She took pride in pointing out that he abolished derogatory appellations such as 'Shanquilla', '*barya*' and '*kayla*'.

Antagonists within and outside of the Derg were met with harsh military force. The slogan "Revolutionary Ethiopia or Death" guided the Red Terror campaign in

1977-78 whereby any form of opposition, mainly student and civilian, was crushed by force of arms and exterminated without scrutiny (Hailu, Wolde-Georgis, Van Arsdale 1994:33). Sarah, quoted earlier, briefly recounts that her close relatives and immediate family members were killed or repeatedly imprisoned under Mengistu's regime. One of her older siblings, a university student during the Red Terror, was tortured and lost all her toes.

Summary killings without legal processes, mass detentions, and systematic torture were common (Moussa 1993:63-64). Civil war and the Somali invasion of 1977-78 significantly increased military spending while the poor starved to death (Sorenson 1994:177) and Ethiopia's economy stagnated. The famine of 1984-85, occurring just over a decade after the hunger of 1973-74 (Rahmato 1987:173), further exacerbated the situation.

In retrospect, the Derg's consolidation of power is interpreted as a continuation, albeit in a different format, of Selassie's autocratic regime (Lata 1999:xix). Intolerant towards institutions and people seeking independence from the socialist political core, the Derg "led to a style of governance reminiscent of Haile Selassie's divide-and-rule tactic" (Bailey 1980:129). Moreover, as Bailey (*ibid.*: 130) points out, the Derg's reforms emerged onto the Amharic base built by Selassie and his predecessors. To control the forces of opposition, the new military dictatorship maintained the repressive and violent policies of the past (Moussa 1993:74). Propagating notions of cultural and religious "equality" and "pan-Ethiopian nationalism" did not suffice to bind together the country's diverse population. Eritrea's bloody struggle for independence demonstrates this.

According to my informant, Bezunesh, "Haile Selassie could not kill Falasha because of the international community [which] would punish him, [so] he assimilated them, and let [Christian] missionaries come and convert the Falashas" (noted by verbatim). From her standpoint, the "revolution was in some ways good because there were too many poor people and the new government would make no difference between religious and ethnic differences, and everybody was Ethiopian and equal." This, however,

was but one aspect of the political changes which swept the country: "The revolution went too far, too many people got killed by accident, for no reason, students got killed, people got killed" she adds.

Teshome, who lived in the capital, was not even a teenager when Mengistu took over. When I asked if he recalls anything about it, he answered:

> Vaguely, I just remember things but I didn't have clear memories of what was happening. […]. I knew that something strange was happening and that the King was overthrown. Everything was chaotic […]. I remember the people marching.

In retrospect, he believes:

> If anything the revolution helped them [the Beta Israel] because they were not allowed to have land and then they got land. Like I think, I'm not quite sure but I don't think like Muslims are allowed to have land then, not anymore […] or like let's say the Gurage people […]. Which is why a lot of them were merchant class. Tradition was that Christians get land but not other minorities. […] Most of the land was under the control of the I guess "the emperor" and the church, but after that when the king was overthrown and the whole imperial family, the church lost a lot of status in terms of owning property. And then the big thing was giving land back to peasants […]. In many ways this is I guess the first time Ethiopian Jews did have land that they could establish as their own and whatever land they had, and crop they had, they didn't have to pay to a land owner.

Though generally unrepresentative of Ethiopian Jews' experience in Africa, three informants mentioned how the revolution disadvantaged their parents. Unable to counter the new decree, their families were obliged to share their land.

Almaz's reflection captures well how news of the revolution spread in more rural areas, when changes were implemented:

> I remember very well. […] Because there was no TV, we don't know what was going on in the city, so all we know is like, all kind of change that would affect like, you know, the area. They would come and they would tell you 'Oh, this is, now we are dividing the city by '*gbireh*', they would call it '*gbireh*' like region. And the farmers, like the rural area, they would divide it in '*gbireh mahberr*' like the association, farmer's associations, peasant associations. […] And plus, the school was closed for a period of time. And then in the school they started teaching about socialism.[…] For us we didn't know, it was fun for us with all the sports and all the activities, we would go to the mountain and plant trees, every Saturday, they made it fun. […] All this change you know? They spent more time [teaching] about socialism than real education. Politics!

From Mengistu's consolidation of power in 1974 to the end of his regime in 1991, the socio-political and economical situation in Ethiopia produced one of the largest refugee populations in the world (Sorenson 1994:70). Never in Ethiopian history had

migration become a "long-term strategy" (Hailu, Wolde-Georgis and Van Arsdale 1994) to the extent it did at the end of the twenty first century. In the next section I explore movements of displacement in Ethiopia and Eritrea that were caused by political upheavals.

Ethiopian Forced Migration

Emigrating from Ethiopia under the socialist government legally required one of three types of documents: a working permit abroad, a scholarship or medical papers. For the majority for whom such documents were inaccessible, clandestine escape routes provided an alternative. Teshome adds that for students unwilling to participate in the military activities, exile was the only recourse:

> So whoever is not agreed with the real revolution, they would run out of the city, they would go to a neighbor country like Sudan. Some went to the desert, where is not governed by the government, because nobody lives there; they used to [...] hide there first. And they... So that's what happened, most of the students, they left at that time, the higher educated ones [...], like the universities after grade ten, most of them left. So, the school [...] was empty almost. Us, you know like in high school from grade seven, eight, nine, then we pass like to the next grade, that's when we knew what was happening. [...]But it was hard. It was really hard.

Neighbouring countries such as Djibouti and Somalia opened their borders, while the Sudan received a significant amount of Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees over the last thirty-five years. As late as the early 1990's, Ethiopia was the largest refugee-producing country in Africa (Bakwesegha 1994:4). Bulcha (1988:81) claims that Ethiopia's political situation has produced five types of refugees: revolutionary activists, contenders for power, opponents of change, persecuted minorities and displaced masses.

According to Hailu, Wolde-Georgis and Van Arsdale (1994), migration flows within and out of Ethiopia, notably among the Tigrayan population, had begun in the 1960's, even before the revolution. The first wave of Eritreans, mainly Muslim pastoralists, were fleeing as early as 1967 (Sorenson 1994:71; Sterkenburg, Kirby, and O'Keefe 1994: 195). With the consolidation of Mengistu's dictatorship, severe attacks on the Eritrean nationalist movements continued. Subsequently, waves of migration amplified, and included people of non-Muslim background (*ibid.*: 72). The drought and

famine of 1984-85 in the northern regions gave rise to yet another wave of Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees.

Though only a few hundred Beta Israel migrated to Israel between the 1950's and 1970's, most fled during Mengistu's dictatorship. The following section will discuss about Beta Israel migration out of Ethiopia and eventually Africa. Unlike other East African refugees, the Beta Israel's departure was set up in the context of making *aliyah*, i.e. going to Israel. In the following section, I treat the particular aspects of this broadly publicized migration that distinguish it from the large exodus of which it was a part.

THE BETA ISRAEL: Creating Awareness and A Way Out

Since the time of Faitlovitch, organizations and committees were formed to educate the public about the Beta Israel, to create solidarity with other Jews and consolidate resources in aiding their rescue and integration. As early as in 1922, the American Pro-Falasha Committee and other organizations in America and Europe were founded, helping to raise awareness and money for education and health programs in Beta Israel villages (Berger 1996:35).

Acceptance and solidarity for the Beta Israel was not generalised amongst Diaspora and Israeli Jews prior to the early 1980's. The American Pro-Falasha Committee, originally founded in 1922, was revitalised in the late 1960's and early 1970's by some of its original members. During this period, aid to the Beta Israel was extended through the Falasha Welfare Association in England, headed by David Kessler (Rapoport 1986:47), and The Friends of the Beta Israel (Falasha) Community of Ethiopia, founded in 1969 in the United States (Berger 1996:35). According to Berger's account, meetings and exchanges between the two American committees gave way to the establishment of the American Association for Ethiopian Jews (AAEJ) chartered in 1974, with Berger being elected president. Its Canadian counterpart, the Canadian Association for Ethiopian Jews (CAEJ) was formed in 1980.

Subsequently, many more associations and committees were conceived. Kaplan mentions eighteen in Canada and the United States alone (1990:189). Common aims guided private associations: assisting and rescuing the Beta Israel from extinction, discrimination, poverty and in more recent times Ethiopia's dangerous political situation; to reunite the group with others Jews in Israel and to support their integration. In the campaign for advocacy, the Beta Israel came to be represented as a Jewish cause and a group in need of rescue.

Private rescue efforts of the late 1970's and 80's can be categorised under two headings: groups that supported Israel's conduct in response to the Ethiopian Jewish cause, and organizations who sought to provoke Israeli and Diaspora Jewish authorities to engage themselves more fully (Grunau 1995:35). In fact, the Israeli government brought over a hundred Beta Israel out of Ethiopia in the late 1970's under conditions of extreme secrecy, while keeping diplomatic ties with Ethiopia. However, according to Rapoport (1986:66-71), a journalist and author of a book about the 1984 Operation Moses, tactics adopted by some private organizations hindered the efforts of the Israeli government and the Jewish Agency[2]. However, along with other authors, Rapoport (*ibid.*: 90) also holds that private organizations played an important role in pressuring the Israeli government into speedier action (Grunau 1995: 37, Shabtay 1999: 5).

When an arms deal involving Israel and Ethiopia was publicly exposed in 1978, political relations between the two countries were shattered and Beta Israel emigration became legally impossible. A year later, in the midst of Ethiopia's worsening situation, the corridor to the Sudan (hence titled the "Sudan route") became the alternative. This road offered an exit for many Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees, particularly at the end of the 1970's (Rapoport 1986:67). For the Israeli government, Sudanese refugee camps became a potential "pick up point" for bringing Beta Israel refugees to Israel. Word went around in Beta Israel villages of a possible migration project to Israel, and thousands headed west (*ibid.*).

---

[2] Founded in 1929, the Jewish Agency is an international organization that encourages and assists Jews to settle in Israel (Hertzog 1999:xiv). For an interesting analysis of the Jewish Agency and other institutions involved in Ethiopian Jews' (amongst other immigrants) integration in Israel, see Hertzog 1999.

Jeremy (male) and Almaz (female), two informants who were refugees in the Sudan, were part of this original cohort. Though both left Ethiopia in the early 1980's, different situations lead to their departure for the Sudan. American and European Jewish visitors regularly toured Jeremy's village when he was a child. Figurines made by his mother and other Beta Israel women were sold as popular souvenir items to Jewish travellers (for pictures, see Appendix I). Through these encounters, his curiosity for America intensified as he got older, and by his seventeenth birthday, Jeremy had already attempted an escape, only to be caught by Mengistu's military officials. Soon after, without any notice to family or friends, he set out once again for the Sudan with twenty-six other Ethiopians, walking for eight nights and eight days to the border. At the time, his family in Ethiopia believed Jeremy would come back or get caught. To this day neither has happened.

Ironically, Almaz had arranged for all the documents required to join a sibling in Israel. Though she had already purchased her bus ticket two days prior to leaving for Addis Abeba, close family members decided to plan a clandestine exit to avoid the circumscription of some cousins into the Ethiopian army. While she was washing clothes in the river nearby, her mother sent for her:

> [My mother said] 'You have to go with them [to the Sudan]'. I say 'What?'. You know my aunt, she is two months older than me, we grew up together, totally together. So, everything we do together. My mom says, 'You want to leave her by herself? You grew up together, you are born together.' Then, you know, it crossed my mind. Like I had my watch, I had, you know my sisters, they bought a lot of things [for me] you know. [...]They really spoiled me [...]. My parents used to say 'They [older siblings] didn't get a single [pair of] shoes, now they buy you two –three pairs of shoes! Even when they graduate high school, they never had a watch'. I decided that [it was] time to leave for Sudan. [...] Maybe it's for good maybe it's for bad? We heard there is a, you know, some group that would help you to go to Israel from Sudan. Once you get Sudan, they will help you. [...] There's a project they told us. [...] My sister's husband, he went, [...] he disappeared, we don't know where he went. After two months he wrote a letter from Israel. So she says 'Oh my God, he went.' Then they said, 'Oh, through Sudan there is a big project, there is a big operation going on to go to Israel'. Well, a lot of people would leave with the family. So, us, [we went] almost at the beginning [of the project].

Ninety-five Ethiopians and Eritreans, including Almaz and some family members, Christians and Beta Israel from Amharic speaking regions, headed for the Sudan. She left with the feeling that she would promptly return: "It was as if I [was] coming back [to Ethiopia] at that time, that's how I felt. I didn't think I would go forever." Most of the

two-week journey was made by moonlight in order to hide from armed groups and shelter from the torrid heat. Jeremy and Almaz paid missionaries to guide and protect them from the national army, and from bandits monopolizing isolated regions between Gondar and the Sudanese border (see map in Appendix II).

Compared to Jeremy's narrative where gender was not presented as an issue during travel, Almaz clearly remembers how fortunate she was to safely reach the refugee camps, considering that she was a woman. Luckily, the Christian Amhara group leader, feared by the other guides, was a close acquaintance of Almaz's uncle and took special care of her:

> There are [men in the group] who doesn't have wives, between the ages of ehh, 20-25, until 30 [...]. So he [the group leader] was scared that somebody would –and my uncle he told them 'These are girls you have to take care of them'. [...] For that, I always thank him, always! [...] I always remember him! If it wasn't for him, I wouldn't be here. You see cause I heard after, the group that came there after our group, [...] there were seven guys, they make this arrangement to take [the girls]. [...] The leader of the group was in the back, so in the middle[...] of the group, there were discussing about me, to... to [...]. They would take out me from the group, and they would, ehhh, make me stay behind with them, and they would do anything, whatever, they want with me, like for, especially for sexual [favors]. [But] because they are afraid of the organizer – their supervisor is well known in that area- so, they wouldn't try it. He doesn't give a damn, he would kill them right away. So they didn't try. But, my cousin came with the group after we came, and she told me 'You are lucky. They told me, you know, that they missed that opportunity [with you]'.

When I asked about his reasons for leaving Ethiopia, Jeremy explained that he wished to improve the quality of his life. Only later on in the conversation did he mention discrimination experienced in Ethiopia, where certain people aware of his ethno-religious background would refer to him as " '*kayla*', hyena, '*buda*', or donkey". Almaz, on the other hand, felt impelled to accompany her cousins, nieces and nephews to the Sudan even though her plans to reach Israel were previously arranged. Neither explicitly stated poverty, war or religion as motivation for flight. Though displacement is never motivated by a single factor, their stories do not correspond to what is generally written about Beta Israel and general Ethiopian migration in "popular" works", to use Rosen's term (1985:58), or in the academic literature about Ethiopian Jews and refugees.

"Popular works" (exemplified by books such as Safran 1987, and Berger 1996) generally imply that the primary reason for Beta Israel's flight is their adherence to

Judaism and their wish to 'return' to Israel. Today, few scholars would disagree that what led the group to depart from Africa was a complex set of macro-level variables which, influenced by religious specificity, propelled the Beta Israel to leave.

In perspective, Ethiopian Jews are not the only group who have received aid from the larger Jewish community in respect to emigration and settlement in Israel or abroad. Before Operation Moses and Solomon, other rescue efforts had taken place with, for example Yemenite and Russian Jews. Though unique and rare, this type of directed rescue where religion, nationality and belonging coalesce, are not treated in migration theories. Moreover, research on refugees rarely accounts for situations such as Almaz's and Jeremy's, where some planning, however minimal, is involved. It should be added that though neither left Ethiopia for reasons stipulated in the UN definition of "refugee", their trek to the Sudan and their stay in temporary refugee settlements is reason enough for both Almaz and Jeremy to consider themselves as refugees.

Getting to the Sudan: Who is a Refugee?

Individuals forced to migrate due to conflicts that significantly decrease their quality of life and threatens life itself are widely referred to as refugees. The United Nations definition serves as the focal point for most Western nations' laws pertaining to refugees and their protection (Martin 1991:46 *2*). The UN Protocol, modified in 1967, defines "refugee" as a person who:

> Owing to the well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is *outside the country of his nationality* and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being *outside of the country of his former habitual residence*, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it. (Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees, Article 1(A)(2), 189 U.N.T.S 137 (1951); Protocol Relating to the Status of Refugees, 606 U.N.T.S 267 (1967)) (emphasis added).

This definition does not apply very well to Africa, a continent that holds fifty percent (50%) of the world's refugees (Kibreab 1994:62), as it does not account for other factors motivating flight[3]. As Bakwesegha points out, fear of persecution is but one component dictating the African refugee situation; others include domestic political and social

[3] See Winter 1994 for a brief overview of conflicts in Africa leading to forced migrations.

upheavals, as well as struggles for national liberation (1994:7). The continent's increasing population of displaced people has given rise to a more local interpretation of the notion of "refugee" proposed by the Organization of African Unity (OAU); i.e., anyone who:

> Owing to external aggression, occupation, foreign domination or events seriously disturbing public order in either part or whole of his country of origin or nationality, is compelled to leave his habitual residence in order to seek refuge in another place *outside* of his country of origin or nationality (Article I, paragraph 2 of the OAU Convention in *ibid.*, emphasis added).

Both the UN 1967 Protocol and the 1969 OAU's definition attach the notion of crossing national boundaries to the meaning of refugee. One must be outside of her or his country in order to be legally recognized as a refugee and receive international assistance and protection (Bakwesegha 1994). These perspectives impose a geography to refugee-ness and do not extend aid to the internally displaced, who are, like the refugee, driven into exile, though within the boundaries of their own country (Winter 1994). The Sudanese soldiers and the Red Cross were prepared to resettle only individuals legally and internationally labeled as refugees; i.e., those who had crossed the border by entering the Sudan.

In 1977, there were an estimated 150,000 African refugees in the Sudan. This number more than doubled by the end of 1979, totaling at approximating 350,000 individuals (UNHCR General Assembly, Official Records: 33rd and 35th Session, Supplement No. 12 (A/33/12 & A/35/12), New York 1978 & 1980). 419,000 out of the 550,000 refugees in the Sudan originated from Ethiopia and Eritrea in 1981; by 1984, the country hosted approximately 500,000 Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees (*ibid.*). There was a forty percent (40%) increase to this figure by 1991. By then, ninety-six percent (96%) of Sudan's estimated 729,200 refugees were from Ethiopia and Eritrea (UNHCR 1992 in Kibreab 1994:44).

Because the influx came from the east, Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees generally settled in eastern camps around Gedaref and Kassala in the Sudan (Winter 1994) (see map in Appendix II). The host country's and international organizations' financial limitations resulted in harsh living conditions for refugees in eastern and central Sudan.

Problems such as the lack of potable water and food, along with major epidemics, exacerbated the already appalling living conditions.

As for the Beta Israel, most found shelter in the eastern settlement of Um Raquba, ("Mother of Shelter" in Arabic) (Rapoport 1986: 106-107). By 1984, there were approximately 500,000 Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees, out of which 20,000 settled in Um Raquba. The Beta Israel, who made up almost half the population at Um Raquba (Kessler and Parfitt in Grunau 1995: 35), spent from a few months to over a year in temporary sites. Almaz lived in Um Raquba for four months before moving around to other areas such as Gedaref and Khartoum. Jeremy, on the other hand, stayed in the camp for a year before heading to the Sudanese capital, where he worked for a Beta Israel family whose head of the household made him work "more than I ever did for my own mother". Eventually, he got in touch with Israeli and American officials.

He recalls the tactic developed by Sudanese soldiers in sorting out "who was Jew and who was not": upon arriving in camps, they would cut up non-kosher meat and give it to Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees. Those who rejected the food were identified as Jews. Though he did not give details about what happened to Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees unable to hide their Jewish identity from Sudanese soldiers, Jeremy mentioned that they were "dealt with". When his turn came, friends implored him to eat the meat and not to cause any trouble: "It was the first time in my life I touched non-kosher food, I took a bite and threw the rest in the dirt" (noted by verbatim), he recalled during our interview with a disgusted look on his face.

When I inquired about the living conditions at Um Raquba, Almaz shook her head and said "terrible, terrible", in reference to the suffering she witnessed. Every day they would eat the same food in which "little worms" would develop, causing "stomach problems like diarrhea". Due to the scarcity of water, many drank from a nearby river. Only when refugees died did it become apparent that the water was contaminated. Jeremy remembers this:

> Very bad, it was bad; the food plus the disease. There was a place there where you drink and, you die. The water was contaminated. They were dying, about ten people a day.

> Almaz: So when we got there [to the refugee camp], everybody was screaming, like the refugees, the Ethiopians, [...] they said "Ahh!!", because, they were sending [...] messages from their group to Ethiopia not to come, no one to come on the [Sudan] route. They had a bad experience, they say they are there for three months [...] and nobody give a damn [...] they had no connection with Khartoum, they are just lost. And when we got there they freaked out. They say 'all these people are gonna die here? All these children, all the women'.

According to Rapoport, 2,000 Beta Israel lost their lives at Um Raquba (1986:107).

Both informants spoke of their experiences in Sudanese refugee camps only after my direct questions. I interpret their reluctance to do so on their own and their very brief and abrupt responses as an indicator that memories of their experience in refugee camps are better forgotten than recalled. Though the impact of what Jeremy and Almaz witnessed seemed very great, neither gave detailed accounts of their time at Um Raquba.

Once out of refugee camps and working in Sudanese cities, gender as a qualifier of experience marks Almaz' narrative. Being in a country where religious Islamic law blended with state law, she was obliged to wear a hijab:

> Because all the Sudan, the women, they [are] supposed to cover, so they cover. Most women, they also stay inside. They don't go [out] too much. So when you go out shopping or on the bus, you see more men than women. And they [the Sudanese men] would be looking at you and say 'Oh, you are so beautiful, you are like '*suchuaria*', which means sugar. So they don't care about their wives. Whenever they see beautiful women, they always run after them.

She remembers how a "very, very nice" Ethiopian Jewish man assisted her in Khartoum, where he would get supplies for Almaz and her nieces. "For girls, it was always harder to get out. In Sudan, they are always looking for girls, even though [they] cover [their] hair".

In retrospect, Jeremy and Almaz are aware of the differences between Ethiopian Jews who escaped Ethiopia by trekking to the Sudanese border and staying in refugee camps, as opposed to those who flew out of Ethiopia, arriving in Israel or North America via a European country. The notion of *shared hardships* drawn from similar experiences underlies both informants' stories. Jeremy points out that there is a big difference between those who passed through the Sudan and others who did not; he adds that, in his opinion, age of departure from Ethiopia also determines one's experience. Another

informant, Bezunesh, remarks that, unlike Ethiopian Jews who passed though the Sudan, she "didn't go through refugee camps, getting here was not, it was just a matter of flying on a plane, that's it, we didn't have refugee camps or anything like that".

Had Almaz not accompanied her cousins and aunts in their journey to the Sudan, she would not have "discovered the country". At several points Almaz refers to the warmth and compassion she witnessed during her refugee experience:

> The only thing, me I liked is, was the inside [of the camp] where we lived, everybody was there for every body. [...] You only had one piece [of food] and you share it. It's so like... amazing! That's what I didn't know and I discovered. I'm glad I came through the Sudan (she starts to laugh), cause I learned a lot. If I didn't I wouldn't know! Especially the walking, oooh!

Though the personal context of their departure from Ethiopia is not accounted for in the UN or the OAU's definition of a refugee, Almaz and Jeremy consider themselves as such. Inquiring whether they felt any danger in Ethiopia, I explained that the widely accepted definition of refugee entails fleeing from a dangerous situation. To this one informant summed it up as follows:

> No, no. I didn't feel like I was in danger, I was lying to them, like you know, I was saying we were in danger. We had to lie. It's not true, but, you know we had to lie. If the Sudanese ask and [I] say 'I just came for pleasure'- but I wasn't in danger, but I had to say, you know, we were going to the military, which is true.

Their cases demonstrate how designations for bureaucratic and legal purposes convey but partially diverse circumstances that lead these individuals to *become* refugees. Perceiving refugees uniquely as an administrative category neglects an important factor: experiential quality. This applies to the internally displaced, for example. Almaz and Jeremy *became* refugees once they crossed the Sudanese border, and as we shall see in the next chapter, their emigration to Canada was directed under the *status* of "refugee". Though they may not have been fleeing from persecution, Jeremy and Almaz *experienced* life in refugee camps, were separated from their families in Ethiopia, and felt as uncertain about their futures as the rest of the individuals at Um Raquba.

Almaz and Jeremy, like thousands of other Ethiopians, Eritreans and Beta Israel alike, left Ethiopia with the insecurity and trauma of parting from family and friends.

> Jeremy: When I left Ethiopia, it was the saddest day of my life, I couldn't believe it. I didn't want to leave, because my father was sick. My sister and one of my older brothers, and his [...] older brother, were already in Israel.

> Almaz: When [...] I [made] that journey, I said [asking myself] 'Will I be able to reunite with my family?' I didn't even think I would get out alive.

Refugees: Where Do They Go?

Once a refugee, those who cross national borders face three options: repatriation, local integration or resettlement in a third country (Stein 1981: 322). The last solution is feasible for only a small portion of African refugees, due to Western immigration laws and the assumed difficulty of integrating rural African populations (Sorenson 1994: 178). Moreover, it is generally understood that given the choice, refugees would return to their country instead of opting for permanent settlement in a foreign environment. For the Beta Israel, the situation was somewhat different for two reasons: their newly acquired birthright to make *aliyah* and legally settle with other Jews in Israel; and the Ethiopian socialist context.

In 1862, a group of Beta Israel attempted migrating towards the Holy Land to fulfill a "back to Jerusalem" dream (Kaplan 1992 :135), though they never made it. In modern times, the Beta Israel immigrated to Israel as recognized members of the Jewish people. Positive identification with Diaspora Jews, along with the Ethiopian political context, introduced a different dimension to the Beta Israel religious paradox of "living here but wanting to be there", as Clifford phrases it (1994). Jerusalem as a "*lieu de mémoire*" for the Beta Israel hence came to be seen in a new light.

While Halevy and Faitlovitch planted the seed of "diasporic consciousness" linked to the Jewish Diaspora (to use Clifford's term) in certain Beta Israel communities, key events nurtured it further; for example, contacts with Western Jews in the 1950's, 60's and 70's, the creation of the state of Israel, and the Rabbinate's ruling. Ethiopian political developments brought things to a turning point where this "diasporic consciousness" became fully present. Kaplan points out that "À mesure que les conditions s'aggravèrent en Éthiopie, l'attachement religieux des Falasha à Jérusalem se transforma bientôt en fervent désir d'émigrer" (1996:233). For Olazabal (1999:264),

> La diaspora, dans son sens le plus profond, est une idée suggérant une minorisation politique et un désir de retour au lieu origines, et un désir de mettre fin à l' «errance».

The construction of Beta Israel Jewish diaspora identity evoked at a particular time in Ethiopian and Israeli history presented an alternative to the group. Their diasporic identity, however, implied participating directly or indirectly to a particular religious *and* national identity, something that conflicted with Ethiopia's socialist political ideology.

As members of the Jewish Diaspora, the Beta Israel not only resettled in Israel or, less often in Jewish communities outside of Israel, such as in Canada, but they were helped by special projects and services mobilized on their behalf. Unlike the majority of African refugees, the Beta Israel received major international assistance mainly from international Jewish sources and the Israeli government, as well as from the United States and Canada. This aid allowed the departure of the Beta Israel from Ethiopia en masse. However, had the Ethiopian refugee context not produced the pressing necessity for such an option, the chances of realizing such an endeavour would have been much bleaker.

Emigration: Getting to Israel

Prior to the 1970's a few hundred Ethiopian Jewish immigrants settled in Israel on their own. In 1977, over a hundred Beta Israel were brought to Israel in exchange for military equipment, through an arms deal between Mengistu and the Israeli government. However, it was only in 1979-1980 that Beta Israel started emigrating to Israel as a group. The new *olim*, or immigrants in Hebrew, were for the first time as a group given Hebrew classes and had access to services offered to neo-Israelis (Dolève-Gandelman 1989:121-123). Subsequently, there were three Ethiopian migratory waves to Israel (Grunau 1995:34).

Between 1980 and 1984, approximately 7,500 Ethiopian Jews mainly from Tigrinya-speaking rural areas in Tigray and Gondar provinces made *aliyah* (see map in Appendix II). In 1984, the Israeli government airlifted about the same number from the Sudan in Operation Moses. This project, which began in November of 1984, came to a halt four months after when diplomatic ties between Israel and the Sudan deteriorated,

largely due to irresponsible media coverage. When the Sudanese president interrupted Operation Moses, stranded Beta Israel were airlifted in the follow-up rescue effort called Operation Sheba, organized and jointly led by the Israeli and American governments. Approximately 8,000 refugees were brought to Israel by these airlifts, such that the number of Ethiopian and Eritrean Jewish immigrants totaled to about 15,000 by the end of 1985.

It would be seven more years before families dispersed by Operation Moses would be reunited. In May 1991, soon after a dialogue between Israel and Mengistu's government was re-established, Operation Solomon brought about 14,000 internally displaced Beta Israel to Israel. This cohort, mainly from Amharic-speaking regions, were temporarily reallocated in Addis Abeba where they could apply for entry visas to the State of Israel (Grunau 1995: 34).

A small minority of displaced Eritreans and Ethiopians (including a small number of Ethiopian Jews) obtained visa and immigration permits for entry to Canada or the United States, based on their refugee status in the Sudan or once out of Ethiopia. The Beta Israel, however, remain the only group who received assistance not only on humanitarian grounds, but based on ethnic, religious and national identification as well. In the Ethiopian historical, political, social and economical framework, such a privilege no doubt intensified hatred, discrimination and violence toward the Beta Israel during a period of global national crisis.

Though many Jewish organizations working in Ethiopia, such as the Organization and Rehabilitation in Training (ORT[4]), extended aid to all Ethiopians, assistance accorded to the Beta Israel was based on their identification as Jews. Jeremy pointed out that rent for lodgings significantly increased in the capital when it was apparent that internally displaced Beta Israel were funded and cared for by Jewish organizations and the Israeli government.

---

[4] ORT is a Jewish organization that had set up training and rural development projects for Ethiopians in the Gondar province as early as 1977 (Rapoport 1986:60).

Bezunesh's reflections on the preparation for Operation Solomon and Jewish intervention in Addis Abeba amongst the internally displaced Beta Israel are interesting in this regard:

> In Ethiopia you have so many religions, and so many different kinds of minority groups. [...] North Americans know about Jews, you know, they're aware of this people, this group called the Ethiopian Jews. But when we grew up and when we lived in Ethiopia, people don't know about Ethiopian Jews. [...] And when they came to Addis Abeba, obviously when they were airlifting them, they had money, stipends that they were getting, so obviously that makes a big splash when you have so many people [...] staying in the middle of Addis Abeba from the countryside with a lot of money. There is a lot of poverty in Addis Abeba, so that makes a difference, but, [...] and I think a lot of people [Ethiopians] don't know what Jews are, they only learned about it because of the airlift. A lot of the Ethiopians know about it because of the airlift, at least the Ethiopians that are here [in Canada] are aware of that basically because of it [the airlift].

An Alternative for Ethiopian Jews: the Montreal Jewish Community

In the early 1980's, news about the Beta Israel's situation in Ethiopia and the Sudan incited members of the Montreal Jewish community to take action. Though it is reductive to speak of *one* Jewish community in Montreal (Olazabal 1999), I use the term in regards to the group which originally shaped, structured and built the first Jewish establishments in the city, and who directed Ethiopian Jewish immigrant's arrival and integration within the framework of those establishments (see Anctil, 1988, and Lévy and Ouaknine, 1989, in Olazabal, 1999).

In Montreal, the "institutional completeness" (to borrow Breton's term), of the global Jewish community is by far the most extensive compared to other ethnic groups or minorities (Elbaz in Olazabal 1994: 139). The city is also home to the second largest Canadian group of holocaust survivors after Toronto, approximately 8,340 individuals (Federation CJA, 1991 Census Series, Jewish Seniors in Montreal, p. 21)[5].

In his analysis of historical Eastern European expressions of Jewish communality and the re-creation of *shtetls* in Montreal, Olazabal records, through the narratives of four generations of Jewish Montrealers, how concepts of Ashkenazi communal life shaped the foundation of Montreal Jewish institutions. The author proposes three principles that he

---

[5] For a list of Jewish agencies, organizations and institutions, and to get a good idea of Jewish community activities, consult "The Montreal Jewish Directory".

considers influential in the development of what he terms Ashkenazi "*vie associative*": *tsedakha* (charity and mutual assistance towards the less fortunate); a *kehilla*, or community, regulated by a *kahal* composed of philanthropists and religious figures who assure the distribution of resources; and the *limoud*, perceived as the highest moral value, whereby knowledge takes precedence over material goods. These tenets defined the groundwork upon which major Jewish organizations in Montreal were structured.

These principles encouraged the development of a specific "*judaïcité montréalaise*", a shared site where prime Jewish (mainly Ashkenazi) symbols emerged, maintained by and within a strong institutional nucleus. This configuration was challenged in the late 1950's and 1960's when Sephardic immigrants began arriving en masse[6] to the city. The new immigrants' reception prescribed to a Jewish sphere guided and developed primarily by and for those of Eastern European background.

Sephardic institutions created by the 1960's catered to North African Jewish practices, culture and language (Olazabal 1999). Though today negative feeling between the Ashkenazi and Sephardic groups in Montreal have decreased according to the author, and intermarriage within both groups are common, drawing from their experience Olazabal explains how "*la judaïcité montréalaise*" was a:

> projet comunautaire à l'origine instauré par un ensemble géo-culturel spécifique, inadapté pour les Juifs d'origine non-européenne (*ibid.*: 224).

Ethiopian Jews in Montreal arrived and integrated almost entirely into groupings founded by Jews from Eastern Europe.

The next chapter explores the political activities of Jewish and non-Jewish Canadian institutions, particularly in Montreal. These groups operated on behalf of the Ethiopian Jewish cause and aided Beta Israel emigration from Africa.

---

[6] Though historically the first Jews in north-east America originated from Great Britain, the next two waves came from Eastern Europe between 1889 to 1920 and 1921 to 1940. The third wave, from 1945 to 1956 also included immigrants and refugees from Israel. Prior to the 1950's, the Jewish community was primarily Ashkenazic. Sephardic emigration intensified between 1957 to 1970, when Jews from the Middle-East, along with Ashkenazi Jews from Russia, settled in the city around 1971 to 1986. The last wave, dating from 1987 to 1991 were largely from the ex-URSS and Israel (Profils des communautés culturelles du Québec, 1995 : 341-350).

CHAPTER 4: BETWEEN AFRICA AND NORTH AMERICA

The main purpose of this chapter is to place Montreal in the context of on-going international rescue operations on behalf of the Beta Israel. In doing so, first, I explore the dynamics between Canadian-Jewish organizations and private pro-Falasha agencies in helping Ethiopian Jewish emigration. Secondly, I will examine approaches and tactics they implemented to mobilize support for the Beta Israel. The last part of the chapter describes the Ethiopian Jewish migration to Canada.

I present three key "established" Jewish agencies[1] that constructed and developed the Canadian program in conjunction with Israeli efforts to aid the exodus of Ethiopian Jews. I conducted recorded interviews with former representatives or employees of each agency. Their narratives will be presented under the pseudonyms Niko (for the Canadian Jewish Committee for Ethiopian Jewry (abbreviated CJC), Suzan (an ex-Jewish Immigrant Aid Services of Canada staff member (abbreviated JIAS), and Dion (previously employed by Hillel). I also contacted other individuals by telephone or in person who were involved with the Ethiopian Jewish groups in Montreal at one point or another.

Falasha Interest and Ethiopian Jewish Migration to Canada

Ethiopian Jewish immigration to Canada, though conceived and directed by established Ashkenazi institutions in Montreal, such as CJC, attracted the interest of other sub-groups of the Jewish community. Though some members dated their interest in Ethiopian Jews to as far back as the 1960's and 70's, it was not until the first Ethiopian Jew, Baruch Tegene, arrived in Montreal from Israel in 1979 that an organized effort took shape. Seeking to gain support from Canadians and Americans, Tegene continued working closely with Jewish agencies and pro-Falasha organizations, such as the American Association for Ethiopian Jews (abbreviated AAEJ). (For more information on

[1] The Canadian Jewish Congress Special Committee for Ethiopian Jewry (1), The Jewish Immigrant Aid Services of Canada (2), and Hillel (3).

Baruch Tegene, see appendix B in Grunau 1995, p. 115). To generate support for the Falashas, the activist spoke at major Jewish community conferences across the world during the late 1970's and 80's. A former CJC representative recalls:

> Well, perhaps over many years I may have seen an article or something, [about Ethiopian Jews] but a concrete exposure to it was at the Canadian Jewish Congress Plenary in Toronto. I think it was in May or so in 1979. As I came in the hotel, I saw a black man standing and smoking a cigarette, he didn't look like your average black man, and then [...], I noticed there was a workshop, in which this guy was talking. And so I went in, and he was talking about the situation in Ethiopia. He was Baruch Tegene [...]. So that was my first exposure beyond magazine article. He was the only Ethiopian Jew here at the time [...].he brought the issue to Canada when he came here.

A Canadian chapter of the AAEJ, the Canadian Association for Ethiopian Jews (CAEJ) was established a year after Baruch Tegene's arrival and worked in conjunction with a Special Committee for Ethiopian Jewry of the CJC (a[2]), which remained active until 1991.

In directing their activities, CAEJ's and CJC's working agreement was based on a fundamental tenet. According to a newspaper article written by a rabbi, "There would be no criticism of Israel, no criticism of the Ethiopian government and no criticism of the Canadian government" (b) (Rabbi W. Gunther Plant 1980). Though both groups proceeded jointly during their first year of operations and even shared a common chairperson for a short while, by August 1981 CJC had officially severed ties with the CAEJ. According to a former CJC representative,

> [The] Congress felt that it was prudent not to do a lot of public [displays], to try to keep it within the [Jewish] community, to have a high profile within the community but a low profile outside of the community. [...] We had a very intense conflict with CAEJ on that ... the break [between CAEJ and CJC] continued until they [both groups] virtually [dis]banded. It was intense criticism.

Generally described as extremist in their critiques of what they considered unfruitful Israeli intervention for the Ethiopian Jewish cause, the outspoken and provocative CAEJ soon after adopted strategies many others considered as "reckless and incompetent" (Rapoport 1986: 91). By 1982, the CAEJ issued a report claiming that attempts were made to "clarify its position, counter a host of inaccurate rumours circulating in the community, and develop more cordial relations ..." (c). This passage

---

[2] See Appendix VI for references concerning articles cited (listed alphabetically by order of appearance).

shows that from early on, CAEJ members were aware of their reputation among those involved in the Ethiopian Jewish rescue.

Ironically, in that same report, CAEJ mentions covert working links with Israel. The secrecy was explained by the fact that "officially, Israel is bound to relate primarily to the "major recognized organs of the community". Since the CAEJ was not a recognized organization, they were put in a "Catch-22 situation, for we [CAEJ] cannot relate properly to Israel until we are a "recognized" agency, yet we cannot become one so because the existing major organizations already "relate" to Israel". In other words, formerly established institutions were an obstacle towards Israeli acknowledgment of the CAEJ. Contrary to what the CAEJ presents, this factor was not the sole obstruction to establishing "official" ties with the Israeli government. As the next few pages show, methods of political lobbying considered "anti-Israeli" by established Jewish institutions, and their vociferous criticism of Israel placed the CAEJ in opposition to "recognized" agencies and Israel.

To my knowledge, only one sit-in took place where members of CJC participated on behalf of the Beta Israel cause (a symbolic *shiva* organized by Jewish students at Cummings House in Montreal, 1982). The CAEJ, on the other hand, adopted tools of political mobilisation employed by the American-based AAEJ (the CAEJ's sister organization and main pro-Falasha activist group in North America), such as demonstrations, uninvited participation in important community meetings (in some cases propelling organizers to forcefully throw out the disruptive activists) (d), and harsh criticism of Israel by way of the media in high profile newspapers such as The New York Times. In concert with American activists, some Ethiopian Jewish immigrants in Montreal and Toronto actively partook in demonstrations organised by the CAEJ. In 1984, over a fourth (approximately twenty-five) of the protestors disrupting the opening of the 53rd General Assembly of the Council of Jewish Federations held in Toronto were Ethiopian Jews (e).

The highly publicized sit-in took place only days prior to the launching of Operation Moses from Sudan. Protestors steered media attention towards a charged issue at a time when Israel required complete secrecy from the press for planning the rescue effort. Perceived as "anti-Israeli" by official Jewish institutions, such political schemes contributed to creating tension in the CJC's Committee for Ethiopian Jewry (the "recognized" establishment for Ethiopian Jews in Canada) and the CAEJ, whose philosophy, according to Niko, was, "The more publicity the better".

Though Niko claims that the AAEJ "were a bit more responsible" than CAEJ, insofar as prior to Operation Moses, the AAEJ had taken a more prudent stance, he believes that both groups "were quite critical of the Israelis". However, the AAEJ generated a discourse inducing enormous public (Jewish and non-Jewish) attention, which served as a "catalyst" for subsequent international rescue operations. According to Rapoport (1986: 90), the AAEJ was largely responsible for introducing the Ethiopian Jewish cause to the public:

> Several journalists familiar with the Falasha story [...] have stated that AAEJ "did very much more harm than good". [...] However, this assessment is still open to question, for only [the] AAEJ was warning in 1983 that thousands of Jews were facing death by disease and starvation in the refugee camps of Sudan.

The remainder of the decade witnessed major discord between the CAEJ and the CJC, widely covered in the Jewish media such as The Canadian Jewish News. According to the CAEJ report of June 1982 cited above, the Consulate General of Israel and CJC went as far as to resort to media censorship, instructing The Canadian Jewish News to exclude any articles or paid advertisements communicated by the CAEJ (p. 4, paragraph #14). In 1985, the CAEJ filed a lawsuit against the CJC, its director of the Committee on Ethiopian Jewry (Stan Cytrynbaum) as well as the Ottawa Jewish Bulletin (f). Attacks were directed via reports, memorandums and bulletins compiled by both fronting organizations.

The media constantly served as both a communication channel and a political tool. The "Editor's Note" to a January 17, 1985 article in The Canadian Jewish News (g)

adds: "We trust that this will conclude the correspondence between CAEJ and CJC in the pages of the Canadian Jewish News." Referring to the use (or abuse) of exposure in the newspaper, the Editor's note underlines the extent to which politicking and publicity were intrinsically linked.

Despite sharing a common humanitarian objective of assisting Ethiopian Jews, strong beliefs and divergent approaches from both sides led to a rather unprofessional relationship, where each made charges against the other in highly public fora. Drawing upon information available in the "Stan Cytrynbaum files" of the CJC archives, it is safe to presume that CJC and CAEJ spent an enormous amount of time, money and energy not only on the plight of Ethiopian Jews, but also on a campaign waged against one another.

Many other helpful groups and individuals did not capture the limelight for their work to help the migration and integration of Ethiopian Jewish immigrants in Canada, despite their significant contribution to the cause. Amongst those active in Montreal was Hillel, the largest international Jewish student's organization, instrumental in assisting the Ethiopian Jewish immigration project to Canada. "The Hillel Task Force for Ethiopian Jewry" worked actively on university and college campuses, printed bulletins, held clothing drives, collected money, brought together volunteers, solicited support and compiled indispensable documents required for the migration process. Along with Baruch Tegene, Hillel was a link between different factions of pro-Falasha agencies and worked in conjunction with the Israeli government, CAEJ, AAEJ, CJC and the Jewish Immigrant Aid Services (JIAS).

Though some documents give evidence of positive contacts between "establishment" and "non-establishment" pro-Falasha agencies, such interaction is not representative of the general *public* ambience surrounding CAEJ and CJC. However, as we shall see in the following section, what was depicted in newspaper reports and the CJC archives mainly portrays the groups' *political* lives. When it came down to the *actual* migratory project, working relations required a modicum of cooperation between

all organizations. An ex-Hillel employee reflects:

> You know, even if the groups were fighting, we worked together because we were all physically taking people out [bringing people out of Africa]. So, I've shared with the American approach, we were using it, they started using it, so it was through a network of people who started- here I'll show you [showing me documents]. So we were in touch with all [...] We sort of stayed in touch with each other and the Israeli government too. I got to tell you, as much as they were telling they were not involved in the media, they were working very closely with us. They were calling me on a, when they were taking Jews out of the Sudan, I was getting a call everyday as to the numbers and what time they would be there. We were sharing documents, we were sharing information, it was, ehm, the public persona was very hostile towards us, but personal persona was just the opposite.

North American organizations involved with the Ethiopian Jewish rescue operations were aware of the need for a concerted effort. In a meeting held in New York on March 23, 1988, representatives of thirteen agencies including CAEJ and CJC met to coordinate activities and to reinforce networks in order to reduce complications due to lack of communications.

Canadian Migration Project for Ethiopian Jews

In a 1984 CJC document aimed to counter "the mass of contradiction and mis-information" published in the Jewish press in regards to Ethiopian Jews, Stan Cytrynbaum, National Chairman of the CJC Committee for Ethiopian Jewry, states the role of Canadian organizations in the rescue operations:

> The overall rescue and relief is being carried out by Israeli authorities. In November, 1981, the Canadian Jewish community, through Canadian Jewish Congress, developed a Canadian supplementary rescue and relief program which operates with full coordination and cooperation of the appropriate governmental authorities. (h)

Montreal and North America were indirectly linked to the larger Israeli rescue operations since the city was an important active basis for political endeavors. Dion believes that the exit of Ethiopian Jews from Africa depended entirely on Baruch Tegene's work: "If it was not for him none of this would have happened, including the immigration of all the Jews [from Ethiopia], he is the person. [...] Him period. He was the catalyst for everything". Niko's reaction:

> Baruch claims, and it may be so, that the exodus from Sudan and what method of doing it was his idea [laughing]. [...] That he proposed it to the Mossad, [...] I don't know. Could be possible.

Regardless of who should get credit for the "Sudan route", through Baruch Tegene's efforts, Montreal became directly involved and as a consequence, developed a migration project in accordance to international relief efforts.

Three Jewish institutions or agencies occupied primary roles in Canadian efforts on behalf of Ethiopian Jews: the Jewish Immigrant Aid Services (JIAS), the Canadian Jewish Congress (CJC) and Hillel. One informant presented an interesting portrayal as to how the core parties (including the Canadian and Quebec governments) concerned themselves with this mission. According to Dion, the CJC and the JIAS "came in afterwards", in response to threats by him and others of embarrassing the Jewish community into action:

> The Quebec government, - the Feds didn't want to do anything. [The] Congress [CJC] didn't want to do anything. [...] A woman who for me is a saint, Louise Gagné, [...] went to Sudan and saw what was going on in the camps. And, we met with [Gérald] Godin, the minister, and they gave me copies [of a letter] indicating that [...] they would sponsor [Ethiopian Jews to come to Canada]. So I went to the Jewish community and I said "We're gonna embarrass you to hell. If you don't give us the money and the support, we're gonna go on a private fund raising campaign". [We] printed out thousands of them [Louise Gagné's letter], and I said that we would distribute it and embarrass the community. So they did agree to sponsor. But it was actually [Gérald] Godin who started it.
>
> Q- So had Louise Gagné not gone to Sudan and seen their situation, then the Canadian government wouldn't have necessarily participated?
>
> A- Right, they were forced into it- everybody was embarrassed. The Jews were embarrassed, the Ethiopians.

Dion explained how Louise Gagné and Gérald Godin introduced the plight of Ethiopian Jews to the federal government, several times referring to the former as "a saint". Eventually, the CJC met with Ministre Gérald Godin, and worked out an immigration program to bring fifty Ethiopian Jewish refugees from Sudanese camps to Canada. The letter, dated the 6th of December, 1982, was written and signed by "Louise Gagné, Secrétaire déléguée auprès des réfugiés"(check Appendix III for a copy of this letter). It details about the first "official" migration project developed with Canadian Jewish institutions (JIAS and CJC), and the federal and provincial governments.

According to Dion, the CJC and the JIAS actively participated in the effort largely in response to pressure. The JIAS (Jewish Immigrant Aid Services) officially implemented the project through Immigration Canada, receiving indispensable aid and support from the federal (Canadian) and provincial (Quebec) governments. Suzan, a former JIAS employee, explains why the federal government chose to operate with the JIAS instead of other institutions:

> The Canadian government, Immigration Canada, wanted to deal with us. [...] [Be]cause some of the things that were being asked by some other people [who wanted to bring out Ethiopian Jews], who were very high profile, didn't make sense in terms of immigration. [...] It was not something immigration was going to go for. [...] They wanted JIAS whom they knew, and we had a long term working relationship with them, they wanted us to be involved with the immigration thing, wanting to deal with us in terms of the immigration. They didn't want to be dealing with all kinds.

Though some (non-Ethiopian) informants expressed concern as to who did or did not get enough credit in the past for the Ethiopian Jewish presence in Montreal, two points emerged from the interviews: first, the project was an orchestrated conjunction between several individuals, associations, institutions and governments. It is important to point out that the network developed in response to the operation involved scores of people who voluntarily contributed their time and money, and are not mentioned in this thesis. Secondly, all three informants agreed that it "all started with Baruch", in reference to the first Ethiopian Jew who arrived to Montreal in 1979.

In 1980, amidst his political activism, Baruch Tegene and some members of the Jewish community arranged the first organized (though not "official") arrival of three Ethiopian Jewish sisters in Montreal. In describing this event, Suzan remembers how the siblings' "personal migration became a community affair":

> When the three girls arrived it was a 'fait accompli'. We were faced with the fact that they were here.
>
> Q- Ok, so they weren't sponsored necessarily. It was a personal migration basically. It was once that they were here that they came in contact [with JIAS].
>
> A- [...] Again it's hard for me to tell you too much, unless they decide to, but, it was not very clean, the whole thing. It's too bad cause children were the brunt of it. [...] I'm not saying the system accommodated their individual situation, the system accommodated a 'fait accompli', which is not usually how anything is done. [...]. We [JIAS] got involved *after* the fact. I remember I went on a holiday and came back to a 'fait accompli', you know, so we got involved *after* the fact because there were immigration questions, because there were legal questions [...]. But it's not like somebody came up with a plan, which we were a part of.

> So the first people [Ethiopian Jews] that came are a trickle. First one first, start of a family. Another part of the family, then we got more involved in actually providing the means for them to get out, you know like organizing the papers. [...] So it happened bit by bit. In a way, everything was influenced with the people that came first, you know.

The sisters arrived under a minister's permit and did not have immigrant status. Though it was legal for them to be here, they were not extended residency rights such as Medicare. In a concerted effort, the CAEJ and the CJC, as well as other organizations, provided financial support for extra expenses. Niko explains how the girls eventually received immigrant status:

> Their mother decided to come. We had a direct line to Lloyd Axworthy's office, he was Minister of Immigration at the time, and there was a Jewish guy from Winnipeg, I forget his name, who was on the refugee board, and through him, he was the one to arrange for the mother to come, in a matter of days, we got a minister's permit. She also didn't have immigrant status, so she didn't have Medicare, and she couldn't just get a legal job, but finally they maneuvered the system [...]. The kids couldn't get status unless a parent was there. Finally when she came she got residency rights and the kids did also. [...] It was one [person] at a time, or a family at a time.

This case set off the development of the project to bring Ethiopian Jews to Montreal. Later, Ethiopian Jewish immigrants obtained status as sponsored refugees upon arrival, under negotiated terms with Immigration Canada.

Regardless of how organizations became involved or of "who was there first", a unique project slowly started to take shape in Montreal in the early 1980's. Suzan remembers the confusion:

> It was sort of a bit of a messy beginning, and then it sort of went from there [...] but I know the first few people came one by one, they didn't exactly, ehm, it sort of started with one case and then another case, you know we kind of started to make up as we went along, and then we kind of came up with a way of doing things.

She believes that Canadian immigration laws, which changed substantially in the late 1970's, and the federal government's implication in the affair provided the backbone to the project's concretization. The program's success, she believes, depended entirely on Canada's immigration policy and the willingness of the governmental authorities to implement the rescue plan.

Migration to Canada: Canadian Refugee Policy

Though much criticism has been directed towards the United Nations protocol, it remains a key element in refugee immigration policy for many Western countries, including Canada and the United States. Since "refugee" was incorporated as a distinct category in the Immigration Act, 1976, Canada's status determination procedure distinguishes two types of refugees: in accordance to the UN Convention protocol (Convention refugees), and the now defunct "Designated Class" immigrants or humanitarian refugees category (Basok & Simmons 1992: 133, Jacob 1992, Adelman 1987), whereby status was determined by national origin, for example in the case of refugees arriving from Vietnam in the 1980's.

By contrast, convention refugees are processed individually instead of by group and must prove, in accordance to the UN protocol, that a well-founded fear of persecution motivated their flight. According to Suzan, insitutionalizing refugee status in Canadian immigration policy and the subsequent development of private refugee sponsorship "changed significantly the way we do immigration in Canada", and gave an important role to private sponsorship:

> What happened in 1978 was that, it was the implementation of [...] the immigration law of 76', [that] put refugees into the law. [...] They were written in the law and they institutionalized the process for sponsorship, private sponsorship of refugees.
>
> The whole Vietnamese Boat People thing happened [in 1979], and it's hard to describe that whole period, [...] but there was this huge enthusiasm.[...] People responded [...]. Huge outpouring of involvement with the public. So private sponsorship, that was supposed to be built in slowly, became a big, big thing.

There are two ways of applying for refugee status in Canada: either to be selected by the government, or to be privately sponsored by an institution, group or individual. In regard to government-sponsored refugees or "public refugees" (*refugiés publics*, as they are referred to in Quebec), the federal government subsidizes expenses during the first year of residence, after which immigrants become eligible to apply for social assistance. In the case of Ethiopian Jewish refugees, some immigrated under private sponsorship, while the federal government financially supported others.

Refugees brought to Canada by private organizations or individuals immigrate under a "sponsorship agreement" prearranged between Immigration Canada and the sponsors. The Canadian government examines three points: the financial resources of the sponsors, the legitimacy of the applicant's claims, and the prospect of granting "landed immigrant" status to the candidate's family. Though sponsors in Quebec initially apply to the provincial government, Immigration Canada utlimately determines which applicants are elligible.

As opposed to other immigrants who must apply to the federal government prior to their arrival to the country, refugees may request status from within Canada. In contrast, for refugee applicants who have not entered Canada, Immigration Canada will only consider claimants that are *outside* the country of flight. For example, Ethiopian Jews who came to Canada via the Sudan were directly processed as "refugees", since they were already outside of Ethiopia. For candidates in Ethiopia, their claim was processed upon exiting Ethiopia and entering a transit country, generally Italy.

This migration project demanded collaboration and networking between governments, organizations, and many individuals. Despite the number of people concerned, only a handful were involved with the complex technical and bureaucratic aspect of their arrival. This, says Suzan, was "for safety, not secrecy".

The Emigration Process

Though an arrangement was established between the JIAS, on one hand, and the federal/provincial governments on the other, Canada got directly involved only after claimants were outside of Ethiopia. Hence, potential Ethiopian Jewish applicants based either in the Sudan (outside the country of flight) or Ethiopia (inside the country of flight) pertained to distinct courses in refugee legislation. In accordance to these laws, two migratory processes were elaborated depending on where the Ethiopian Jewish candidates were identified, that is in Sudan or Ethiopia:

From the Sudan: Only a few Ethiopian Jewish refugees (approximately eight) were sponsored out from the Sudan by the Canadian government or private Jewish sponsors. Given that the UN *defacto* granted refugee status to those in Sudanese camps, bringing government-sponsored candidates to Canada was a matter of bureaucratic processing. Contrary to this, private sponsorship entailed a different problematic since, in circumventing additional risks, Jewish names of funding institutions had to be concealed from Sudanese officials dispensing exit visas. According to Suzan, considering that "Le Soudan était très intolérent contre les Juifs à cette époque, où être Juif était un danger" (noted verbatim in a telephone conversation, December 5, 2000), a sponsor with a name like JIAS (Jewish Immigrant Aid Services) could potentially be a disadvantage and even block the refugee's departure. Suzan explains that an Anglican church "involved strictly as a cover" accepted to identify themselves as sponsors in an agreement orchestrated with JIAS. Once the refugees arrived in Canada, JIAS took over complete responsibility for the cases.

From Ethiopia: At its peak, the project brought out no more than 150 refugees between the 1980's and the 1990's. Suzan, Dion and Niko recalled that the hard part was getting people out of Ethiopia. Ethiopian Jews were required to leave socialist Ethiopia and to find way to a country of asylum in order to receive refugee status and subsequently be eligible for Canadian aid. Candidates had to be provided with compulsory "exit documents" recognized by Ethiopian officials, such as a job offer, a scholarship or medical papers. Sponsors funded the refugee's voyage from Ethiopia to Montreal via Italy, where Canada begun the bureaucratic processing of their claims.

Providing "Exit Documents"

According to my informants, a system was eventually set up whereby necessary documents were arranged for individuals seeking to leave Ethiopia. A special committee composed of at least one Ethiopian Jewish immigrant selected candidates. "Proofs" of personal relationship with a Canadian citizen were provided for applicants.

The Ethiopian government accepted one of three types of "exit documents": scholarships, working visas or medical papers. Hillel occupied a primary role in providing "exit documents" for many of the cases, though other organizations also partook in the effort.

According to Dion, the entire project demanded innovative ways of working and doing things:

> If we were sticking to the rules, then you couldn't do anything. Once you're prepared to fake papers and things that are paralegal, then stuff gets done.

Entering Canada

Suzan points out that "How they were brought out and how we got them in were two different things". To Canadian authorities, how the Ethiopian Jewish refugees arranged to leave Ethiopia was not relevant, only their sponsorship to settle in Canada.

Individuals *directly* involved at *both* ends were the Ethiopian Jewish immigrants. Their future and that of their families depended entirely on their rapport and interactions with authorities in Ethiopia and Canada.

As Dion explains, potential immigrants were deliberately kept in the dark:

> The ones coming out didn't know what was going on. All they knew was that they were receiving papers and money. They had no idea what was going on, [...] we didn't want people to know cause we were afraid that they would say something inappropriate, so they just knew they had a friend here and they were getting material. But [...] what was going on, they didn't know.

This protective measure limited communication already constrained by language barriers. Suzan mentions that some were disappointed to find out that their fake job offers and scholarships were designed only as a means of getting them out:

> And it's true that some people didn't understand that the papers that they got to leave were not what was going to happen to them once they got here. And there were a lot of misunderstandings around that, and that was part of the capacity of the people here to explain to their relatives, that, yes, you're getting a scholarship but it's not a scholarship, you're getting a work offer but it's not really a work offer. [...] The Canadians didn't care what we said to the Ethiopian government, particularly. But they did care what we told them, the Canadian government. So anything you told the Canadians that was not true was a *big* deal. Big, big, big deal. And of course it's very hard to compute this. I mean, it's ok to create a total fiction to get you out of Ethiopia, but you have to tell the absolute truth to the Canadians [...].

Suzan speaks of the impact of Ethiopia's socialist regime on the Ethiopian Jewish immigrants involved with the project. According to her, what was "underestimated very much, especially with some of the younger people, was the effect of coming out of that communist education, and what it did to people, the mistrust". Canadians involved in the effort attempted to figure out what was "Ethiopian" in the immigrant's behavior and what was a consequence of a "communist education", such as secrecy and "the checker and the checkee" system:

> In any society built on that model, there were these group meetings where people are denounced or, people are confronted. [...] When anyone goes anywhere they never go by themselves [...]. So there's always a checker, and a checker's checker.
>
> [...] For example, when we tried to send only one person to a particular meeting [in Montreal], they couldn't [...], they'd be squirming [...]. And finally we had to realize, the person just *couldn't* go by themselves, because they knew [...] they wouldn't be totally credible. Their report wouldn't be totally credible. So they needed somebody to be with them.

Who Came to Canada

Some Ethiopian Jewish refugees in Montreal had the additional responsibility of aiding pro-Falasha agencies and the Canadian government in rescuing friends and families from Ethiopia. According to Suzan:

> [...] Each person as they arrived was playing, had several roles, okay. Usually most people when they first arrive they try to integrate, [...] you try to find them services you need, you concentrate on the task at hand in terms of, you try to figure out how this society works, how do I integrate, how do I find a job, send my children to school. [...] But the Ethiopians were on a mission! Alright, not everybody, I must say. [...] Here are these Ethiopian Jews that are expected to know all these things and do all these things, and they felt a responsibility to try and help other people. But, in order to help other people effectively, you have to understand the system that you're in. You have to understand what are the possibilities and the limitations about what you're asking for [...] in order to try and help the people you are trying to help!
>
> And I remember the time [...] we had gone with others, who went to Ottawa to explain a little bit to the guy who was in charge of refugee affairs in Ottawa, of how things work in Ethiopia, for him to understand what was going on and to, because, at one point we took a couple of the younger people who had been instrumental in helping be able to reach the embassy there [...]. And at one point, this guy who was about 16 or 17 at the time was explaining- but you got to understand, look at the pressure! What are most 16 and 17 year olds doing? They're not out rescuing their families, they're not expected to explain stuff about their country, I mean how many people here can explain to you anything about Canada and how it works, for God's sake? How many people finishing high school, who haven't quite finished high school, can explain to you how the Canadian system works? And we were expecting from them, to find out how the Ethiopian system works. And they did know a lot more than any Canadian kid would know about the system here! But there are limits to what you can know. There are limits if you've always lived in Gondar, to understand how anything works in Addis.

Suzan's narrative clearly explains the double task ascribed to the immigrants, most of whom left Africa in their teenage years. On the one hand, refugees relatively young in age dealt with the experience of displacement and of discontinuity upon leaving family and friends behind in a risky migration process. Upon arrival refugees were expected to provide information in order to facilitate subsequent cases, dealing first-hand with the Canadian and Immigration officials, and representatives of Jewish organizations.

For refugees from Sudan, the process began prior to their arrival to Canada. They were identified by project coordinators in North America and subsequently employed by Israel to direct Ethiopian Jews from refugee camps toward rescue planes during Operation Moses. Though both Jeremy and Almaz briefly mentioned "working for Israel", neither gave any further detail about their involvement.

Dion provided some information about what Ethiopian Jews working for the Mossad experienced, in one case stating that:

> *X* had killed people [in Sudan] when she was [in her late teens], [...] and pretended to be a Muslim woman, and then [in preparation for Operation Moses], would take them [Ethiopian Jewish refugees] to the airport to take the planes [for Israel]. All the ones who were in Montreal [after their stay in the Sudan] were the agents actually doing the transportation.

Suzan assumes that "Those people had a really rough time [in Sudan]. I think to this day we don't know everything they lived through". Like Dion, she claims that "The first group [of Ethiopian Jews] that came [to Canada] from the Sudan were the helpers".

In contrast to the large cohorts settled in Israel, the most who came to Canada were high school graduates since they "had to be able to handle the immigration" (Niko), which implied a minimum knowledge of language skills and literacy. Fairly young in age, many though not all, were able to express themselves minimally in English. All of the Ethiopian Jews in Canada who came under the migration project are related to one another by ties of kinship or friendship:

> Suzan: I mean there is nobody who is totally apart from everybody, cause that's how they came here, they came here through their connections. It started with Baruch who brought the next one, who brought the next one. [...] Things kind of branched off.

Dion explained that of the 300 Ethiopian Jews rescued by the project based in Montreal, half were directed to Israel while the rest settled in Canada. Suzan and Niko hold that at its peak, the Canadian project brought in no more than a total of 150 Ethiopian Jews. According to a present JIAS employee, about a hundred came in the 1980's and some fifty more in the 1990's (see Appendix IV for numbers of Ethiopian Jews in Canada). No more than seventy Ethiopian Jews, half of whom are children born in Ethiopia, Canada or Israel, presently live in Montreal. Some made *aliyah* and resettled to Israel, while others moved to other Canadian cities, primarily Ottawa and Toronto. Unfortunately, several Ethiopian Jewish community members died in Canada, either by suicide (three according to Niko, and one Beta Israel Pentecostal since Grunau's 1995 thesis) or accidents (one to my knowledge).

Shortly before Operation Solomon in 1991, the CJC and the JIAS stopped the Canadian program because "Israel established diplomatic ties with Ethiopia. At that point, it became steadier, and we saw no particular role to bring them [Ethiopian Jews] to Canada" (Niko). A letter written by JIAS Executive Director Joel Moss dated January 11th, 1990, and addressed to Mr. Hector Cowan, Director of Refugee Affairs, Employment and Immigration Canada, indicates that "in view of recent developments [...] and the renewal of diplomatic relations between Ethiopian and Israel", no additional cases will be processed for Canada (i).

Though the project officially terminated and the CJC Committee for Ethiopian Jewry disbanded in 1991, a small number of Ethiopian-Israelis have left Israel to settle in Montreal. (None agreed to participate in this research.) An anthropologist who has worked with Ethiopian immigrants in Israel suggests that for some Ethiopian-Israelis who adopted Pentecostalism, Canada and particularly Montreal is seen as a haven from familial and societal pressures. To my knowledge there are no research on Ethiopian-Israelis (Pentecostals or others) in Canada.

The creation and implementation of the program described here significantly influenced the lives of those involved, particularly the migrants themselves. This chapter has presented the technical aspects of Ethiopian Jewish migration to Canada. Before introducing the Ethiopian Jewish informants' experiences of immigration and settlement (Chapter Six), in Chapter Five I describe the representation that framed their arrival. In doing so, I explore the Beta Israel image constructed and disseminated in the media and by Jewish organizations in Montreal.

CHAPTER 5: POLITICAL ACTIVISM AND REPRESENTATION: CREATING A DISCOURSE

"For the Israelis, the Ethiopians
are like long-lost relatives
stepping out of biblical times"

-The New York Times, 4-01-85, p. A1 (j).

The main objective of Chapter Five is to explore the conjunction between political activism and the representation it creates of its mission. In North America, Ethiopian Jews became known in a framework of intense political activism, media coverage and debate. Contemporary Ethiopia and Ethiopian Jewish history were presented by private pro-Falasha organizations in messages framed in Jewish, biblical and humanitarian discourses. In this chapter, I will argue that the expectations of people involved with Ethiopian Jews in Montreal, in terms of interaction with the latter and integrative processes with the local Jewish community, were influenced mainly by a group image constructed *prior* to the migration, and reinforced by the immigrants themselves upon arrival. I explore Ethiopian Jewish migration to North America in reference to a representational structure where the immigrants never appear just as people, but as an urgent *political and humanitarian cause* in desperate need, as the object of a *sacred Jewish mission.*

Salvation Through Migration: Constructing "Falasha" Image

In her account of Canada's burst of support for the Vietnamese Boat People, Suzan explains how imagery determines the response towards humanitarian issues, underlining the dynamic relation between the *media*, *governmental authorities* and the *public*'s involvement:

> There was this huge enthusiasm, it was this moment where everything converged, where government and media were on the same wave length, huge amount of publicity, you know like 'pr', [...] with the idea: here are these people, you know they're half way around the world, and they need help and we should help them. People responded. [It] depends how you represent things to the public.

Pro-Falasha organizations promoted the Beta Israel cause extensively via newspapers, articles, books, newsletters and conferences. In North America, widely diffused Jewish and non-Jewish newspapers (to name a few: The Gazette, Le Devoir, La Presse, The Suburban and The Canadian Jewish News in Montreal and Canada; The New York Post and The New York Times in the United States; The Jerusalem Post in Israel) broadly informed and educated the public about the group's plight. Promoted in the media,

private organizations, as did some authors and journalists, transmitted an essentialised and romanticized image of Ethiopia, Israel and the Falashas, where history was rearranged and interpreted in accordance with political agendas (Kaplan 1992, Quirin 1992, Shelemay 1989). I will present examples of such imagery throughout this chapter.

In the effort to mobilize support in Jewish circles, the peril of the Beta Israel was portrayed by way of analogies to the experience of Jews in Christian Europe, thereby evoking powerful identity references. Private pro-Falasha organizations provided an intense discourse that successfully *played on Jewish memory*, whose pivotal points involved references to Jewish experience of 'otherness' in medieval and contemporary Europe. Memory invoked as political tool gave urgency to the Falasha cause through emphasis on collective suffering due to religious difference, discrimination (anti-semitism), and religious persecution (the holocaust) across time (from the past to the present) and place (Europe and Africa).

In invoking the language of pan-Jewish solidarity, the first Ethiopian Jew I met in Montreal informed me that "It was not easy being a Jew in Addis, not at all". Seeman's work with Ethiopian-Israelis (including the Feres Mura, i.e. former Beta Israel Christians who have returned or wish to return to Judaism) presents collective experiences of distress as a paradigm for Jewish solidarity and affiliation. According to the author, "the ability to share or react to suffering is deployed as a powerful claim to kinship and mutual responsibility" (1999:105).

The link between the Shoah and the Beta Israel was repeatedly invoked in articles and newsletters. In an extreme representation, a Hillel leaflet produced in 1983 (see Appendix V for a copy) associating Sudanese refugee settlements with Nazi concentration camps and portraying the "communauté-soeur", the Falashas, as "la minorité Juive la plus persécutée au monde" (emphasis in the original). Moreover, Africa's particular history is muted and re-defined in European terms: "Ce nouvel HOLOCAUSTE n'a pas lieu en Allemagne bien sûr, mais en Afrique" (emphasis in the original).

While such discourse cast the plight of the Beta Israel in a *symbolically meaningful* framework, Africa and specifically Ethiopia were disassociated from their own context and

reconfigured to highlight *continuity* between European and African Jewish experiences. Charged with sentiments drawn from collective Jewish memory, this discourse specifically constructed by and designed for Westerners injects reflections of European Jewish experiences into an alien context. As Quirin states: "The attempts made by some to describe the Beta Israel as a *foreign* minority does violence to their history and to Ethiopian history, though it fits into an analogous outmoded view of Africa" (1992: xi, author's emphasis). In speaking of the Euro- or Americo-centric (to borrow once again Pankhurst's words) approach to Ethiopian Jews, Bezunesh addressed the constructed analogy between Christian Europe and Ethiopia:

> Like in Europe you had Christians and then you had Jews, there were hardly any Muslims, right? [When] they wanted to bring out the Jews [from Ethiopia] I think a lot of the Europeans were identifying [...] with their own historical experience, I think. [...] They saw their ancestors [in Europe] [...] being persecuted there because they were Jews. And the states made it almost like a law to persecute them, [be]cause then the church had a lot of control too, and they collaborated obviously. But in Ethiopia, [...] they were nothing, [...] there are just so many people to clamp down on, so many other religious, you know what I mean? So many people of indigenous religions, so many, do you know what I mean?

Of the Americo- and Euro-centric thinking on the Beta Israel, Pankhurst writes:

> People in Europe – and America too often assume that Ethiopia, and the Beta Israel, must fit into an essentially European schema. They write as though ... so-called "Ethiopian Jews" differ from European Jews only insofar as they come from Africa; and that relations between the Beta Israel and their Ethiopian Christian neighbors are no more than a replica of inter-religious relations in Europe. Such assumptions, it could be argued, are largely the product of Eurocentrism, and fail to take sufficient account of the uniqueness of the Ethiopian, or African situation (1995:1).

The link between political activities on behalf of the Beta Israel and the holocaust is underlined in Summerfield's analysis of the group's situation during the Italian Fascist occupation of Ethiopia between 1935-1941. The author concludes "It would seem that various pro-Falasha organizations attempted to place the Falashas in the arena of world Jewry by exaggerating the impact that the occupation had on the Beta Israel in order to portray them as 'suffering Jews' at the time that European Jewry was being savagely persecuted" (1999:58).

Though not all portrayals were as extreme as the one in the Hillel leaflet, others used on the Shoah analogy as a strong reminder of the deadliness of "silence". Playing on guilt, the authors of an "Information Paper" published by the AAEJ (No. 7, February 1980) call upon American Jews to partake in the holiest injunction of Judaism, that is the Mitzvah of saving lives (*pikuah nefesh*) in a paragraph entitled "A Holocaust in the Making":

> In a tragedy hauntingly reminiscent of Europe during the Nazi occupation, a community of 28,000 Jews is silently facing extinction. While most of world Jewry remains unaware, the Falashas are caught in the middle of a revolution and a civil war. They suffer from disease, poverty and intense conversion efforts by missionaries. Today they are being dispossessed of their homes, enslaved, and killed. The holocaust analogy does not lie in the method, nor in the recurrence of Jewish suffering. Rather it is in the reality that just as the extermination of Jews by Nazis proceeded in secrecy, very few know of the continuing decimation of the Falashas. If their plight worsens, then a second holocaust will wax unknown, until it surfaces to once again shame the Jewish conscience.

Drawing from his interviews with members of the Jewish community in Montreal, Olazabal (1999: 249) writes :

> Il est indéniable que la représentation mentale de la *shoah* évoquée en tant que lieu de mémoire a suscité un sentiment de cuplabilité plus ou moins prononcé tant chez les rescapés que chez ceux à qui l'Amérique épargna les persécutions, tout come parmi un certain nombre de descendants.

The guilt over "not having done enough" evoked on the last sentences of both excerpts is echoed in the narrative of one Jewish (non-Ethiopian) informant. Explaining why he got involved in bringing Ethiopian Jews to Canada, Dion recounts "I'm the child of a holocaust survivor. The Jewish community was responding the same way it responded during the holocaust, they weren't doing anything."

Events of the early 1980's involving Ethiopian Jews occurred at a time when Jews in the Diaspora felt impelled to actively and consequentially partake in the *making* of Jewish and general history. Recalling the shame and grief related to the Shoah, private organizations pressured Israel to mediate and take action. According to Rapoport (1986:57), distorted versions of atrocity reports in the Western Jewish press, such as claims that a "holocaust" was under way, stemmed from a desire to see the Falashas' wishes of making *aliyah* be fulfilled.

In response to the widely received portrayal of Ethiopia as a "*lieu de memoire*" corresponding to Nazi Germany, a CJC document signed by Stan L. Cytrynbaum, National Chairman, CJC Committee for Ethiopian Jewry writes:

> With respect to the analogy of the experience during the holocaust, there is no analogy. Israel and the organized Jewish community in the Diaspora, and especially here in Canada, are treating the condition of Ethiopian Jewry as a matter of the very highest priority, and are, fortunately receiving the most cooperative response from a variety of governments, including the Canadian Government. At this time there is no inaction, passivity, lack of vision, lack of daring, lack of anger or lack of compassion. (k)

Though it has been superficially explored in the literature, my research indicates that a small number of Ethiopian Jewish activists working with pro-Falasha political groups contributed enormously to the construction and dissemination of the "persecuted Jews" (to borrow Quirin's (1992) term) image prior to and after the airlifts. North American Jewish groups brought in Ethiopian Jewish spokespersons to promote their cause and offer a "first hand account" of the Falasha situation (see for example, "The Black Jews" by Louis Rapoport). Bezunesh and I discussed how an Ethiopian Jewish activist whom she knows portrayed the community in a way significant to non-Ethiopian Jews, with references to pan-Jewish suffering. When I inquired as to why she thought the activist did that, she said "I guess *X* saw his people suffer in Ethiopia and wanted to do something about it".

To deny the suffering lived by the Beta Israel in Ethiopia is to distort their experience. By the same token, framing their time in Ethiopia within an 'imported' rhetoric misrepresents their experience. The Euro- and Americo-centric analogy draws from a charged political context that, ultimately, was used to better or to save people's lives. In parallel, however, the political discourse constructed around the Beta Israel exploited on the misrepresentations made of the Beta Israel's and Ethiopia's history. The tendency to exaggerate the link between Jews in Europe and Jews in Ethiopia in terms of their experiences of 'otherness' is a popular deformation that has persisted to this day. Though academic literature has emphasized these issues (Kaplan 1992, Quirin 1992, Shelemay 1991, Pankhurst 1995), the consequences of such imagery, as they relate to Ethiopian Jewish self-perception and representation, remains largely unexplored.

As mentioned in Chapter Four, Ethiopian Jewish immigrants in Canada negotiated the double task of integrating into Western society and creating political awareness. Suzan's account makes clear the type of political involvement that was expected of the new immigrants:

> Q- Was there pressure put on people [Ethiopian Jews], let's say, to do the 'p.r.' [public relations] thing ?
>
> A- Of course. All the time. [...] Yeah. People were invited and do the fund raising, and there was a [Ethiopian] dance group that was happening. [...] And people felt that- there was a lot of pressure on people to put their guts on the table and going around and telling these stories, and bringing awareness and fund-raising-
>
> Q- You mean in terms of what they experienced as Jews?
>
> A- Yeah. Sometimes you tell the story, and you know, if you tell your story enough, the story- If you have to go out, y'know, once a month, and tell your story, and the story of the Ethiopian, or, or- So imagine if you are

> on a mission all the time. [...] You can't keep constantly putting your own guts on the table. You make- it's not that you make it up, I think you decide...
>
> Q- You converge, so that the audience-
>
> A- Decide what converges. You can also decide, what am I willing to share? Of course it becomes embellished a little bit. Or it becomes a version of the story that you relate [to others]- Imagine if you were here, you had just arrived in Canada, and you had to be- on one hand you are trying to settle, and on the other hand, you are on a mission to save Armenia. Y'know. You are doing this at the same time ya' know?

Though some conferences and reunions were organized in the name of political activism, this interview excerpt shows how the expectations of the people in the local Jewish community formed the Ethiopian Jewish speakers' account. This led the immigrants to depict their experiences in terms of what was meaningful to the audience. As Suzan mentions, "embellished" stories present a discourse that the audience can symbolically access, while it pressures speakers into disclosing *personal* information about their lives and experiences of how they lived and left Africa.

"Embellishing" helps understand how Ethiopian Jewish migratory experiences became cast in terms of biblical imagery. The example I present here is the public narrative written for a conference given in Montreal on April 20, 1985, signed by an Ethiopian Jewish immigrant: "It is a miracle like the exodus of the time of Moses. We feel as if we have come out of the slavery of Egypt to the freedom of the Promised Land" (1). Interestingly, during my research I came across other personal information about the speaker that was not addressed in that particular speech. This is not to insinuate that the spokesperson should have or had to reveal everything about her personal life, nor is it my intention to reduce the importance of what was said during the lecture. In giving her speech, however, certain information selectively excluded from her text might have affected the representation of her experience, and by the same token, would have distanced her from the idealized Jewish identity she presented. This example illustrates how narratives, far from being constructed in an isolated sphere, are elaborated in a dynamic context that influences the procedure of deciding what is said and what is not said.

During my stay in Israel, I witnessed the public narrative of an Ethiopian-Israeli friend (Lisa) previously employed as a spokesperson by the American Jewish Joint Distribution

Committee[1] in the United States. Lisa delivered a personal and emotional story to a crowd of American and British Jewish tourists about a seven-year-old Falasha girl's experience in Ethiopia, Sudan and Israel. In perfect English, she explained how her community tenaciously held on to religion, never letting go of the dream of "returning to the land of milk and honey[2]" despite their hard times in Ethiopia.

Debating the veracity of her narrative lies beyond the scope of my intentions, and by no means do I consider Lisa's feelings about her intense and unique experiences as false or insincere. What I would like to focus on is *how* she presented her story. She offered an image her audience could easily understand by conveying it in a meaningful and recognizable format. Omitting any mention of other persecuted or discriminated groups in Ethiopia, Lisa's story positioned the Beta Israel as the *only* minority and as *the* antithesis to the Christian population. Framed by biblical imagery, she interpreted two symbolically charged references in Ethiopian society, also present in European Jewish history, as symbols of a pan-Jewish identity: the notion of the evil eye (*buda*) marked her narrative, as did the status of landless and occupational minorities. In previous chapters, I examined the complexity of the Beta Israel's status in Ethiopian society as carriers of the evil eye and as a landless occupational minority. I have underlined that the Beta Israel were not the only landless occupational minority in Ethiopia (though some Beta Israel did own land), nor were they the only group stigmatized as holders of supernatural powers. In presenting these attributes as exclusive to Jews in Ethiopia, once again drawing parallels with Christian Europe, Lisa overlooked the specific setting of Ethiopia's socio-cultural and religious environment. Yet the speaker offered a discourse that her Western Jewish audience can symbolically access, all the while muting important aspects of the African milieu that might distance her story from the idealized "pan-Jewish experience" she evoked.

In regard to her migration she readily admitted, "When I came to Israel I thought all the Jews were black like me". Nonetheless, Lisa did not present her experience in terms of being a part of a visible minority in Israel, nor did she refer to internal differences, i.e. linguistic, cultural and religious, dividing the umbrella-termed "Ethiopian Jewish community" in Israel. Moreover, the

---

[1] The JDC is an American Jewish organization founded in 1914. It channels funds, sponsoring programs of relief and rescue to Jews around the world.
[2] I recorded Lisa's narrative verbatim during my stay in Israel, in the city of Beer Sheva, July 1999.

speaker did not explore any references of indigenous healing practices, such as Ethiopian women's use (including the Beta Israel) of menstrual seclusion huts. Nor did she refer to the "non-Jewish" elements of the Beta Israel's religious beliefs, linked to supernatural powers, possession cults, amulet writing, body tattoos, etc.

Visual Imagery

Lisa's seminar ended with a short film showing the arrival of Operation Moses refugees to Israel. Powerful images of thousands of barefooted and skinny Ethiopians wrapped in white *gabbis* and *shammas* (typical Ethiopian clothing wrapped around the body), and children screaming in their mother's arms exploded on the screen. Minutes later, *gabbis* were replaced by jogging pants and tee-shirts, their feet covered with sparkling white running shoes, and the airport background substituted by *mercaz clitas*, or absorption centers.

Prior to the airlifts, visual imagery played an important function in communicating the plight of the Beta Israel to Westerners and Israelis. Some information sheets arranged by pro-Falasha groups (for example the Canadian Association for Ethiopian Jews (CAEJ) and the Hillel Task Force for Ethiopian Jewry) included pictures of huts, garments and statuettes decorated with the Magen David.

Viewed as an 'authentic' Ethiopian Jewish production, these famous clay figurines became popular items for Western tourists visiting Ethiopia. A few of them are part of the ethnographic collection of the anthropology department at Université de Montréal (see Appendix I for pictures). During a class discussion, graduate students including myself observed the imposing representation of the Lion of Judah adorned with the Magen David on one of the statuettes (Appendix I; illustration no.2). Impressed by its majestic allure, we concluded it to be a symbol of the Beta Israel's unbroken and continuous Jewish heritage, reinforcing our notion of an 'indigenous' Jewish group in Ethiopia.

Contrary to our idealized interpretation of Beta Israel history, Shabtay writes: "During the period of [Faitlovitch's] visits and activities (1881-1955) some major changes took place, among them: the Star of David begun to appear as a symbol of the Jewish people" (1999:4). Besides

Shabtay, other authors have mentioned the Star's appearance as a contemporary symbol widely adopted by the Beta Israel preceding contact with Western Jews. In Abbink's article titled "An Ethiopian Jewish 'Missionary' as Culture Broker" (1985), the author writes of a Beta Israel "active as a 'missionary' teacher among the Tigray community in the 1960's and 1970's" (22:1985), who urged Beta Israel women to replace Christian embroidery on their clothes by Jewish symbols, such as the Star of David and *menorahs*. According to the author, many Christians irritated by the demand, interpreted the move as an attack to gain political support. As explained in Chapter Two, the Beta Israel's recognition as part of the Jewish people entailed political and national sentiments that conflicted with Ethiopian nationalism and its socialist government.

In efforts to lobby for support, pictures of Ethiopian straw and mud huts were sometimes added to information sheets. In such depictions of African village life, no distinctions were made between poor villages and better-off ones, because the images of an impoverished mode of living meshed with the political message of 'saving' the Beta Israel. As Malkki (1997) puts it, *images were made to speak instead of people*. These portrayals were addressed to audiences in Canada, the United States, Europe and Israel. Especially with Ethiopia's famine in the 1980's, it is easy for Westernized viewers to see huts and other images of villages as illustrations of poverty.

Without discounting the famine, I would like to underline that certain elements that Westerners almost 'naturally' associate with extreme economic hardship in far away continents do not necessarily reflect the people's *real* situation. Three Ethiopian Jewish informants who participated in this research originated from villages where their families were economically comfortable in terms of Ethiopian standard. If we were to view pictures of their native villages, would they also be seen as "poor", though others in Ethiopia might consider them "rich".

Interpretations of visual images of Ethiopian Jew's mode of life were made on the basis of representations of Ethiopia in the media. As Sorenson explains, after the news reports on the country's famine crisis in 1984, "Virtually overnight, it seemed that a new image of Ethiopia had been created. [...] Ethiopia appeared as a nightmarish zone of human suffering, distillation of Third World horrors. [...], the emblem of disaster, a symbol of nightmarish collapse of all order" (1993:1). Sensationalist images of famine, civil war and political turmoil stained Ethiopia's image,

reducing the country as a whole to a locale of generalized famine and chaos. Visual images occupied an important role in diffusing the notion of Ethiopia first and foremost as a poverty-stricken and refugee-producing country. It is within this larger framework that Ethiopian Jew's plight was established to the public.

Debating Information and the Media

While private pro-Falasha agencies promoted the image of Ethiopian Jewish suffering as a consequence of their Jewish identity, a fact-finding mission organized by B'nai Brith Canada in 1984 reports: "We found no specifically anti-Jewish legislation or discrimination. That is important in view of the wrong information that is being fed to the media. It is true that Jews are not allowed to leave Ethiopia, but because of the Marxist government in that country, no one is allowed to exercise the option of leaving that country" (m).

Another group composed of Canadian Jewish Congress representatives and Canadian Jewish community leaders concluded after visiting Ethiopia in November 1984 that "the conditions are not too bad (by Ethiopian standards)" for Ethiopian Jews since "the effects of the famine have not yet reached their towns and communities" (n), though a shortage of food supplies may occur in that "large communities move from famine areas into Gondar [where most Ethiopian Jews live]". According to an article titled "Rescue of Ethiopian Jews a sensitive subject" (o), this last assessment angered Ethiopian Jews in Montreal in that it "made it sound as if the Jews are not desirous of leaving". Soon after the press release, a CJC document signed by Stan L. Cytrynbaum, director of the CJC's Committee for Ethiopian Jewry, positions the Congress in light of Ethiopia's famine crisis:

> The Canadian Association for Ethiopian Jews (C.A.E.J.) appears to be the only organization in the world which is portraying Ethiopian Jews in Ethiopia as prime victims of the Ethiopian drought and famine. We receive calls every day from people in the community who have the impression that the Ethiopian Jewish community in Ethiopia is being devastated by the famine. This is simply not true at the present time. The nature of the publicity and public solicitation carried on by C.A.E.J. is deliberately misleading and confusing the community. (p)

Though this indicates that the CJC did not participate in exaggerated representations of poverty affecting Jews there in particular, it favored an image of the Beta Israel as remnants from biblical times and Ethiopia as a land deprived of modernization. Upon returning from a second CJC fact-finding mission reported in The Suburban (November 23rd, 1988) (q), Stan Cytrynbaum states:

"If I wanted to imagine what life was like at the time of Abraham that would be the closest I'd get to it". The author of the article writes: "The Montrealers saw virtually no mechanization. [...] Housing is primitive. The simple windowless dirt-floor structures are constructed of sticks and mud. They lack electricity and there is no apparent water supply ...". The delegation visited regions which were economically fairly stable in respect to other areas, mainly Addis Abeba and Gondar province. In another article (Janice Arnold 1988) (r), Barry Smith, a CJC committee member, describes Ethiopia as "it was like stepping back 2,000 years".

CJC and B'nai Brith either refuted head-on charges of anti-semitism linked to the famine crisis made by private organizations, or simply omitted any mention of it as a cause of suffering amongst Ethiopian Jews. Yet, when I inquired as to why they believed Ethiopian Jews were regarded negatively in Ethiopia, all three former representatives of Jewish agencies referred to anti-semitism, and made parallels with the Jewish experience in Christian Europe:

> Suzan: La persecution religieuse, à cause qu'ils étaient Juifs, bien sûr. (Noted verbatim during a telephone conversation.)
>
> Dion: It was clearly anti-semitic. [...] Falasha means "landless" did you know, [...] All these stereotypes of the Jews in the Middle Ages, the Falashas had. [...] The evil eye, they could put curses on the people, everything that was European anti-semitism they had against Ethiopian Jews, so it's clear that there's a link between the two [...] it was anti-semitism, it's not just that they were not Christian.

Niko seemed to be the most informed about Ethiopian society and contextualized his reply accordingly:

> Q: In your opinion, from what you read and what you understood, do you think that they were being discriminated against because they were Jewish per se?
>
> A- In Ethiopia? Yes. There are a few different factors. One is that the dominant religion of Ethiopia, even though it's not the largest population, is Christianity. There's an element of anti-semitism which is virtually inherent in traditional Christianity. And that, just as it affected Europe, it affects Ethiopia. Ethiopia, there is another element. [...] You might say forget the religion for a moment, and think of it in terms of India, [...] the Falashas, [...] the other Ethiopians referred to them [as] strangers, foreigners. [...] It became an occupational caste. There are certain occupations that are taboo in certain societies and in other ones they are respectable. The Ethiopian Jews, for I don't know how long, but it seems like it's a very long tradition, do work of smelting, work with fire, blacksmiths, tool making, and your Ethiopian tradition, and I think it's similar with other societies too, views working with fire as work of the devil. And people who work with it are in league with the devil.
> ... It's a kind of society where superstition and rumor is very very central to the life. It's not my field, but I think that in many primitive, maybe I shouldn't be using primitive, but- I'll use it, in many primitive societies, that's a very important factor. [...] My family comes from Poland, and with European Jews, there were long standing superstitions which we don't even realize are there!

His narrative shows Ethiopian Jewish immigrants experiencing a "cultural clash" during the transition from Ethiopia's "primitive society" to more industrialized countries such as Canada and Israel:

> The culture clash is very deep. People would react and then say 'They're coming from a primitive place and they don't know running water and they want to drink the toilet water and they don't know how to turn on the electricity'-
>
> Q- About the ones in Israel ?
>
> A- In Israel and here. You know most of the ones that came here in the beginning were from a more urban [region], but even. [...] Even those who were well educated, the culture clash was enormous, enormous.

Although Ethiopian Jews in Canada had a secondary education or more, Suzan, Dion and Niko pointed out that it was not an easy transition for the immigrants or the host Jewish community in terms of integrating and getting acquainted with every-day life in North America.

Living the Image: Beyond the Media

Two (non-Ethiopian) Jewish informants expressed amazement in regard to the different modes of life between Ethiopia and Canada:

> Niko : Things like opening up a revolving door, [Shay] lived in Addis Abeba, they had a car. [Shay] was in an [elite] school. But a revolving door was, woah! An escalator! These things, you know it's very easy to learn, when you're carrying your water from a stream, for a quarter of a mile, it's very easy to learn how to turn on the tap. When you see people going everyday to go find wood to burn. This is the most common thing you see in Ethiopia, people are going and hunting for wood ...
>
> Dion: We gave someone tons of clothes, pants, socks, everything. We said 'This is for you'. So he went and he took one pair of pants, one pair of socks. We said 'This is all for you', he looked and said 'You can only wear one at a time'. [...] We took them to stores, elevators, escalators, they [had] never [seen them] before. It was as if you took someone from Mars and brought them to Canada. The grocery stores freaked them out, [...] there was so much food. They couldn't believe it. Little things. Escalators freaked them out. Little things we take for granted, they were shocked at. [...] To see them come out and not know basics was amazing. I saw their faces when they saw, they saw an escalator or at the food store, it was as if you were on Mars. It was so foreign to them it was unbelievable to think that these things we take for granted they had never seen before.

Suzan obliquely notes that Ethiopian Jewish immigrants negotiated the wide gap between their lives in Ethiopia, North American standards of living and the status of the Jewish community in Montreal:

> Now, when you arrive in Canada, in the midst of the sea of plenty, and to a community [that] doesn't work in the factories anymore, you know. [...] You see wealth, you see community structures, you see this, you see that. That's what you see. [...] You see other people who are telling you all kinds of things about how you live your life, while they are living the very nice life, thank you very much. [...] A lot of people meant well but were very patronizing; other people were very helpful because they were very respectful.

She attributes the dynamics of "power imbalance" not only between Ethiopian Jews and the Jewish community, but equally in regards to any refugee or immigrant who arrives to a new country. However, individuals involved in the integration of the Ethiopian Jews felt they could comment on how the immigrants were settling. Suzan relates:

> The trouble is, people came in with a very high profile, everyone had something to say, people [Ethiopian Jews] were very much taken in hand you know […] One of my clients who I won't mention who he is, I had one guy who would, really I learned a lot from, […] he used to ask me his questions. And, he was great because by these questions I understood what was, some of what was going on, some, not all. So one day […] he says 'You know, who has power over me?'. I said, '[…] What do you mean?'. He said 'people are always telling me what to do. Who do I have to listen to and who don't I have to listen to?'. […] Then I realized […], you know how when you're training as a social worker […], you're […] taught how to make suggestions, in a non-direct way. […] I would try to be indirect. […] If you just arrived and all these people who are fairly fancy people in the community are telling you 'You should do this and you should do that, you should do something else', you know, and questioning your choices and making snarky comments about why you chose to spend money on this or the other thing, people take it- I mean, people are not stupid, you know! People are good at sniffing out, you know. So what he was asking […] was, of all these people actually telling me what to do, who actually has the power over me, that I have to listen to? You know, that was a really good question!

> … He [an Ethiopian Jewish immigrant] asked, 'How many times do I have to say 'thank you' for the same thing […]? I was given a coat and I said 'thank you', how many people do I have to say thank you to?' Everyone expected them to be so grateful all the time […]. It was terrible. It's a terrible thing to do to somebody, to be constantly putting them in this position of reminding them of what they're getting […]. For example, […] I'm not a religious person, but, about certain levels in the notion of *tzedakha*, of charity, of Jewish charity, there are levels […]. And the lowest level, the most uncomfortable is 'I give you something', and the highest level is, 'I give, and I don't know who it's going to, and the person that gets it doesn't know who it's coming from and I don't ask for any recognition'. So it's anonymous. The highest level of charity is anonymous, nobody knows I gave, nobody knows who you got it from. But no, it wasn't like that at all.

This narrative clearly underlines the power imbalance and dependency experienced by the new immigrants and the host Jewish community. The individual in the first example seemed to understand there might be a personal stake in accepting or refusing "strong suggestions" about how he chose to live. The second example indicates how immigrants were reminded of their liminal position vis-à-vis the powerful core, where the receiver was constantly made to feel like a needy 'Other'. Suzan's narrative shows that the immigrants were treated like 'babies' of the Jewish community, and that some people involved had a patronizing approach. As I show in the following section, the dynamics of giver/receiver was present from the beginning of the migration project, since originally, once they safely arrived in Canada, community officials expected the immigrants to make *aliyah* and settle in Israel.

Staying in Montreal: An Issue

Unlike the United States, where refugees and immigrants can enter and proceed to a third country of settlement, Canada does not sponsor sending people abroad. In other words, Ethiopian Jewish refugees in Canada were (and still are) allowed to leave for Israel if they chose to do so, but this was not a condition imposed on their arrival. This means that the sponsored refugees could live wherever they wished. The immigrant's flexibility to exercise this right made "some people unhappy", according to Suzan.

She pointed out that the debate of *yeridah* (living outside of Israel) versus *aliyah* (moving to Israel) is an issue involving *any* Jewish immigrant who chooses to settle outside of Israel. However, this theme took on a different twist in the Ethiopian Jew's case since direct attempts were made to convince the group to make *aliyah.* In 1987, Vainshtein, a former director of immigration in Israel involved in the integration of Ethiopian Jews, spoke at a conference on "The Unfinished Exodus of Ethiopian Jewry" in a Montreal synagogue, to a crowd of fifty people including many Ethiopian Jews. According to a news account:

> ...Vainshtein bluntly told [them] [...] that the only place for the Ethiopian Jew is Israel. "As for you here, I hope it's only temporary. There is no future for Ethiopian Jewry in Montreal, or anywhere outside Israel. The future is only Israel . . . . If this is true for strong communities in North America, it's especially true for weaker ones."

Once again, the immigrant's liminal position is highlighted, as the speaker conveys the message that Ethiopian Jews are not capable of making competent decisions without the intervention of a powerful Israeli or Jewish agent. Though Vainshtein believes this holds even for "strong [Jewish] communities" in North America, it applies all the more to Ethiopian Jews in the Diaspora. The immigrant's capability of making sound life-decisions is questioned and they are relegated to a position of weakness and dependency vis-à-vis a more powerful 'Other'.

I asked Rudy, an Ethiopian Jew, about pressure felt by the immigrants in Montreal to make *aliyah*:

> Q- Do you think maybe that Montreal was a stop before the immigrants went to Israel, instead of having them actually stay here?
>
> A- Yeah, I think there was a big move to, you know, why don't they move to Israel, why are they here, kind of thing.

> Q- But you never felt that personally ?
>
> A- [...] We didn't have that pressure, but I think there was a lot of pressure on my [family member] to live with us there.

I asked Niko if sending the immigrants to Israel was conceived as part of the migration project:

> Q- Was there any intention of sending some off to Israel once they got here?
>
> A- We all assumed, you know, I mean the propaganda, or the literature that you read is that the Ethiopian Jews have been trying for years to fulfill their dreams of going to Zion, to Jerusalem. So we assumed, ok, they'll come here and they'll want go to Israel (laughing). [...] But that's one thing, theory, and most want to be in Israel, that's true, but others chose to take the opportunity to come here.

According to him, the Israelis worried that in creating an Ethiopian Jewish community outside of the Middle East, it would become a haven for others and invite them to leave Israel for Canada. Expectations of the Ethiopian Jewish immigrants in Canada were drawn from media imagery about the group ("the propaganda, or the literature that you is read is ... "). Organizers of the migratory project anticipated that Ethiopian Jews in Canada would make *aliyah* and behave in accordance with an idealized vision of their Jewish identity. While Niko ascribes the desire to make *aliyah* to Ethiopian Jews on the basis of their Judaism, yet by the same token, he himself should equally be regarded as someone who wishes to "fulfill the dreams of going to Zion".

A document in the CJC archives (s) describes an attempt to identify the "right person" to "convince the Ethiopian Jews in Canada to migrate to Israel". As Grunau remarks, "What is interesting about the issue of community officials trying to convince the Ethiopians in Montreal that they should leave for Israel is that this underscores the Ethiopian's perceived lack of subjective agency by those who, with all good intentions, set out to save them" (1995: 45). The author argues that the migration project was called off not only because Israel established diplomatic ties with Ethiopia, but because there were difficulties in integrating Ethiopian Jews to the Jewish community in Montreal (*ibid.*).

In discussing *aliyah*, Bezunesh presents her interpretation of how Jews in North America conceptualize Eretz Israel:

> … I think a lot of the Jews here when they go are seeking a certain kind of…. experience? You know they go to have that experience. They get that, and then they come back with that. They don't live there all the time, so they go there get their fix of spirituality or something and then they come back to multicultural. I don't think they're aware of what it's doing to other people because they go and get their experience and get whatever they would want, and then they would come back here. You know, to a largely secular world, that they like.

Ethiopian Jewish Community: Activities in Montreal

At its peak in the late 1980's, over a hundred Ethiopian Jewish immigrants lived within Montreal's Jewish community. Upon arrival, immigrants were largely in their late teens and early twenties; the eldest of the community, according to Suzan, was approximately forty years old. In her view, the group's young age, as well as the small number of those who came to Montreal in comparison to the community in Israel (there are approximately 76,000 Ethiopian-Israelis today) (t), made their integration difficult. Grunau accounts for lack of traditional leadership as a factor associated to a likely difficult resettlement (1995:71).

In addition to their young age, Ethiopian Jewish immigrants represent a tiny portion of Montreal's Jewish community. Stein writes: "The ethnic community eases the shock of adjustment and transition for the refugee. It lessens the danger of social and personality disorganization, and it provides a group identity and a network of relationships, associations and institutions" (1981:329). It is not surprising that, given the size of the group, some Ethiopian Jews in Montreal involved themselves actively with the general (non-Jewish) Ethiopian community.

Since the arrival of Ethiopian Jewish immigrants was part of a chain migration, everyone who came under the official program is in one way or another linked to each other. In fact, the community can be divided into three familial clans.

> Suzan : There were a lot of personal relationships an inter-personal, that you know, that were very complex, a lot of which, ah, we didn't necessarily know that much about, you know, people weren't necessarily forthcoming, y'know, and why should they be, about their personal stories?

In other words, those who immigrated under JIAS' and Immigration Canada's program brought with them their social and familial networks already developed in Ethiopia. Hence, the foundation of Montreal's "Ethiopian Jewish community" was structured and shaped in light of their arrival. Their integration to the city is a continuation of a loose model based on their relations in Ethiopia, transplanted and re-defined in the migratory context.

During the 1980's and early 1990's, a wide array of activities focused on Ethiopian Jews were publicized in Jewish Canadian newspapers, including events such as art exhibits, thanksgiving and memorial services, bar mitzvahs, and the commemoration of Operation Solomon. Guests and lecturers from Israel and abroad, for example Rabbi Yosef Hadani, the first Ethiopian-Israeli rabbi and spiritual leader, and Dr. Ephraim Issac, came frequently to give conferences or hold fundraising events.

A film, followed by a conference and the inauguration of the Ethiopian Dance Troupe composed of Ethiopian Jewish immigrants, included Ethiopian Jewish "artifacts, foods and customs of the Falashas" (u). This event (January 15, 1989) was "designed to heighten awareness of Ethiopian Jewry's customs" (*ibid.*). Activities aimed at encouraging cultural specificity. Typical Ethiopian customs, including "exotic" cuisine, traditional clothing, songs, dances and art displays were identified as "Jewish" and taken out of their context. In discussing some of these events, Suzan remarks:

> … People weren't very much interested necessarily in modern Ethiopia- but what was going on in Addis wasn't that interesting. I mean, it only became interesting when you dressed up in a traditional costume…
>
> … The irony is, there's nothing particularly Jewish about Ethiopian costumes, so it becomes Ethiopian [Jewish] […] .I don't know how much of the folklore is particularly Jewish, there probably is some songs that are Jewish, but a lot of it is not.

Many authors have argued that, for example, Ethiopian Jewish food and clothing is typically "Ethiopian", and do not differ from that of the surrounding population. In comparing the Beta Israel with their Christian neighbors, Pankhurst writes that "both lived in identical round mud huts; both dressed in the same identical clothing; […] both ate the same type of food […]"(1995 :3).

In Montreal, elements presented as "Ethiopian Jewish culture" interested the community in that it reinforced the notion of Ethiopian Jews as an "exotic" people with "foreign" customs yet linked to the Jewish community through sharing of an ethnic, religious, and national affiliation, as well as a history of suffering.

CHAPTER 6: PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE: ETHIOPIA, CANADA AND ISRAEL

In this chapter, I discuss affiliation to the birth country (Ethiopia), the host country (Canada) and Israel. When I first started conducting interviews, I was struck by the differences between Ethiopian Jews in Montreal and those I met in Israel in regard to how they perceive Ethiopia. This led me to inquire about the informants' remembrances of Ethiopia, experiences in Canada, and impressions of Israel. In the process, national sentiments that the informants might have towards any of these countries were expressed, at least obliquely. I argue that social milieu frames and orients identity, and try to show how the Canadian context, and particularly Montreal's multi-ethnic society, figures in the attachments, identity and belonging expressed by the immigrants.

Ethiopian Jew's affiliation to Ethiopia, positive or negative, is a topic that is largely unexplored about the group in Israel. Interestingly, five out of six Ethiopian Jewish informants describe satisfying relations with the larger Ethiopian community in Montreal, Toronto and Ottawa. All five participate in organized activities and social events, and keep close contact with non-Jewish Ethiopians. According to Niko, many Ethiopian Jews have married non-Jewish Ethiopians. Some of the spouses are members of other minority groups from Ethiopia. Though one cannot ignore the small number of Ethiopian Jews as a factor encouraging ties with the broader Ethiopian group, positive identification (in five out of six cases) to Ethiopia and its people must be accounted for as well.

Interestingly, five out of six Ethiopian Jews expressed positive sentiments towards "Ethiopia the country", yet negatively remarked on "Ethiopia the political state", while all the informants identified (although differently) with Ethiopian culture. Five refugee informants express a positive attachment if not towards Ethiopia, then toward the Ethiopian community in Canada. The informants mentioned the background of Ethiopians they were referring to only after I asked specific questions as to what ethnic or religious group their acquaintances belong to (for example, "Oromo", "Muslim" or "Jewish"). Rather, Ethiopian friends were referred to as "Ethiopian", like the informants themselves.

Although the small number of my Ethiopian Jewish informants does not permit me to draw any firm conclusions, their narratives nonetheless have something to say about their lives as individuals, as members of the Jewish community, and as Ethiopians in North America and Israel. In this context I discuss issues of personal values, represented primarily by the family and the importance of education.

Impressions of Ethiopia are based on the informant's experiences preceding departure, including migration and settlement in Canada, subsequent visits to Israel and in some cases Ethiopia as well. Migration studies shows that it is not uncommon for migrants to nostalgically view their native country in a positive light (Glick Schiller, Basch, Szanton-Blanc 1995), since migrants perceive it in light of what they experienced *during* and *after* their migration.

"I Love My Country, I Don't Like Politics"

Teshome, the first Ethiopian Jewish informant I interviewed, uttered those words after I invited him to discuss his birth country. After our meeting, he shook my hand and politely added, "Say hello to your parents", knowing that they were from Ethiopia. In fact, my parents did not know Teshome. They had never met any Beta Israel while living in Addis Abeba. Teshome regarded my parents as distant but indirectly affiliated "kin" though they are not themselves Ethiopian. Initially, I interpreted this as a reference to a shared past, i.e. flight from Mengistu's socialist government. This 'common' experience of Ethiopia goes beyond established ethnic, social, economical and religious barriers, and situates Teshome's identity in relation to Ethiopia.

Family members acquainted with Ethiopian culture pointed out to me that asking about one's family is common social behavior in Ethiopia, and that Teshome's comment might not necessarily manifest his positive attachment towards his birth country. Though this claim is true, the interview shows that Teshome strongly identifies with Ethiopia, and to (general) Ethiopians as a people, as he is active in Canadian-Ethiopian associations. Interestingly, during our interview, I noticed a symbolic piece of jewelry that he was

wearing. On it was the emblem of Ethiopia's imperial heritage, The Lion of Judah, representative of its last descendant, Haile Selassie. In light of the events that marked Ethiopia in the past thirty years, the symbol on Teshome's jewelry is not without political or national connotations.

Other informants remember social and political hardships in socialist Ethiopia, yet still express positive national identification. Sarah, for example, obliquely refers to the torture and repeated imprisonment endured by close family members; and yet, the connection to "her country" remains positive: "I have a beautiful country … Life was good in Ethiopia, I love *my country*". Throughout our interview, she referred to Ethiopia as "my country". Sarah remembers "everything" about her time in Ethiopia.

Surprised by her strong attachment to Ethiopia, I asked what she thought of the popular notion to the effect that "the Falashas", as she called herself, originate from Israel:

> I don't believe it … people at my work tell me I am from Israel, that my ancestors come from Israel and they married with the people in Ethiopia, and keep telling me that it is why I am not black or white.

To this she argues that everyone in Ethiopia and not just "the Falashas" are light-skinned in comparison to other sub-Saharan African populations. As for her ancestral lineage: "I will believe I am from Israel when I see it in writing, I am born in Ethiopia, my father is born in Ethiopia, my grandmother was born in Ethiopia".

Jeremy refers to his birth country as "home", adding that "In Ethiopia, you can make many friends in one day; if you ask a question people will come to you and help you". In his native village, everyone was very much interrelated and in close contact with one another: "You can go anywhere in the village and you know everyone and what they are doing". Remembering a care-free lifestyle, he recalls going around and hanging out with friends, horseback riding and swimming, all things he misses. I inquired if he would consider moving back to Ethiopia should the political situation change, and Jeremy answered "yes".

As for Almaz: " My life in Ethiopia was very great! I liked it". Only later does she mention negative events, drawing a more realistic picture of her experience there. Almaz was critical of the fact that under Mengistu's regime, Ethiopian schools gave precedence to socialist education as opposed to what she called "real education". Nevertheless, the negative events do not seem to tarnish her memories of Ethiopia and the Sudan:

> Q- When you think about Ethiopia or your journey to Sudan, what do you remember?
>
> A- I remember all the good things. [...] During the journey I remember all the [...] dry season, the tiredness, ehhm, the mountains, the rivers. One river we had to cross seven times. [...] It was a circle, circle [making "s" figures with her fingers in the air] and we had to go straight. We crossed it seven times, do you believe it? [...] We are going from east to west. The river was from north to south.

Unlike Jeremy, who didn't explore in detail his trajectory to Sudan, Almaz expresses amazement at what she saw and discovered about Ethiopia's landscape:

> You know you learn, you read it in a book, it's geography, but when you see it with your eyes, it's unbelievable! It's the earth. [...] For me it was like an adventure because I see a lot of things I never saw, I never knew.
>
> Q- Have you been back to Ethiopia?
>
> A- I really want to go. I really miss my town, I want to know, you know, how it is. I remember we used to play. Next to my home there was an open yard, so it was green the whole year. You don't care, wearing shoes or not, it was so green. I miss that part. Then the teenage time came (laughing)! Ay! I really want to go back to see.

Though her response expresses a strong regional connection, after the tape recorder was turned off, we continued discussing Ethiopia's cultural, national and religious heterogeneity. In this context Almaz added: "No matter what the religion, there is one country". Her apartment is adorned with miniature *messobs* (hand-thatched straw tables) and a large painting of an Ethiopian woman; an extensive collection of Amharic compact discs are stacked in a rack, and volumes in Amharic are piled on a coffee table next to children's books in Hebrew. Upon entering her kitchen, a magnet on the refrigerator door can be seen. It reads "ONLY ONE ETHIOPIA" written in bold across Ethiopia's tricolor flag, each word decorating a color band.

In comparison to other informants, Bezunesh and Rudy (who have since returned to visit Ethiopia) were quite young (in their early teens, and pre-teenage years respectively) when they left. Both girls remember times spent in school and playing with

friends. However, unlike the other informants, neither refers to Ethiopia as "their" country, nor do they express a specific national affiliation towards Ethiopia, though Bezunesh has many Ethiopian friends.

On a visit there, she became acquainted with family members and visited many important sites. Bezunesh reflects:

> People are really interesting there. [...] The things they say, even those who don't know how to write, they're just really really thoughtful about things they say. [...] It's just a different perspective actually. [...] It's really refreshing in many ways.

As for returning permanently:

> I wouldn't mind moving back, actually I would like to see it, and I think I could do a lot [...]. Now that you're here and got educated you can contribute to a lot of things? I don't know how much, but I think it would be nice to try.

Though Rudy's family was "fine" economically speaking, poverty was present in her every-day environment. From what she remembers, however, she does not relate to the sensationalist images of extreme famine and poverty of Ethiopia that swept the Western media. After a recent visit, she reflects:

> I just came back [from Ethiopia] ... going back I realized I don't remember much (laughs), [...] a lot of my memory was positive things, I lived in Addis, [...] my parents were working, we weren't well-off but we were fine you know [...]. I remember a beautiful country [...], [I] didn't travel much outside of Addis, but the pictures at that time in the 80's of starvation [...], that wasn't at all [what] I knew Ethiopia to be.
>
> I do [...] remember the poverty of the neighborhood sort of like they integrated? [...] My friends [...], they were very poor.

During her first visit back to Addis, flowers helped her to re-connect with the city:

> ... I think [...] that my memory didn't deceive me is, when I arrived in Addis, this time around, there were the flowers at the airport, and it just like it was sort of like a confirmation, God, I guess my memory isn't tricking me, the city is beautiful. And then [...] you see a lot of the poverty and the ... road, but for me like the presence of flowers very much comforted me. So that's pretty much what I remembered.

Interestingly, Rudy states that she does "not identify [...] as Ethiopian, not anymore", though her narrative shows that she is ambivalent:

> ... Because like what I know about Ethiopian history, I'm not impressed with, in a sense it's very dominated by one culture, and I happen to be part of the Amhara, and so you know, you know how could I be proud [...] of a regime that oppressed others. [...] I'm not pro-Ethiopia, I'm not

> anti-Ethiopia either, but I sort of see it as it, yes I'm Ethiopian, ah! Because like at the same time in Ethiopia my parents, you know they weren't in the best conditions. [...] My grandmother [...] said 'Why are you going back to Ethiopia, don't you know what they did to us? If it's money, I'll give you money!' (laughing), like go anywhere in the world but don't go there, because that's where they harmed us, and they're going to do something bad to you! And so how could I be proud of a country [...] that my family suffered at the hands of. [...] Those are more like questions that kind of come up.

Between being part of the Amhara group, linguistically and culturally speaking, and a member of a family who lived as a repressed 'Other', Rudy does not recognize herself in these "Ethiopian" references and places herself in the middle: "I'm not pro-Ethiopia, I'm not anti-Ethiopia either, but I sort of see it as it, yes I'm Ethiopian, ah! Because like at the same time in Ethiopia my parents [...] weren't in the best conditions."

This informant extensively discussed issues around exploring her individuality and finding her place. Rudy's personal trajectory is presented in greater detail in the last section of this chapter.

Marriage and The Family

The family represents an unshakable nucleus in all the narratives. Interestingly, life choices, decisions and key matters about their future are always addressed in reference to their families. In short, home is where the family is, and the family is created on the background of a solid marriage.

In speaking of certain practices in Ethiopia, Sarah explains, "In my country, marriage doesn't go by age, it goes by the body. When your body is ready to have kids, then you get married". Hence, many women, like her, marry at an early age by Western standards. Almaz praises her parents for the family they had, pointing out all the hard work involved in raising, feeding and educating ten children. According to her, the traditional marriage customs in Ethiopia account for their strong relationship:

> Well, you know at their time, they got married very early. My mom, she got married at ten. [...] They don't have to have sexual [relations] with the husband. They just go to their mother-in-law and father-in-law, they grow up and then when they are ready. They want, you know, the husband and the wife, to know each other, like a sister and a brother. That's why now the marriage last long. It's because, my mom she doesn't know anything except for my father and my father the same thing. They love each other so much, they don't know anybody else. [...] All the people like that, even now [that] they go to Israel, they are still together.

Now that Almaz has several children of her own, she appreciates the advantages of being brought up in a large family and a sheltered village, as opposed to her experience of child rearing in Canada:

> [In Ethiopia] if you ever ha[ve] to go anywhere, you leave your kids with the neighbours, you know. Even outside, nobody cares. The kids will play outside. Like, the moment you start walking, you just [go] outside to play with your sister, your brother. [...] Here, it's much harder. It's hard to have more family here. There it's much easier. There you need the, like, the money to raise the kids. But you have the family. It takes the money to raise the kids. You have to have the support. Here if you have enough money, still, you need the people. There, you have support, you have to worry like, what to feed the kids. We never had any problems.

All the Ethiopian Jewish informants emphasized their familial attachments and the difficulty of being separated from loved ones. Almaz remembers the day she left Ethiopia as the saddest day of her life: "I couldn't believe it, I didn't want to leave". Jeremy recalls "The hardest part was being away from my family".

Family to Education: A Primary Value

Almost all (five out of six) have obtained or are in the process of finishing specialized courses, CEGEP diplomas or a bachelor's degree in the Canadian education system. Directly or indirectly, all emphasize the importance of education as a transmitted familial value, accounting knowledge as an essential component to one's identity.

Laughing, Almaz remembers how her mother, an illiterate woman, closely followed her children's education:

> I don't know my mom was, you know, when we had [...] homework? She said 'What homework'- even though she doesn't know how to read write, she would go, 'Let me see your book, let me see your exercises'. And if we get *x* she said 'Why [do] you have this *x*?' She knows the signs for when it's right, so she says (laughing) 'Why [do] you have this *x*?' She was so smart! [...] They didn't say [...] 'Oh, you go to school, learn, it is your business'. No, they participated in our lives. That's how much they worked together with the kids.

Her father repeatedly stressed the value of knowledge:

> My father, he always told us, you have to go to school, you have to learn, that's one thing nobody can take away from you [...]. Unless you die, nobody can take it away from you. [...] That's what he wished for [...]. Every night he used to check our homework. Go to school [he said].

Intelligence through education is not only represented as the path towards empowerment, but of social mobility as well. Almaz explains that she knew many Beta Israel in Ethiopia who held important positions in the capital:

> If you are really smart, you are allowed to educate yourself and be in a higher position. [...] There was one professor [...] I told you about [...]. My other cousin, he [was] educated. He was the manager of the commerce bank. So? If you are really smart, nobody will stop you. Even before the revolution, with Haile Selassie, they would say [...] 'You would be foolish if you don't learn in this kingdom', [...] the Haile Selassie kingdom.

In a country where almost ninety percent (90%) of the population is illiterate, education is of primary importance to those who have access to it. For Almaz, it was portrayed as a powerful personal resource. For many in Ethiopia, social mobility relied upon either military involvement or education: "You would be foolish if you didn't learn in this kingdom".

Much like Almaz's parents who continually underscored the positive value of schooling, Rudy's family persistently emphasized the importance of going to school. As for Sarah, she is happy she came to Canada "because of the education".

The Ethiopian Jew's representation of Ethiopia are in contrast to the popular collective picture depicted in chapters Four and Five. There were no mentions of personal experiences of poverty, or of danger in Ethiopia, no more so than for the rest of the Ethiopians in their region of origin. Equally, those old enough to remember spoke mostly (though not exclusively) of their positive rapport with non-Jewish neighbors.

Moreover, contrary to the depictions exposed in Montreal in creating awareness for the Beta Israel, these informants were educated, came from comfortable milieus (according to Ethiopian standards) and had access to land or property. None of these important factors were discussed in the numerous articles and newspaper clippings analyzed in the previous chapters.

<u>Settling In Displacement: Starting Over In Canada</u>

The informants who passed through Sudan prior to arriving to Canada convey hardships they faced in a foreign country, far from loved ones:

> Almaz: It was so hard. The first year, I was almost crying every day. After a year, I spoke with my parents. I thought it would get better, but I was crying. Even though I spoke with them, it got worse. Because [...] being in Sudan is one situation, the only thing I concentrate [on] there is getting out alive, being well. I make sure my parents are well. But when I get here, I start to worry for them. Plus, [...] now I say 'Nothing is going to happen to me', [...] how am I going to, you know. How am I gonna see my parents? It's like all [...] the life I was living with my parents, it came back to me at that time. It was hard.

This experience is not atypical for refugees. During their stay in settlement camps, efforts were channelled solely towards survival: "The only thing I could concentrate there is *getting out alive, being well*". Though her safety was assured once she came to Canada, her family's situation in Ethiopia remained a source of stress and discomfort.

It was a long time between the time Jeremy left Ethiopia and when he re-contacted his family. He remembers how drastic the change was from one continent to another. In his native village, Jeremy explains, there was no running water or electricity; once he reached Sudan the climate was so dry that he would dig a ditch to access water at deep ground levels. Before Jeremy migrated, he believed social inequality and discrimination in Ethiopia mirrored the government's "backwardness". In coming to North America, Jeremy was disappointed to discover that racism and anti-semitism affects even a "developed" country such as Canada.

He expressed what he has experienced not only within the larger society in Montreal, but also within the Jewish community: "I never thought that Jews could be racist". Shocked by these discoveries, he no longer attributes the existence of social inequalities to political "underdevelopment". As for Canada, he says "Here, you ask a question to people on the street and they run away. People are as cold as the weather!"

At the same time, Jeremy experienced negative reactions to the fact that he is "black and Jewish". Jeremy calls himself a "double minority" though he acknowledges

that he doesn't look stereotypically "black": "One person thought I was from Pakistan!" he adds with surprise.

Jeremy spoke the most about his initial impressions of Canadians and of Montreal society, though both he and Almaz discuss their feelings of displacement. More than the other informants, this seems likely since their experience of escaping through the Sudan, of living in refugee settlements and working within the framework of larger Israeli rescue operations, sets Jeremy's and Almaz' experiences apart from that of other informants. In other words, their displacement and 'refugee-ness' began long before their entry to Canada. Arriving to Montreal meant for them yet another experience of being uprooted, and of adapting once again to an unfamiliar setting far away from their families in a new continent, climate and social environment.

In the Communities: Jewish, Ethiopian and Ethiopian Jewish

In addition to aiding the entry of Jewish immigrants, the Jewish Immigrant Aid Services (JIAS) "ensures their social and economic integration into Canadian and Quebec society upon arrival[1]". The JIAS had an important role in the settlement of the Ethiopian Jews in the city. Many other organizations, establishments and individuals offered social, economical, religious, emotional and psychological support. Half of the Ethiopian Jewish informants either presently work or have previously worked for Jewish institutions. Others (not necessarily informants for this research) participate in synagogue congregations or in Jewish organizations. All the informants without exception mention having received aid and support from the Jewish community in Montreal.

At the same time, five Ethiopian Jewish informants out of six entertain social, familial and community ties with the larger Ethiopian communities in Canada, some which are divided across regional, religious, linguistic or political lines. Negative reactions within the general Ethiopian community to their ethno-religious background did not seem to be a problem for any of the informants. As Bezunesh explains:

---

[1] The Montreal Jewish Directory, spring/summer 2000/5760, p. 122.

> A lot of the Ethiopians [...] come from either a religious or a minority group [...]. A lot of the Ethiopian friends I have know I'm Jewish, but it doesn't come up as a topic of conversation. Unless if there was something they wanted to know or if they had a question about it, like if there was a topic of discussion about Ethiopia or something like that, I mean it's just not relevant or something, at least not with the friends I have.

The Ethiopian Jewish "community" is a large network of people who in one way or another are linked to each other. Though there were many group activities in the past, at the time of writing virtually all organized events had ceased. It has been two years since the last "Commemoration of Operation Solomon", and after-school activities and tutoring services are no longer offered at the YM-YWHA[2] to Ethiopian Jewish students, though according to one informant, the number of Ethiopian children enrolled in Jewish schools has not decreased.

Rudy sees a marked difference between the community life in the late 1980's and early 1990's, and the context in Montreal today:

> The Ethiopian Jewish organization, it was very strong at that time, the community was a lot larger [...]. At least once a month we used to meet to have dinner at someone's house, we used to rotate houses and, that was fun. [For] a child it was not that bad.
>
> Q- Do you know why those activities stopped?
>
> A- I think there was [...] conflict within the community. [...] A lot of people also moved to Toronto, quite a number of them, eh, and then later people moved to Ottawa, but I think it was just [...] personality differences, things in the community would go up and down. [...] There were [...] positive things that were happening, [...] like cultural events, holiday. Initially the community wasn't big, we wouldn't have it at the Y [YM-YWHA] we would have it at [people's] houses, [...] there used to be a lot of love. [...] As a kid, growing up I heard of the problems, [...] I know it wasn't as kosher as I used to think (laughing), ehm, and then people used to also like, you know like fight amongst themselves you know like, one time they're speaking to one person and the next time like, you're not speaking to those people [...].
>
> Q- All of this is in the Ethiopian Jewish community?
>
> A- Yeah, because ehm, ... like it's a small community and everybody was sort of like family, eh, and then at some point you just like don't see a person like, I wouldn't see a person or wouldn't care about that person, ehm, and it just wasn't explained to us, to the kids and it sort of reminds me of, like living in Ethiopia and not being told I was Jewish...things happen.

---

[2] YM-YWHA: Young Men's-Young Women's Hebrew Association.

Interestingly, the YM-YWHA's activity schedule for December 1999 – January 2000 included a rubric titled "Ethiopian-Jewish program"(p.16)[3]. The project coordinator at the Y confirmed that now there are no officially organized activities. She mentioned conflict between two families about how the Ethiopian Jewish community should be structured. The schedule included a program in hopes of bringing Ethiopian Jewish community members to a discussion panel and working out an agreement. According to this individual, an election was scheduled to take place in September 2000 to resolve community affairs. However, the day before, another conflict arose and the meeting was postponed, and as of June 2001, had still not been held.

Between Canada and Israel

Since settling in Canada, all of the Ethiopian Jewish informants have traveled to Israel at least once, since virtually all their families reside there today. During the interviews, we discussed their impressions of Israel, its general society, and of Ethiopian-Israelis in comparison to what they experienced in Canada.

Sarah appreciates the educational possibilities in Canada but believes that "life is better in Israel because of the family and the Ethiopian Jewish community", in reference to the approximately 76,000 Ethiopian-Israelis there. Though a few years ago, Ethiopian Jewish community life in Montreal "was nice", she feels no "community support" in Montreal today, since almost half have moved away and the few still residing here "don't agree on things". Although she sees some people during family or special events, it has been two years since Sarah attended an organized community event.

Almaz's first trip to Israel was an intense experience that reunited her with her family for the first time in five years:

> I was screaming, crying, crying [...]. One week I didn't go outside. The first day? Every time I see my mom my dad, cry. I see my sisters, cry. I see my brothers, cry. I was always crying, so they say 'Instead of being happy you cry'. I didn't believe I went to see them. When you travel, when I had that journey [to the Sudan], I said 'Will I be able to reunite with my family?' That was, for

---

[3] Program description: "An opportunity for Jews from Ethiopia to meet on a regular basis. This group offers social and recreational activities such as holiday celebrations, children's programs and helps Ethiopians integrate into the Jewish community. Programs are planned by group members with the help of Y program staff".

> me, unbelievable. To get out from there and [...] see my parents? [...] It's really unbelievable, that time. I didn't even think I would get out alive. I was lucky [...]. Everybody was lucky, the whole family was lucky. [...] God protect us and plus my parents prayed all the time, it's their God was good to us, wherever we had to go. Otherwise we wouldn't make it. Plus if you are innocent, you are innocent. And then, God is with you. That is one thing I believed.

When I asked her if she was happy about having come to Canada instead of Israel, she replied "In a way yes, in a way no":

> When it comes to family, social life, no. There it's so social. You have all the family. Every Shabbat they get together. But [...] let's say you want to go to school. There's so many processes, they don't finish it right away for you. [...] The system is different. When I was there, my parents were telling me don't go out, don't go to this section, because it's the Arab area. You don't know who is the taxi driver, [you] don't take any taxi because most of them are Arab, and sometimes they would take and they would kill [people]. And that's scary. I go there to relax, to enjoy the family, [but] everywhere we want to go, especially you go to Jerusalem, they say no, you can't go [everywhere].

Though Almaz prefers the Canadian system since it is familiar to her, she is aware of the difference between social and family life in Israel and Montreal. Israel's political situation did not seem to appeal to her in that it limits her movements, unlike in North America.

Bezunesh spoke at length about her experience in Israel and what she saw of the Ethiopians' integration there:

> Q- So you've been back to Ethiopia once and you'd like to go back there. And Israel?
>
> A- Like to go live in Israel? I don't know [...]. There's too much conflict, not just between Muslims and, I mean Palestinians, and Jews [...] ...
>
> Q- You mean, between the Jews?
>
> A- Yes [...]. They're very abrasive.
>
> Q- In what sense? How did you feel the difference?
>
> A- [...] I guess it's typical immigrant experience, but with a lot of the Ethiopians, well, basically they're out of the system. They're not in the system they're just outside, outside of it, and the families have nothing, [...] especially the men, because they have no useful purpose to serve. [...] Not working, and maybe they feel that.[...]. They don't cook in the house, they don't do anything like that so what else could they, what's the use of the male role model. And that's bad for them.

Bezunesh's narrative addresses typical concerns experienced by immigrants in the context of displacement, often marked by the long transition of re-defining gender roles.

Bezunesh sees important differences between Israeli and Canadian society, and interprets Ethiopian Jew's experience of integration in that context:

> There isn't that respect of multiculturalism that you have […] in Canada. That's a huge problem I think, something they have to address. So a lot of the [Ethiopian] kids [in Israel], they're ashamed of their background; […] they wouldn't eat the food, like kids would never eat the *injera* [pancake-like bread] in school. They will never take *injera* to school, they'd rather eat that bleached bread with that chocolate thing they put on. And they have so many cavities, the kids. […]And their parents don't have cavities. […] Why do these kids have so much cavities? Because they eat really bad food. Just rotting. Horrible. And that's because of it. They're too ashamed to eat the food of their parents eat. They want to be really Israeli, at all costs, they don't speak the language, they don't know Amharic.
>
> Q- Seeing all this, if you were to have gone straight to Israel-
>
> A- I'm glad I didn't.
>
> Q- How come?
>
> A- Because I'd be subjected to all of that. You know like, I should feel bad about eating *injera*? […] You pay money to have that in a restaurant! Why should I …Or you know, If you want to give it up cause you feel you don't like it or you just have other alternatives, it's ok not to want it, but if you've given it up because you want to be like everybody else and you feel ashamed, then that's different.

In comparison to her Canadian experience of integration, Bezunesh refers to the pressure of adhering and conforming to Israeli culture and society, an environment she considers "abrasive". Canada's open multicultural context seems reason enough for Bezunesh to be happy for her settlement in North America:

> Q- So do you feel that here [in Canada] you were able to keep your culture in a sense?
>
> A- Well it's Canada, you can do whatever you want you can worship the moon if you want, which is just fine you know. But there [in Israel] […] I guess a lot of Israelis feel uncomfortable with so much power […]. It's just a thought. […] Israel tries to conform everybody into, you know, a certain way. They don't have this multicultural sense, at all.

Unlike other informants, Bezunesh and Rudy express an attachment to Canada not only for its social services and political 'comfort', but also in terms of a strong attachment to its society and people.

Jeremy also discusses issues concerning the Ethiopian-Israeli community and their integration in Israel. He notes that "A lot of the girls are studying well but the boys hang around instead of being in school". But he also believes that had Ethiopian Jews not made *aliyah*, their cultural and religious specificity would not have survived.

Jeremy stressed internal divisions within the community in Israel based on area of origin (rural or urban), linguistic differences (Amharic and Tigrayan) and variations in religious practices. He explains how, due to miscommunication, Tigrinya-speaking immigrants were re-circumcised in Israel as part of their "absorption", unlike the Amhara population. Jeremy points out: "Re-circumcised for what? They were already circumcised in Ethiopia, they were already Jewish in Ethiopia". In Canada, changes of names and religious practices were not expected of the Ethiopian Jewish refugees.

In her research on identity, literacy and rituals of Ethiopian Jewish immigrants in Israel, Anteby (1999) points out the impact that such processes carry:

> Because the naming-system is so closely tied in Ethiopian Jewish society to social structure and identity, negotiating names in face of the demands of literacy in Israel, points to the undermining of this traditional practice inherent to oral discourse (*ibid.*: 203).

In Canada those who changed Ethiopian names for Hebrew ones did so at their own discretion. I asked Niko if such "absorptive" processes institutionalized in Israel were an issue in their migration project to North America:

> Q- Here, from what I understand, there was no re-conversion or name change, or it was not obligatory at least. There was no, you know, some of the other processes that they have in Israel.
>
> A- [...] Many of those who came [to Canada] came from Gondar town or from Wallaqa, which is right near Gondar, and the community there was religiously [...] traditional. They were converted [to normative and rabbinical Judaism], I don't mean converted, but their services were in Hebrew, they used the Torah as we do, basically [...].
>
> Q- So they were more into rabbinic Judaism.
>
> A- Yes, yes.

In comparison to Israel where the reception of immigrants was institutionalized and part of a larger system[4], integration of Ethiopian Jews who came to Canada offered a less structured yet more flexible environment, in terms of maintaining certain identity references in the process of migration, with its inherent demands negotiating the changing of space, place, people and culture. For Suzan, the North American context made integration:

---

[4] See Hertzog 1999 for an interesting account of absorptive measures in Israel in reference to Ethiopian immigrants.

> harder- it's easier and harder all at the same time. It is very very difficult when you don't have enough of a critical mass of people. Even for the job of integrating into a large society, it's good to have people who, ah, who [are] like you, to help you.

Dion offers an explanation as to why some of the ceremonies processed into Ethiopian Jew's absorption in Israel were not obligatory for those who came to North America:

> Q- And the name change in Israel, that was part of the absorption [for those in Israel]?
>
> A- Yeah they did that with everybody [in Israel], not just [with the Ethiopian Jews].
>
> Q- And that was not an issue with those who came to Montreal?
>
> A- I met with the Chief Rabbis [...] here, there was a ruling based on saving a soul, to the effect that the fact that they were being persecuted as Jews, and in saving a life we were obliged to help them.
>
> A- The authenticity of their 'Jewishness' was not a problem?
>
> Q- They want, they said if they are getting persecuted because they're Jewish, then we have an obligation to think about it.

Dion's explanation demonstrates the significance of *pikuah nefesh* (Jewish obligation of saving lives) as a primary reference in organizing Ethiopian Jewish migration to North America. It also evokes a popular and sensitive image whereby Jewish identity is taken as a singular and isolated factor responsible for the Beta Israel's hardships in Ethiopia. This is a reductive description of events which, as I have shown in this thesis, are much more complex.

Though none of the migration project organizers interviewed for this research mentioned issues concerning the "Jewishness" of the candidates, files available at the CJC archives shows that some research was conducted to verify the applicant's religious background. For example, in a communication titled "July 19th, 1988" to the HIAS office in Geneva, an ex-JIAS director writes "Please be so kind as to advise re the Jewishness of the following, as JIAS has been requested to process these individuals", followed by a list of three names (v).

Negotiating Identity Within Identities: Belonging Somewhere

In this section I present in more detail the story of the only informant who directly explored identity issues. I would like to emphasize that in no way should the data presented in the next few pages be seen as general to the Ethiopian Jewish community, or even to the other Ethiopian Jewish informants, for it is only Rudy's perspective on her experiences that I discuss here. Her interpretation cannot be extended to any larger framework on Ethiopian Jewish identity, at least not in this study, since the scope of my research cannot support this.

However, I present her personal trajectory because it addresses important themes in migration and ethnic studies. Rudy's narrative demonstrates how her identity is far from being a simple addition of Ethiopian and Jewish elements. Rather, other references informed her process of finding out where she belongs, and helped her trace her self-discovery through Canada, Israel and Ethiopia.

She begins her journey upon arriving in Canada in her early teenage years, where her religious heritage was revealed to her on the day a family member took her to a Jewish school. Although she was in school with other Jewish students, Rudy's first impressions of the Jewish community were not reassuring. She felt disassociated from other classmates:

> The Jewish school [...] I was in [...] wasn't familiar to me [...]. [There] wasn't much I could relate to, even if there was the religion I could relate to, I couldn't, because [...] it wasn't my religion, so it was a new thing to me, so I sort of [...] resented that. I went there about for four years, and by then I should have been able to speak Hebrew, but [...] I think subconsciously I was [...] refusing to know anything about [it], to accept [it], because I was like forced to go there.

By her mid-teenage years when activities were organized less frequently for both the Ethiopian Jewish and the wider Ethiopian community in Montreal, Rudy felt "sort of a need to go to Ethiopia, but Israel was ok". During her first trip to the Middle East while in her mid-teens, Rudy spent a lot of time with the Ethiopian Jewish community and started to "really know what my family was about, like what Ethiopia is about", and got "acquainted with my family, it wasn't really Jewish, it was Ethiopian. [...] The whole summer [of my trip] was like Ethiopian". For Rudy, Israel was the second best

environment to learn about her Ethiopian heritage, something she did not feel she could gain knowledge of in Montreal, since Ethiopians represent such a small portion of the population.

Looking back on her memorable vacation she adds:

> And like I remember the first time I went to Israel, it felt very much like I was in Ethiopia.
>
> Q- In what sense?
>
> A- Ehm, the people and the way the country looks, like the desert, yeah like the white houses, I don't know it just felt very familiar, and so like by the end of my trip, I felt like I had *been* in Ethiopia! (laughing) I don't know if any of this makes sense! I mean like it was a psychological thing.

I asked her to explain what she meant by the "need to go to Ethiopia", and her response accounts for skin colour as symbolic marker of identity and an important component of 'belonging'. She was the only informant to explore issues of identity and skin colour in detail:

> I just had like an intense feeling that I needed…It may have been like, you know questions that I was going through like identity and, to find out where [I am, because] even with my black friends I wasn't considered black […]. So it was like Ethiopia is the only thing that I can identify with; Jewish I couldn't really identify with that; black, it's like I could maybe identify with that, so Ethiopia sort of like remained (laughing) for the first time […] when I was fifteen, it wasn't that intense, […] I really felt at peace with my trip to Israel, again it just felt very familiar, sort of like when I got to Ethiopia and saw those flowers, it just felt really familiar.

In defining where she 'belonged', Rudy introduces three identity references: Jewish – black[5] – Ethiopian. According to her representation, black and Ethiopian somewhat overlap, but black/Ethiopian and Jewish are mutually exclusive. Interestingly, Rudy associates phenotypical differences with feelings of displacement within the Jewish realm:

- "There's a *physical barrier* between me and the extreme Jewish community".
- "… I was going to Sunday Jewish schools and I wasn't having a very good. experience with the teaching and the '*how could you be Jewish if you're black*'".
- "*Physically* […] they will always *see* that I'm not like them".

---

[5] In this thesis, the word 'black' is only in reference to skin colour.

- "I still sort of identify as Jewish, but then again *it's not really my religion*".

and equally outside of the "black" community:

- "Even with my black friends, I wasn't considered *black*".
- "Black, it's like I could *maybe* identify with that".

Rudy turned to her "Ethiopian side" which lead her to reunite with family and meet with Ethiopian-Israelis.

Upon completing high school she expressed once again "a need to get out, there was also a need to be in Ethiopia. And I couldn't really do that, so I went to Israel". Studying at a university in Jerusalem, Rudy spent most of her weekends going from one part of the country to another, visiting family and relatives and mingling with "Americans, Canadians and Ethiopians ... and I still didn't meet the Israelis". Although Ethiopians in Israel *are* members of the larger Ethiopian-Israeli and general Israeli populations, she did not describe Ethiopians she met as "Israeli", presenting both populations almost dichotomously.

In describing her years as a student in Israel and why she eventually decided not to emigrate to Israel, her identification, as a "black woman" represented a source of conflict with her experience of Israeli and Arab society. Throughout her narrative, gender is presented as a factor that conditions her experience of 'blackness'. Though during the first part of her sojourn Rudy connected with her "Jewish side", she eventually sought out some of the familiar things she grew up with in Canada:

> I felt on the Jewish side by then, and even thought about making *aliyah* at some point, like halfway through it, so it was like very attractive, like I got caught up, just, I had a very strong feeling at that moment, but then it was like, I felt that the place was too small. I wanted some of the stuff I had in Montreal, like knowing nobody on the street and like nobody harassing me (laughing), and like I wanted to see green things around me and not like a bunch of white buildings, you know things I was taking for granted here... and so, and then I just got frustrated with the very aggressive society.
>
> Q- In Israel?
>
> A- In Israel, yeah.
>
> Q- In what sense?

A- People are very rude, pushy, (laughing), yeah, and that was not the biggest problem I had, it was with the men, there was a lot of sexism and there was always some sexual comments I would be hearing [...].

Q- In the Ethiopian community or just in general?

A- General. In the Ethiopian community? ...Not really, [...]but I mean the ....I mean like... when I used to go out to the *shouk*, the traditional Arab market, that was really you know, but then that's when I started having a lot of problems there would be a lot of comments of me being a black woman, around there, around the whole city, there would be you know, very blatant sexual comments ... that would come from the Arab men, it just... it just didn't make me feel safe, it just, yeah so I sort of like decided I'm not making *aliyah*, I'm going back to Montreal, yeah, and I came back here.

Through her stay in Israel, she was acquainted with and grew closer to members of her family. Rudy found that the Ethiopian-Israeli youth were very unfamiliar to her:

I mean that's some, some of the problem I had with the youth in Israel, ... communication, they didn't speak Amharic.

Q- The younger ones in your family?

A- Yeah, the younger ones, or people who have been in Israel for three-four years and suddenly they don't speak Amharic (laughing) ! [...]. They left when they were teenagers [...]. I just [...] didn't understand that...you know, just like for us it was important to communicate with our parents, well we had to, the effort came from the kids to make it Amharic, and I wasn't seeing that in Israel. [...] I was [...] not accepting that mentality of rejecting the Ethiopian part. Because even though [...] you can't necessarily relate to Ethiopia the country, you can relate to Ethiopia the culture, and you know if I can't communicate with my parents, then that would be just horrible (laughing)!

Q-So how do the younger ones in your family in Israel communicate with their parents?

A- They don't, they don't really communicate with their parents, they go to boarding school, they come home like twice a month, and eh have very little rapport with the parents and it just creates a big crisis... [...] I don't want to raise my kids in Israel, it seems like a lot of problems.

Rudy sees the differences she felt between herself and Ethiopian-Israeli youth as a concern with Israeli society as a whole:

Some of the ideas that I grew up [with] here, like accepting a person as who they are, [...] would be very hard to [...] [apply] in Israel. [Beside] the anti-Palestinian sentiment which is difficult for me to accept, [...] given [that] when you're studying African stuff or Africa, and how Israel was involved in the apartheid movement, [...] just a bunch of things, I just don't... I'm not a Zionist. A lot of it is, there's a lot of Zionism in Israel, ehm , and I don't know, I would have to have to find people that are sort of like... similar in that but that are not too much on the extreme side [...].

Although in Israel Ethiopians are not the only 'visible minorities', by the end of her studies Rudy felt strongly about Montreal's multiculturalism, which, according to Meintel "offers a hospitable environment for minority identities" (1991: 209):

> Q- So where would you want to raise your kids?
>
> A- Montreal! (laughing)
>
> Q- You really identify with the city?
>
> A- Yeah cause I think it allows space for [...] diversity and there's also a certain unity to it.

Interestingly, Rudy's narrative equates 'visible minority' with 'immigrants', a category she feels a part of in Montreal:

> I mean the thing that I did really appreciate in Montreal was that, well it wasn't much with the Jewish community, but like all of my friends were [...] immigrants [...].
>
> Q- All outside of the Jewish community?
>
> A- Yeah, [...] I couldn't make friends with the Jewish kids [at school]. There [were] no Haitian, or Indian, [or] other kids [that weren't] from the dominant group, [within] the kids that I went to [Jewish] school with. And so that sort of made me feel like I ... and so I continued with that.

People she befriended outside of the Jewish school were not a part of a cultural network familiar to her family, which sometimes became a source of tension:

> ... And like my parents had trouble identifying with the black part of my family, I mean with my black friends.
>
> Q- You mean the non-Ethiopians like the Haitians or -
>
> A-Yeah. I didn't have any black friends, there were [...] no Ethiopians [...] that went to school with me and I didn't make friends with them, [...] so the only friends I had were [...] Filipino or West Indian, and so that was sort of like a conflict with my parents.
>
> Q- Do you think it's because they wanted you to have a Jewish identity or –
>
> A- Yeah. In a sense because they couldn't relate to the black community in experience like that wasn't their experience [...].

In Rudy's narrative, 'visible minorities' constitutes a group in itself, with boundaries reinforced by sharing of an 'immigrant' experience. Moreover, she makes a slight cultural distinction between "blacks" on the one hand ("My parents had trouble identifying [...] with my *black friends*") and other friends that she includes in the "visible minority/ immigrant" category ("The *only friends I had* were like *Filipino or West Indian* [...] my parents couldn't relate to the *black community experience*"). She realizes that the

small size of the Ethiopian Jewish community in Montreal allows only minimally any identification to what she terms a "black Canadian experience" in regards to the group's culture, religion and history.

After her studies in Israel, Rudy returned to Montreal to complete her university degree. Her developing interest in Africa lead her to participate in an "Africana Studies" committee:

> Here I was having Jewish friends because of my involvement in Africa, so being around those people is what gave me a lot of sense of positive of the Jewish community, and I was relating with them as people and like totally forgetting they were Jews, and them as well. [...] I still sort of identify as Jewish, but then again it's not really my religion, it's my family's religion. [...] There are benefits to the community, [...] there's a lot of things that I appreciate about it, like the strong infrastructure, and, and I think the community has a lot to offer other communities and a lot to learn at the same time, there's place for improvement.

Through her implication in this committee, Rudy connected with the people involved, "a large portion [of whom] were Jews". Her participation in the committee helped her to identify as a Jew in a positive way. Since then, Rudy's work allowed her to see a side of the Jewish community she was not introduced to growing up:

> ... [Be]cause I needed to see that, I needed to like, to be in contact, [be]cause I had a notion of what the Jewish community was about and, it was always like, me being on the side. [...] Working with low-income Jewish people sort of like, [...] so the community is diverse, there's space for everybody, and it's not perfect, it's far from perfect, and there's actually room for me within that community [...]. The clients would identify a lot better with me that they would identify with their social workers, and that's you know, a better approach.

In describing her rapport with co-workers, Rudy makes a distinction between them and the clients she was attending to:

> I really liked [...] working with the clients; the other workers I couldn't really relate [be]cause they had sort of like a bourgeois lifestyle [...]. The clients, you know they're very real, have real issues. [There] was the whole thing about, you know, living a very high, upper class lifestyle, [...] talking about the latest hair dresser, it didn't concern me [...]. I was working with the poor people within the Jewish community, and [...] it was ok.

These last few interview excerpts point out to a growing positive identification with the Jewish community which Rudy characterizes as "diverse", and contrary to what she previously felt, Rudy believes there is a place for her there. As mentioned in a previous section, she identifies ambivalently to "Ethiopia the country", yet expresses interest about the diversity of the country's population: "There are seventy-two ethnic groups in

Ethiopia [...]. So what happened to the other seventy!" she laughs. In contrast to her attachement to Israel and Ethiopia, which were at times positive and in other instances conflictual, Rudy expresses a constant and strong attchement to the Canadian and particularly the Montreal multiethnic context.

Although she generally draws upon a bi-polar concept of people and places, (Ethiopian/Israeli; black/white; Canada/Israel; them/me) Rudy's work with the "Africana Studies" committee, and her involvement with low-income Jewish families, has created a channel of identification to the Jewish community. She now "appreciates" it, adding "there's actually room for me".

In this chapter, I have introduced some of the themes discussed with the Ethiopian Jewish informants, far from homogenous groups in regard to experiences, migratory trajectories and life events. I sought to underline a simple yet over-looked concept: behind every refugee or immigrant there is a personal history enmeshed with political events that lead individuals to *become* refugees and immigrants (Malkki 1991).

Ethiopian Jews in Canada not only *became* refugees and immigrants, but they became "Ethiopian Jews" (Weil 1995) as well in the framework of their exit from Africa. In the process of helping and building support for them, their cultural background and migratory experiences were essentialised and inevitably reduced to a few elements. It is between this reified portrayal and the *actual* people it assumes to depict that I situate and present my interviews with Ethiopian Jewish informants.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSION

The material I presented in this thesis is part of a growing contemporary effort to better understand certain aspects of Ethiopian Jewish experience. Much like recent works on Ethiopian-Israelis demonstrate, I show that there is a wide array of diversity characterizing this group. Hence, rather than speaking abstractly of "Ethiopian Jews" or of "Ethiopian-Israelis" without any concrete references, one might ask *which* "Ethiopian Jews" or *which* "Ethiopian-Isrealis" is one attempting to represent?

As I have pointed out in the Introduction, this research is not about all Ethiopians Jews in Montreal, a grouping that would include Beta Israel Pentecostals and Ethiopians from Israel who have made Montreal their home. Rather, I have concentrated on the initial immigrant group who came to Canada during the 1980's.

This *local* study reveals a gap between the lived experiences and constructed images representing the Beta Israel's lives in Ethiopia, their departure from Africa and arrival to Canada. To my knowledge, this research is the first to broach questions about the immigrant's affiliation with present-day Ethiopia and its people. Moreover, the interplay between representation, humanitarian mission and politics, as it relates to the lived experiences of Ethiopian Jewish informants, is not explored in detail in general works about Beta Israel emigration.

Popular interpretations about Ethiopian Jewish life and history were developed in the framework of political activism. North American and Ethiopian Jewish activists contributed to the creation of the "persecuted Jews" image. This portrayal is a distortion that contrasts with what can be found in the academic literature about the group's experience in Ethiopia. I argue that the collective representation of Ethiopian Jewish refugees who came to Canada was established prior to their arrival, and that traces of this impression are found today.

Generally, in speaking of the exodus of Ethiopian Jews, the image introduced by pro-Falasha activists over-emphasizes certain elements by taking it out of the Ethiopian

milieu, while completely ignoring other factors. Accordingly, I analyze Ethiopian Jews' exit from Africa within the framework of the upheavals that shaped contemporary Ethiopian history. In considering the macro-level factors that gave rise to the Ethiopian Jewish migratory experience, I include the impact of Diaspora Jews as a primary reference. Their involvement, and the recognition of the Beta Israel as part of the Jewish people, entailed a reworking of the Beta Israel's historical ethno-religious attachment towards Israel.

Historians have demonstrated that the tension between the Beta Israel and Ethiopia's political nexus is not a contemporary phenomenon. However, the Beta Israel's acknowledged identification with Diaspora Jews, exemplified by the right to make *aliyah*, re-defined the relation between Ethiopia's socialist government, who was promoting pan-Ethiopian national unity, and the Beta Israel.

Efforts instigated by Diaspora and Israeli Jews account for significant differences between the trajectories of the Beta Israel and other East African refugees. For many Ethiopians, the "Sudan route" was one of the only ways out of socialist Ethiopia. In preparing Operation Moses (1984), the "Sudan route" became for the Beta Israel a means of escaping Ethiopia and finding their way to Israel or, to a lesser extent, North America. While most rural African refugees do not resettle in a country outside of Africa, special projects were implemented to enable the Beta Israel to do so.

The narratives I present of the two informants who passed through Sudanese refugee camps raise important questions about what is *not* mentioned in refugee studies. Keeping in mind that their personal stories should not be taken as representative of the general refugee experience, these two cases suggest that certain aspects of migration are not accounted for. For example, how do we consider refugees flights that were planned, however minimally? How can we better understand the process by which individuals *become* refugees? How do we define the boundaries and limits of processing claims of refugee-ness?

It is important to point out that the background of the Ethiopian Jewish informants who participated in this research differ from the cohort who immigrated to Israel, in that the former group tends to be more urban, educated and literate than their Israeli counterparts. This does not minimize the importance of global questions I address about *how* the experiences of Ethiopian Jews in Canada and Ethiopia were represented to the public. Though this study explored political and integrative activities and their consequences in a specific locale (Montreal), hopefully future researches will shed light on the influence of political discourse, the portrayal of Ethiopian Jews and their migration in relation to the group's immigrant experience in Israel.

The events I explore are mostly set in the 1980's. During this period, political efforts that took place in Montreal linked the city to the larger Ethiopian Jewish migration to Israel, and to Operation Moses. And what about the next decade, marked by the second airlift? I address only superficially the case of the Ethiopian Jews who arrived to Montreal from Ethiopia in the 1990's. Nor have I included the experience of the few Beta Israel Pentecostals. Is there an association between the latter group, Ethiopian Jews and Ethiopian-Israelis living today in Montreal? If so, how are their identities articulated vis-à-vis one another in the North American context?

Moreover, Ethiopian-Israeli immigration, which must be viewed in the framework of the increasing Israeli migration to Montreal, raises interesting questions for other studies. For example, what encourages Israelis (and not only Israelis of Ethiopian origin) to live in *yeridah*, i.e. to leave Israel and settle elsewhere? How are they received by the larger Jewish community in Montreal? I invite future researchers to explore what is lacking in this study, and to examine themes such as these that are not developed in this thesis.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abbink, J., 1985, "An Ethiopian Jewish 'Missionary' as Culture Broker", Israel Social Science Research, vol 3, no 1-2, pp. 21-32.

Adelman, H., 1987, "Refugee Status Determination", attachment provided for the CJC National Executive, CJC Archives, Stan Cytrynbaum files, box 3 and 5, 4 p.

Anderson, Alan B., 1991, "Implications of the Changing Demographic Profile, Multiculturalism and Immigration policies for Canadian Ethnic Research". In Sharma, Satya P., Alexander M. Ervin & Deirdre Meintel (eds.), *Immigrants and Refugees in Canada: A National Perspective in Ethnicity, Mutliculturalism and Cross-Cultural Adjustment*, Canada, Printing Services, University of Saskatchewan, pp. 17-36.

Ashkenazi, M., 1988, "Political Organization and Resources Among Ethiopian Immigrants", Social Science Information, vol 27, no 3, pp. 371-389.

_______, 1985, "Studying the Students: Information Exchange, Ethiopian Immigrants, Social Workers and Visitors", Israel Social Science Research, vol 3, no 1-2, pp. 82-93.

Ashkenazi, M. and A. Weingrod, 1985, "Introduction: From Falasha to Ethiopian Jews", Israel Social Science Research, vol 3, no 1-2.

Atlas, Yedidya, 1985, "Rabbinical Perspective", The Jerusalem Post, Friday November 8, 1985.

Baête Neves Flores, Luiz Felipe, 1995, « Mémoires migrantes: migration et idéologie de la mémoire sociale », Ethnologie Française, 25 (1), pp.43-50.

Bailey, Glen, 1980, "An analysis of the Ethiopian revolution", M.Sc. thesis, Carleton University.

Bakwesegha, C. J., 1994, "Forced Migration in Africa and the OAU Convention". In Adelman, H. and J. Sorenson (eds.), *African Refugees: Development Aid and Repatriation*, Canada, York Lane Press, pp 3-17.

Barth, Fredrick, 1995, « Les groupes ethniques et leurs frontières ». In P.Poutignat and Streiff-Feinart, J. (eds.), *Théories de l'ethnicité*, Paris, Presses Universitaires Françaises, pp. 203-249.

_______, 1969, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference*, Boston, Little, Brown.

Basok, Tanya and Alan Simmons, 1992, "A review of the politics of Canadian refugee selection". In *The International Refugee Crisis: The British and Canadian Responses*, MacMillan, London & Toronto, pp. 132-156.

Baumann, G., 1996, *Contesting Culture: Discourses of Identity in Multi-Ethnic London*, Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, pp.9-36.

Beiser, M., M.D., 1991, "The Mental Health of Refugees in Resettlement Countries". In Adelman H. (ed.), *Refugee Policy: Canada and the United States*, Ontario and New York, York Lanes Press Ltd, pp. 425-442.

Bell, Vicki, 1999, "Historical Memory, Global Movements and Violence: Paul Gilroy and Arjun Appadurai in Conversation", Theory, Culture and Society, 16 (2), pp.21-40.

Ben-Ezer, G., 1985, "Cross-Cultural Misunderstandings: The Case of Ethiopian Immigrants-Jews in the Israeli Society", Israel Social Science Research, vol 3, no 1-2, pp. 60-70.

Benita, E. and G. Noam, 1995, "The Absorption of Ethiopian Immigrants: Selected Findings from Local Surveys", Israel Social Science Research, vol 10, no 2, pp. 81- 96.

Berger, Graenum, 1996, *Rescue the Ethiopian Jews! A Memoir, 1995-1995*, NewYork, John Washburn Bleeker Hampton Publishing Company.

Bloch, Maurice, 1996, « Mémoire autobiographique et mémoire historique du passé éloigné », Enquête, numéro 2, Usages de la Tradition, Marseille, Parenthèse, pp. 59-76.

Bourdieu, Pierre, 1993, *La misère du monde*, France, Éditions Du Seuil.

Bourguignon, Erika, 1996, "Vienna and Memory: Anthropology and Experience", Ethos, 24 (2), pp. 374-387.

Brennan, T., 1990, "The National Longing for Form". In Bhabha, H. K. (ed.), *Nation and Narration*, United States and Canada, Routledge, pp. 44-70.

Bulcha, Mekuria, 1988, *Flight and Integration: Causes of Mass Exodus from Ethiopia and Problems of Integration in the Sudan*, Uppsala, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies.

Chauvin, Marcel, 1980, « Politique linguistique et gouvernement impérial éthiopien (1973-1974) ». In Jopseph Tubian (ed.), *L'Éthiopie Moderne : De l'avènement de Ménélik II à nos jours. Comptes-rendus du cinquième congrès international des études éthiopiennes (Nice/ 19-22 decembre 1977)*, United States, Rotterdam, pp. 425-446.

Claphan, Christopher, 1988, *Transformation and Continuity in Revolutionary Ethiopia*, Great Britain, Cambridge University Press.

Clifford, James, 1994, "Diasporas", Cultural Anthropology, 9 (3), p.302-337.

Cohen, John M., Arthur A. Goldsmith & John W. Mellor, 1976, *Revolution and Land Reform in Ethiopia: Peasant Associations, Local Government and Rural Development*, United States, Rural Development Committee Center for International Studies, Cornell University.

Connerton, Paul, 1989, *How Societies Remember*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Corinaldi, M., 1998, *Jewish Identity: The Case of Ethiopian Jewry*, Jerusalem, The Magnes Press, The Hebrew University.

Devereux, Georges, 1972, *Ethnopsychanalyse complémentariste*, Paris, Flammarion.

Dolève-Gandelman, T., 1989, " "Ulpan" is not "Berlitz": Adult Education and the Ethiopian Jews in Israel", Social Science Information, vol 28, no 1, pp. 121-143.

Donham, Donald Lewis, 1999, *Marxist Modern : An Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution*, California, University of California Press, pp. 30-35, 127-130.

______, 1986, "Old Abyssinia and the New Ethiopian Empire: Themes in Social History". In D. Donham and Wendy James (eds.), *The Southern Marches of Imperial Ethiopia*, Great Britain, Cambridge University Press, pp. 3-48.

Dothan, T., 1985, "Jewish Children from Ethiopia in Israel: Some Observations on their Adaptation Patterns", Israel Social Science Research, vol 3, no 1-2, pp. 97-103.

Dorai K., M.-A. Hily and E. Ma Mung, 1998, « La circulation migratoire », Migrations Études, pp. 4-140.

During, S., 1990, "Literature – Nationalism's Other? The Case for Revision". In Bhabha H.K. (ed.), *Nation and Narration*, United States and Canada, Routledge, pp. 138-153.

Ervin, A. M., D. Meintel and Satya P. Sharma (eds.), 1991, "Chapter One: General Introduction". In *Immigrants and Refugees in Canada: a National Perspective on Ethnicity, Multiculturalism and Cross-Cultural Adjustment*, Saskatoon, University of Saskatchewan and Université de Montréal, pp. 1-3.

Ervin, A. M., 1991, "Chapter Ten. Introduction: Refugee Resettlement". In *Immigrants and Refugees in Canada: A National Perspective on Ethnicity, Multiculturalism and Cross-Cultural Adjustment*, Saskatoon, University of Saskatchewan and Université de Montréal, pp. 135-138.

L'État du monde. Annuaire économique et géopolitique mondial 2002, Canada, Éditions La Découverte, Éditions du Boréal, pp.164-167.

Fischer, M.M.J., 1986, "Ethnicity and the Post-Modern Arts of Memory". In J. Clifford and G.E. Marcus (eds.), *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, Berkley, University of California Press, pp. 194-233.

Gallisot, René, 1987, « Sous l'identité, le procès de l'identification », L'Homme et la société, 83, pp.12-27.

Gebregergis, Tzegezab, 1990, *Ethiopia, an Empire Under Fire and in Crisis: Is it on the Eve of Death or Total Transformation?*, Holland, Liberation Printing Press.

Glick Schiller, Nina, Linda Basch and Cristina Szanton Blanc, 1995, "From Immigrant to Transmigrant: Theorizing Transational Migration", Anthropological Quarterly, 68 (1), pp. 48-63.

Grosser, A., 1996, « La mémoire des peuples », Études, no. 3844, avril, pp. 503-515.

Grunau, Esther, 1995, "Ethiopian Jews in Canada: A Process of Constructing an Identity". M.Sc. thesis, Department of anthropology, McGill University.

Hacking, Ian, 1995, *Rewriting the Soul*, Princeton University Press.

Hailu, T., T. Wolde-Georgis and P. W. Van Arsdale, 1994, "Resource Depletion, Famine and Refugees in Tigray". In Adelman, H. and J. Sorenson (eds.), *African Refugees: Development Aid and Repatriation*, Canada, York Lanes Press, pp. 21-41.

Halbwachs, Maurice, 1980, *The Collective Memory*, United States, Harper & Row Publishers, Inc. (English translation of *La mémoire collective*, France, Presses Universitaires de France, 1950.)

Halper, Jeff, 1985, "The Absorption of Ethiopian Immigrants : A Return to the Fifties", Israel Social Science Research, vol 3, no 1-2, pp. 112-139.

Hareven, T., 1978, "Cycles and Cohorts: Reflections on Theoretical and Methodological Approaches to the Historical Study of Family Development", Journal of Social History, 12, pp. 97-109.

Henze, Paul B., 1995, *Ethiopia and Eritrea in Transition: The Impact of Ethnicity on Politics and Development*. California, RAND.

Hertzog, E., 1999, *Immigrants and Bureaucrats: Ethiopians in an Israeli Absorption Center*, United States, Berghahn Books.

Holt, D., 1995, "The Culture Cluster: A Comparative Perspective on Ethiopian Jewish Problems in Israel", Israel Social Science Research, vol 10, no 2, pp. 97-116.

Jacob, A., « *Les réfugiés, tout un monde… Recension des Écrits sur les politiques, programmes et services aux réfugiés* », with the collaboration of Daniele Blais. Montreal, 1992.

Jeudy, Henri-Pierre, 1995, « Entre mémoire et patrimoine », Ethnologie Française, 25 (1), pp. 5-6.

_______ , 1995, « Palinodie », Ethnologie Française, 25 (1), pp. 65-71.

Kaplan, Steven, 1996, « Les Falasha » (Chapter19). In *AETHIOPIA : Peuple d'Éthiopie*, Berlin, Sous la direction de Cultures et Communications, Gordon & Breach – Arts International, pp. 229-236.

_______ , 1995, "History, *Halakha* and Identity : The Beta Israel and World Jewry", Israel Social Science Research, vol 1, no 2, pp. 13-24.

_______ , 1992, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia : From Earliest Times to the 20th Century*, New York and London, New York University Press.

_______ , 1990, *Les Falashas*, Belgium, Éditions Brepols.

_______ , 1985, "The Beta Israel (Falasha) in the Ethiopian Context", Israel Social Science Research, vol 3, no 1-2, pp. 9-20.

Kearney, Michael, 1986, "From the Invisible Hand to Visible Feet: Anthropological Studies of Migration and Development", Annual Review of Anthropology, 15, pp. 331-361.

Kibreab, G., 1994, "Refugees in the Sudan: Unresolved Issues". In Adelman, H. and J. Sorenson (eds.), *African Refugees: Development Aid and Repatriation*, Canada, York Lane Presses, pp 43-68.

Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara, 1994, "Spaces of Dispersal", Cultural Anthropology, 9 (3), pp. 339-344.

Labelle, M., G. Beaudet, J. Lévy and F. Tardif, 1993, « La question nationale dans le discours de leaders d'associations ethniques de la région de Montréal », Cahiers de recherche sociologique, no 20, pp.86-111.

Lambek, Michael, 1996, "The Past Imperfect : Remembering As Moral Practice". In Paul Antze and Lambek, M. (eds.), *Tense Past. Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory*, New York, Routledge, pp. 235-254.

Lata, Leenco, 1999, *The Ethiopian State at the Crossroads: Decolonization and Democratization or Disintegration?*, New Jersey and Asmara, The Red Sea Press, Inc.

Leslau, Wolf, 1951, *Falasha Anthology*, United States, Yale University Press.

_______, 1957, *Coutumes et Croyances des Falachas (Juifs d'Abyssinie)*, Paris, Le concours du centre national de la recherche scientifique.

Lipsky, George A., 1962, *Ethiopia: Its People, Its Society, Its Culture*, United States, Hraf Press.

Lucas, Gavin, 1997, "Forgetting the Past", Anthropology Today, 13 (1), pp. 8-14.

Malkki, Liisa, 1997, "Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization". In Karen Fog Olwig and Hastrup, Kirsten (eds.), *Siting Culture: The Shifting Anthropological Object*, London and New York, Routledge, pp. 223-254.

_______, 1995, "Refugees and Exile: From the 'Refugee Studies' to the National Order of Things", Annual Review Anthropology, 24, pp. 495-423.

_______, 1995, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*, United States, The University of Chicago Press.

_______, 1992, "National Geographic: The Rooting of Peoples and the Territorialization of National Identity Among Scholars and Refugees", Cultural Anthropology, 7 (1), pp. 24-44.

Martin, D. A., 1991, "The Refugee Concept: On Definitions, Politics, and the Careful Use of a Scarce Resource". In Adelman H. (ed.), *Refugee Policy: Canada and the United States*, Toronto, York Lanes Press Ltd, pp. 30-51.

Megill, Allan, 1998, "History, Memory, Identity", History of the Human Sciences, 11 (3), pp. 37-62.

Meintel, D., 1999, « Récits d'exil et mémoire sociale de réfugiés ». In F. Laplantine, J. Lévy, J.B. Martin, A. Nouss (eds.), *Récit et connaissances,* Lyon, Presses Universitaires, 1998, pp. 55-74.

_______, 1993, « Introduction : Nouvelles approches constructivistes de l'ethnicité », Culture, XIII, (2), pp.10-15.

_______, 1992, « L'identité ethnique chez de jeunes montréalais d'origine immigrée », Sociologie et société, 24 (2), pp. 73-89.

______, 1991, "Studying Immigrant and Refugee Groups in Quebec". In A. Ervin, D., Meintel and S. Sharma (eds.), *Immigrants and Refugees in Canada: a National Perspective on Ethnicity, Multiculturalism and Cross-Cultural Adjustment*, Saskatoon, University of Saskatchewan et Université de Montréal, pp. 207-218.

Messing, Simon D., 1982, *The Story of the Falashas: "Black Jews" of Ethiopia*, United States, Balshon Printing & Offset Co.

Moussa, Helene, 1993, *Storm & Sanctuary: The Journey of Ethiopian and Eritrean Women Refugees*, Canada, Artemis Enterprises.

Munitz, S., B. Priel and A. Henik, 1985, "Color, Skin Color Preferences and Self Color Identification Among Ethiopian- And Israeli-Born Children", Israel Social Science Research, vol 3, no 1-2, pp. 71-81.

Namer, Gérard, 1993, « La mémoire collective comme pratique de mémoire sociale ». In G. Gosselin, *Les nouveaux enjeux de l'anthropologie: Autour de Georges Balandier*, Paris, Éditions L'Harmattan, pp. 111-114.

Newman, S. M., 1985, "Ethiopian Jewish Absorption and the Israeli Response: A Two-Way Process", Israel Social Science Research, vol 3, no 1-2, pp. 104-201.

Olazabal, J.-I., 1999, « La transmission d'une mémoire sociale à travers quatre générations ». Ph.D. dissertation, Departement of anthropology, Université de Montréal.

Oriol, Michel, 1979, « Identité produite, identité instituée, identité exprimée : Confusions de l'identité nationale et culturelle », Cahiers Internationaux de Sociologie, LXVI, pp.19-28.

______, 1985, « L'ordre des identités », Revue Européenne des Migrations Internationales, 1 (2), pp. 165-179.

Ottaway, Marina, 1987, "State Power Consolidation in Ethiopia". In *Afro-Marxist Regimes: Ideology and Public Policy*, United States, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., pp. 25-42.

Pankhurst, R. D., 1995, "The Beta Esra'él (Falashas) in Their Ethiopian Setting", Israel Social Science Research, vol 10, no 2, pp. 1-12.

Parfitt, T and E. Trevisan Semi (eds.), 1999, *The Beta Israel in Ethiopian and Israel: Studies on the Ethiopian Jews*, Great Britain, Curzon Press.

Peressini, M., 1991, "Chapter Twenty. The Life History as an Expression of Multiple Identities: Notes on Research in the Immigrant Context". In A. Ervin, D., Meintel and S. Sharma (eds.), *Immigrants and Refugees in Canada : A National Perspective on Ethnicity, Multiculturalism and Cross-Cultural Adjustment*, Saskatoon, University of Saskatchewan and Université de Montréal, pp. 231-248.

Poutignat, P. and J. Streiff-Feinart (eds.), 1993, *Théorie de l'ethnicité*, Paris, Presses Universitaires Françaises, pp. 93-133.

Publications du Québec, 1995, *Profils des communautés culturelles du Québec*, pp. 189-194; 341- 350.

Publications du Québec, 1995, *Profils des principaux groupes religieux du Québec*, p. 172.

Quirin, J., 1992, *The Evolution of the Ethiopian Jews: A History of the Beta Israel (Falasha) to 1920,* United States, University of Pennsylvania Press.

Rahmato, Dessalegn, 1987, "The Political Economy of Development in Ethiopia". In *Afro-Marxist Regimes: Ideology and Public Policy*, United States, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., p.179.

Rapoport, L., 1983, *The Lost Jews : Last of the Ethiopian Falashas*, New York, Sten and Day.

________, 1986, *Redemption Song: The Story of Operation Moses*, United States, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers.

Ricoeur, Paul, 1984, *Time and Narrative: Volume 1* (English translation of *Temps et Récit*), United States, University of Chicago Press, Ltd.

Rosen, H., 1995, "Working as a Government Anthropologist Among the Ethiopian Jews in Israel", Israel Social Science Research, vol 10, no 2, pp. 55-68.

______, 1985, "Core Symbols of Ethiopian Identity and their Role in Understanding the Beta Israel Today", Israel Social Science Research, vol 3, no 1-2, pp. 55-59.

Rowlands, Michael, 1993, "The Role of Memory in the Transmission of Culture", World Archeology, 25 (2), pp. 141-151.

Rumbaut, R. G., 1991, "Migration, Adaptation, and Mental Health: The Experience of Southeast Asian Refugees in the United States". In Adelman H. (ed.), *Refugee Policy: Canada and the United States*, Ontario et New York, York Lanes Press Ltd., pp. 381-424.

Saghal, Gita et Nira Yuval-Davis, 1991, « Le fondamentalisme, le muliculturalisme et les femmes », Les Temps Modernes, pp. 258-270.

Safran, Claire, 1987, *Secret Exodus : The Untold Story of How Operation Moses Saved the Lost Tribe of Ethiopian Jews*, New York, Prentice Hall Press.

Salamon, Hagar, 1999, *The Hyena People: Ethiopian Jews in Christian Ethiopia*, United States, University of California Press.

Santamaria, Ulysses, 1988, "Ethiopian Jews: Emergence of a Social Movement and New Spheres of Analysis- An Introduction", Social Science Information, vol 27, no 3, pp. 355-356.

Seeman, D., 1997, "One People, One Blood: Religious Conversion, Public Health and Immigration as Social Experience for Ethiopian-Israelis". Ph.D. dissertation, Department of anthropology, Harvard University.

Seremetakis, C. Nadia, 1993, "The Memory of the Senses: Historical Perception, Commensal Exchange and Modernity", Visual Anthropology Review, 9 (2), pp. 2-18.

Shabtay, Malka, 1995, "The Experience of Ethiopian Jewish Soldiers in the Israeli Army: The Process of Identity Formulation within the Military Context", Israel Social Science Research, vol 10, no 2, pp. 69-80.

________, 1999, Between Reggae and Rap: Music and Identity among Ethiopian Youth, Overseas Students Program, course readings, Spring Semester, Ben Gurion University, Israel.

Sharma, Satya P., 1991, "Chapter Two. Introduction: Ethnic Studies in Canada- Theory, Methodology, and Application". In Sharma, Satya P., Alexander M. Ervin and Deirdre Meintel (eds.), *Immigrants and Refugees in Canada: A National Perspective in Ethnicity, Mutliculturalism and Cross-Cultural Adjustment*, Canada, Printing Services, University of Saskatchewan, pp. 5-16.

Shelemay, Kay Kaufman, 1991, *A Song of Longing*, Urbana and Chicago, University of Illinois Press.

______, 1989, *Music, Liturgy and Falasha History.* Michigan, University of Michigan Press.

______, 1980, "Continuity and Change in the Liturgy of the Falasha". In Jopseph Tubian (ed.), *L'Éthiopie Moderne : De l'avènement de Ménélik II à nos jours. Comptes-rendus du cinquième congrès international des études éthiopiennes (Nice/ 19-22 decembre 1977)*, United States, Rotterdam, pp, p. 479-488.

Shnapper, D., 1993, « Ethnies et nations », Cahiers de recherche sociologique, no 20, pp.157-167.

Shneller, R., 1985, "Heritage and Changes in the Nonverbal Language of Ethiopian Newcomers", Israel Social Science Research, vol 3, no 1-2, pp. 33-54.

Sorenson, John, 1994, "Refugees, Relief and Rehabilitation in the Horn of Africa: The Eritrean Relief Association". In Adelman, H. and J. Sorenson (eds.), *African Refugees: Development Aid and Repatriation*, Canada, York Lanes Press, pp. 69-93.

______, "An Overview: Refugees and Development". In Adelman, H. and J. Sorenson (eds.), *African Refugees: Development Aid and Repatriation*, Canada, York Lanes Press, pp. 175-190.

______, 1990, "Opposition, Exile and Identity: The Eritrean Case", Journal of Refugee Studies, vol 3, number 4, pp. 298-319.

Stein, Barry N., 1981, "The Refugee Experience: Defining the Parameters of a Field Study", International Migration Review, 15 (1-2), pp. 320-330.

Sterkenburg, J, J. Kirby and P. O'Keefe, 1994, "Refugees and Rural Development: A Comparative Analysis of Project Aid in Sudan and Tanzania". In Adelman, H. and J. Sorenson (eds.), *African Refugees: Development Aid and Repatriation*, Canada, York Lanes Press, pp. 191-209.

Taylor, Donald D., 1991, "Chapter Eleven. Vietnamese Refugees Adaptations in Three Contexts: A Life History Approach". In Sharma, Satya P., Alexander M. Ervin & Deirdre Meintel (eds.), *Immigrants and Refugees in Canada: A National Perspective in Ethnicity, Mutliculturalism and Cross-Cultural Adjustment*, Canada, Printing Services, University of Saskatchewan, pp. 139-146.

Terdiman, R., 1993, *Present Past: Modernity and the Memory Crisis*, Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press.

Tibebu, Teshale, 1995, *The Making of Modern Ethiopia: 1896-1974*, United States, The Red Sea Press, Inc.

Todorov, Tzvetan, 1995, *Les abus de la mémoire*, Paris, Arléa.

Ullendorf, Edward, 1968, *Ethiopia and the Bible*, England, The Oxford University Press.

______, 1960, *The Ethiopians: An Introduction to Country and People*, England, Oxford University Press.

United Nations High Commissioner For Refugees
1976, 31st Session, Supplement No. 12 (A/31/12), paragraph 97-100; 129-135.

1978, 33rd Session, Supplement No. 12 (A/33/12), paragraph 105-109; 139-142.

1980, 35th Session, Supplement No. 12 (A/35/12), paragraph 89-93; 123-128.

1982, 37th Session, Supplement No. 12 (A/37/12), paragraph 106-147.

1983, 38th Session, Supplement No. 12 (A/38/12), paragraph 111-128.

1984, 39th Session, Supplement No. 12 (A/39/12), paragraph 114-119.

Van Esterik, J. L., 1991, "Chapter Sixteen. Communicative Claims in a Refugee Program: Case Study of an Anthropologist as a Service Provider". In Sharma, Satya P., Alexander M.Ervin and Deirdre Meintel (eds.), *Immigrants and Refugees in Canada: A National Perspective in Ethnicity, Mutliculturalism and Cross-Cultural Adjustment*, Canada, Printing Services, University of Saskatchewan, pp. 185-195.

Weil, S., 1995, "Introduction: Ethiopian Jews in the Limelight", Israel Social Science Research, vol 10, no 2, pp. *iii-viii.*

______, 1995, "Collective Designations and Collective Identity among Ethiopian Jews", Israel Social Science Research, vol 10, no 2, pp. 25-40.

______, 1995, " "It is Futile to Trust in Man": Methodological Difficulties in Studying Non-Mainstream Populations with Reference to Ethiopian Jews in Israel", HumanOrganization: Journal for the Society for Applied Anthropology, vol 54, no 1, pp. 1-9.

White, Hayden, 1987, *The Content of the Form: Narrative Discourse and Historical Representation*, United States, The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Wieviorka. M., 1993, « Nationalisme et racisme », Cahiers de recherche sociologique, no 20, pp.169-181.

Winston, Diane, 1980, *The Falashas: History and Analysis of Policy Towards Beleaguered Community*, Perspectives, (policy study published by the National Jewish Resource Center), pp.1-24.

Winter, R., 1994, "Ending Exile: Promoting Successful Reintegration of African Refugees and Displaced People". In Adelman, H. and J. Sorenson (eds.), *African Refugees: Development Aid and Repatriation*, Canada, York Lanes Press, pp. 159-170.

Yerushalmi, Yosef H., 1989, *Zakhor, Jewish History and Jewish Memory*, New York, Schocken Books Inc.

_______ , 1988, *Les usages de l'oubli*, Colloque de Royaumont, Paris, Éditions du Seuil.

Young, Allen, 1975, "Why Amhara get *kurenya*: Sickness and Possession in an Ethiopian *zar* Cult", American Ethnologist, no 2, vol 3, pp. 567-584.

Yuval-Davis, N., 1993, "Nationalism and Racism", Cahiers de recherches sociologiques, no 20, pp. 183-202.

APPENDIX I

Pictures of Ethiopian Jewish Figurines

Courtesy of:
Collection ethnographique
Département d'anthropologie
Université de Montréal
(collector: Asen Balikci)

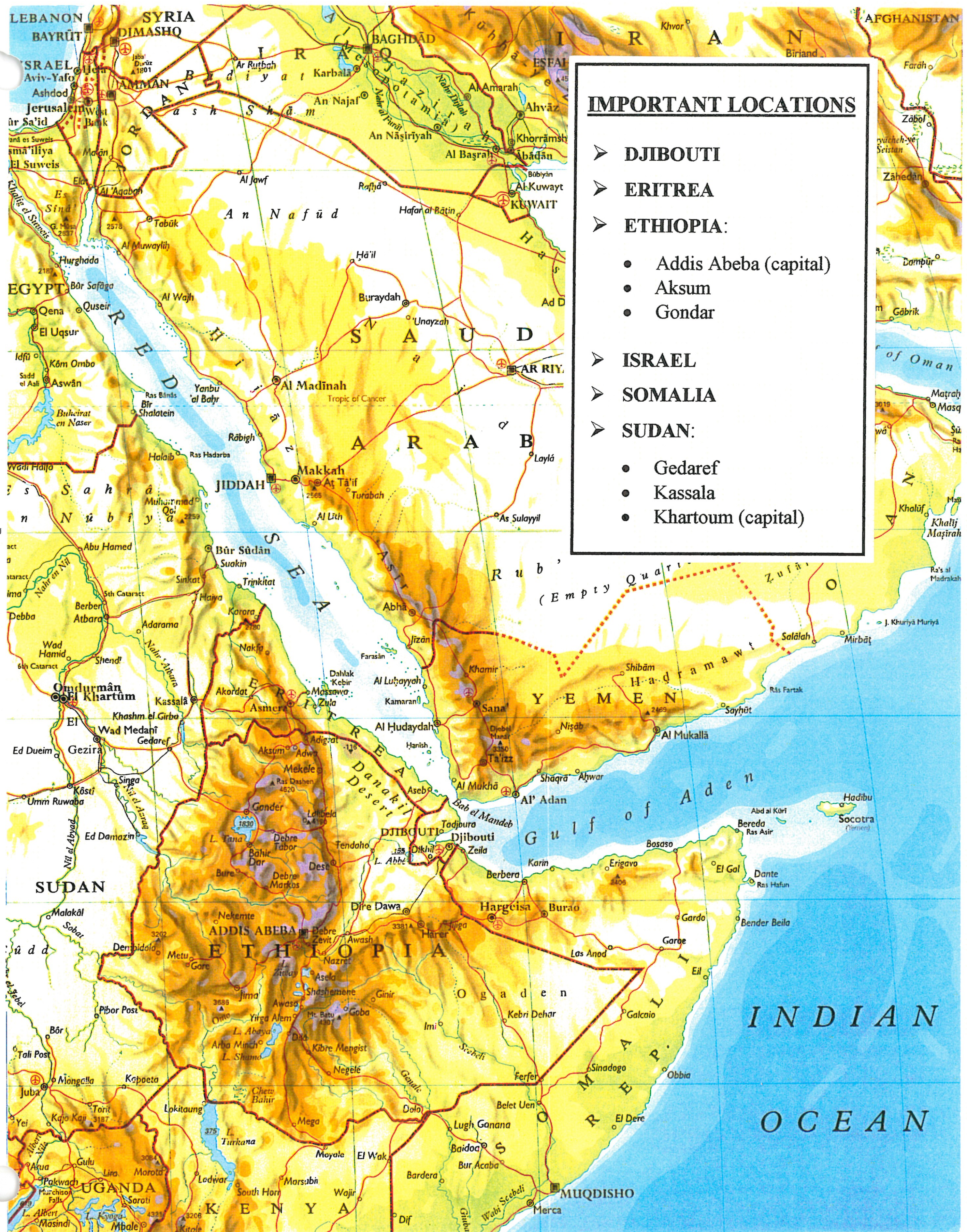
Illustration no.1

Illustration no.2

APPENDIX II

Map of Arabia and the Horn of Africa

Reproduced from:
Oxford Atlas of the World, 1999
7th Edition, p. 102.


IMPORTANT LOCATIONS
DJIBOUTI
ERITREA
ETHIOPIA:
Addis Abeba (capital)
Aksum
Gondar
ISRAEL
SOMALIA
SUDAN:
Gedaref
Kassala
Khartoum (capital)
LEBANON
SYRIA
BAYRŪT
DIMASHQ
ISRAEL
AMMAN
JORDAN
BAGHDĀD
IRAQ
IRAN
AFGHANISTAN
KUWAIT
EGYPT
SUDAN
SAUDI ARABIA
RED SEA
JIDDAH
Makkah
Al Madīnah
Tropic of Cancer
An Nafūd
ERITREA
Asmera
DJIBOUTI
Djibouti
ETHIOPIA
ADDIS ABEBA
Aksum
Gonder
L. Tana
YEMEN
Sana'
Al' Adan
Gulf of Aden
Socotra
SOMALI REP.
MUQDISHO
Hargeisa
Ogaden
INDIAN OCEAN
UGANDA
KENYA
Omdurmân
El Khartûm
Kassalâ
Gedaref
Wad Medanî
Bûr Sûdân
Danakil Desert
Bab el Mandeb
Dire Dawa
Rub' al Khali (Empty Quarter)
Hadramawt
Juba
Turkana

APPENDIX III

Letter From Louise Gagné,
December 6, 1982.

Courtesy of:
Mark Zarecki

Gouvernement du Québec
Ministère
des Communautés culturelles
et de l'Immigration

Montréal, le 6 décembre 1982

Monsieur Mark Zarecki
5565 Coolbrook
MONTREAL (Québec)
H2X 2L6

Monsieur,

La présente a pour effet de confirmer avoir reçu le 29 septembre 1982 une liste de six (6) jeunes réfugiés appartenant à la communauté Falasha d'Ethiopie. Le 18 octobre 1982 vous m'informiez que l'un deux était mentionné sur une liste de 29 réfugiés qui serait pris en charge par une autre association américaine.

Puis le 16 novembre 1982, vous donniez l'alerte concernant deux autres jeunes vivant une situation particulière de danger au Soudan.

Enfin le 30 novembre 1982, vous me transmettiez une liste de 86 personnes, regroupées en 16 unités familiales dans divers camps ou prison au Soudan. Plus récemment, le Congrès Juif du Canada rencontrait le Ministre, Monsieur Gérald Godin. Ils convenaient de mener un programme conjoint afin de faciliter l'arrivée de cinquante (50) réfugiés Falasha au Québec.

Espérant que ces démarches permettront de venir en aide aux réfugiés de votre communauté qui en ont le plus besoin.

Louise Gagné

Louise Gagné
Secrétaire déléguée
auprès des réfugiés

LG/jm

355, rue McGill
Montréal, Qué.
H2Y 2E8

APPENDIX IV

Number of Ethiopian Jews in Canada

YEAR	TOTAL IN CANADA*
1985[1]	50
1988[2]	90
1989[3]	105
1992[4]	135
2001[5]	total not available (70 in Montreal)

* approximate figures

[1] Letter written by R.A. Girard, Director Refugee Affairs, Employment and Immigration Canada, August 9, 1985. (CJC Archives, Stan Cytrynbaum files, box 1).
[2] Confidential CJC memorandum written by Stan L. Cytrynbaum addressed to "National Executive, Committee members and Community leadership". (CJC Archives Stan Cytrynbaum files, box 1).
[3] Memorandum complied by JIAS, January 17, 1989. "Re: Ethiopian Cases Processing for Canada". (CJC Archives Stan Cytrynbaum files, box 4).
[4] Article titled "Montrealer's Hopes Lie in Israel", The Gazette, 1992. (CJC Archives, Stan Cytrynbaum files, box 4).
[5] According to an Ethiopian Jewish informant, as well as the Jewish Immigrant Aid Service.

APPENDIX V

Hillel Leaflet Distributed in Montreal, 1983

CENTRE **HILLEL**

VOUS SOUVENEZ-VOUS? Plus jamais a-t'on dit!

Et pourtant, aujourd'hui, en 1983, des Juifs continuent à mourir par centaines, par milliers peut-être, parce que dans leur pays depuis des siècles, ils sont des "étrangers", des "Falashas".

Ce nouvel HOLOCAUSTE n'a pas lieu en Allemagne bien sûr, mais en Afrique:
LES JUIFS NOIRS D'ETHIOPIE (250 000 au 19ème siècle, moins de 10 000 aujourd'hui...) constituent la minorité Juive la plus persécutée du monde.

Décimés par familles et par villages entiers, pourchassés, dispersés, les quelques survivants ne doivent la vie qu'à la fuite et à la clandestinité. Ceux qui ont réussi à franchir les frontières d'Ethiopie croupissent dans des camps de réfugiés au Soudan, dans des conditions misérables comparables à celles (de triste mémoire) des camps de concentration...

Quand une espèce animale est en voie de disparition, tous, savants ou non, trouvent normal de mettre tout en oeuvre pour sa sauvegarde...

LAISSERONS-NOUS DISPARAITRE UN PEUPLE?...UNE COMMUNAUTE-SOEUR?

Mieux que toutes les armes, c'est le silence aussi qui tue...
Aussi nous crions!!!

IL FAUT SAUVER LES FALASHAS.

RENEE EDERY
Coordonnatrice du Comité Falashas
Pour plus d'informations:
Centre Hillel aux 738 2655-2280.

5186 CÔTE DES NEIGES, 1er ÉTAGE — MONTRÉAL, QUÉBEC — H3T 1X8 — TÉL.: 738-2655

APPENDIX VI

Documents and Newspaper Articles

Referred and cited articles:

a- Adelman, Howard. Document titled "Memorandum Re Construction of Board of Directors – Canadian Association for Ethiopian Jewry", October 1980. CJC Stan Cytrynbaum files, box 1.

b- Rabbi W. Gunther Plaut. The Canadian Jewish News, Thursday, December 11, 1980. World News : p. 2. "A Very Complex Problem: How to Help the Falashas". CJC Archives, Stan Cytrynbaum files, box 4.

c- Anonymous. CAEJ Report Update, June 1982, p. 4, paragraph # 15. CJC Stan Cytrynbaum files, box 3.

d- Anonymous. "Falasha Activists Physically Thrown Out of CJF Meeting", (Chicago) SENTINEL, December 2, 1982. CJC Archives, Stan Cytrynbaum files, box 4.

e- Rucker, Patricia. "GA Opening Disrupted by Protest for Falasha", The Canadian Jewish News, Thursday November 22, 1984, p.3. CJC Archives, Stan Cytrynbaum files, box 1.

f- Cytrynbaum, Stan L. See post script on p.2 of a letter written by Stan Cytrynbaum addressed to professor Irwin Cotler, dated May 27, 1985. CJC Archives, Stan Cytrynbaum files, box 1.

g- Anonymous. "How Easy it is to Grandstand: Harris, Rose Slam CAEJ Claims". CJC Archives, Stan Cytrynbaum files, box 1.

h- Cytrynbaum, Stan L. Document without title, beginning with "In view of the mass contradictions and …", 1984, p.1. CJC Archives, Stan Cytrynbaum files, box 4.

i- Moss, Joel. Letter written by JIAS Executive Director Joel Moss dated January 11th, 1990, and addressed to Mr. Hector Cowan, Director of Refugee Affairs, Employment and Immigration Canada, Stan Cytrynbaum files, box 4.

j- Friedman, Thomas L. Article titled : "For Ethiopian Jews, Israel is Another World". CJC Archives, Stan Cytrynbaum files, box 3.

k- Cytrynbaum, Stan L. Letter addressed to the Editor of The Jewish Star, December 11, 1984, p. 5. CJC Archives, Stan Cytrynbaum files, box 1.

l- Document titled: "Draft for April 20, 1985".CJC Archives, Stan Cytrynbaum files, box 1.

m- Anonymous. Press release titled: "First Canadian Jewish Mission Returns from Ethiopia", March 30, 1984 in the CJC Archives, Stan Cytrynbaum files box 3.

n- Lazar, Barry. Press release titled: "Congress Representative Meets Jews in Ethiopia: Says Famine Has Not Yet Reached Ethiopian Jews", December 6, 1984. CJC Archives, Stan Cytrynbaum files, box 3.

o- Csillag, Ron. The Canadian Jewish News, May 15, 1986. CJC Archives, Stan Cytrynbaum files, box 2.

p- Cytrynbaum, Stan L. Untitled text printed with CJC headnote, p.3. CJC Archives, Stan Cytrynbaum files, box 4.

q- Cohen, Elaine. In page B-4 of an article titled: "Fact-Finding Mission to Ethiopia Proves Real Eye-Opener". CJC Archives, Stan Cytrynbaum files, box 3.

r- Arnold, Janice. The Canadian Jewish News, Thursday, December 1, 1988, p.34. CJC Archives, Stan Cytrynbaum files, box 2.

s- Anonymous. "Notes from a meeting in New York" (March 23, 1988), page 9. CJC Archives, Stan Cytrynbaum files, box 1.

t- Fidelman, Charlie. The Gazette : "At Home in Israel: Ethiopian Helps Airlifted Immigrants Adapt"., Saturday, June 9, 2001, p. A7.

u- Anonymous. The Suburban, January 16, 1989. CJC Archives, Stan Cytrynbaum files, box 2.

v- Abrams, Herb. Letter to Ernest Berger. July 19, 1988. CJC Archives, Stan Cytrynbaum files, box 4.

APPENDIX VII

Glossary

Words in Arabic:

shouk: traditional Arab market.

"*suchuaria*" (used in the Sudan): sugar.

Um Raquba: "Mother of Shelter". Name of refugee camp in the Sudan where most Ethiopian Jews were temporarily settled.

Words in Ethiopic (Amharic, Ge'ez or Agaw):

atinkugn : prohibitions concerning interactions with non-members and impure objects or beings, defined by Beta Israel religious exclusionary practices

ayhud: see Chapter One for detail.

barya: term associated with 'slave' and 'slavery', associated to phenotypical differences.

buda: evil eye conviction associated with sorcery and supernatural powers.

"*Ethiopia Tikdem*": slogan used to express Ethiopia's socialist philosophy of "Ethiopia First", which came to stand for Ethiopian Socialism.

gabbi (sing.), *gabbis* (plur.): thick typical Ethiopian white clothing wrapped around the body.

gbireh: region.

gbireh mahberr: different associations, such as peasant and farmer, created during socialist Ethiopia, and divided by region.

injera: pancake-like bread.

kayla: a negative or in some regions a neutral appellation synonymous with the Beta Israel.

kebele: association of farmers.

messob (sing.), *messobs* (plur.): hand-thatched straw tables.

shamma (sing.), *shammas* (plur.): Ethiopian white clothing with colorful decorated edges.

'Shankilla': pejorative appellation to describe groups in Ethiopia linked to notions of 'slaves' and 'slavery'.

taib: when applied to the Beta Israel, this terms mean one who is not merely skillful but also possessed of an extraordinary power used for good or evil (Wagaw 1993:20).

Zemecha: development campaign to fight illiteracy, designed by Ethiopia's revolutionary government in the 1970's.

Words in Hebrew or Yiddish:

aliyah: literally, "to arise". To "make *aliyah*" refers to the immigration of Jews to Israel.

halakha (n.), or halakhic (adj.): Jewish oral law.

halakhikly : in accordance to Jewish oral law.

kahal: group of philanthropists and religious figures in charge of the *kehilla* (community) who distribute resources.

kehilla: community.

limoud: Jewish moral value where knowledge takes precedence over material goods.

menorah (sing.), *menorot* (plur.): traditional seven-candle Jewish candelabra.

mercaz clita: absorption centers in Israel.

mitzvah (sing.), *mitzvot* (plur.): literally: one of the tenets of the Jewish Law; figuratively: a deed and/or something that brings one closer to God.

pikuah nefesh: obligation to remove one from danger.

shiva: mourning practices.

shtelt: traditional Ashkenazi townships.

tsedakha: Jewish charity and mutual assistance towards the less fortunate.

olim: immigrants in Israel.

yeridah: emigration out of Israel (when used in this thesis), or adopting the ways of the secular world. One can be *yeridah*, yet live in Israel.