From a Returning Jewish Diaspora to Returns to Diaspora Spaces: Israeli-Ethiopians Today

by Lisa Anteby-Yemini

Abstract

This article discusses the processes of de-diasporization and re-diasporization experienced by the Israeli-Ethiopian community in Israel but which take a special twist regarding the homecoming of a Jewish diaspora. At first the Ethiopian immigrants' culture and religion were marginalized or silenced. Yet, the older generation progressively returned to their linguistic, religious, social, cultural and economic practices, forming a "little Ethiopia" in Israel while the younger generation, who strove to become as Israeli as possible, began feeling discriminated, leading to the beginning of a protest movement in 2015, demanding social justice and inclusion in the Israeli narrative. A second part examines physical and virtual "returns" to diasporic spaces through an ethnic revival and the re-appropriation of Ethiopian roots among the younger generation (in theatre, dance, music, literature and visual arts), as well as through return trips to Ethiopia and "heritage tourism;" new identifications, with a global Black diaspora, and the emergence of Israeli-Ethiopian diasporas living abroad, complicating yet again the notion of "home." This paper thus shows how Israeli-Ethiopians challenge notions of homecoming and question constructions of location, displacement and identity.

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Introduction

Most Ethiopian Jews lived in small villages in the remote highlands of north-east Ethiopia as farmers and artisans until their immigration to Israel. The quasi-totality of this community now lives in Israel, where Israelis of Ethiopian origin number some 150,000, including more than a third of this group who were born in Israel. Better known as Falashas – a term rejected by Israeli-Ethiopians today – they called themselves Beta Israel, or "House of Israel." They claim to be descendants of an ancient exiled Jewish group and saw themselves as strangers in Ethiopia. Visions of returning to Jerusalem (*Yerussalem* in the Ethiopian Jews' pronunciation), portrayed as their ultimate homeland, were passed down from generation to generation, through prophecies, stories, and identity constructs as Others. This ideology of difference was also sustained through ethno-religious borders separating them from local Christians and Muslims.[1] The Ethiopian Jews' Torah (*Orit*) was written in Geez, the liturgical language of the Orthodox Ethiopian Church, and they followed Jewish Biblical practices and holidays, including strict observance of Shabbat and purity laws; thus, for example, men who touched a corpse were isolated for seven days in a special hut, as were women during menstruation and after childbirth. The Beta Israel did not have access to the Talmud or Rabbinic codes of Jewish law. The yearning for Zion was expressed in their festivals and prayers, when they would face in the direction of Jerusalem. The holy city was seen as the City of Gold and some recall being told

[1] Hagar Salamon, *The Hyena People. Ethiopian Jews in Christian Ethiopia*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

they would become "white" upon reaching the Promised Land. In 1862, thousands of Ethiopian Jews attempted to walk towards Jerusalem, yet failed. The dream was nonetheless kept alive and many Israeli-Ethiopians recounted to me their longing for Jerusalem, expressed through the words they sang as children, in Amharic – their spoken tongue – when they saw storks migrating back to Ethiopia: "*Shimela shimela yä-yerusalem säwotch dehna natchäw*?" [Stork, stork! Are the people of Jerusalem doing well?].[2]

The Ethiopian Jews' isolation led them to believe they were the only descendants of the ancient Hebrews. It was only in 1865, with the arrival of Protestant European missionaries followed by Jewish emissaries, that they began to think of themselves as members of a global Jewish community.[3] In 1975, the fateful decision of the Israeli Rabbinate recognizing them as Jews, descendants of the lost tribe of Dan, allowed them to immigrate under the Law of Return. However, the dictatorial regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam forbade any citizen to leave Ethiopia, and Israel did not encourage *aliyah*. When political instability and famine in 1983 led thousands of Christian Ethiopians to flee towards Sudan, many Ethiopian Jews decided the time had come to leave. As conditions deteriorated in the Sudanese refugee camps, Israel, pressured by various actors, organized in 1984-5 a massive airlift from Sudan. Codenamed Operation Moses, that brought close to 7,000 Ethiopian Jews to the Jewish homeland. In 1989, an Israeli Embassy opened in Ethiopia, and thousands of Jews left their villages for Addis Ababa in the hope of immigrating to Israel. On the eve of the fall of Mengistu's regime in May 1991, the Israeli government launched Operation Salomon, airlifting 14,000 Ethiopian Jews to Israel within 36 hours.

This article will discuss the homecoming of this Ethiopian Jewish diaspora, confronted with the harsh reality of absorption policies, Orthodox Judaism, socio-economic marginalization, and racialization in the Promised Land. Yet, within Israel, this group has gradually developed new diasporic identity features, primarily as an Ethiopian, but also as a Black diaspora – and recently beyond Israel, as an Israeli-Ethiopian diaspora abroad. The processes of de-diasporization and re-diasporization found among other migrant groups here lead to questions

[2] These very same words were recorded in 1935 by French anthropologist Marcel Griaule during the Dakar-Djibouti expedition when he visited Beta Israel villages in Ethiopia.

[3] Steven Kaplan, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia. From Earliest Times to the Twentieth Century*, (New York: New York University Press, 1992).

about the relationship between homeland and diaspora,[4] especially for a Jewish migrant group returning home to a state where the dominant Zionist ideology negates diaspora identity.

The first part of this article will address the challenges for Ethiopian immigrants, who, returning to a "homeland" never previously seen, experience inclusion along with exclusion, as well as increasing diasporization. The erasing of their culture and religious heritage, the clashes with the Rabbinate, the doubts cast upon their Jewishness, and the unexpected racism have left many Ethiopian Jews disenchanted. Nonetheless, even as their memory and history were being marginalized or even silenced to melt into a Jewish-Israeli national identity, the older generation began again to turn to their native linguistic, religious, social, cultural and economic practices, forming a "little Ethiopia" in Israel, while the younger generation, on the whole, rejected these elements of a diasporic lifestyle and strove to become as Israeli as they could. However, they found themselves excluded and discriminated against. This led to several protests, culminating in a wider social movement in 2015. The young Ethiopian Jews demanded social justice and inclusion in the Israeli collective, as well as recognition of the erased memory of their past and their ignored history in the Israeli-Zionist narrative.

This claim to re-appropriate their past entailed, inter alia, "homing" new spaces of belonging, making Israeli-Ethiopians develop into new diasporas. A second section of the article will thus explore today's physical and virtual returns to diasporic spaces, expressed through an Ethiopian ethnic revival among the younger generation (in theater, dance, music, literature and the visual arts), but also through return trips to Ethiopia and heritage tourism; one also observes new ways of identifying, such as with a global Black diaspora, as well as the emergent phenomenon of Israeli-Ethiopian *émigrés* living abroad (primarily in the USA), following the trend of other young Israelis who (re)emigrate (*yordim*) to the diaspora. This article will therefore endeavor to show how the case of Ethiopian Jews challenges the very notion of ethnic return to the homeland, as well as enables the rethinking of history and memory as they shape the community's construction of location, displacement and identity, illustrating the tensions between the diasporization of home and the homing of diaspora, to use Avtar Brah's terms.[5]

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[4] Nicholas Van Hear, *New Diasporas. The Mass Exodus, Dispersal and Regrouping of Migrant Communities*, (London: Routledge, 1998).

[5] Beginning in 1991, I have been carrying out fieldwork among Israelis of Ethiopian origin in Israel, as well as participating in demonstrations and attending cultural, community and religious

Returning Home?

Despite huge investments by the Israeli government and numerous NGOs, linguistic, economic, social, educational and cultural absorption of Israeli-Ethiopians continues to be riddled with difficulty; moreover, doubt as to their Jewishness still arises in specific contexts. Police violence, high percentage of youth in detention, discrimination in the workplace, in the army and in education, marginalization, spatial segregation and poverty are the images associated with Israeli-Ethiopians and the topics of most studies on the group. Research on professionals who have attained socio-economic mobility in politics, the military, the arts, business, law, high-tech and more, thus constituting an emerging Israeli-Ethiopian middle class, is still lacking except for a few publications.[6] In addition, the Ethiopian community in Israel is heterogeneous because of regional divisions, social class, degrees of religiosity, affiliation with the Falashmoras, and other factors, thus comprising several sub-groups.[7] This first part will limit itself to examining some paradoxes of Ethiopian Jews' homecoming that have not been given sufficient attention in the literature.

Silencing Ethiopian Culture, Erasing Beta Israel Identity

Many Israeli-Ethiopians feel their culture and religious heritage have been marginalized or even erased. According to Zionist ideology, new immigrants are required to shed their culture and customs of diaspora and adopt a new Israeli-Jewish identity. Perhaps the first and foremost example of the denial of this diasporic past was the imposing of new Hebrew or Israeli names on new immigrants (*olim*) from Ethiopia, as with former Jewish *olim*. Erasing their

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events. Following the protest movement of 2015, I have interviewed one-and-a-half- and second-generation Ethiopian Israelis and several of those who made return trips to Ethiopia or settled in Europe or the USA.

[6] See for example *The Monk and the Lion. Contemporary Ethiopian Visual Art in Israel*, eds. Tal Dekel et al., (Tel Aviv: Achoti–For Women in Israel Publications, 2017); Yarden Fanta Vagenshtein, Lisa Anteby-Yemini, "Migration, Gender, and Mobility. Ethiopian-Israeli Women's Narratives of Career Trajectories," *African and Black Diaspora. An International Journal* 9/2 (2016): 257-273; Sophie Walsh, Abigail Yonas, "'Connected but Moving Onwards... Keeping the Balance.' Successful Ethiopian Women in Israel," *Society and Welfare* 32/3 (2012): 317-346 [Hebrew].

[7] Shalva Weil, "Ethiopian Jews. The Heterogeneity of a Group," in *Social, Cultural and Clinical Aspects of Ethiopian Immigrants in Israel*, eds. Eliezer Witztum, Nimrod Grisaru, (Beersheba: The Jewish Agency for Israel–Ben-Gurion University of the Negev Press, 2012): 1-17 [Hebrew].

original Ethiopian names constituted a double silencing, since each name held a linguistic meaning, in Amharic or Tigrinya, as well as a symbolic one, linked to a specific event at birth. Tsahay, renamed Dvora, explained to me that her original name meant "sun" and was given to her by her father who thought her "skin was as light as the sun." New family names, usually based on the first name of the paternal grandfather, were also imposed on members of what Israeli bureaucrats considered the same "family," often going against Ethiopian conceptions of kinship and blurring genealogical links. The authorities also required, to issue Israeli identity cards, precise birthdates, which some immigrants could not supply, so that for some, only an approximate year appeared, with no day nor month (e.g. 00/00/1954); one immigrant rightly told me: "Look, it's as if I wasn't born!", perhaps best expressing the feeling of one's entire identity being erased.

However, the most devastating denial, in the eyes of the community, was the Israeli Rabbinate's refusal to accept the Beta Israel religious tradition, which had been maintained for centuries in Ethiopia. The non-recognition of the authority of the Beta Israel spiritual leaders (*qesotch*) was a blow to their honor and to the dignity of all Ethiopian immigrants. Furthermore, the *qesotch* were distressed to see that their purity rituals were not observed in Israel and their ritual slaughtering was not considered kosher. Elders asked me repeatedly how it could be that in Israel one could touch a corpse and not be isolated for seven days, or that women were not kept apart during menstruation or after birth, and even attended the circumcision of their newborn boys in the presence of other community members![8] Many Ethiopian immigrants indicated they believed themselves to be the authentic Jews, and that the Promised Land had become impure.[9] They were, therefore, deeply hurt to discover that the Rabbinate cast doubts on their Jewishness because Beta Israel divorce and conversion did not conform to Rabbinic Judaism. This produced feelings of alienation and frustration, which some consider a major reason for the crisis of the second generation.[10] In addition, because the majority of the youth were sent to religious boarding schools where Jewish Orthodox practices clashed with the parents' traditions, the gap between the generations widened, rendering the Beta Israel religion further illegitimate. Even though, following a powerful protest by

[8] Lisa Anteby-Yemini, *Les juifs éthiopiens en Israël. Les paradoxes du paradis*, (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2004).

[9] Emanuela Trevisan Semi, "The Beta Israel (Falashas). From Purity to Impurity," *Jewish Journal of Sociology* 27/2 (1985): 103-114.

[10] Sharon Shalom, *From Sinai to Ethiopia. The Halakhic and Conceptual World of Ethiopian Jewry*, (Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House, 2016).

the Ethiopian community, the humiliating symbolic conversion required by the Rabbinate was discontinued in 1985, today Israelis of Ethiopian origin must still follow specific procedures to ascertain their personal *halakhic* status when registering for marriage at religious councils.

Forced changes in the two realms of religion and civil identity, among others, demonstrate how Israeli authorities erased signs of the Ethiopian immigrants' past, repeating the same mistakes as during the absorption of Jews from Arab countries in the 1950s. As a result of this paternalist acculturation process, the younger generation felt pressured to abandon Ethiopian customs, clothing, foodways and languages. Many young immigrants I met in the 1990s spoke of being ashamed of their Ethiopian culture and endeavoring to be as Israeli as possible, while their parents attempted to return to their diasporic practices.

"Little Ethiopia": Diasporizing the Homeland

Following periods of varying length spent in absorption centers and "caravan," or mobile home, sites, these new Israelis settled in permanent dwellings and rapidly re-created Ethiopian ways of living. Because they chose to buy apartments next to each other, thus they involuntarily created "ethnic enclaves." This had negative consequences for the integration of the second generation, but also enabled them to set up Ethiopian neighborhoods with social and economic structures reminiscent of their villages in Ethiopia: mutual help and rotating credit associations (*qubye* or *eqqub*); burial associations (*edder*) to manage mourning ceremonies often attended by thousands of community members and including preparation of food, renting buses to the cemetery, and more; meat-sharing groups which pooled money to buy an animal that an elder or *qes* would slaughter and divide equally among members; coffee groups which meet for traditional *bunna* ceremonies; councils of elders (*shmaggelotch*) to resolve conflicts; and, the emergence of traditional healers to treat problems that could not be cured by Western medicine.

Ethiopian Jewish religious life began thriving again, with ritual celebrations including baby naming, marriage, mourning and house-warming ceremonies, as well as specific holidays such as the *Sigd*, which was officially recognized as an Israel national holiday in 2008. Despite the fact that close to twenty Israeli-Ethiopians have been ordained as Orthodox rabbis by the Rabbinate, they have an ambivalent status in their community and are often seen as traitors competing

with the traditional leaders, the *qesotch.*[11] To date, a Beta Israel religious revival has led to the creation of a dozen Israeli-Ethiopian synagogues across the country, the consecration of thirty young *qesotch*, and the founding in 2008 of a national Council of Israeli Qesotch. Even though the majority of the *qesotch* are granted no official recognition by the Israeli Rabbinate and their interpretation of Jewish law is ignored, they are highly respected by their community and invited to public events such as demonstrations, weddings, and cultural activities to give their blessing, thus maintaining the Geez language and liturgy.[12] However, while secularization has spread, especially among the youth, some Israeli-Ethiopian rabbis try to preserve and adapt the Beta Israel oral tradition (or "*Shulhan ha-Orit,*" as Sharon Shalom terms it) to Rabbinic Judaism.

Traditional foods and dishes have also made a comeback, as elder women again began preparing *indjära,* a flatbread made with *teff* flour, stews (*wät*), Shabbat bread (*dabbo*) and domestic beer (*tälla*). Gradually, Ethiopian grocery stores selling spices, *teff* flour and *gesho* leaves for making beer and restaurants, with catering services, opened around Israel. Similarly, hair salons and ethnic stores offering traditional white cotton shawls (*shammä*) and embroidered dresses or CDs and DVDs of Ethiopian music and films have also appeared. As the older Ethiopian-Israelis decorated their interiors with posters of Ethiopia and traditional artifacts such as woven straw baskets or horsetail whisks, they also watched videos of Ethiopian singers and dancers. The Amharic and Tigrinya languages are also maintained through daily interactions, especially with the older generation, most of whom fail to learn Hebrew, and through daily broadcasts on Israeli public radio, and more recently an Israeli-Ethiopian cable TV channel (ETV). An Amharic language exam has been introduced as one of the disciplines covered by the Israeli state high school completion exams (*bagrut*). A broad network of associations promoting Ethiopian Jewish culture or involved in social, educational (e.g. *Fidel*) and legal (e.g. *Tebeka*) matters has been set up. Most recently, a website called *Little Ethiopia* offers community news and services, testifying to the growing consumption of ethnic culture and products in Israel.

[11] Rachel Sharaby, Aviva Kaplan, "Between the Hammer of the Religious Establishment and the Anvil of the Ethnic Community," *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 14/3 (2015): 482-500.

[12] Frank Alvarez-Péreyre et al., *Anthology of Jewish Ethiopian Liturgy*, (Jerusalem: The Magnes Press–Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2018), which also contains CDs of Beta Israel prayers recorded in Israel.

This nostalgia for their native land is also reflected in the discourse of the older generation, who still call Ethiopia *agäratchin* ("our country") and often spoke to me about how many cattle they had owned, how delicious the *indjära* was, how pure the air felt and even how good the water tasted![13] As they idealized their former home, they also yearned for Ethiopian values such as honor and respect, which many felt were trampled by the Israeli establishment or even their own children, who had become insolent (*baläge*).Thus, as they constructed a new identity for themselves as Israeli citizens, the parents' generation also recreated, through linguistic, cultural, religious, social and media practices, Ethiopian *ethnoscapes*, defined by Arjun Appadurai as the native country reinvented in the imagination of deterritorialized groups. These processes of diasporization of the Promised Land and homing of Ethiopia provide clear manifestations of the paradoxes of homecoming also found among other Jewish immigrants.[14] At first, the 1.5 and second generation tended to reject most of their parents' practices. As they endeavored to become Israelis, speaking Hebrew, eating Israeli food, being educated in Israeli – often religious – schools, serving in the army, studying at institutions of higher learning and entering the job market, they also realized that they were not fully accepted and felt they were treated as second-class citizens. Political activism to defend their rights, accompanied by demonstrations, grew in the 1980s and 1990s, culminating in a large protest movement in 2015.

The Social Protest Movement of 2015

Numerous instances of everyday racism punctuate the life of Israeli-Ethiopians; however the turning point is no doubt the Blood Affair of 1996.[15] For many of those I spoke to, this episode changed their relationship with Israeli society. In the years since, various incidents have sparked protests, such as a building

[13] Lisa Anteby-Yemini, "Promised Land, Imagined Homelands. Ethiopian Jews' Immigration to Israel," in *Homecomings. Unsettling Paths of Return*, eds. Fran Markowitz, Anders Stefansson, (Boulder: Lexington, 2004), 146-163.

[14] Andre Levy, Alex Weingrod, "Paradoxes of Homecoming. Jews and Their Diasporas," *Anthropological Quarterly* 79/4 (2006): 691-716.

[15] The Israeli Blood Bank decided to discard blood donations from Israelis of Ethiopian origin because of high rates of malaria, hepatitis B and AIDS among them, but without disclosing this policy, allegedly to "preserve their honor." When the practice was revealed by a journalist in 1996, Israeli-Ethiopians demonstrated massively, accusing the government of racism and demanding that the policy be discontinued. Don Seeman, *One People, One Blood. Ethiopian-Israelis and the Return to Judaism*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009).

project's decision in 2012 not to sell apartments to Israelis of Ethiopian origin in Kiryat Malachi, or the unexplained death of Yosef Salamsa, a young Israeli-Ethiopian first arrested and then released by the police in 2014, only to have his lifeless body found shortly thereafter. The release of the April 2015 video of Damas Fakado, an Israeli-Ethiopian IDF soldier, being beaten by two Israeli policemen, triggered a series of demonstrations the following month. These were staged primarily by the second generation to protest against racism, police brutality, and inequality meted out to the Ethiopian-Israeli community, and ended in violent clashes with the police.

While the Israeli-Ethiopians' slogans and their demands had clearly been influenced by the discourse of leaders of the Afro-American black struggle such as Malcolm X, the events of 2015 in Baltimore and the *Black Lives Matter* movement in the USA, their identification with Black Americans also had its limits.[16] In fact, the young Israeli-Ethiopians demanded, first and foremost, to be treated as full Israeli Jewish citizens, equal to the Whites. The Hebrew signs at the demonstrations called for "Integration!" (*hishtalvut*) and "Equality now" (*shivyon 'akhshav*), and the English banners read "Stand Up for Your Rights!". Many young people I spoke to during the protests voiced their feeling of not belonging to Israeli society, even after serving in the army, completing their studies and securing a job. Others said they felt not quite Israeli and not quite Ethiopian, an "in-between" status common to immigrants worldwide, and befittingly expressed in the title of an Israeli-Ethiopian author's book, *Half-Strangers.*[17] Yet they also deeply wished to be included in the Jewish national collective and be recognized as Israelis, often repeating to me "I have no other country" [*ein li eretz aheret*], pointing unambiguously to Israel as their home. They protested against discrimination in employment, housing, education, religious status, as well as over-policing and racial profiling of their community, but also against the differential treatment still applied to "Ethiopian immigrants" (e.g., in the army or in educational programs), after over 30 years in Israel or even being born in the country! They simply asked to be treated like other Israelis, not differently. As one leader declared: "I was born here, I am Israeli. We have the same obligations as the others, so we should also have the same rights." Many of those I interviewed also considered their claims for social justice and equality a concern of the entire Israeli society and not an "Ethiopian issue," again stressing

[16] Alon Burstein, Liora Norwich, "From a Whisper to a Scream. The Politicization of the Ethiopian Community in Israel," *Israel Studies* 23/2 (2018): 25-50.

[17] Alon Masganaw Demla, *Half-Strangers*, (Holon: Orion Books, 2011) [Hebrew].

the need for their inclusion in the Israeli nation-state. This is also reflected in the concomitant demand for inclusion in the wider historical Israeli narrative.

Rewriting Ethiopian Jewish History

The desire for recognition as full-fledged Israeli citizens parallels the goals of a small but growing body of critical works by Israeli-Ethiopians, particularly in the social sciences, arts and literature, which aims to deconstruct Ethiopian Jews' history, migration journeys and integration in Israel and to include them in the dominant Israeli narrative, relying on post-colonial theories and racial, intersectional and subaltern studies. These writings and artistic productions, mainly by members of the 1.5 and second generations, emphasize the need for voices of the Israeli-Ethiopian community to be heard and to rewrite life in Ethiopia and the migration and absorption experiences from their perspective – not through the eyes of non-Ethiopians. Thus, they aim to restore the memory of Ethiopian Jewry erased during the integration process and increase public awareness of the Beta Israel heritage, which has not been granted adequate exposure in Israeli discourse and public space, causing many Israeli-Ethiopians to feel excluded from official history and Israeli nationhood.

Some suggest a critical analysis of Beta Israel history and religion, such as Israeli-Ethiopian rabbi Sharon Shalom,[18] who closely compares the oral tradition of Ethiopian Jews with Rabbinic Talmudic tradition, but also asks what right and authority Israeli rabbis have to decide which interpretation of the Torah is the correct one or why Ethiopian Jews must adapt their tradition to hegemonic Orthodox Judaism in Israel. A literary approach is taken by Israeli-Ethiopian author 'Omri Tegamlak Avera, whose novel *Asterai* ends with a section on a Beta Israel historical narrative interwoven with fictional twists.[19] In contemporary history, a collective book of testimonies by prisoners of Zion from Ethiopia sheds light on their suffering and the torture they endured because of their Zionist activities,[20] endeavoring to integrate them in the broader Israeli narrative of prisoners of Zion around the world. In the new film by Israeli-Ethiopian director Alamwork Davidian (*Fig Tree*, 2018), set in 1989, the Ethiopian civil war is seen through the eyes of an Ethiopian Jewish girl whose family is preparing to

[18] Shalom, *From Sinai to Ethiopia*.

[19] 'Omri Tegamlak Avera, *Asterai*, (Tel-Aviv: Yedi'ot Aharonot, 2008).

[20] *The Dream Behind Bars. The Story of the Prisoners of Zion from Ethiopia*, eds. Baruch Meiri, Rahamim El'azar, (Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House, 2001).

immigrate to Israel; the filmmaker, who was herself a young girl at that time, draws on her own experience of fear and suffering under the dictatorship of Mengistu. Another initiative is the creation in 2016 of a research group at the Van Leer Institute in Jerusalem, headed by social activist and academic Efrat Yerday and titled "A Story Rewritten. Ethiopian Jews Rewriting Their Story;" it comprises Israelis of Ethiopian origin but excludes non-Ethiopians. The project purposes to work out a critical approach toward scholarly study of Ethiopian Jews by non-Ethiopian researchers, a re-examination of the hegemony of the Israeli establishment's narrative of Ethiopian Jewish *aliyah*, which is presented as the sole possible narrative, exclusive of other stories that do not fit in with it, and the opening of a research field on race in Israel.[21] A more radical group of students of Ethiopian origin set up an online forum, Y.E.S., where some claim to be "strangers" and an "oppressed minority" in Israel, forming an "Ethiopian Jewish liberation front."

Israeli-Ethiopians' re-appropriation of their past focuses particularly on the rescue operations organized by the State of Israel, especially Operation Moses, the airlift carried out in 1984-5 from Sudan.[22] Many consider the Israeli narrative as biased, given that it portrays the Ethiopians as victimized Jews that Israel saved and fails to mention the racism of the Israeli government of the 1970s and 1980s or the outstanding role played by Ethiopian Jewish activists already in Israel at the time and by American Jewish organizations in pressuring Israel to save Ethiopian Jewry. The official story neglects Beta Israel agency, leaves out the fact that they left their villages voluntarily and that they endured trauma and loss in Sudan; it only highlights the courage of the Israelis involved, casting them as saviors.[23] Some claim this narrative "ignores Israel's role in the death of thousands of refugees in Sudan while the government debated how to relate to this part of the Jewish people."[24] Several autobiographies, novels, poems, plays, films and songs, most of them written in Hebrew by Israeli-Ethiopians, recall the secret departure from Ethiopia, the hardships of the trek to Sudan, the horrendous conditions in the refugee camps, and the death toll, an estimated

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[21] See https://www.vanleer.org.il/en/research-group/story-rewritten-ethiopian-jews-rewriting-their-story, accessed May 2, 2019.

[22] Shira Havtam Shato, "The Different Narratives of the Journey of Aliya of the Jews of Ethiopia," MA Thesis, Hebrew University, 2010 [Hebrew].

[23] Sharon Shalom, *Conversations about Love and Fear. The Dialogue between the Rabbi's Daughter and the Kes' Son*, (Rishon LeTzion: Yedi'ot Aharonot Books–Hemed Books, 2018), 37 [Hebrew].

[24] Van Leer research group; see note 21.

4,000 Ethiopian Jews who perished on the way They attempt to counter the dominant discourse,, in which their *aliyah* is explained as due to famine in Ethiopia and they themselves are portrayed as passive and grateful for being rescued by Israelis. Some works also uncover silenced stories inside the community, such as the special connections one needed to be chosen by the "Committee" of Israeli-Ethiopians sent to Sudanese refugee camps to designate candidates for *aliyah* and their order of departure. This involved internal struggles, bribery, sexual favors and even rape of young girls.[25]

The narrative of the journey through Sudan is a central theme in the collective memory of the Ethiopian Jewish community in Israel, and has also been transmitted to the second generation and appears in their artistic productions, discussions on social media and identity constructs. The flight from Ethiopia is often seen as replicating the Biblical Exodus, borrowing the same symbols of suffering and redemption.[26] Yet many Israeli-Ethiopians feel this was a traumatic experience, and the deaths of their brethren have not been recognized by Israeli society. After a long struggle led by Israeli-Ethiopian activists, in 2003 the State of Israel established a Day of Remembrance (*Hazkarah*) for those who perished on the journey through Sudan, to coincide with Jerusalem Day, which commemorates reunification of the city in the course of the Six-Day War of 1967. The choice of the same day makes a gesture of including this community in the Israeli national memory of the fallen soldiers for Jerusalem; however, the thirty years' struggle to obtain official recognition of this part of Ethiopian Jewish memory demonstrates its marginalization in the master narrative.[27] The annual commemoration ceremony takes place at Mount Herzl, Israel's national military cemetery in Jerusalem, where a memorial has been erected bearing over 1500 names of the deceased. Even though some activists argue that Jerusalem Day overshadows their commemoration, which is thus deprived of the visibility it deserves, several institutions (schools, universities, community centers) have begun marking this Ethiopian Jewish Memorial Day, gradually inscribing it in Israeli public space.

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[25] See the film by Danny Adino Abeba, *Code Name. Silence*, 2005, where he condemns the Israeli government for not investigating these cases.

[26] Gadi BenEzer, *The Ethiopian Jewish Exodus. Narratives of the Migration Journey to Israel 1977-1985*, (London–New York: Routledge, 2002).

[27] Emanuela Trevisan Semi, "*Hazkarah*. A Symbolic Day for the Reconstituting of the Jewish-Ethiopian Community," *Jewish Political Studies Review* 17 (2005): 191-197.

Another new initiative is the recently founded *Forum Yerusalem*, which comprises over 20 organizations and works to include the story of Ethiopian Jewry in the Israeli Zionist narrative. It presents Ethiopian Jewish life stories – Farada Aklum, Baruch Tegegne – to incorporate them as Israeli heroes and heroines in the national discourse. It also promotes educational fieldtrips in Israel to sites telling the story of Ethiopian Jewry, such as the Mount Herzl monument, while also striving to render the narrative more visible in Israeli public spheres. Thus the exhibit "Operation Moses: 30 years after" opened in 2016 at the Diaspora Museum in Tel Aviv. Despite the absence of a critical approach toward the Israeli narrative, in several portraits of men and women who had immigrated with Operation Moses trajectories of failure (unemployment, poverty, marginalization and even suicide) did appear side by side with stories of success (access to high positions, economic mobility, social integration), accompanied by video interviews by Israeli-Ethiopian filmmaker Orly Melessa. To this day, there is no Ethiopian Jewish museum or heritage center in Israel, in spite of several attempts (in Rehovot, Tel Aviv and recently Jerusalem) which have failed, mainly due to power struggles within the Ethiopian community. In 2019, Ethiopian-Israeli rabbi Sharon Shalom was appointed to the first Chair of Ethiopian Jewish Studies at Kyriat Ono College. It is too early to say if he will rise to the challenge of developing a vibrant center of Ethiopian Jewish study and legacy.

In a similar manner, other marginalized groups in Israel, such as Mizrahi Jews, have been creating new spaces of counter-memory, seeking re-appropriation of their history and challenging the dominant narrative by voicing their "subaltern memories" striving to include them in the Israeli-Zionist story.[28] Egyptian Jews, among others, also feel their migration stories have been silenced and their sufferings lack recognition.[29] The current re-workings of Ethiopian Jewish memory and their contested historical narratives, sometimes assuming political and militant dimensions, are connected with a wider trend of recovering their past among the younger generation of Israelis of Ethiopian origin.

[28] *Memory and Forgetting among Jews from the Arab-Muslim Countries. Contested Narratives of a Shared Past*, eds Emanuela Trevisan Semi, Piera Rossetto, *Quest. Issues in Contemporary Jewish History. Journal of Fondazione CDEC* 4 (2012), 1-6.

[29] Michèle Baussant, "Aslak eh? De juif en Egypte à Juif d'Egypte," *Diasporas* 27 (2016): 77-93.

Returning to Diasporic Spaces

This section will focus on diasporization processes inside the Israeli-Ethiopian community, which unfold through cultural awakening, trips to Ethiopia, identification with a Black diaspora and emergence of Israeli-Ethiopian diasporas abroad.

Ethnic Revival: Reclaiming Ethiopian Roots

There is no doubt that today many young Israeli-Ethiopians are proudly returning to their roots. The silencing of Ethiopian culture and history has given way in the last two decades to a return, a legitimation and an increased visibility of Beta Israel traditions.[30] Thus, the demonstrations of 2015 were accompanied by Israeli and Ethiopian flags, marking both a strong national Israeli identity and pride in an Ethiopian identity. One of the most visible and symbolic statements of this re-identification with their country of origin is the decision of many young adults to change back to the Ethiopian and Amharic names given them at birth, thus re-appropriating their past. The Amharic and Tigrinya languages have also become more legitimate. Young parents have mentioned to me, for example, that they teach their children Amharic, including literacy, through computer programs. Choosing tattoos with Amharic letters or words and launching a fashion line featuring words in Amharic characters ("little princess," "love") on clothing and accessories also point to strategic uses of linguistic heritage. In addition, Israeli-Ethiopians' growing awareness of their ethnic identity emphasizes Ethiopian values, such as politeness, hospitality, honor, or respect for the parents. This is expressed, for instance, in the recognition of community elders and *qesotch*, who are invited to speak at demonstrations and appear in artwork, plays, films, novels and photography by young artists of Ethiopian origin. The 2019 mediatized image of lawyer and newly appointed Member of Knesset Gadi Yevarkan kneeling to kiss the feet of his elderly mother upon her arrival for the swearing-in ceremony, eloquently manifests this desire to maintain certain Ethiopian practices in the public domain.

One of the most dynamic fields of this cultural awakening is the visual arts, including film, painting, drawing, sculpture, graffiti art, video art, installations, and photography, through which artists of the 1.5 and second generations are

[30] Shalom, *Conversations about Love and Fear*, 156.

attempting to mainstream Ethiopian Israeli culture.[31] They resort to practices, images, sounds, symbols and artifacts linked to life in Israel and Ethiopia, such as Ethiopian textiles and clothes, coffee beans, Beta Israel myths, figures of *qesotch* and elders, and Amharic letters and words. Some rely on childhood memories or return to Ethiopia for inspiration, while others have never set foot in Ethiopia and draw on an imaginary space transmitted by family stories. Some works convey criticism of the integration process through social and political awareness, such as Nirit Takele's paintings (e.g. "Mikveh," recalling symbolic conversion, or "Justice for Yosef Salamsa" with its reference to police brutality). Various Ethiopian-Israeli media often try to convey an alternative image to that of a community of weak, poor, voiceless and excluded citizens;[32] thus Shmuel Beru's film *Zrubavel* (2008), Esti Almo Wexler's photos of successful Israeli-Ethiopians, her children's series "Grandfather Berhano's Travels," her talk show "Women Speaking" and her first feature-film *Lady Titi* (2018). Even so, there are still forces that exclude, silence and marginalize these creations.[33] Despite this, many artistic productions represent Israelis of Ethiopian origin as integrated, protesting for their rights or reclaiming their ethnic identity, thus offering an alternative narrative of integration. By combining Ethiopian and Israeli identities, these young artists are creating a new discourse on gender, race, difference, identity, belonging, ethnicity, and class, and on the experience of being black in would be white Israeli society.[34]

In literature, as well, usually written in Hebrew and sometimes in Amharic or Tigrinya, novels – often autobiographical – essays, poetry, blogs, and forums on social media suggest a new discourse of ethnic pride and criticism of integration.[35] For example, Avera's novel *Asterai* tells the story of a young boy's life in Ethiopia, followed by his tortuous journey through Sudanese refugee camps and his arrival in Israel, only to be disillusioned after several years in the Promised

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[31] Dekel et al., *The Monk*.

[32] *Ibid*.

[33] Esti Almo Wexler, "The Monk and the Lion. A Journey of Identity and of Returning Home," in *The Monk and the Lion*, eds. Dekel et al., 113-124.

[34] *The Monk and the Lion,* eds. Dekel et al.

[35] One can cite among others Dalia Bitaolin-Sherman, *How the World Turned White* [Ekh she-ha-olam nihie lavan], (Modiin: Kinneret Publications, 2013) [Hebrew]; Abraham Edga, *Facing forward* [Im ha-panim Kadima], (Tel-Aviv: Tcherikover, 2002) [Hebrew]; Asher Elias, *An Ethiopian in your backyard* [Etiyopi ba-khatzer shelkha], (New York-Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House, 2001) [Hebrew]; Tsega Malaku, *Not in our school* [Lo be-beit sifrenou], (Steimatzky Publications, 2014) [Hebrew]; Gadi Yevarken, *Start at the Beginning* [Matkhil mi-hatkhala], (Tel Aviv: Halonot Publications, 2003) [Hebrew].

Land; it is only by reconnecting with nature and his roots that the hero finds salvation in Israel. In this moving fictional tale, the young author, who himself made *aliyah* in 1984 via Sudan, uses numerous Amharic words in the text and refers to a wide range of Ethiopian beliefs and practices: spirits (*quollé, zar*), the hut for women during menstruation and after childbirth, marriage celebrations, mourning customs, Beta Israel religious festivals and Shabbat. The powerful longing for Jerusalem is symbolized by a black bird (*asterai*) which is said to fly every year over Ethiopia, bringing good news from Jerusalem, recasting the century-long myth of the stork. The power of cultural heritage is epitomized by the central message of the hero's grandmother throughout the novel: never neglect nor forget your culture and the religion your ancestors transmitted to you. Ethiopia is often pictured in these writings as a Garden of Eden and a lost paradise, where the appropriation of an imagined African identity makes Ethiopia become home and Israel – the diaspora.[36] Other works, by contrast, overtly criticize certain archaic Ethiopian practices.[37] Ethiopian proverbs and traditional tales are also used, as by Esti Almo Wexler (2017), who explains the dilemmas of integration through an Ethiopian folktale. Performers of the spoken word, often inspired by black slam poetry, are also emerging, reminiscent of Mizrahi artists of the *Ars Poetica* movement.

Theater has developed, mainly in the work of the Israeli-Ethiopian ensemble *Hulugeb* ("together" in Amharic) founded in 2004 on the initiative of the Confederation House in Jerusalem and the Israeli Ministry of Culture to promote theater professionals of Ethiopian origin in Israel, as well as highlight Ethiopian culture and the hardships of absorption; some productions have won awards and toured abroad.[38] Other actors or directors of Ethiopian origin also stage plays, some in Amharic for a community-based audience, others in Hebrew, for larger Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian audiences, and several geared to young children or teenagers. Many depict nostalgic and pastoral scenes from village life in Ethiopia, such as the coffee ceremony or wedding celebrations, with figures of elders and *qesotch*; the actors are sometimes dressed in Ethiopian clothing and accompanied by different kinds of Ethiopian music. These plays also address integration issues, such as racism, domestic violence or generational gaps, often with humor and self-derision. Dance troupes have also flourished, the

[36] Adia Mendelson-Maoz, "Diaspora and Homeland. Israel and Africa in the Hebrew-Israeli Literature of Beta Israel," *Research in African Literatures* 44/4 (2013): 35-50.

[37] Such as Asfu Beru, *A Different Moon*, (Jerusalem: Keter Publications, 2002) [Hebrew].

[38] Sarit Cofman-Simhon, "African Tongues on the Israeli Stage: A Reversed Diaspora," *TDR. The Drama Review* 57/3 (2013): 48-68.

best known being Beta, which present different choreographies including Ethiopian traditional dance (*eskesta*). Israeli musicians of Ethiopian origin have also developed a renewed interest in their roots and in Ethiopian musical traditions, sometimes singing in Amharic or in Hebrew interspersed with Amharic words, evoking Ethiopia or yearning for its culture, and using traditional Ethiopian instruments; some singers record with Ethiopian musicians or shoot clips of their albums in Ethiopia. Ethiopian pop is also widely appreciated among the 1.5 and second generation, and numerous concerts in Israel feature famous Ethiopian singers.[39]

An interesting development is the emergence of cultural entrepreneurs who organize large events celebrating Ethiopian culture in Israeli public spaces, such as the *Hulugeb* festival taking place since 2000 in Jerusalem (dance, music, theater) or the more recent *Sigdadia* organized by Israeli-Ethiopian actor, playwright and director Shaï Ferado. The last edition was held in 2018 at Habima Theater, a central Tel-Aviv venue, targeting an Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian audience, and featured two days of plays, lectures, concerts, films, open dance classes, a fashion show and an arts, crafts and food fair where small Israeli-Ethiopian businesses promoted their products, among which were locally designed clothes and Ethiopian imported clothing, jewelry, books, cosmetics for dark skin, black dolls with different sets of clothing – including a traditional Ethiopian embroidered white dress and a booklet on her migration to Israel. Marketing Ethiopian culture in Israel as trendy and ethnic is also reflected in the opening of new restaurants, such as *Balinjera*, set up by a comedian and a fashion model, both of Ethiopian origin, in Tel-Aviv, and presenting Ethiopian food as cosmopolitan and healthy. In addition, several places present Ethiopian culture for Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian Israelis and foreign tourists: a Beta Israel village and farm complex near Kyriat Gat offers workshops in Amharic calligraphy and Ethiopian-style mud building; in Bet Shean, a theater therapist of Ethiopian origin offers an Ethiopian experience including a traditional coffee ceremony and recounting of the migration journey. Educational programs about Ethiopian culture are being encouraged in school curricula, such as Alemu Eshetie's project "Museum in a suitcase" presented to schoolchildren throughout Israel.

The parents' longing for Ethiopia takes on new forms of post-nostalgia (to use S. Boym's term) among the second generation who, through art, literature, music,

[39] Ilana Webster-Kogen, *Citizen Azmari. Making Ethiopian Music in Tel Aviv*, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2018).

and dance express an interest in their cultural legacy and even demonstrate ethnic activism. This trend is part of a wider revival of ethnicity in Israel, such as theater in Moroccan-Jewish dialect[40] or Mizrahi literature,[41] which challenges the Zionist undertaking. The culture of origin thus becomes a resource for artistic creativity and produces a hybrid Israeli-Ethiopian identity, strengthened by return trips to Ethiopia.

Traveling Back to Ethiopia: Homing Diaspora?

After several years in their new homeland, a growing number of Israeli-Ethiopians began returning for visits to their country of origin. These growing numbers of trips to Ethiopia were made for family motives (among those who still had family members living there), medical reasons (visiting traditional healers and bathing in warm springs), business trips (for those involved in import-export and commercial ventures), leisure, heritage tourism or simply nostalgia for the old country. Some have even invested in real estate in Addis Ababa or bought a house for family vacations. Others travel to insure maintenance and restoration of cemeteries and synagogues in former Beta Israel villages. These frequent return trips since the 1990s have led to new transnational practices and economic networks between Israel and Ethiopia.[42]

More recently, the younger generation began to develop artistic mobility between Ethiopia and Israel, with the circulation of several Ethiopian musicians and singers performing in Israel, as well as young Israelis returning to Ethiopia to carry out art projects. This is the case of Ethiopian-born Nirit Takale, who spent several months in Addis Ababa as an artist-in-residence in 2018 and returned to Israel with a new series of paintings which went on exhibit at international art galleries, and Israeli-Ethiopian singer Dega Feder who recorded in Ethiopia with local musicians and then came to Israel to play with her band. Alamwork Davidian has spent six months in Ethiopia shooting her latest movie (*Fig Tree*, 2018) with a crew of local Ethiopians, Israelis and foreigners and a cast of Ethiopian actors, which is why the entire film is in Amharic. This was her first

[40] Cofman-Simhon, "African Tongues."

[41] Emanuela Trevisan Semi, "La mise en scène de l'identité marocaine en Israël. Un cas 'd'israélianité'diasporique," *A Contrario* 1/5 (2007): 37-50.

[42] Lisa Anteby-Yemini, "From Ethiopian Villager to Global Villager. Ethiopian Jews in Israel," in *Homelands and Diasporas. Holy Lands and Other Places*, eds. Alex Weingrod, Andre Levy, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 220-244.

time back to Ethiopia, confronting her with issues of race, identity and belonging.[43] Eliyah Maharat travels to Ethiopia, following social art enterprises and making transnational connections between contemporary artwork in Israel and Ethiopia.[44]

However, if until a decade ago or so, most return trips to Ethiopia were made by young adults and older Israeli-Ethiopians accompanied by one or two family members or friends, today younger people and even teenagers travel to Ethiopia, and increasingly go on organized trips. Several Israeli associations organize "roots tours" of northern Ethiopia, such as project "Masa – journey to identity" for teenagers of Ethiopian origin. The teenagers visit their families' villages, try to find their homes, and sometimes meet remaining family members. Itineraries follow places of importance for Ethiopian Jewry, such as cemeteries, synagogues, emblematic villages (Ambover or Wolleka), as well as general tourist sites. Furthermore, because of the gradual institutionalization of such heritage tourism, these trips have also come to include Israelis of non-Ethiopian origin. Some trips are geared to youth in leadership programs and include young immigrants of various origins as well as Israelis. As the Israeli-Ethiopians discover, sometimes for the first time, pride in their heritage, the non-Ethiopians discover, often also for the first time, a culture unknown to them, and share emotional moments with their peers, such as when a group of young Israelis of Russian and Ethiopian origin visited a former Beta Israel prayer house with a Star of David and Hebrew religious books.[45] Other trips are organized by government offices or private companies for Israeli professionals such as state officials and individuals working in education, social work or health and who wish to gain a better understanding of Ethiopian culture. One of the goals of the *Yerusalem Forum* is to promote identity trips to Jewish villages in Ethiopia for Israeli decision makers and influential public figures, in an effort to include Ethiopian Jews' past in the collective Israeli narrative.

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[43] Conflicts with local Ethiopians arose about the work's historical subject matter. Because they saw Davidian as one of them – an Ethiopian rather than white or a foreigner – the locals were readier to accept her way of presenting what they felt was "their" civil war (Discussion following the screening of the movie, Tel Aviv, March 2019).

[44] Dekel et al., *The Monk*.

[45] See the 2009 documentary on the trip of Israeli youth of Ethiopian and Russian origin to Ethiopia by Eli Tal-El, *The Name My Mother Gave Me*, (Israel: Tal-El Productions, 2009) [Hebrew and Amharic].

This memorial dimension of the trips and the new forms assumed by return visits geared at learning about family history, Ethiopian Jewish heritage, the country of origin and its culture, are reminiscent of roots tourism among other immigrant groups. Several conversations demonstrate how these trips consolidate the Israeli identity of the travelers. Maya tells me: "In Ethiopia, I realized I was now Israeli;" Shim'on recalls, "I felt like a stranger in Ethiopia." Dani claims after his trip: "I know now how lucky I am to live in Israel." Simha recalls upon returning from Ethiopia: "I wanted to see where my father's house was, but I would never be able to live there." Many thus feel they do not belong in Ethiopia and realize how Israeli and Westernized they have become, similar to the findings in other pilgrimage trips for Israeli-Moroccans or Israeli-Russians. At the same time, many Israeli-Ethiopians acknowledge a feeling of pride in their roots and their parents' past and value their Ethiopian ethnicity. Others claim they feel connected to Ethiopia, wish one day to live there and above all do not feel different because of their skin color, as in Israel. Findings clearly show that the older generation feels more nostalgic and often speaks of feeling at home in Ethiopia. However, whatever the age, the majority of Israeli-Ethiopians carry out very short visits to their native villages, trying to find family homes, burial places and former Christian or Muslim neighbors, and usually plan longer stays in cities like Gondar or Addis, or even tour Ethiopia to places unconnected with Ethiopian Jewry. Thus, whatever the nostalgic longing for village life, most find themselves spending their time enjoying and consuming Ethiopian popular culture in Addis Ababa – a way of appropriating a new urban culture which was not theirs before their or their families' migration. As a result, in spite of processes of homing Ethiopia, almost everyone I have met considers Israel their home and wants their children to grow up Israeli. In addition, a certain part of the younger generation identifies with yet another diaspora, mainly through virtual links.

A Virtual Black Global Diaspora

The discrimination and racism experienced by Israelis of Ethiopian origin entail the adoption of new racial constructs as they discover their blackness, or *négritude,* in Israel. Gradually, a racialized discourse opposing Black and White developed inside the community and a Black identity was put forth by some Israeli-Ethiopians who began to identify with other black minorities in the world. To some extent, the designation "black," as among other minority groups

in Europe and elsewhere, has become a political color in identity politics.[46] Some studies indicate that middle-class Israeli-Ethiopians emphasize their blackness specifically as a way to denounce racism, whereas the working-class distances itself from Black racialized identity, through de-stigmatization processes, and relies on a local Israeli identity.[47]

This has led some of the younger generation to adopt symbols – in clothing, music, hairdos, gestures – of urban African American culture,[48] appropriating identity models of a Black global diaspora.[49] In particular, through new media channels on TV, social media, and the internet, Israeli-Ethiopian youth have discovered a globalized space of Black music including hip-hop, reggae, and rap, Afro-diasporic culture and beauty models, as well as icons such as the Black American rapper Tupac Shakur.[50] The young people's experiences of marginalization, poverty, and exclusion echo in these Black singers' music. Ethiopian-Israeli rap and hip-hop groups emerged in the 1990s, often singing in Hebrew; other singers of Ethiopian origin identified more radically with blackness. A case in point is Esther Rada, who sings in English while appealing to her Ethiopian roots in her Ethiojazz music and *eskesta* dances, yet presents herself as Afro-diasporic.[51] However, identifying with an imagined Black diaspora should not be seen as a sign of failure to integrate in Israel or resistance to an Israeli identity, but rather as an integration strategy taking a detour through globalized Black music and identity constructs.[52] In fact, taking on Black music and identity can be considered as a symbolic resource to mobilize creativity and build a community.[53] It also reads as a reference to modernity that empowers Israeli-Ethiopians, enabling them to claim a place of their own in Israeli society.[54]

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[46] Avtar Brah, *Cartographies of Diaspora. Contesting Identities*, (London: Routledge, 1996), 97.

[47] Nissim Mizrachi, Adane Zawdu, "Between Global Racial and Bounded Identity. Choice of Destigmatization Strategies among Ethiopian Jews in Israel," *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 35/3 (2012): 436-452.

[48] Malka Shabtay, *Between Reggae and Rap. The Integration Challenge of Ethiopian Youth in Israel*, (Tel-Aviv: Tcherikover, 2001) [Hebrew].

[49] Anteby-Yemini, "From Ethiopian Villager to Global Villager."

[50] David Ratner, *Black Sounds. Black Music and Identity among Young Israeli Ethiopians*, (Tel Aviv: Resling, 2015) [Hebrew].

[51] Webster-Kogen, *Citizen Azmari*.

[52] Anteby-Yemini, "From Ethiopian Villager to Global Villager."

[53] Ratner, *Black Sounds.*

[54] Gabriella Djerrahian, "The 'End of Diaspora' Is Just the Beginning. Music at the Crossroads of Jewish, African and Ethiopian Diasporas in Israel," *African and Black Diaspora. An International Journal* 11/2 (2017): 161-173.

Furthermore, identifying with a global black diaspora offers an alternative space of belonging, a virtual homeland, situated between Ethiopia and Israel, thus creating an additional twist in the search for the location of home.

Emerging Israeli(-Ethiopian) Diasporas

The Ethiopian community in Israel is becoming more cosmopolitan as its members maintain ties with or travel to other parts of the world, such as the United States, Europe, and Asia. Some travel for vacations, family visits, professional trips (e.g. in high-tech or politics), training, university studies, exchange programs, as members of delegations representing Israel, with youth movements or as guests of Jewish communities abroad. Others tour South America or India, as do numerous other Israeli backpackers. Artists are invited to perform or exhibit their works in Paris, Berlin, London and New York. Links to other non-Jewish Ethiopian diasporas are also developing, mainly in production and consumption of Ethiopian music, which connect different Ethiopian diasporas in the world and include Israeli-Ethiopians in this transnational cartography.[55]

An aspect of this trans-nationalization process is the emergence of an Israeli-Ethiopian diaspora abroad. As far back as the 1970s and 1980s, a small Ethiopian Jewish community settled in Canada and integrated in the wider Jewish Canadian English-speaking community. Today, some members of the second generation have made *aliyah* to Israel. In the last two decades, an Israeli-Ethiopian diaspora has also emerged in the USA. It is estimated at over 1000, including about 500 in New York City. The community's members have set up an association called *Chassida/Shmella* (the double name meaning "stork" in Hebrew and Amharic, recalling the song discussed on p.1 of this article) to facilitate their integration in America, maintain Ethiopian-Jewish rituals and festivals, and teach US Jews about Ethiopian Jewry. The association celebrates the annual *Sigd* festival, inviting Ethiopian-Israeli rabbis and *qesotch* to perform traditional ceremony and prayers, followed by an Ethiopian meal; the celebration is usually held in an American synagogue and is geared both to an Israeli-Ethiopian and Jewish American audience. The reasons mentioned to me for emigrating from Israel were economic motives, seeking a more equal and multiracial society, escaping racism, looking for adventure, the American dream,

[55] Webster-Kogen, *Citizen Azmari*.

artistic opportunities, receiving study grants, winning the Green Card lottery and marrying an American Jew. A small group of Ethiopian-Israelis have also moved to Addis Ababa, the most notorious being former Member of Knesset Addisu Messale. The relocation is primarily for business purposes, but a few claim they have a better economic and social position in Ethiopia and can achieve more than in Israel; some also feel "invisible" because they do not confront daily racism anymore. However, very few have settled permanently in Ethiopia.

As has become clear, Israeli-Ethiopians today form growing transnational communities spread out over several continents. They are part of the more general Israeli trend of (re)-emigrating (*yordim*) from Israel, and should be seen as part of a wider Israeli diaspora abroad. Yet their situation also indicates the emergence of a new Israeli-Ethiopian transnational community, parallel to other communities such as the Russian Jews. This complicates yet again the notion of "home."

Conclusions

I have tried to show that Ethiopian Jews returning to their ancestral homeland experience erasure of diasporic memory and identity at first, but this "de-diasporization" later proves a failure. Not only has the older generation rapidly recreated Ethiopian practices, but in the last two decades, the younger generation, initially pressured to forget their origins, are now recovering their silenced heritage. This is clearly linked to a wider phenomenon of ethnic awakening in Israel, among second and third-generation Oriental Jews as well as the 1.5 generation of Israeli-Russians. However, while the parents seem to live in a diaspora within Israel, the 1.5 and second generations show a strong Israeli identity and belonging to the Jewish national majority. Thus, at post-2015 demonstrations, some marched wrapped in the Israeli flag; fewer Ethiopian flags were to be seen. As Steve Kaplan notes: "In narratives and practices Ethiopian Israelis appear to dissociate themselves from such [an Ethiopian] diaspora consciousness in order to affirm their place as Jews returning from Diaspora"[56] to their homeland. But it is perhaps when they become self-confident as Israeli citizens that they can also allow themselves proudly to display their Ethiopianness, and even their blackness. Various factors, including generation

[56] Steven Kaplan, "*Tama Galut Etiopiya*. The Ethiopian Exile is Over," *Diaspora* 14/2-3 (2005): 381-396, 383.

and context, explain why Israeli-Ethiopians feel in some cases completely Ethiopian, in others completely Israeli, or mainly Jewish, Black or diasporic Israeli abroad, and sometimes combinations of all these, leading to hybrid identities.

These as with other Jewish immigrants, multiple belongings lead Levy and Weingrod to argue that the same place can be both homeland and diaspora and that homecoming initiates new centers; this is found for example among Israeli-Moroccans, for whom center and periphery become blurred,[57] or Egyptian Jews who maintain multiple affiliations in Israel or in France.[58] The emergence of several centers shows that returning to the Jewish homeland means that Israel does not always remain the center, and that home can be displaced yet again, in old or new diasporic spaces such as Ethiopia, the virtual Black global diaspora, North America or Europe, which in turn become re-imagined promised lands. These multi-sited identity constructs are common to ethnic return migration. However, for a returning Jewish diaspora supposedly at home in the Promised Land, creating a "little Ethiopia," making frequent return trips to Ethiopia, or emigrating from Israel, all pose questions for homecoming here, raising the idea of a dual homeland, at once in Israel and elsewhere. Orit Teshoma, in a spoken word text in Hebrew "*Sliha, ima etiopia*" ["Sorry, Mother Ethiopia"] asks her motherland Ethiopia to forgive her:

> Afraid that the day will come and nothing will remain/because I forgot to leave you room/you see I was preoccupied with daily struggles/…We didn't forget Jerusalem/…but very quickly I forgot you/ you see it's not like I am coming back you know that/ I don't have another country/…

Cabra Casay, singing in Amharic and Hebrew about Israel as her home and Ethiopia as her roots, also introduces this idea of having two homelands,[59] thus unquestionably challenging the Zionist project.

The processes of diasporization of Israel and domestication of Ethiopia (or other diasporic spaces) defy the Israeli assimilation model and demonstrate its obsoleteness in an era of globalization. I would claim that multi-layered identifications – such as Israeli, Jewish, Black, Ethiopian and diasporic Israeli – as

[57] Trevisan Semi, "La mise en scène de l'identité marocaine en Israël."

[58] Baussant, "Aslak eh?."

[59] Webster-Kogen, *Citizen Azmari*.

well as the trans-nationalization of Israeli-Ethiopians should be seen not as a failure of absorption but rather as a sign of their integration into Israeli society and their redefinition of what it means to be Israeli today.

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Keywords: Israeli-Ethiopians, Migration, Diaspora, Israel, Homecoming

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