AN ETHIOPIAN JEWISH 'MISSIONARY' AS CULTURE BROKER*

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Given the perceived initial differences (religious and cultural) between Beta Israel Judaism and mainstream Judaism, a process of 'translation' and 'reform' was deemed necessary by Israeli religious and government circles. After the Second World War, non-Beta Israel Jewish teachers, doctors and visitors were active as 'culture brokers' in this respect, and an important position was also taken by indigenous teachers. These had acquired knowledge of Hebrew and Judaism, and fully identified with Israel. The present article describes the ambivalent position of such a culture broker and his program of change in the Tigray community, still a relatively unknown section of traditional Beta Israel Ethiopian society.

INTRODUCTION

The [illegible] Jews[1] focuses on several main themes: their historical connections with Ethiopian Christianity, their liturgical tradition and music, the influence of Christian missionaries, their gradual identification with the State of Israel, and, obviously, their plight as a refugee group or minority in a country that refuses to permit any of its subjects to emigrate legally. Increasing attention is now directed to the Ethiopian Jewish (Falasha)[2] community in Israel (cf. Abbink, 1985), which now numbers some 14,000 people. The remnant of this community in Ethiopia, which presumably still numbers some 10,000 strong, has not been studied since 1974, and information consists only of reports by travellers or tourists.[3] These suggest that the Government is trying to disperse the Jews throughout the country, within the framework of resettlement projcts. Since Beta Israel – the name the Ethiopian Jews call themselves – society has been in upheaval for more than a decade, one may indeed surmise that the traditional way of life is no more.

The present article deals with a specific aspect of the rapprochement between the Beta Israel and the Jewish religious authorities of the State of Isrel against the above-described background of social crisis in Ethiopia and growing community identification with Israel. The focus is on the period before a definite decision regarding the religious status of the group, was taken. It will be recalled that they were acknowledged as Jews under the Law of Return only in 1975.[4]

The initial difference between Beta Israel religious practice and the Talmudic Jewish tradition was often striking. They practiced a Toranic form of Judaism but knew nothing of post-Exilic developments. When the French Jewish Orientalist J. Halevy visited them in 1868, the Beta Israel told him that they had believed themselves to be the only 'Israelites' (another self-term) left in the world. They were

which had evolved while they had 'remained behind'. In essence, they then already acknowledged the need to 'catch up' with the 'white Jews' (cf. Halevy, 1877:259).

* To the memory of *Qes* Bizhan, 1900-1984.

Halevy promised them support in reestablishing bonds with mainstream Judaism.[5] b

the first decades of this century, was a modest beginning made, a
result of the activities of one indefatiguable sympathizer, J. Faitlovitch (1880-1955), a pupil of Halevy in Paris. The anthropologist Messing, who recently published a book on the Ethiopian Jews, rightly calls him a 'culture broker' (1982:54), though he does not elaborate on this issue. Faitlovitch did, in fact, act as an intermediary between the world Jewish tradition and the isolated, near-lost Beta Israel community,[6] with the aim of bringing the two together, in a spiritual and material sense, envisaging substantial cultural and religious change in the community. He thus came to play the classic role of the culture broker, i.e., to partially integrate or fuse two spheres that were formerly disparate and unconnected. While Faitlovitch's activities and impact still call for clarification, especially in view of the reactions of the Beta Israel to his work,[7] it can be safely said that their socio-religious acculturation and 'incorporation' into world Jewry began after he established contact with them. These activities were disrupted by war, civil strife and financial problems and a substantial impact was manifest only from the nineteen fifties on, when Israel set up a somewhat erratic educational program for the community, together with some provision for medical assistance in selected villages. The Beta Israel came to see themselves largely in terms of their new identity, i.e., as exiles destined to return to Israel, their 'ancient homeland'. This new identification was only partly the result of the 'missionary' pressures mentioned above. 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 recent years, civil war, drought and famine).

to direct my attention. Descriptions of this process often focus mainly
of non-Ethiopian Jews in imparting religious and educational change (rabbis, teachers, physicians, travellers, tourists). Hardly anything is known, however, of the role of indigenous change agents, i.e., persons who took over the task of disseminating new religious and other knowledge to the group when the 'non-Beta Israel' teachers, etc. had departed or had not reached a particular section of them. Some instances of Beta Israel groups not touched by western-Jewish change agents were the communities of Shire (Tigray), Quara (Gondar region, west of Lake Tana), Lasta (Wallo) or Walqait (North Gondar region; see map).

One particular Beta Israel, who was active as a 'missionary' teacher among the Tigray community in the 1960's and 1970's, is the main subject of this article. I shall cite details from his personal history, which I gathered during fieldwork. Langness (1965:22-25) has long since emphasized the value of life histories in the study of culture change, which is the general frame in which the activity of this teacher should be perceived.

The word 'missionary' may be seen as controversial: Judaism does not proselytize and the Tigray Beta Israel were no more in need of 'missionizing' than any other section of Beta Israel Jewry. However, the extent of religious change envisaged by the earlier-mentioned non-Beta Israel change agents, as well as the persistent effort of the person in question to bring about an essential reorientation of world view and ritual among the people with whom he worked may perhaps justify the use of the word

accord it no analytical value for the rest of this article. The term *'culture broker'* is more accurate, to be defined as a kind of middleman, mediating between two value systems and two 'identities' in order to facilitate their integration. The emphasis here, more than in classic cases described in e.g. Press (1969), is on the *cultural* aspect, i.e., the realization of a perceived common underlying value similarity. In our case, the 'integration' may also appear to be somewhat undirectional.

THE PROBLEM

Until 1975, the Beta Israel were not always considered as Jews by origin or religion, although sympathizers and spokesmen of the group claimed that they should be. When a list of marginal 'dispersed' Jewish communities was compiled in 1951 in Israel, it was noted that any assistance in the immigration of Beta Israel could only be given after a full 'return to Judaism' of the community (confidential source). Neither the Chief Rabbinate nor the Israeli civil authorities recognized the Beta Israel as Jews. In this period, a struggle for identity was fought by various Beta Israel individuals in [illegible] whom [illegible] (cf. Kessler, 1982, ch. 8). Over the years, various rabbinic commissions of inquiry were even sent out to Ethiopia to visit the Beta Israel, to observe their religious and social behavior and to gauge the extent of their Jewish character. This was done in order to facilitate further decisions on whether and how to assist them or prepare them for immigration to Israel. The idea was that the Beta Israel would have to be religiously 'incorporated' into mainstream Judaism in order to qualify for sustained attention and eventual immigration. The community came to accept this idea in its broad outline, and a standard pattern of 'positive impression management' emerged among members of the community in Ethiopia vis-a-vis the visitors. As representatives of the normative, encompassing 'great tradition' these visitors indicated the need for rapprochement, but left it to others – cultural brokers – to step in and effect a mediation. At such a point, when the need for genuine change within the Beta Israel community was felt, the indigenous culture broker became a key figure. Such a person, a member of the community but also familiar with the 'modern', incorporating tradition (Talmudic Israeli Judaism) was in a position to translate the proposed changes into terms familiar to the group in question. Therefore, the main problem posed here is: in what way was this intermediary culture broker instrumental in effecting culture change and identity change, how was his role interpreted by members of the community where he worked and what problems did he encounter in playing this role? I shall mainly focus on a study of 'superstructural change', since the material basis of the Beta Israel community remained almost unchanged.

THE CULTURE BROKER

My subject A.C. [illegible] in a Beta Israel community in the Shire district, Western Tigray. It must be emphasized that several Beta Israel had acquired positions of authority due to the contacts with western Jews in and outside Ethiopia well before A.C. became active (cf. Messing, 1982:64f.), i.e., outside the traditional leadership structure of priests and elders. Until some years ago, for instance, Israel-educated Beta Israel teachers were active in various villages around

Gondar town (a few of them are still presumed to be there). They taught Hebrew, (Jewish) history, arithmetic and other general subjects in primary schools and did much to reinforce the bond with Judaism and Israel. The Tigray district, where some 15% of all Beta Israel used to live, was generally overlooked by western Jewish educational and financial programs and it was here that A.C. chose to become active.

His life history may serve as a good starting point for study of the impact of culture contact and socio-religious change in the Beta Israel community of Tigray, about which there is still comparatively slight knowledge. In [illegible] the 'first generation' (Messing, 1982:62-79), that is, those educated in schools in Ethiopia and Europe, due to Faitlovitch's efforts. A.C. can be said to represent the second generation, among whom one may also count the Israel-educated teachers mentioned above. In fact, when he started his 'career' in Tigray, he more or less modelled his role on that of these teachers, although with more 'missionary zeal.' His personal background also set him apart from this teachers' faction in the (Gondar) Beta Israel community (cf. also Abbink, 1984a:280).

A.C. was born some 53 years ago in the Saqalt district of Gondar region. His precise ethnic origins are not known, although he claims descent from a Beta Israel family (some of his later opponents asserted that he was not a Beta Israel but came from a small neighboring tribe. This is doubtful). He grew up in Saqalt and at a later age moved frequently with his family wherever employment for his father was available. A.C. received hardly any formal education, like most rural youths in those days. He appears to have lived for some time in the Waleqa-Ambower region but in his adolescent years and after seems to have lost contact with the Beta Israel community for quite some time. He travelled a lot in northern Ethiopia, worked at various jobs, and, notably, studied for three years with (Christian) monks on one of the isolated monastery islands in Lake Tana (he claimed that Christian faith was not a precondition for this). His aim was to learn more of Ethiopia's history and to master the ancient religious language, Ge'ez.

In the 1950's he lived in Addis Ababa and at one time worked as a caretaker near the Israeli embassy there. Here he became acquainted with some Israelis and some Addis Ababa Jews and thus his long-standing association with the cause began; he started learning Hebrew and made contacts with some important educated Beta Israel [illegible] worked in a factory co-managed by Israelis. Here he met some Beta Israel from Tigray. After a year or so he went to the Beta Israel region in Gondar, where he became closely associated with the High Priest of the community, Qes Birhan Biruk,[9] and some of the teachers working with him. This group around Qes Birhan came into conflict with the rest of the teachers and with others who received money from foreign Jewish organizations, channeled through an important educated Beta Israel, Y.B. The Qes Birhan group claimed that the Beta Israel in outlying districts (Quara, Lasta, Tigray) were neglected by Y.B. (who reputedly never sent them money or teachers). Qes Birhan had visited the Tigray community and claimed that they were in need of and asking for material and spiritual assistance. This was also stated by an Israeli visitor, a former longtime resident of Asmara (see Nimtzowitz, 1962), who became one of the patrons of the Birhan group. Subsequently, it was decided that, at the request of the Tigray leaders, this group would send a teacher on a religious and educational mission.

A.C. was chosen and received the blessing of Qes Birhan. He arrived in 1964/65 and stayed for some 15 years.

Thus, the Tigray Beta Israel, who wanted their share in the modest material, educational and religious assistance that emanated from world Jewry and Israel, themselves made the choice to realign themselves with the broader entity of world Judaism, recognizing it as a more evolved form of their own, ancient, Ethiopian-Judaic belief. A.C. also visited Israel in 1971, invited by his patron and thereby fully confirmed his role and 'mandate' (cf. Press, 1969:205) as a mediator between Israeli-Jewish culture and Ethiopian-Jewish culture.

It may be clear from this (necessarily very brief) biography that A.C. was actually a marginal figure in Beta Israel society (a marked characteristic of most brokers/mediators [cf Blok, 1969:370], perhaps even a prerequisite: it is the ambivalence bound up with it which allows the broker to function at all). This is evident in the following points: a) his precise family origins remain unknown and he himself was not entirely clear about them; b) he had been out of touch with the Beta Israel for many years; c) he knew Ge'ez, the prestigious religious language, but had not studied it under Beta Israel priests or 'monks', the usual way to acquire it for a Beta Israel; d) he became a [illegible] priest) and his position remained ambiguous; e) he knew Hebrew and details of Talmudic Judaism but was not educated in Isrel or in Israel-sponsored institutions in Ethiopia (as were most other Beta Israel village teachers); f) he was supported by the Tigray community where he worked, but was also receiving money via his personal network overseas (Europe, Israel, money with which he built a stone-wall synagogue, see later).

A.C. remained active in his role as culture broker until his emigration in 1981.

THE MEDIATION

When A.C. arrived in Tigray, he was received well by most of the Beta Israel there. This section of the community was religiously more traditional than the Beta Israel around Gondar, who had been exposed to 'pan-Jewish' influences (cf. Shelemay, 1977:21) for many years.

A.C., an intelligent and powerful personality, saw his role indeed in missionary terms and intended to do his work as least as well as, or better than the teachers in the Gondar villages. He express aim was to 'reform' Beta Israel Judaism, bring innovative change, stimulate a redefinition of Beta Israel group status, and gradually prepare them for migration to Israel. This required integrative mediation between the distant great tradition, located outside Ethiopia, and the local one, which was historically only an accidentally-arrested subform of it. He stressed the positive value of the link with Israeli Jewish identity and Jewish aspects of Beta Israel identity while devaluating the 'non-Jewish' aspects of the Beta Israel ethno-religious identity (connected with magic and divination and embodied in, e.g., the *tanqways*, magicians-folkhealers). A.C. also

The activities of A.C. as culture broker should be divided into two periods, be[illegible] and after 1974, the year of the Ethiopian revolution. The second period marks a break with the first because of the effects of the radical changes in Ethiopian society, also felt in Tigray. The main emphasis will, however, be on the pre-1974 period.

The general idea behind the religious and cultural reform envisaged for the Beta

Israel was that they should be 'updated', and, in this process, be made aware:

1. that they were but a small part of world Jewry;
2. [illegible]
3. that Hebrew should be adopted and introduced gradually into prayer services;
4. that any 'sacrifices' of animals should be abolished as not befitting modern Jewish ritual;
5. that Beta Israel religious festivals should be brought into line with general Jewish ones (i.e., the Beta Israel lunar calendar should be replaced by the Jewish lunar calendar, discrepancies in timing should be amended, and additional festivals introduced);
6. that the Bea Israel should be given the opportunity to learn to use ritual objects like *tefillin* and *tallit* and also the *mezuzah*;
7. that *kashrut* rules should be tightened;
8. that some customs with regard to 'ritual purity' (e.g., of women during menstruation or after childbirth) should be relaxed or abandoned (cf. Abbink, 1984a:86);
9. that Sabbath observance should be amended, by making some additions to ritual;
10. that ritual slaughter (distinct from sacrifice) by priests should be improved, as Beta Israel practice was not entirely in accordance with Jewish stipulations.

Within the framework of these notions, A.C. set to work to 'mould' Beta Israel religious life and identity, starting in Adiworowa, a village inhabited exclusively by Beta Israel. He tried to fit the new elements into the existing pattern of religious behavior (which he knew fairly well), taught the young generation, gave information about Israel and the western Jews. He could not, however, enforce his proposed changes. He had at his disposal only his obvious knowledge of Hebrew and Jewish ritual mentioned above, his contacts with the 'white Jews' of the normative tradition, and his 'mandate' from High Priest *Qes* Birhan Biruk in Gondar and High Priest *Qes* [illegible] decisive for his continued acceptance by the Beta Israel in Tigray. It should be recognized that his position in the community was not undisputed, though he had come by invitation and was accepted by the major part. Strain was inherent in the very character of his role.

Certain elements of his teaching were accepted without any problem, and may be seen as the uncontroversial aspects of his mediation efforts: a) the formation of groups of pupils for Hebrew lessons, prayer and a 'choir' club; b) the provision of information on Israel and world Jewry; c) the addition (not substitution) of (Hebrew) prayers to the prayer service; d) fund collecting and building a new synagogue; e) institution of additional festivals (Purim and Chanuka) and ritual rules; f) his effort for the use and import of more (Hebrew) prayerbooks and ritual utensils.

The strain resulted from the fact that he was expected to innovate, but not too much. At various points in his program he met with reluctance and opposition: first, on the part of the priests and elders and second, from a group of youngsters partly educated in Ethiopian state schools.

With the first group there were differences of opinion over the following points (discussion of which may clarify the scope of A.C.'s mediation effort and its limitations):

1. The times of prayer. On Sabbath eve, for instance, priests and elders prayed in the prayer-house all night and left early Sabbath morning. It was just then that A.C. and some pupils came in to start their Hebrew prayers, in accordance with Jewish tradition. The priests thought this inappropriate; they perceived their own observance as entirely correct and felt that their authority should not be 'undermined.'

2. The priests demanded that everyone remove their shoes before entering the prayer-house (cf. Messing, 1956:34). A.C. maintained that this was not necessary and refused. This was a breach of Beta Israel ritual.

3. Through his international contacts, A.C. succeeded in gathering funds for the construction of a stone synagogue in Adiworowa, where a number of priests lived. But a conflict arose over the location of the building: A.C. wanted it constructed on a clean site, where mud and dirt were less of a nuisance. The priests preferred to have it close to their homes, regardless of the presence of dirt and mud. It was finally built according to A.C.'s wishes, some 600 meters from the homes of the priests.

4. The priests absolutely refused to allow women and children to enter the inner part of the synagogue (this was only permitted in large synagogues with different sections for priests and laity, and for men and women and children). A.C., however, claimed that women and children could participate, in their own corner of the building; they could stand at the left side (facing in the direction of Jerusalem, as prescribed by tradition). As A.C. had collected the money for the synagogue and thus had some authority over it, he had his way.

5. Instead of the ritual kissing of the ground during the prayer service on certain occasions, A.C. tried to introduce among his pupils, the Chassidic bowing movements with the upper part of the body. This was fully incomprehensible to the priests and the elders who were perplexed by these 'mad movements'. A.C.'s explanation about the custom in Israel among pious Jews was met with incredulity.

6. An important issue was that of sacrifice, long a controversial item in the relations between Beta Israel and other Jews. A.C. tried to discourage any sacrifice (*qorban*) whatsoever, because Judaism has forbidden sacrifice, after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem (70 C.E.). The Beta Israel were used to making sacrifices on several religious festivals or at the request of some person who had committed a religious transgression or an offense. A goat, cow or lamb was sacrificed at the special holy area (*awd*) near the prayer-house, the meat eaten by priests, guests (and offender), some of the blood smeared on the doorpost of the prayer-house, and the remains of the animal were burned[11]. Though most of the sacrifices had already fallen into disuse (due to economic reasons), the Beta Israel leadership continued to maintain that they were correct.

Some wider issues, rooted in the way of life of the Beta Israel, and not only of

7. The traditional decorations made by Beta Israel women – body tattoo and embroidery of clothes should, according to A.C., be abandoned. The motifs of these

[illegible] flower patterns, crosses were in fact [illegible]
The women went to (Christian) specialists to have the latter [illegible]
(e.g., on forehead and arms) in order to ward off evil and to become more attractive. The symbols embroidered on dresses were also largely the same as those of Christian Tigray women, and A.C. urged the Beta Israel women to replace them by Jewish symbols like stars-of-David, or *menorahs*. This at first antagonized many Beta Israel and also many Christians, who interpreted the move in a political sense.

8. A vital issue was also that of the now well-known separate huts for women, connected with menstrual and post-natal taboos: the 'house-of-blood' (Amh:*yamargam gojjo*) and the 'house-of-childbed' (Amh:*yaras gojjo*). This core value of Beta Israel culture was initially opposed by A.C., who knew it had been rejected by Talmudic Judaism. But he met with opposition from both the priests and elders, and some of the ordinary men and women. Though A.C. agreed with the need for rest and convalescence of the women at these times, he accused the religious leaders of neglecting the physical and spiritual well-being of the women, who had to live for relatively long times (from eight to eighty days) in huts. He asserted that a) the custom was not prescribed in this form in the Torah and b) the women were exposed to bad weather, unhygienic conditions and snakes, etc. Several women had died because of one of these factors.

When he met with adamant refusal to change the custom, he asked the male relatives of the women to at least build good huts. He himself started a campaign for this in Adiworowa, Indabaguna and Bet Maryam villages. He had success only in his own village. As will be known, the issue of the ritual separation of women is still problematic among the new Ethiopian immigrants in Israel.

A.C.'s relationship to the second group mentioned, some of the young Beta Israel [illegible]
during the second period of his work, after the 1974 revolution. There had always been some Beta Israel boys (no girls) who could pursue an education outside their village, in a high school in one of the larger towns (e.g., Makala), and others who had 'run away' from home to try life in the city (Asmara, Addis Ababa, Misiwa). Some of them came back to their villages and became teachers in state schools (in the mixed Christian-Moslem-Beta Israel villages). A number of these men opposed A.C.'s role as a 'Jewish teacher-missionary' and identified themselves and the Beta Israel primarily with Ethiopia, especially after the revolution seemed to augur a new era of change and progress. They thus rejected the religious changes proposed by him, as well as the 'political implications' of his program, several times, the various sections of the Beta Israel supporting either A.C. or these opponents came into conflict. This faction (who received some support from the *tanqways*, who saw their position as threatened by A.C., as he rejected most of their work) at some point tried to indict A.C., appealing to the Tigray provincial authorities to stop his work. This was not successful. The Beta Israel priests were caught in between these conflicts, as their own position vis-a-vis A.C. remained necessarily ambivalent, as we have seen. Their view of A.C. became more favorable when news of the 1975 Israeli decision of recognition reached the Beta Israel. A.C. pursued his broker role for five more years, although under increasing strain.

The debates around the issues treated in the above section attest to A.C.'s ambiguous position as a culture broker. The Beta Israel knew he was closer to normative Jewish tradition than they and that most innovations would have to be accepted, if they wished to maintain th link with world Jewry and Israel. This largely accounted for A.C.'s continued presence in their midst[13] and for their formal acceptance of the proposed changes. But it was difficult to put the innovations into practice in their socio-cultural environment and in the framework of their traditions, sanctioned by the ages and by their steadfastness as a Judaic group. The general result of A.C.'s mediation effort was, therefore, a nominal acceptance, but a rather slow remoulding of actual behavior. This was true for the priests as well as for the common folk. Their traditional way of life was functional in their own conditions and radical change could not be expected in so short a time. In this sense, the 'success' of A.C. was perhaps not immediately apparent. This can be further illustrated by looking at some points which were not fully 'solved' during his efforts (some of them have surfaced again in Israel among the immigrants).

a) The priestly prayer-house service and the normative invocation of certain historical (oral) traditions, e.g. those on the [illegible] of monks [illegible] *not* abandoned or devalued by priests or elders. In Israel, these traditional community leaders feel at a loss, because their traditions are not given recognition or in any way 'translated'.

b) The status of the traditional Beta Israel religious literature, the corpus of their own prayers (in Ge'ez, with parts in Agaw), and the prayer melodies, were not discussed. This literature was used in many rituals, at births, the *ardi'it*-ceremony and at funerals.

c) The circumcision rite (*brit milah*, or in Amharic: *gizrat*) was carried out differently from the rest of Jewry: not in a prayer-house/synagogue, nor by a *mohel* (a religious male practitioner) but by either a male or female elder or a priest. This was not changed.

d) The issue of 'symbolic conversion' required of new Beta Israel immigrants upon arrival in Israel, by order of the Chief Rabbinate. For this the Beta Israel in Ethiopia were not really prepared, perhaps due to its delicate nature, or to the expectation that the issue would soon be resolved. It is now one of the main points against which Ethiopian Jewish immigrants in Israel protest.

The inherent difficulties of the 'missionary' program and of the broker role of C.A. did not, in the end, prevent a growing self-identification of the Beta Israel as Ethiopian Jews with an option to move to Israel, when the time would be ripe. This identification was thus irreversible, and was seen as presaged in their own tradition.

This time came in the early 1980's, when, also due to upheaval in the wider society, the migration of virtually all Tigray Beta Israel began. They sold their belongings, loaded their animals with the necessary goods and foodstuffs, and set out [illegible] Israel. A.C. himself set an example: when rumors reached him that the Ethiopian police were planning his arrest, he devised an ingenious scheme for escape, made his way with his wife and children to a refugee camp, and eventually reached Israel.

CONCLUSION

A.C.'s position as an indigenous culture broker was difficult from the start. There where he worked. The local community accepted the link with the encompassing 'great tradition', but the necessary changes in its religious and social life were not acknowledged without debate. The priests and elders especially were faced with a dilemma, because implementation of the program would undermine their position, even though they could not reject its basic tenets. The change in ethno-religious identification would also bring younger, educated members of the community into conflict with their emergent Ethiopian-national identification. Furthermore, there were additional internal divisions in the community, e.g., between men and women, on account of the program.

Nevertheless, when faced with civil war, ideas of 'national self-determination', acts of revenge by counterrevolutionary forces against the Beta Israel[14] and a threat of drought and famine, they opted for wholesale immigration to their promised land, interpreted by most of them in messianic terms.

One may assert that A.C.'s mission was not entirely successful in reforming the Beta Israel in the mould of mainstream Judaism; but, spurred on by the force of circumstances, it still had its desired ultimate effect. A purely 'cultural' brokerage may therefore, under certain conditions, indeed be successful.

FOOTNOTES

1 Especially in the wake of the exposure in the world press of the secret escape route from Ethiopia to Israel, in January 1985.

to be addressed as 'Ethiopian *Jews*', not as 'Falashas' (generally seen by them as a derogatory word). This term is, however, the most commonly used word in the journalistic and scholarly literature, up to 1983/84. In Ethiopia they were known as 'Falashas' by Amhara, Tigray and foreigners; or as '*Kayla*' by Amhara and Tigray, but also as 'Beta Israel' and 'Israelotch' (self-terms). As my paper deals with the group in Ethiopia, I will use the term Beta Israel to refer to them in this context (cf. also Abbink, 1984b).

3 Several delegations of American and Canadian Jewish organizations, as well as some Israelis (including members of the Knesset) visited Ethiopia, but they were to visit only a few Beta Israel villages around Gondar.

4 Up until 1985, the Beta Israel were not seen as fully Jewish by sections of Orthodox Jewry. For instance, it appears that, contrary to some of his earlier statements, the great Halachic authority Rav Moshe Feinstein of New York has recently declared that they are not to be considered as Jews to all purposes (cf. *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 16-23 February 1985). His opinion counts as decisive in many Orthodox circles.

5 For information on traditional Beta Israel life, see Leslau, 1951, 1957; Schoenberger, 1975; Abbink, 1984a: ch. 2.

6 Faitlovitch always used the designation 'Falashas'.

7 Cf. Messing, 1982:67, 104 (note 62). In conversations during fieldwork among the Ethiopian Jews in Israel (1981 and 1982), I heard many stories from older informants about the encounters of Faitlovitch and the Beta Israel. From these accounts it appears that Faitlovitch, though certainly accepted by them, had no easy task to convince them of the correctness of all his proposed changes and innovations.

[8] I refrain from giving his full name. In Israel, the Ethiopian Jews generally use at least two names: an Ethiopian one (or more) inside their own group; a Hebrew one in contacts with non-Ethiopian Israelis (some Ethiopian Jews, however, have retained their Ethiopian names for all purposes). The data for this article comes from conversations with A.C., cross-checked with other Tigray immigrants and others.

[9] A notable spiritual and community leader of the Beta Israel, who came to Israel in 1977 and died there on December 22, 1984.

[10] Beta Israel called their prayer-houses variously *maqurab, masgid, bet salot* or *bet Egziabher*.

[11] If the animal was slaughtered for consumption, the hide could be sold.

[12] An indication of its importance was the fact that a newly ordained priest received, immediately after his consecration by the High Priest, two sacrificial knives. Without them he was not a true priest.

[13] The fact that he married, before he came to Tigray, a woman born in Tigray (daughter of a respected Beta Israel priest) may also have helped him.

[14] Such acts were perpetrated by anti-*Dergue* forces because they saw the Beta Israel as 'Israelites', maintaining connections with the State of Israel, which reputedly provided the *Dergue* with weapons and other assistance in those years.

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