THE ABSORPTION OF ETHIOPIAN IMMIGRANTS: A RETURN TO THE FIFTIES

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In discussions of the current problems of the Ethiopian immigration to Israel there appears a commonly used phrase "repeating the mistakes of the fifties". The nature of the "mistakes" made during the process of mass migration to Israel from Middle Eastern countries in the decade 1950-1960 is analyzed against the background of academic studies of those immigrants.

Four major causes for the resultant social gap between Oriental and Western Jews in Israel are discussed. It is shown that these same causes are still the source of much of the difficulty seen in the acculturation of Ethiopian immigrants to Israel in the eighties.

INTRODUCTION

Few people would deny that there exists in Israel a "social gap" between the predominantly Ashkenazi middle-class which makes up the mainstream of Israeli society and the "second Israel", Jews of Middle Eastern background who are found by and large in the working classes. Disagreement does exist, however, as to the source of this "gap". Some (Bar Yosef, 1959; Frankenstein, 1953; Kleinberger, 1969:49-51) place much of the blame on the cultural differences or deficiencies of the immigrants themselves; others (e.g., Selzer, 1965 and especially Swirsky, 1981) accuse the State and its "absorption" agencies of outside discrimination and exploitation; most, however, tend to take the middle ground of showing how ideological and structural factors meshed with the immigrants' cultural background to produce the opposite of what was intended: social, economic, political and cultural disparities rather than a unified and ethnically undifferentiated society. This "middle" approach characterizes the major works on ethnic integration, from Eisenstadt (1954) to Smoocha (1978), and invariably dwells on the inherent tensions between the reality of ethnicity and ethnic inequalities in Israel and the formal ideology, backed by normative pressures and institutionalized policies, that aims at creating a "melting pot".

Disagreement also exists over the seriousness of the "social gap" in Israeli society and whether it is widening or narrowing. Swirsky (1981) sees it as a permanent feature of Israeli society, based upon a clear and intended relationship of "dependency" of working-class Easterners upon the European-run polity and economy. Nahon (1984) argues that, while various agents of socialization have succeeded in bringing the children of immigrants from Eastern and Western backgrounds closer together, in areas of competition (education, occupational status, income and general standard of living) the "gap" remains significant between the two groups. Elazar (1983), however, tries to debunk talk of a continued "gap" by arguing that the Sephardim, Israel's "new majority", are not only coming into their own as successful members of the society but are, in fact, poised to become an equal, if not predominant force in the hitherto Ashkenazi-controlled polity.

Finally, while researchers have concentrated on describing and analysing the "gap" according to various objective indices, there is no doubt, in view of the mass of vitriolic statements of the past decade and a half that, together with objective inequalities, strongly *felt* feelings of deprivation, deculturation and anger also constitute essential features. In the eyes of those who perceive themselves as victims, deep-seated cultural wounds make the "gap" – which most, I would argue, perceive as intentional – an issue of emotional significance beyond mere material concerns.

Attention has been called to ethnic differences affecting the process of "absorption", to the bureaucratic structure that was created to deal with the large-scale post-1948 immigrations, and to the social and economic constraints of the period. However, scant attention has been paid to what may be called the "superfluous" sources of the "gap", commonly called, in public debate, "the mistakes of the fifties". Reference is to those causes of alienation, lack of integration and lack of mobility that could have been avoided and which, perhaps, account for the most bitter and intractable aspects of the contemporary "social gap".

If, indeed, much of the present ethnic and class divisiveness in Israeli society could have been avoided had not serious "mistakes" been made during the "absorption" process, it might well be asked if the absorbing agencies that continue to deal with new immigrants have learned the "lessons" of the fifties. Given the recent immigration of some fourteen thousand Ethiopian Jews (not to mention thousands of newcomers from Soviet Georgia and the Caucasus that have not received as much attention), this question is of more than academic interest. Already protests of immigrants and aliya activists can be heard, and charges that we are returning to the fifties (if we ever left them), are being made. What, then, were the "mistakes" of the fifties and what "lessons" might we learn so as to avoid adding yet another non-Western group to the victims of the "social gap"? How similar are the policies and structures of integration of today to those of the 1950s? These are the questions this paper will try to address.

While reams of polemical material have been written, little basic research has been done on the entire immigration and integration process of the 1950s and 60s. What is needed is a thorough review of the non-published reports and proposals to the various absorption agencies of the period, as well as interviews with the participants, academic and bureaucratic, who created the integrative frameworks – not to mention those who passed through it. I do not claim to have done this research.. My conclusions rest upon more readily-available published material, together with interviews with immigrants of the time, and must therefore be taken as tentative. Rather than exhaustively researching the absorption process of the fifties, however, I have concerned myself with isolating the essential elements that account for much of the bitterness and lack of integration that have become so evident in the eighties. In short, I try to isolate the essential "mistakes of the fifties".

I then attempt to contrast the absorption of Ethiopian immigrants in the eighties, arguing that, according to the essential features I have found, the structure and concept of absorption remain basically the same. Here, too, we suffer from lack of comprehensive studies, as well as from limited time-depth (though I can at least claim active involvement in absorption work over the past decade, and a previous five months of fieldwork among the Jews in Ethiopia). The discussion of Ethiopian absorption thus suffers from a lack of formal documentation, being based largely on my comprehensive report on problems of Ethiopian absorption, issued last year (Halper, 1984). It should be considered as a preliminary assessment awaiting further

research. The discussion at times borders on the polemical; the intention is to avoid the circumspections of my colleagues of the fifties, and perhaps to sharpen the focus of the debate.

THE "MISTAKES" OF THE FIFTIES

In the social sciences – even the applied social sciences – one usually cannot speak of clearcut "mistakes". Policies, and the frameworks for implementing them, derive essentially from concepts and analyses employed by policy-makers to achieve certain goals. While the goals may certainly be questioned, they can hardly be "mistakes", since they themselves derive, not from some objective source that can be denoted "right" or "wrong" but from a general social consensus which sets down the desirability of goals to be pursued. Similarly, there being no hard-and-fast answers of controlled laboratory precision in the "real world" in which social scientists work, we can only hope for what Niehbur appropriately called "proximate solutions to insolvable problems". Past policies which today seem so evidently "mistaken" or misguided were part of the groping towards "proximate solutions" in their time. What is indefensible, however, is the failure to apply new approaches to basically similar phenomena, and it is in the interest of making explicit the shortcomings of the absorption process that this paper is written.

The undesirable aspects of the "social gap", those that were not an inevitable part of the integrative process, were not, then, "mistakes" but rather the natural results of unrealistic goals, misguided policies, bureaucratic organization and insensitive procedures. Four major causes of the "social gap" can be traced to the 1950s: an extreme "melting pot" approach; lack of understanding of the role culture plays in ethnic adaptation, and the consequent elimination of this essential vehicle; the channelling of immigrants to the margins of society; and the closed, authoritarian and complex bureaucracy that was largely exempt from any public accountability, and which turned the immigrants into "wards" of the State.

(1) The Pressure of the "Melting Pot"

The ideology *mizug galuyot* (mixing of the Exiles), the Hebrew equivalent of the "melting pot" concept, proclaimed the need to mix Eastern and Western Jewish cultural elements into a uniquely Israeli blend. In practice, however, immigrants were expected to give up their ethnic cultures in favor of that of Ashkenazi-based Israel. Jewish communities in the Diaspora may have picked up elements of their host societies, it was argued, but these cultures were only relevant as long as Jews remained in the Diaspora. Alien cultures distorted and covered "true" or "authentic" Jewish national identity, which could only be reclaimed in the independent State of Israel. There is no such thing as a "hyphenated Israeli", a Jew in Poland or Morocco was essentially a Jew and not really a Pole or Moroccan. The demand that he shed his "false Diaspora identity" for the "authentic" Israeli one corresponded to the need to build a unified Jewish society out of *kibbutz galuyot* (the "ingathering of the Exiles"). In return for discarding their Diaspora identities, the immigrants became equals of the veteran "host" population, and hence need not regret the loss of their redundant culture (now relegated to the status of quaint but irrelevant "folklore").

This ideology would have been valid had Israeli identity been a neutral concept based on a true and equal amalgamation of immigrant cultures. But this, of course, was not the case. Political Zionism was a European movement and ideology that soon overwhelmed, by its scope, organization, finances and overall dynamism, the Sephardi and Eastern elements of the staid and traditional "Old Yishuv". The cultural and institutional infra-structure of the future State of Israel was essentially consolidated as far back as the 1920s. Hebrew had already become the Yishuv's spoken language and many of the basic values of the emergent Israeli society – democracy, equality, pioneerism and volunteerism, secularism, progress and technology, the glorification of labor and a pro-Western political and cultural orientation (Koenig, 1952; Eisenstadt, 1954:46-89) – were already ascendant. The major parties had their roots in this early pre-State period, and the first elections to the Yishuv's representative body, *Knesset Israel*, took place as far back as 1922. The Jewish Agency, the Histadrut and its subsidiaries, the Hagana defense force, the Hebrew University, Hadassah Hospital, the Hebrew theater and newspapers, a national bank – all these basic institutions and more were functioning a quarter century or more before independence. A strong urban industrial base in the growing cities along the coast and a struggling but well-developed rural agricultural sector arose in the pre-State years. Because of the Western origins of Zionism and the fact that by 1948 more than 80% of the Jewish population was Ashkenazi (Sicron, 1957:50), to be "Israeli", despite claims of authenticity and uniqueness, meant in fact to be Western.

Mizug galuyot, then, not only eschewed cultural pluralism for a monist, melting pot approach but, by creating an essential identity between Israeli and Western cultural norms and values, effectively delegitimized non-Western cultures. Because of a basic continuity, Ashkenazi Jews felt a lesser sense of loss and were more willing and able to "adopt" the "new" Israeli culture than were Eastern immigrants (even though the struggle of Jews from Germany, to hang on to their identity indicated that Ashkenazis too could be strongly attached to their Diaspora cultures). This, then, was the "hidden curriculum" behind *mizug galuyot*.

Moreover, the process of "absorption" was defined almost exclusively in static, structural terms, and measured by the degree to which the immigrants took on the characteristics of the "host" society. Thus, Eisenstadt (1954) defines "absorption" in terms of the "resocialization" of the newcomers and the extent of their "institutional dispersion" – though both Eisenstadt (1954:259) and Matras (1962:215) recognize that complete absorption seldom is achieved. As to the immigrants themselves, they were categorized in the fifties not on the basis of cultural origin but in such structural terms as "isolated, apathic families", "isolated stable families", etc. (Eisenstadt, 1954:143-168). This categorization justified the tendency of the absorption bureaucracy to treat the newcomers on an individual or family basis rather than as cultural entities with agendas, preferences and norms of their own.

(2) "Primitivity" as a Replacement for the Culture Concept

The ideology of *mizug galuyot*, which called for the elimination of ethnic (i.e., Eastern) cultures in Israel, received powerful support and legitimization from the efforts of the absorption agencies, mass media and members of the academic community to cast new immigrants from Muslim countries as "primitives". In one stroke, the immigrants' claim to a culture of their own was refuted, measures forcing

them to discard their "old" ways in favor of "the way we do it in Israel" were justified. The paternalistic right of the absorption agencies to determine every aspect of the newcomers' lives was claimed "in the interests of the immigrants themselves", and breaking of the old culture was seen as a positive step. Yet the elimination of the culture as a vehicle of adaptation left individual immigrants with few resources of their own and virtually guaranteed dependency upon outside agencies, alienation from both the dominant society and from themselves, and the development of what we euphemistically refer to today as the "social gap".

The concept of "primitivity", was freely bandied about in conversations, public discussions and the press during the 1950s; that the immigrants from Muslim countries were "primitive" became a matter of public consensus, and therefore a truism. And since "primitives" are seen as subhuman, the term permitted virtually unrestricted generalizations and accusations. The most notorious, related by Patai (1953:296-97), were the writings of Arye Gelblum in the respected paper *Ha'aretz*. In the issue of April 22, 1949, he wrote:

> *A serious and threatening question is posed by the immigration from North Africa. This is the immigration of a race the like of which we have not known in this country...*
>
> *Here is a people whose primitiveness reaches the highest peak. Their educational level borders on absolute ignorance. Still more serious is their inability to absorb anything intellectual. How many obstacles have to be overcome in educating the Africans....When one Bulgarian Jew argued with them about standing in line for food in the dining room, an African immediately pulled out a knife and cut off his nose...*
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> *In the living quarters of the Africans* [*note the repeated use of the "loaded" term "Africans" rather than "North Africans"*], *in the camps you will find dirt, card-games for money, drunkenness and fornication...not to mention immorality and stealing....In one camp they "planned a revolt" which included...murdering all the local officials of the Jewish Agency.*
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> *What, therefore, can be done with them? How to "absorb" them?...And to them will be added one day immigration of the Jews from Arab countries! If this is not done within limits and gradually, they will "absorb" us and not we them....*

Though the style is harsh and bombastic, there is little doubt that Gelblum was echoing what many people felt. Patai himself writes critically of such viewpoints in his 1953 book *Israel Between East and West*, but the mild and unintentionally sardonic response to Gelblum he reprints (p.297) from *Davar* of March 3, 1950, is indicative of the extent to which such notions were accepted. "This is exactly the 'race' we need", replies one K. Shabtai.

> *We suffer from an overdose of intelligence...We have vital need of sizable "injections" of naturalness, simplicity, ignorance, coarseness. These simpletons, these childish Jews with their simple-mindedness and their natural intelligence...are a life-elixir against our over-intellectual anxiety which is the source of many of our troubles.*

More insidious, perhaps, was the legitimization given to such terms by the academic circles of the day. Particularly unfortunate was the use by the educational

psychologist, Frankenstein (1951; 1957; 1963) of such terms as "primitivity", "primitive mentalities", the "pathologies" of primitivity, "failed cultures" and his primitivity-purged program of "intellectual hygiene" for the classroom. True, we should recall that such terms were in use in the scientific jargon of anthropology in the early 1950s. Moreover, Frankenstein used these terms in highly idiosyncratic ways, retranslating sociocultural concepts into psychological analyses [so that, in his use, children, the mentally ill and retarded, members of "failed cultures" and even individuals in modern society whose ego-structures are inadequately developed, are considered "primitive", a use almost completely divorced from the sociocultural environment]. While careful in his definition of "primitivity", Frankenstein nevertheless lent academic credence to expressions that carried very different meanings outside the university, where, needless to say, the fine analytical meanings were lost. The "filtering down" process was evident. Kleinberger, basing himself on Frankenstein's list of characteristics of primitivity, passes over the details of Frankenstein's arguments and writes forthrightly in his book *Society, Schools and Progress in Israel* (1969:50-51):

> *All these characteristics of the traditional society of Oriental Jews reflect the "primitive" mentality of its members, which has been conditioned by the prevailing social system. Typical traits of this mentality are lack of rationality and planning, weakness of social and intellectual abstraction, adherence to the familiar and the concrete, magic thinking and superstition, inability to distinguish subjective intentions from objective conditions and formal relations, and the resulting disposition to feel frustrated and personally offended by adverse circumstances, inability to control affects and impulses, etc. These are momentous impediments to scholastic success in a modern, Western-type educational system.*

It would be interesting to know where these trait-lists originated, for neither Frankenstein nor Kleinberger reveal the sources of the data. Having interviewed immigrants from Kurdistan who arrived in the early fifties and who spent years in transit camps, and assuming Frankenstein conducted actual fieldwork and that his traits of "primitivity" are not merely taken from the psychological texts he cites, one can reconstruct a research situation. Picture the scene. It has been raining for days and everyone is cold and miserable. A child falls sick and is taken by its father to the infirmary tent. After hours of waiting he is finally received by the nurse. Not knowing Hebrew, he cannot explain the child's illness; needless to say, the nurse knows no Kurdish. After minutes of stammering, the father becomes frustrated; the child is crying and the nurse impatient. "Look," she says finally, "I have a lot of patients to see. I don't have time for this." Suddenly all the pain and anger rise to the surface – the cold and crowded shanties, the bawling children, the aloof officials, the separation of families, the lack of employment, the social isolation. The father loses his temper and overturns the table."Inability to distinguish subjective intentions from objective conditions", writes the psychologist (or more likely the psychologist's research assistant); the father does not understand the economic and social limitations of the country in the early fifties, the difficulties of mass immigration, the shortage of nurses, the needs of the other patients – the "objective conditions". He obviously suffers from a "resulting disposition to feel frustrated and personally offended".

If this vignette does an injustice to a generation of dedicated researchers, I apologize. But it does capture a glaring omission in the literature on "primitivity"; that is, the failure to locate and explain behavior within its social, cultural and material contexts.

From here, of course, the slide to stereotypic thinking was a short one. "Primitivity" had many synonyms, popular and academic. *Dor hamidbar* (the generation of the wilderness) was one of the most telling. Arguing that the immigrant parents from Muslim countries had nothing to offer Israeli society, that they themselves would never become "absorbed" and that, on the contrary, they could only hinder the integration of their own children, absorption officials tried as much as possible to minimize and neutralize parental influences. They did so by separating the children into special sections of the camps, by teaching them as if they indeed had no parents or cultural backgrounds, by encouraging them, through informal activities and in other ways, to identify solely with the new society. Needless to say, the children, responding to these pressures and messages, soon began to perceive their own parents as primitives. In 1955, Shumsky pointed out the ambivalence and alienation the younger immigrant generation felt towards their parents. Indeed, as Shuval (1962) shows, many of the immigrants, and particularly those from North Africa, internalized their own negative self-images. "Moroccan knife", "Kurdish head" (all brawn and no brains), Persian "stinginess" – all these negative stereotypes circulated freely in the Israeli society of the fifties. Only the Yemenites seem to have escaped a completely negative image; somehow their "primitivity" was less threatening than that of the others, perhaps because they were seen as quiet and deferential. Indeed, as we shall see, the Ethiopian immigrants of a generation later were destined to share this image of "positive primitivity".

It is important to note here that we are not speaking *solely* from the perspective of hindsight, and that the shortcomings of the "primitivity" approach, combined with that of the "melting pot" ideology, were spelled out even in the midst of the fifties. Shumsky warned of the results of deculturalizing the Afro-Asian immigrants, and Bier (1954:386-87) was quite explicit in her observation in the pages of *Megamot*, the leading Israeli journal of sociology and education:

> *We are used to seeing the immigrants of Eastern lands as lacking culture, as a page on which nothing has been written, and as thirsty to receive from us, people of the West and of culture, our way of life...*
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> *Although the Kurds, [with whom she worked in the transit camps] come with a culture of their own, here comes an army of counselors, full of good intentions to extract these immigrants from the swamp of primitivity and lack of education. Here we declare: 'Everything that you do is not good; we will teach you new and better ways.' And what is the reaction? The elderly cannot accept the new values. Or they remain silent and watch as we take away from them the respect and love of their children, and their bitterness does not find a way to express itself. Or they begin to hate us and their accumulated bitterness bursts out from time to time against teachers, counselors and other workers.*

The main shortcoming of all these concepts and stereotypes, besides their implicit or explicit invidiousness, was the lack of a cultural dimension. To be sure, there were those who cautioned against ignoring the immigrants' cultural backgrounds. Patai (1953) tried to draw an analysis of Eastern cultures and sets of guidelines from the

extremely thin ethnographic material of the time, and Shumsky (1955) warned of a "clash of cultures". Even Frankenstein, whose psychological writings virtually ignored the cultural context, wrote (1953:21):

> *Every attempt on the part of the culturally and economically dominant group (and there can be no doubt that the immigrants of Western origin have, to all intents and purposes, always constituted such a group in Israel), to determine the absolute social norm and to impose it on less developed groups, is likely to lead to the estrangement, isolation and petrification of those groups and to an intensification of their 'undesirable' traits.*

But however much they attempted to moderate the excesses of the *mizug galuyot* approach, the social scientists of the fifties all agreed that "absorption" was desirable and possible. The disagreement over methods, such as it was, did not call into question the final goal. To my knowledge, no one at that time supported cultural pluralism – although Patai (1953:334) called for "cultural synthesis instead of cultural absorption; an ingathering of cultural contributions from each ethnic element in the country, instead of the assimilation of all to the Western culture of Ashkenazi Jewry". Even the term "ethnic" was expunged from the Israeli vocabulary; in its place the concept *edah* (community) was substituted, signifying the communal identities and associations among Eastern immigrants that, it was commonly believed, would die out with the immigrant generation, and thus, while not to be encouraged, did not contradict the general trend towards "mixing".

The weakening or elimination of cultural frameworks resulted in two major failures that explain much of the creation, durability, and bitterness of the "social gap".

First, rapid deculturalization led to just what Frankenstein said it would: estrangement, alienation, rootlessness. Eisenstadt (1950:210), as early as 1950, noticed an anomie, "unintegrated social behavior", in the culture-contact situation in Israel. For all the psychological emphasis on "primitivity", no one seemed to take into account the sense of "belonging", one of Maslow's (1954) five "basic needs", what Shills (1957) was to call "primordial affinities" and Isaacs (1975), "basic group identity". The genuine and deeply-rooted identity which Eastern newcomers felt for the Jewish society in Israel certainly helped moderate the sense of cultural loss and disorientation, but the situation in which the "old way of life is undermined but has not yet been replaced by a new one" (Eisenstadt, 1950:210) gave rise to feelings of alienation – from the new society as well as one's own cultural traditions – frustration and, in the present generation, outright rage. Selzer (1965:14), in a pamphlet put out by The Council of the Sephardi Community in Jerusalem, speaks of "cultural genocide", and the "Declaration of Independence" proclaimed by representatives of the Ohel movement in poor neighborhoods in Jerusalem in 1980 (which the President was asked to sign), expresses the bitterness of many Easterners. If the apparent strengthening of ethnic feelings in the past few years is an indication, it appears that ethnicity, continued identification with what should have been a passing "Diaspora" phenomenon – namely, the *edah* – meets the individual's need for belonging and meaning, more than does membership in such a large entity as a national society.

Second, the emphasis on structural characteristics of the Eastern communities and on psychological traits ignored culture as an adaptive mechanism. Instead of permitting ethnic accommodation to work, relying on the immigrants' identity as Jews

and as Israelis to prevent social disintegration, the artificial process of "absorption" was adapted. Eastern immigrants became "wards of the State", "administered communities" in the words of Weingrod (1962; also Kushner, 1973), with no say whatsoever in any decision affecting their own lives, from the smallest (dress and diet) to the most fateful (location, proximity to other family members, education, religious observance, jobs and the like). The entire burden of adaptation and integration was thrown upon the individual, even though individuals from many Muslim countries lacked the social, educational and occupational skills to move into the mainstream. Though families and communities could offer certain supports in cases where all were concentrated in transit camps and later in housing projects, development towns and moshavim, immigrant cultures were prevented from fulfilling their adaptive potentials.

Anthropology generally assumes that cultures are capable of adapting to new social circumstances on condition: (1) that the traditional culture remains somewhat intact and that continuity can be maintained; (2) that the newcomers are in regular interaction with members of the host society; (3) that access to the main institutions of the society is available; and (4) that time is allocated – sometimes a generation or more – for the process of accommodation to work itself out. Such a viewpoint requires, of course, a tolerance of cultural pluralism (at least until integration can be effected), a precondition that contradicted the ideology of *mizug galuyot* and was therefore missing.

As a result, none of the four conditions obtained in the early 1950s (though the immigrants were granted access into the lower echelons of the main educational, political and occupational institutions). Traditional cultures were neutralized, interaction with members of the host society was minimal, immigrants were channelled into the margins of society, and, by isolating the *dor hamidbar* from their children, it was believed that "absorption" into society could be effected within ten or fifteen years without compromising the Western character of the society.

Significantly (and ironically), the immigrants lent a hand in the destruction of their own cultures. Part of a culture's adaptiveness lies in its conservatism: it acts as a filter accepting, rejecting, modifying new influences in such a way that necessary change can be incorporated into the ongoing cultural system. It is a measure of how much the Eastern immigrants identified with the new society and wanted to integrate (if not assimilate) into it that they were willing to do things (such as shaving off sidelocks in the case of the Yemenites) that they would surely have suffered rather than doing in their countries of origin. Instead of harnessing this motivation and its cultural vehicle in the interest of eventual *mizug galuyot*, the absorption authorities, lacking an understanding of cultural dynamics, blinded by their uncompromising "melting pot" approach and anxious to "save" the younger immigrant generation, destroyed the very mechanism that could have ensured social integration and solidarity. Not only was the policy unwise, but it was also, in hindsight, dishonest. In return for abandoning their traditional cultures, Eastern immigrants were promised complete social inclusion; but when they fulfilled their side of the bargain, the authorities did not, or could not, "deliver". One of the basic "lessons" of the fifties is that while enlightened policies may facilitate adaptation and integration, artificial and completely administered integrative efforts cannot replace the natural process of accommodation.

(3) The "Channelling" of Immigrants to the Margins of Society

There is no need to belabor the obvious and well-documented point that the Eastern immigrants of the fifties were channelled to the margins of Israeli society. One need not accept the widspread belief among many working-class Jews of Afro-Asian background that they were brought to Israel as "hewers of wood and drawers of water" in order to supplement the small, largely middle-class Ashkenazi work force, or that they have deliberately been kept "dependent" upon the Ashkenazim (Swirsky, 1981), in order to perceive the reality of the "social gap", with its geographical (Efrat, 1984) as well as social, cultural, economic and political aspects. Berler (1970) discusses the sound conception behind Israel's policy of "population dispersal" in the fifties, but by clearly showing the inequalities in educational, occupational and cultural opportunities, not to mention disparities in housing, welfare needs and general mobility between development towns and the central cities, he severely criticizes that policy's execution and the inequities it has engendered. Cohen (1970) is much harsher in his criticism of these "planted" communities, showing, among other things, how dependent the immigrants are made on centralized government agencies and the "veteran" Ashkenazi absorbers and how isolated they become from the mainstream society. Shokeid (1971), Weingrod (1966) and the collection of articles in Shapiro (1971) point out similar problems in the case of the immigrant moshavim; less documented, but no less visible, are the disparities in housing, education, employment and social integration between veterans and Eastern residents of the mostly-homogeneous housing projects of the larger cities (see, e.g., Cohen, 1973:619-639): the Jewish Agency's "Project Renewal" was aimed at the "physical and social rehabilitation" of urban neighborhoods and development towns,most of which were erected not more than a generation before.

The result of these channelling policies was the creation of ethnic "pockets" in both the urban and rural sectors of Israeli society. In principle, the concentration of immigrants from similar backgrounds need not be a hindrance to integration; in terms of cultural adaptation, it is even necessary in order to promote continuity and solidarity. But when the adaptive cultural element is removed, as it was in Israel, the "pockets" become simply stagnant, isolated and festering wellsprings of alienation, rage and inequality. Three factors in particular combined to prevent mobility and integration: the attempt to scatter communities and extended families throughout the country, leading, in many cases, to concentrations of immigrants from Eastern countries but not of people from the same countries and cultures; the fact that the ethnic "pockets" were in marginal areas marked by scant material resources, little economic opportunity, meager cultural life and lack of access to the main centers of education, employment, politics and culture; and the high degree of segregation of the immigrants from the mainstream society, preventing the type of regular interactions that are the main mechanisms of socialization to a new society (see Eisenstadt, 1954:136-137).

(4) The Bureaucratization of Absorption and the Immigrants' Status as "Wards of the State"

Needless to say, the immigrants themselves had no say in their eventual disposition. Marx (1976:22) provides a graphic description of the process of settlement in the Galilean town of"Galilah":

> *...The immigrants who agreed to move to the outlying towns like Galilah were those whose freedom of choice was restricted, and who depended on the accommodation and assistance offered by the authorities. Many of the new arrivals in Galilah were destitute, lacked skills and educational qualifications, and had large families....*
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> *The decision where to send new immigrants was made at the Jewish Agency head office. There the Absorption Department collated weekly lists of the available accommodation submitted by Amidar Housing Corporation with reports from the Jewish Agency's Immigration Department on the number of immigrants due to arrive. The reports included details on their social characteristics and local preferences. But the Department's main concern was to settle immigrants in the available accommodation, and it considered other factors only when suitable pressure was applied....*

From the start, the bureaucratic organization of the absorption process stood out as a primary characteristic of the post-1948 situation, differentiating it from the pre-state absorptive process (Eisenstadt, 1954:135-136). In their careful, round-about way, academic observers noted the dangers of placing immigrants in the care of huge bureaucracies which, by nature, were monistic and authoritarian. Absorption bureaucracies confront the immigrant with what Eisenstadt (1954:173-174) calls a "unity of definition ofthe situations" – in other words, the one and only proper and approved way of doing things in Israel. "The unity of situations", he writes,

> *gives rise...only to the most elementary forms of stability of behaviour. In itself it does not enlarge the immigrant's social space or create active initiative on his part in new roles and organizations. The bureaucratic nature of the conditions of absorption necessarily confines him within rather passive and elementary roles, and does not enable him to extend his activities within the new social structure to such an extent as to give him a feeling of security, 'belonging', or participation.*

Though Eisenstadt and others have done considerable writing on bureaucracy in Israel and other developing countries, they have focused little attention on it as an independent variable in immigrant absorption. Moreover, while carefully phrasing their reservations over the efficacy of bureaucratically-determined integrative processes (see the dense jargon of the preceding passage), they both shift the burden of failure in absorption onto the culturally different immigrants themselves while deflecting outright criticism from the bureaucracies. Since this paper attempts to review the structure and shortcomings of the absorption system in the most explicit way possible, I will risk stepping beyond the bounds of what is implied in such writings in order to set out the fundamental flaws in a bureaucratic structure of absorption.

Two major problems, from an anthropological perspective, are inherent in the very nature of bureaucratic functioning. Buraucracies relate to categories of people that are created in light of the bureaucracies' assigned role and formal organizational components, not to cultural communities or groups whose boundaries and aims are continually fluctuating, and which may not be "approved" by the political system. Second, having an essentially *administrative* function, bureaucracies cannot deal adequately with the dynamics of cultural change and integration. In other words, a

fundamental conflict exists between a bureaucratically-run process of "absorption", in which categories of immigrants (elderly, adult, teenage, child; male and female; married and single; "religious" or "non-religious"; arrivals before or after a particular date; etc.) are artifically channelled into various sectors of society, including occupational and educational frameworks, and the natural process of "adaptation" in which cultural and non-cultural groupings of various kinds seek, over time, accommodation to the host society.

Thus, as Marx indicates, those immigrants who moved (or were moved) to Galilah were those "whose freedom of choice was restricted, and who depended on the accommodation and assistance offered by the authorities". Would they have gone there on their own? Did moving to Galilah in the end contribute positively or negatively to their "absorption"? How did the move to Galilah affect the ethnic community, and therefore its adaptive abilities? To what degree did the move to Galilah lock the immigrants into a certain social and economic stratum? These and many other questions, while they may be asked during the planning phase (in which, it can be safely assumed, the immigrants themselves had no meaningful role, if any), become irrelevant once the "absorptive framework" is set and immigrants channelled into it. The same may be said of all the bureaucracies handling immigration. Absorption, then, becomes a "top-down" process, and its implementation is conducted according to bureaucratic rules, procedures and conceptions – Eisenstadt's "unity of definition of the situations." (A shortcoming in Eisenstadt's approach is that while he deals with the limitations of bureaucratic absorption, he fails to describe just how all-encompassing the buraucracy is, thus reducing its impact.)

Once this formal absorptive situation is understood, the remarks of Eisenstadt quoted in the passage above take on far-reaching implications. The bureaucratially-defined absorption situation, he suggests, determines the essential parameters within which immigrants must confine their adaptive efforts. These parameters are restrictive, stifle initiative, generate dependency upon the bureaucracy and enforce passivity, and, by being outside the mainstream social system, do not lead to either participation in the mainstream or to feelings (certainly mutual) of belonging. Herein lies one of the basic flaws of such a system. All that has been said so far indicates that the bureaucracy arrogates to itself every element and item of the integrative process – something, I argue, that in itself cannot work. But it then goes on to convince (or force) the immigrants to give up their only adaptive vehicle, their ethnic associations, in the promise that the absorption bureaucracy will see to their integration into the very heart of Israeli society. When the immigrants agree, out of a desire to integrate, to liquidate their own ethnic communities and identities, they quickly discover that the bureaucracy cannot "deliver". Instead of finding themselves happily integrated into the mainstream, they find themselves in peripheral development towns, moshavim or housing projects, confined to the lower strata of society, unable to gain upward mobility and unaccepted by the "hosts" with which they identify. Ethnic communities become ethnic elements in pockets of Israeli society, and the dynamic process of adaptation becomes reduced to a static struggle to survive, accompanied by deep feelings of bitterness, anger, frustration and betrayal.

In the end, the reducing of ethnic groups to artificial categories by the bureaucracy has two unwanted effects. On the one hand, it demanded of immigrants as individuals that they cope with Israeli society, though many (from Afro-Asian countries) were lacking the necessary social and technical coping skills. The atomization of immigrant

communities, a result of a lack of a a culture concept, of bureaucratic organization and of channelling, is perhaps the most destructive aspect of bureaucratic absorption. On the other hand, by making ethnicity illegitimate and attempting to break up ethnic groups, the bureaucracy forced the immigrants – who recognized that the artificial absorption system met neither their affective nor their social needs – to reconstitute their cultural associations in an "underground" manner. Thus, for all its attempts to enforce a "melting pot" policy, the bureaucracy did not eliminate either ethnicity nor its adaptive dimension. On the contrary, by replacing adaptation with an ineffective and alienating form of integration, it generated feelings of ethnic solidarity and polarization that stand today in stark contrast to the universal willingness of the immigrants of the fifties to do anything that would advance their integration, even assimilation, into Israeli society. In view of social developments today, we see that the efforts of the absorption bureaucracy to create *mizug galuyot* served only to heighten ethnic differences and widen the "social gap." The essential "lesson" to be learned here is that the absorbers must learn to harness the motivation of immigrants to integrate by supporting their efforts while at the same time allowing the process of adaptation to proceed unhindered insofar as possible. The immigrants desire *mizug* no less than do the bureaucrats and the "host" society; if polarization results, it is due to the system of integration and not to qualities inherent in the immigrants themselves. Ironically, instead of concluding the "absorption" process with the passing of the "wilderness generation", the bureaucratic approach merely postponed it for a generation. The children of the immigrants are today addressing the essential problems of tradition versus Westernization whose answers the absorption agencies tried to dictate to their dependent and vulnerable parents.

At no point did the social scientists of the fifties seriously and explicitly question the need for assigned tasks of, and functioning of the bureaucratic structure itself; indeed, it is probably justified to assume they saw the bureaucracy as necessary not only to meet the physical demands of the mass waves of immigration but also to convey in a "unitary" way the values and expectations of the host society, in addition to new occupational skills. The closest they come to stating their reservations over the bureaucratic dangers pointed out by Eisenstadt is, in general, in common-sensical suggestions that some "primary, non-formal, elements of behaviour" be introduced into the bureaucratic structure, that "officials go beyond purely bureaucratic relations and establish more direct personal relations with those under their care", and that immigrants be helped "into organizations and groups which embrace most of the spheres of social activity" (Eisenstadt, 1954:174-176). Notice that the basic absorption position is preserved: no one speaks of the immigrants as equal "partners"; certainly not of freeing their cultures to interact with the host society. Though Bar Yosef (1959) pays lip-service to the need to differentiate between various "Oriental" groups, the sociological literature dwells almost exclusively on deculturalized structural categories of immigrants-family types, personality types and the like – rather than on disrupted but still functioning cultural systems. The assumptions, it may be inferred, were that *mizug galuyot* on a Western model was indeed the desired aim, that the Eastern cultures were irrelevant to Israeli society and that the immigrants had to be "resocialized" – all this out of a static structuralist analysis that failed to take into account cultural dynamics. Indeed, lacking the cultural dimension, there is no other alternative to the bureaucratic approach, and the most one can hope for is to somewhat "personalize" bureaucrat-immigrant contact.

What, then, was the alternative? In my view it was to allow the natural mechanisms of integration embodied in the cultural dynamic of adaptation to take their course, with such bureaucratic agencies as schools, social welfare offices and housing companies providing limited and culturally-sensitive *support*. Thereby, the legitimate functions of integrative agencies – material support and the transmission of necessary functional skills – would be dissociated from the process of socialization and the synthesizing of the traditional with the new, aspects of adaptation and integration that justly belong to the immigrants themselves. The immigrants of the fifties possessed great resources. They often came as intact communities, and when this was not so, often had "veteran" immigrants from their countries of origin to guide them. They identified highly with Israeli society – even with those aspects that shocked, surprised or concerned them – and possessed a high degree of motivation to join with it, based on a strongly felt tie of common Jewishness. And, despite the Gelblums, they enjoyed an essential legitimacy as Jews, ensuring access to the major institutional spheres of the society. All that was missing in the fifties was the mechanism, the motor that would activate and harness this integrative energy. Supporting the immigrants while allowing them to find their own place in society would have achieved, I contend, a greater degree of integration, albeit pluralistic rather than "absorptive", and at no slower a pace than was actually achieved.

ETHIOPIAN "ABSORPTION": THE FIFTIES REVISITED

A generation separates the mass aliya of the 1950s and that of the Ethiopian Jews of the 1970s and '80s. One would have expected fundamental differences in the conception and organization of the "absorption" process, if for not other reason than that the absorption officials themselves declare incessantly that they will not repeat the "mistakes" of the fifties. The basic integrative situation is also vastly different. In the fifties, a small, economically constrained society of 650,000 was called upon to handle an influx of 700,000 between the years 1948-1952. Most of the newcomers were either traumatized victims of the Holocaust or immigrants from non-Western, mainly pre-industrial societies, and another half a million immigrants, mainly from Morocco, came in the subsequent decade (Sicron, 1957). Today Israel is an established society of more than four million, called upon to integrate a total Ethiopian immigrant population of only 15,000. In the fifties, Israel was forced to erect massive *maabarot*, or transit camps; today an entire infrastructure of absorption centers exists. In the fifties, the absorbers were sure of their ability to turn the Easterners into mirror images of themselves; today, less sure, they nevertheless enjoy the enormous advantage of hindsight.

Yet, as I will argue here, the absorption process has not been reformed or changed in any significant way, nor are the "mistakes" of the fifties being avoided – if, indeed, they are grasped at all. Judged by the four essential features of absorption in the 1950s – the uncompromising "melting pot" concept of *mizug galuyot*; the elimination of culture as an adaptive vehicle; the channelling of immigrants to the periphery of society; and the authoritarian control exerted over the immigrants by the absorption bureaucracy – the process is virtually identical and is generating social problems that are virtually identical.

(1) The "Melting Pot" Concept

Over the years the "melting pot" concept of ethnic mixing on a Western basis has come under increased fire, especially from that policy's victims. Henry Toledano, in his article, "Time to Stir the Melting Pot" (1973:335), writes:

> *The term* mizug galuyot, *which is the pet phrase in Israel for integration, literally means the merging or mixing of the exiles. But in mixing, elements of group A and element of group B are brought together to produce C. C is neither A nor B; it is made up of the best elements A and B have to offer. In Israel, however, the mixing – mizug galuyot – apparently means simply the Ashkenazification of the Sephardim.*
>
> *Integration is said to take place in Israel when a Tunisian Jew is drawn into a Hasidic dance, or when a Moroccan rabbinic student grows peot (sideburns) and learns to discuss the Talmud in fluent Yiddish. This was the process before 1948, and this is the process today.*

Despite vociferous objections on the part of Eastern Jews to the hidden agenda of westernization contained in the melting pot approach, there is no evidence that, in the case of Ethiopian immigrants, the absorption authorities have retreated from the insistence, characteristics of the fifties, that they be stripped of their traditional culture in favor of the modern "Israeli" one. Ora Donyo, one of the key policy-makers of the Department of Immigration and Absorption of the Jewish Agency, states explicitly that the Agency operates according to the principles of *mizug galuyot* (Donyo, 1982). In the case of the Ethiopians, however, this has a double meaning: general and religious.

The general process of forced "mixing" begins the moment Ethiopian immigrants set foot in Israel. They are endowed with Hebrew names – often with no connection to their original ones – and given new birth-dates, since categorization into the myriad cubbyholes of a bureaucratic society cannot proceed without the reckoning of precise age, a practice not followed in Ethiopia itself. Their traditional clothes are exchanged for jogging suits and tennis shoes, *kipot* are plopped on the heads of the children (and adults, if they agree). Within a short time the immigrants have an entirely new identity and physical appearance.

The imposition of skullcaps on a population that did not wear religious head coverings (with the exception of the priests) indicates the additional pressure placed on the immigrants to "melt" into the only religious framework accepted by the absorption agencies, that of Jewish orthodoxy as interpreted by the Chief Rabbinate. It precedes what has become one of the most traumatic and bitter experiences in Ethiopian "absorption", the demand that the immigrants undergo a ritual ceremony variously interpreted as a symbolic "conversion" (*giur b'khumra*) or merely as the reestablishing of long severed links between Ethiopian and world Jewries. Opposition to this ceremony is widespread within the community and occasionally even degenerates into violence. Many of the young people, together with a considerable number of older priests, view it as casting doubt on their Judaism. Even when the rabbis mitigated their demand from symbolic circumcision to merely a ritual immersion, opposition remained strong and adamant. Nevertheless, the struggle is an

uneven one, since the rabbinate simply refuses to marry anyone who has not satisfied their religious requirements.

Whether in the religious or general social sense, forced acceptance of "Israeli" norms is uncompromisingly imposed upon the immigrant Ethiopian community. Conversely, the retention of traditional Ethiopian elements of culture is discouraged. Despite the emphasis on their "spiritual absorption", not one Ethiopian synagogue exists to serve the approximately 15,000 immigrants; nor is there a single community center for the *edah*. Religious holidays are marked according to accepted Jewish-Israeli practices, and the only Ethiopian religious ceremony which has been even minimally retained (and "approved") in Israel is the *Sigd*, a ceremony of "return to Zion" that was revived with the help, not of the absorption agencies, but of one of the voluntary activist groups. And despite declared aims of "guarding the status and the dignity of the elders of the community" (Donyo, 1983:7), there is no significant framework for consulting with them or bringing them into the decision-making process.

The struggle of the Association of Ethiopian Jews over the use of Ethiopian musical instruments should also be mentioned in the context of Beta Israel attempts to retain elements of their culture in the face of the assimilative pressures of the absorptive bureaucracy. The Association, an Ethiopian self-help group, has as one of its primary goals the retention of Ethiopian Jewish culture, both as a value in itself and as a means of uniting the community during the difficult process of integration and maintaining its morale. It has therefore organized a folkdance troupe to appear before both Ethiopian and Israeli audiences. A major problem is the lack of instruments, since few could be brought to Israel by the immigrants themselves. The Association then turned to the Jewish Agency which has a considerable collection stored away. However, the Agency (or more accurately, the Department of Immigration and Absorption), views the activities of the Association as essentially political, even "Marxist", and refuses to have any contact with it. The Association has attempted to gain access to the instruments by appealing to the Ministry of Education, the National Council for Ethiopian Jews and various figures in the folkdance world – all to no avail. This seemingly minor matter reflects wider and more basic realities. The absorption agencies might cooperate to a point with Ethiopian *individuals* on their payroll, but will boycott Ethiopian activist groups. To the degree that the agencies will allow traditional cultural elements to be preserved, it will only be as innocuous and selective elements of "folklore". The Association's dance troupe is still much too "ethnic" and "political" to be tolerated. Thus, under the "melting pot" approach, culture can be retained in selective "folklore" forms only, and then only when it has been sufficiently separated by time and organization from its cultural-ethnic and political context (Halper and Abramovitch, 1984). As in the fifties, ethnicity, as opposed to "*edah*-ness" (*ethniut* versus *'adatiut*), continues to be illegitimate.

It is in this perspective that we can understand the meaning of the new term "adaptation" (*histaglut*) as used, together with the traditional "absorption" (*klita*) by absorption officials. On the surface, the adoption of the term "adaptation" would seem to imply not only a culture concept but also the realization that "absorption" must be tempered by some concessions to a culture's right and ability to conduct its own integrative effort according to its own integrative goals, a significant advance on the fifties. Closer examination, however, reveals that in absorption jargon "adaptation" really means the immigrants' acceptance of, and adjustment to, the norms imposed by the host society – in other words, absorption – but with the superficial involvement

of immigrant representatives in the absorption process. Thus, describing what she means by "the process of adaptation", Donyo (1983:6) speaks first of counselors and interpreters, "all of them Falashas" (Donyo still uses that term even though for years the community has explicitly said it considers it offensive). Their job is to act as "bridges between the other providers of services and the immigrants,....through them the workers learn to understand unknown behavior...and can transmit messages that would not be understood by the immigrants without the formulation and brokerage of the counselors". In other words, the role of the official "Falashas" (who often refer to themselves as "glorified waiters"), is to get the message through to the absorbees and to explain to the absorbers "unknown behaviors" that can then better be channelled. This is a far cry from the concept of cultural adaptation as understood by anthropologists, and indicates adherence to the notion of *mizug galuyot*.

(2) The Continued Lack of a Culture Concept

The continued unwillingness of the absorbers to consider Beta Israel culture as having any meaningful role in a true process of adaptation obviates the need for either a culture concept or for a deep understanding of Ethiopian Jewish history and culture. Lacking a culture concept or true understanding of the dynamics of cultural adaptation, the absorption officials must fall back on essentially the same a-cultural (or anti-ethnic) views that characterized their predecessors in the fifties. Ethiopian immigrants must be seen as coming from a situation so different and backward that it must be eliminated in order for "absorption" to take place (the term "primitivity" is self-consciously avoided, though still implied), and the immigrants must be considered as essentially incompetent to make decisions regarding their own integration.

Discussions of Ethiopian culture begin, then, by emphasizing how far removed Ethiopian reality is from that of modern Israeli society. Donyo (1983:5), for example, asserts that "their need to adapt to new things is greater than that of every previous group of immigrants" – a debatable proposition. "Everything is new for them: the climate, living in a building, the white faces, the language, the type of food and its taste, the use of money, the encounter with women filling roles outside the family, and many other things". She then goes on to describe "our care" (*tipul*) of the new immigrants: highly-structured programs in absorption centers supposedly lasting only a year, then other absorptive measures once the immigrants receive permanent housing, including extensive use of boarding schools (Donyo, 1983:6-7).

Articles stressing Beta Israel primitivity appear regularly in the popular press, dwelling on the problems the immigrants have with gas burners, on their propensity to place clothes in the refrigerator and their amazement at seeing cars and airplanes. A TV film showed Ethiopian children learning how to use knives and forks as Israeli children complained about how the Ethiopians "stink". But, as in the fifties, these uninformed views of culturally-different immigrants have found academic legitimization. One of the most notorious "reports" is that by Gershon Avner, a former president of Haifa University, in a pamphlet entitled *The Falashas Today*, published by the American Jewish Committee. Among other things, Avner states authoritatively, but incorrectly on almost every point:

> *Almost all arrivals have never seen, nor used, a bed, a cupboard, gas for cooking, electricity, a water tap, a toothbrush, shoes, stockings, Western clothes.*

At first, they perceive danger in the swinging door of a cupboard; electricity bewilders and awes them. They cannot count, just as they cannot read or write, and they have no notion of dates or time (Avner, 1982:5).

An even superficial knowledge of modern Beta Israel history, readily available from books, from experts on Ethiopian and Beta Israel life and from the immigrants themselves belies attempts such as those mentioned above to portray Beta Israel as "primitives". Though pockets of Jews have indeed remained largely untouched by the outside world, the vast majority of Beta Israel, living in the region of the provincial (and once national) capital of Gondar, have had extensive contacts with non-Ethiopians for the past century and a half. Since the 1830s, Protestant missionaries from England, Germany and Switzerland have proselytized intensively among the Jews in Ethiopia. The French-Jewish Orientalist, Jacques Faitlovitch, following his mentor Joseph Halevy into Ethiopia, began in 1904 a campaign to bring modern Jewish and European culture to the Beta Israel, to "reform" their religious practices so as to win them the recognition of the world Jewish community, and to combat missionary inroads. About forty young Jews were sent to Europe for study in the 1920s and '30s, and modern Jewish schools were opened upon their return in Addis Ababa and some of the larger villages.

The Italian invasion of Ethiopia put an end to most of Faitlovitch's efforts, but a connection to Israel was established in the 1950s. In 1955, twenty-seven Ethiopian-Jewish students were brought to Israel for training at the Kfar Batya teachers' seminary. At about the same time, a boarding school for Beta Israel teachers was established in Asmara. Eventually, twenty-seven schools, employing thirty-six qualified Beta Israel teachers, were opened in the villages, though Faitlovitch's death in 1955 gave the Jewish Agency an excuse to close most of them. Nonetheless, seven schools remained open, in addition to several ORT facilities serving Beta Israel pupils (Kessler, 1982: 106-169).

In the meantime, wider contacts with modern Ethiopian society were proceeding apace. When I arrived in Gondar in 1966 for fieldwork among the Beta Israel, I found a group of almost twenty Beta Israel students studying in the local high schools or public health and teachers' colleges. Two young people were preparing to continue their religious studies in a *yeshiva* in Torino, Italy. I was aware that other Jews were employed in the city – or in other cities and towns surrounding the Jewish area – and that many others made regular use of Gondar for weekly market activities. By this time visiting groups of European or American Jews were not a rarity, and Israeli doctors who were working in the public health college in Gondar established a series of clinics in some Jewish villages, training the young people to deal with childbirth and with minor illnesses. During the sixties and seventies, hundreds of Ethiopian Jews, girls as well as boys, completed elementary school in the villages, and high school and vocational programs in the cities. Many were drafted into, or joined the Ethiopian army; others sought employment in Addis Ababa; still others emigrated to Israel. By 1973, when the Rabbinate finally recognized them as Jews, approximately 350 Beta Israel were already living in Israel, each having found his own way to enter the country "illegally", and stay.

The Ethiopian community in Israel is much more diverse than one would expect from reading Donyo, Avner and newspaper articles. It covers a wide gamut from religious to traditional to secular; from isolated rural groups to rural groups exposed to

outside influences; to urban groups from illiterate to university educated; from traditionally-oriented to Marxist; and so on. Certainly the potential exists, both in the community's general exposure to modern influences and in the significant numbers of well-educated younger people, for the immigrants to have a much greater say in decisions affecting their integration than is today the case. They could perhaps even move to a more viable adaptation model of integration.

Moreover, a body of expert knowledge, though admittedly still inadequate, exists on both Ethiopian Jewish history and culture, and on the dynamics of ethnic integration in Israel. In order to make that point, a symposium was held in February 1985 under the auspices of the Israeli Anthropological Association, attended by twenty-seven scholars and applied anthropologists with extensive knowledge of Beta Israel.

Why, then, are the vast majority of experts not consulted or given a meaningful role in the integrative process? Why are the policy-makers and their staffs still so ignorant of Beta Israel culture? Why has no handbook of Ethiopian Jewish culture and history ever been prepared for the thousands of workers who deal with Ethiopian immigrants? Why is the absorption machinery still committed to "care" of immigrants rather than to dynamic adaptation? The reason, in my opinion, is traceable to the continued adherence to the melting pot approach. *Mizug galuyot*, as we have seen, rejects the notion of legitimate Jewish ethnicity in Israel and endeavors to eliminate it in favor of "absorption" on a Western model. The very notion of culture, then, is perceived as dangerous, unwanted and, more to the point, irrelevant. By emphasizing the backwardness of Beta Israel culture, the absorption officials can easily justify its elimination. The only "advance" from the fifties, perhaps, is that instead of claiming that immigrant culture must be destroyed because it is "primitive", the reason given today is that it is simply untenable and must be replaced by "modern" ways of doing things "for the immigrants' own good". As a result, academic knowledge of Ethiopian culture is also seen as irrelevant, and since most academics can be relied upon to criticize the present system and its absorptive assumptions, it is considered better to get along without them (although a few must be retained in non-decision-making capacities in order, again, to lend academic respectability to the absorption process). It is no accident that, as in the 1950s, the greatest academic input comes from psychologists – those who can help change behavior in desired ways without referring to the immigrants' culture context. Finally, lacking a cultural context and the self-integrative potential inherent in the adaptative approach, the immigrants can be presented as they in fact are without the adaptive dimension of culture; child-like innocents who are basically unable to make the transition without the enveloping "care" of the absorption bureaucracy. The circle is complete: without culture the immigrants must do as the absorbers say "for their own good" or risk remaining outside the dominant society.

The keystone of the contemporary absorption system – and the most telling expression of the melting pot approach – is the absorption center (one of the few innovations since the days of the *maabarot*), where the immigrants' intended ten months' stay is extended to four or five years. The centers are in some ways a regression from the controversial transit camps, however. In the first place, they tend to be more peripheral to the mainstream society. The *maabarot*, for all their segregating qualities, were at least located near the major population centers (the placing of immigrants in "development" towns began in the mid-fifties). Absorption

centers are located, with but a few exceptions, in the economically and socially weaker areas of the country. The officials of the Jewish Agency, according to their own testimony at the Knesset Immigration and Absorption Committee, claim the Ethiopians are too "primitive" to cope with the larger cities in the center of the country where 85% of the Jewish population lives. Moreover, in the fifties, Agency officials tried to scatter immigrants from a particular country or city of origin over several *maabarot*, but the sheer numbers often precluded this, so that, despite pressures to absorb, cultural communities were able to maintain at least a modicum of solidarity and mutual support. In the absorption centers, scattering is complete. Not only are members of extended families often placed in different and distant centers, but special centers and boarding arrangements are made for school-age children and teenagers.

Most conspicuous to anyone familiar with the absorption center organization, however, is the absolute control the center staffs exercise over the lives of the immigrants – making them more like "inmates" in some "total institution" (Ashkenazi and Weingrod, 1984:10). All decisions, from such petty ones as lunch menus, when the telephone may be used and who may visit, up to such fateful ones as what school to send the children to or eventual location, are made by the staffs and their superiors. Rarely are immigrants consulted on issues effecting their lives and futures, and certainly no cooperation exists with the different Ethiopian organizations that have emerged to give voice to the immigrants' grievances. As far as I am aware, no center has encouraged the formation of an immigrants' committee to give the residents input into the decision-making process.

Indeed, the best description of the immigrants' status is that suggested by several speakers at the Anthropological Symposium on Ethiopian Absorption, namely, that of "wards". They are not wards of the State *per se*, but of two other masters: the Jewish Agency, the Ministries of Absorption and Education and other formal agencies of absorption, on the one hand; and the orthodox religious establishment that determines matters of individual status, religious observance and type of education, on the other.

Within this totally administered setting, Ethiopian Jewish culture has been immobilized and neutralized. The issue of menstrual practices illustrates this well. One of the basic norms of Beta Israel Judaism is that of family purity. Following the Biblical injunctions, a Beta Israel woman withdraws physically from her home to a hut (*beit nida*) for the duration of her menstrual period, during which she is ritually unclean. In Israel, no provision is made in the centers to accommodate women. Rather, they are simply but firmly told, "We don't do things like that here". Rivka Hanegbi, a senior psychologist with the Jewish Agency, told the anthropological symposium of the great sufferings this lack of flexibility brings upon the women. They are often filled with feelings of guilt over "polluting" their families, suffer insomnia and depression, and sometimes hide the entire week in closets. Even if we grant that such practices may have to change in Israel, cannot change be instituted more humanely? Should not the system, especially in the first weeks and months after immigration, show more flexibility, more willingness to entertain non-conforming but innocuous cultural practices? In general, questions such as menstrual practices bring up a moral dimension little considered by the absorptive machinery. What is the legitimate limit of bureaucratic intervention in immigrants' lives? Save, perhaps, for such extreme practices as clitorectomy and glottorectomy, it might be suggested that the more

personal a particular matter, the less justification exists for outside dictates. But, as we have clearly seen, even such mild relativism flies in the face of Israel's uncompromising *mizug galuyot*, which must eliminate any and all non-"accepted" practices, no matter how trivial.

Beyond the moral issues are practical questions of plain effectiveness. Though the transition from Eastern to Western society was accomplished quickly in the fifties and sixties, no one has shown that, given the immigrants' close identification with the state and strong motivation to integrate, the policy of *mizug galuyot* was superior over, say, a support system that would have allowed adaptation to take place over a generation or more within the tolerant framework of cultural pluralism. Indeed, given the resurgence of Eastern culture in Israel today and the bitter realities of the "social gap", one can question whether outward pressures to conform did not give rise to deeper resentments that might, in the future, endanger the social fabric, especially that woven with Western values. For beyond practical questions of absorption versus adaptation lurks yet another, deeper consideration: that of alienation and rage towards the absorbers, for robbing one of primordial identity.

To be sure, the Beta Israel view themselves as Jews and aspire to integration, even assimilation, within the mainstream society. But there is evidence that their attachment to Ethiopian culture goes far deeper than mere folklore. The notion that one's diaspora identity is inauthentic and should be jettisoned in favor of "authentic" Israeli identity is all well and good; many immigrants themselves may even agree with it. But three intervening considerations call that view into question: (1) Diaspora Jewish culture cannot be so easily isolated from that of the long-time host society, so that "Ethiopian" becomes as fundamental to a person's identity as "Jewish"; (2) The "authentic" Israeli identity may disappoint, and may be rejected by the immigrants as a shallow imitation of non-Jewish Western cultures; and (3) Even if the immigrants agree to forego their traditional identities in favor of a new "Israeli" one, artificial expedition of the process (as has been the case since 1948) destroys both the ability of the immigrant culture and the individual immigrant to truly absorb the new ways. This leaves the immigrants (viz. many of the children of the fifties' immigrants) with neither traditional nor "Israeli" identity, but with a feeling of simmering rage. The policy of *mizug galuyot*, anti-ethnic as it is, will generate, I suggest, deep-seated resentments and social pathologies to the same extent (or more) that it advances the causes of "absorption".

(3) The Channelling of Ethiopians to the Margins of Society

Despite lip-service to the contrary (for example, Ethiopians were not settled in the development town of Beth Shemesh because of a proper concern over the dearth of employment opportunities – a decision, however, recently reversed), Beta Israel immigrants are channelled, like their counterparts of the mid-1950s, into peripheral development towns. Commencing with the large-scale aliya in 1980, all Ethiopians were placed in absorption centers in development areas, and none of the major population centers. Only when all these facilities had been filled to over-capacity were a few immigrants channelled to centers in the Jerusalem and Natanya areas.

As in the case of Galilah in the fifties, placement of immigrants in permanent housing is conducted without consulting the immigrants themselves. It is also done, in

many cases, without consulting – or even forewarning – the host communities or their political representatives. In Nahariya, for instance, great indignation was expressed at the fact that hundreds of Ethiopians were bussed into town in the dead of night and left at the local authority's doorstep (*Ha'aretz*, December 26, 1984). Even in cases where the authorities were informed, little was done to prepare them or their towns for the impending arrival of so large an immigrant population. In some cases – Safed, Ma'alot, Yeruham, Eilat, Acre, Tiberias, and Upper Nazareth, to name but a few – vociferous opposition was voiced. The Ethiopians, it was claimed not altogether unfairly, would complete for already scarce jobs and housing in the hard-hit development areas (*Koteret Rashit*, January 2, 1985:pp.14-16). With this reservoir of fear and resentment to feed upon, hostility against the immigrants was increased by the spread of unfounded rumors: the Ethiopians brought diseases, they were not really Jewish, they were primitives, and the like. That the absorption agencies did virtually nothing to prepare the way for the Ethiopians in these tense and economically-deprived areas is bad enough; that they refused to settle them in urban areas where jobs and housing are more readily available, and where the Israeli mainstream lives, indicates to what degree bureaucratic decisions are able to override the desires and well-being of the immigrant population.

Significantly, the only option offered to the immigrants, a moshav near Kiryat Gat, was rejected by them. My impression is that they are more interested in being with the mainstream population in the larger cities than in either development towns or moshavim. Since secular kibbutzim are considered "inappropriate" to the "religious" Beta Israel population, they did not even come into consideration (*Jerusalem Post*, December 30, 1984).

Channelling takes a social as well as a geographical form. Perhaps the only effective inter-ministerial committee on Ethiopian absorption is that composed of religious officials of the various ministries, the "Committee for Spiritual Absorption". Early on in Ethiopian immigration, an arrangement was reached between the Jewish Agency and the Chief Rabbinate that all matters pertaining to individual status, education and religious observance would become the sole province of the orthodox establishment. A symbolic conversion (*giur l'khumra*) was imposed upon the Beta Israel community. Despite concessions on the part of the rabbinate in the face of fierce, sometimes violent resistance, all those wishing to get married or to receive other services granted to Jews must perform the ceremony.

Wards of the orthodox establishment, the Ethiopians find themselves channelled almost exclusively into institutions in the religious sector. All school-age children must be enrolled in religious schools, and where the religious schools are full, special classes are opened in the centers in preference to sending them to "secular" schools. This rule applies to children and teenagers sent to boarding schools, and even to students over the age of eighteen attending vocational programs. Needless to say, conformity to accepted orthodox practices is enforced in these institutions – the wearing of *kipot*, for example, a custom not followed in Ethiopia – and few if any Ethiopian traditions are retained. Indeed, as one teacher put it on TV, her job is to "uproot" the religious "superstitions" of the Ethiopians and replace them with "the true faith".

It is an open question whether or not the immigrants themselves would choose these institutions over others, the orthodox way over Eastern traditionalism or Western secularism, or development towns over kibbutzim and cities. The point is that without having been consulted, the Ethiopians are being channelled into certain

sectors of society rather than others, a practice that must affect their integration in basic ways.

Ironically, the lack of a culture concept and the refusal to bring either Ethiopians or academic experts into the absorption process defeats even those measures taken by the agencies to enhance Beta Israel integration. This is especially the case in the field of education. The question of schooling is an extremely difficult one in the Ethiopian case. The very conception of the nature, content and function of formal education must be radically different in a peasant-based non-industrial society than in Israel. Cultural factors, such as not entering into discussion with teachers and varying concepts of time, must also be taken into account (Lord, 1970), together with the Ethiopians' own perceptions of the value of education in general, and different kinds of education (vocational versus academic, for example, or technical versus humanistic), as means of integration and mobility in Israeli society.

The absorption agencies have tried vigorously (within the limitations of their commitments to sending children to religious institutions) to utilize *ulpanim* (intensive Hebrew courses), the general school system and the universities in the process of absorption and mobility. But their lack of sensitivity to cultural and social variables undercuts their own best efforts. From my experience in observing *ulpanim* and speaking with teachers and pupils, for example, I find that the standard Hebrew courses are being taught without attention being paid to the fact that many pupils are in fact illiterate or semi-literate. This presents an entirely different pedagogical problem to the teaching of Hebrew to literate immigrants. Consequently, many Ethiopians leave *ulpan* with a barely minimal grasp of the language (Kislev, 1985). By the same token, those who have followed the progress at the various universities of Ethiopian students – about ninety in number – are aware that beyond the praiseworthy willingness to accept them, no effective program has been devised to prepare them for the university, and many, if not most, are failing. Similar problems of expectations and performance are common in elementary and secondary schools.

This, then, is another, more subtle type of channelling. By creating formal opportunities without adequate planning, the absorption agencies ensure the rechannelling of Ethiopian students into the same working-class, development-town society that has generated so much bitterness among the previous victims of the "social gap".

(4) The Bureaucratic Organization of Absorption (Continued)

This last point brings us to the fourth of the essential characteristics of Ethiopian – and nineteen fifties – absorption: the bureaucratic organization of the absorption process. Little need be said about the cumbersomeness of a bureaucracy employing thousands of absorption center staff, social workers from myriad national and local authorities, teachers, *somchot* (para-social workers attached to Ethiopian familes), volunteers, and echelons of higher and lower officialdom in the processing of just 15,000 immigrants, especially given the duplication and bitter rivalry of the two major absorption bodies: the Jewish Agency and the Ministry of Absorption. Rather, it is the structure of absorption process, essentially identical to that of the fifties, which concerns us here. I contend that the very elements that characterized – and defeated – the absorption process in the fifties and sixties continue to characterize the "absorption" of Ethiopian immigrants in the eighties. These are: the dividing of immigrants into culture-less bureaucratic categories; the ineffectiveness of an artificial

integrative policy; the effect of separating the immigrants from the host society while hindering both their acceptance and their learning of necessary social skills; the debilitating dependency generated; the atomization of ethnic groups into individual units; and the spawning of alienation and polarization produced by the channelling of immigrants to the social peripheries.

Instead of cataloguing the stages and settings of Ethiopian dependency upon the bureaucratic absorption system, some of which have been described above, it might be better merely to point out that at no time, from the moment of entry into the country until the assignment of permanent housing, do the immigrants have any say whatsoever in any aspect of their own integration. "Absorption" takes place entirely within artificial situations such as absorption centers, and when finally free of such total institutions, the Ethiopians are dispersed across the country so that even the "underground" process of ethnic adaptation is difficult to maintain. Though many praise-worthy attempts are made by the bureaucracy to train Ethiopians in vocational skills, and, in different ways, to prepare them for modern Israeli society, the end assumption is the same as it was a generation ago: that "preparation" on an individual basis in formal settings will guarantee integration. Indications are that this approach will fail just as it did in the fifties, and for the same reasons. Significantly, though the immigrants are highly motivated to integrate, the number of Ethiopian activist organizations suggests that the Beta Israel are insisting upon an active role in planning and implementing their "absorption" to a degree far beyond that of the more passive immigrants of the fifties. The hostility these groups face from absorption officials and the absolute refusal to cooperate with them reveal the continued exclusivity claimed by the bureaucracy in all matters related to absorption.

Today, it is true, the absorption officials are much less confident than they were three decades ago as to the effectiveness of their policies, themselves stressing the need to avoid the "mistakes" of the fifties (Donyo, 1983:6). They publicize the considerations behind absorption policy, participate in public discussions and, at least outwardly, seem to consult with experts and immigrants. But, I suggest that since their assumptions, views, policies and structures and hence results, are virtually identical to those of the fifties, the policy-makers are extremely defensive and insecure. These characteristics, when coupled with the inherent exclusivity of bureaucratic operations, serve to neutralize the seeming openness of the policy-making process. Policies are still formulated entirely by the bureaucrats themselves, although actual decision-making often devolves upon the absorption center staffs who have little knowledge of Ethiopian culture or of the broader issues of integration. Consequently, the absorptive system today is characterized by a plethora of policies which preempt any attempt by the immigrants to choose things for themselves, but which leave huge gaps in the processing of immigrants, that are filled in on an *ad hoc* basis. Individuals familiar wth the absorption system today cannot but be impressed by the fact that while the bureaucracy controls every aspect of Ethiopian absorption, the decision-makers often speak and act as if this were the first wave of immigration in Israeli history. If anything, it is abundantly evident that the "mistakes" of the fifties are being repeated with the faithfulness of a director's script.

With a few exceptions (Ashkenazi and Weingrod, 1984; Halper, 1984 and perhaps the "behind the scenes" urgings of those anthropologists, sociologists and psychologists who have some access to the decision-makers on certain occasions), the social science community of today has remained as compliant and uncritical of the absorption

process as was that of the 1950s. To be sure, myriad studies have been done or are underway on the Ethiopians, but the absorptive machinery remains intact and more or less unscathed by academic criticism. As in the fifties, most researchers seem content to accept the structure of absorption as it is in concept and organization, concentrating either on immigrant behaviors that must be changed and suggesting how, or offering suggestions on how to make the bureaucratic system more effective without calling for its drastic revision or elimination. Just as Almars (1958) saw fit to remind his colleagues of the fifties of their ethnic responsibilities towards the objects of their studies, so too might we be reminded today of the special responsibility of field workers towards the "objects" of their studies – especially those as powerless and dependent as Beta Israel. If anything, it is hoped that this paper will stimulate discussion of the shortcomings of the absorptive process in addition to those of the objects of that process, and will correct the "blaming the victim" tendency (Ryan, 1972) in immigrant research in Israel.

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