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Diaspora Within a Diaspora;
Ethiopian Jews and Racial Prejudice in the State of Israel

by

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Diaspora Within a Diaspora;

Ethiopian Jews and Racial Prejudice in the State of Israel

Thesis Abstract -- Idaho State University (2023)

Antisemitic mentalities toward Jewish people have forced populations of Jews to disperse around the globe for thousands of years. As these populations established and assimilated to their diverse locations, there was a separation in Jewish practice and authority. Ashkenazic and Sephardic Jews of Europe gained higher rank when the western world rose with industrialism and modernity, giving them a sense of power over other Jewish populations. The European practice of racial eliteness found in white skin, not only deemed dark skinned Jews as ‘other’, but restricted historical narratives of dark-skinned Jews. When the State of Israel was established in 1948, Ethiopian Jews were not included under the Law of Return, even though Jewish leaders were aware of their existence. The State of Israel was established on racial prejudices and authoritative powers that were more unique to European Judaism than it was to any other form of Jewishness, creating a modern state of racial inequality that lasts today.

KEY WORDS:

Judaism, Jews, Jewishness, Jewish Identity, Diaspora, Ashkenazim, Sephardic, Beta Israel, Ethiopian Jews, Ethiopia, Hebrew, Israel, State of Israel, Graenum Berger, Racism, Racial Inequality, Racial Prejudice, Westernization, White Jewishness, Contemporary Judaism, Modernity, Modern Judaism, Zionism, Anti-semitism, African Judaism.

INTRODUCTION

Diaspora, in migration studies, is a term used to describe the dispersion of people that results in their relocation in a dramatic or visible number. Jews have been one exemplary group to experience extreme diaspora. Records, like those found in the Holy Bible, provide a narrative of Jewish existence over 3,000 years ago and that Jews have dispersed all over the globe from the Holy Land of Israel. The attention to this event by theologians, scientists, and historians has brought to light more empirical evidence that continues to expand on the outcomes of Jewish dispersal.

Lines of research trace the Jewish diaspora in connection to global events like the 14th century Black Death where communities of Jews were slaughtered on the accusation of causing plague and bringing death to Europe. The Spanish Inquisition of the 15th century cleansed the Iberian Peninsula of Jewish communities, forcing conversion to the Dominican Order or expulsion of those who failed to comply. And the WWII Holocaust, where roughly six million Jews were transported into concentration camps, often being met with death. In an attempt to flee the hostile discrimination and pogroms placed upon them, able Jews fled to find refuge in other parts of the world.

Despite enlightenment, industrialism, science, and pluralism in a developing world, there remained a persistent intolerance of Jews from one generation to the next—also known as antisemitism. Antisemitism is the term to describe the practice of hostility, prejudice, or discrimination against Semitic peoples. Questions I primarily began to ask about antisemitism included, where did antisemitism begin? What has fed this long history of intolerance? and, ‘where do contemporary practices of antisemitism stand now and why?’ In search of these

questions, my studies have ushered me to trace the footsteps of different Jewish groups through diverse global events to discover if dispersed populations ever regained a sense of ‘home’ or ‘belonging.’

When Israel was established halfway through the twentieth century, it created a homeland for the Jewish diaspora who migrated to the new Israeli state under the Israeli government’s ‘Law of Return.’ Jews hailed from far corners of the earth under the perception that there would once again be a homeland in Israel free from persecution and hate. However, I investigate how this is different. Israeli law was created under specific characteristics that mimicked Western ideology and mirrored modern Jewish identities. Jewish populations who did not share those characteristics and identities were not accepted or were marginalized, including Jewish tribes in Africa.

Richard Hull, the author of *Jews and Judaism in African History*, regularly taught at New York University on Jewish History from antiquity to modernity, focusing much of his course work and scholarly work on Africa.¹ Hull believes that Jewish history dates back to 5000 BCE in Africa, and that Jews have “played a colossal role in the history of the continent, one that is hugely disproportionate to their numbers.”² In many topics of interest, he suggests Jewish influence is widely marginalized and sped over in contemporary history. Not only in Africa but all over the world.³

¹ Hull, Richard, *Jews and Judaism in African History* (Markus Wiener Publishers, 2009).

² Hull, *Jews and Judaism*, pg. xi.

³ Hull, *Jews and Judaism*, pg. xx.

The broad scope of Hull's vision was not only to achieve a comprehensive narrative of Africa—that he claims did not exist—but also to highlight a dire need to “correct the global Ashkenazi-centric perspectives and Eurocentric origins of most Jewish histories.”⁴ He suggests that historians must acknowledge Jewish identity—Ashkenazi, Sephardi, Mizrahi, Beta Israel – and treat their respective histories based on their defining characteristics. In doing so, scholars must also revisit the current ‘bias grips’ that disables scholarly academia on the subject. These ‘bias grips’, or namely Ashkenazi/Eurocentric influences aren’t only historical flaws, suggests Hull, but can be examined and proven. In other words, Jewish histories were written under the influence of westernized experience, identity, and perception. I echo much of the same sentiment, emphasizing the necessity to include Jewish history from the African continent and investigate Jewish identity within their respective characteristics.

Sporadically during the first millennium, Ethiopian Jews had been driven far from the global view when forced from the country's center and coastal cities to the north-northwest outer rim. Christian and Muslim powers drove the Jews to find refuge in tribal communities, often hidden in mountain ranges. The geological implications sheltered the tribes from being exposed to global events, including modern science, medicine, and yes, religion. The separation that Ethiopian Jews faced, prohibited the tribes from reflecting contemporary characteristics that would easily grant them a right to return to Israel during the twentieth century.

The debate over Ethiopian Jews, known at the time as the ‘Falasha’ (a term Ethiopian Jews deem derogative), had been circulating since the early twentieth century. Global Jewish leaders considered whether or not the Ethiopian Jews had authentic lineal ties to Judaism until

⁴ Hull, *Jews and Judaism*, pg. xii-xiii.

accepting them as Beta Israeli brethren before the 1920s. Although Israel gained state legitimacy in 1948, it would take almost 30 additional years until Ethiopian Jews could migrate to Israel. In addition to the question of whether or not Ethiopian Jews had the right to return to Israel, they also faced different treatment plans in their absorption, placement, and reemployment programs once they arrived in Israel.

To investigate the disparaging indifference in Ethiopian acceptance, absorption, and placement in Israel requires acute attention to Graenum Berger. Berger organized the AAEJ (American Association of Ethiopian Jews) that brought mass immigration of Beta Israel from Ethiopia. Berger first stumbled upon ‘the Falasha Jews’ in 1955 after which he made the moral decision to dedicate his life to their cause. For over three decades, Berger corresponded with international politicians, global powers, and religious leaders, but was often met with cold shoulders and deaf ears.

One of the leading reasons for Berger's consistent frustrations are significantly tied to Jewish identity. The majority of Jews in the world today derive from European/Ashkenazi groups. Therefore, the majority of politicians and leaders that Berger contacted shared the same Western mentalities that discriminated against Ethiopian Jews. Those correspondences are the leading resource for this analysis to demonstrate the contemporary issue of identity and race in Israel today.

Before outlining the methods of this research, it must also be disclosed that there is a similar issue of identity biases when mining archives. In an attempt to single out which archive would best suit the research of Ethiopian Jews and Graenum Berger, there were a few things to consider: (1) which archives in the United States primarily span on Jewish history, (2) what

politics/policies do those archives sustain, (3) what do the collections consist as a whole, and (4) what was is the main objective of this project? Considering those questions, the Center for Jewish History in New York City, and the American Jewish Archives in Cincinnati, Ohio, became two candidates for the project.

Each establishment met the required needs of this project until investigating the collection descriptions and archive history. The Center for Jewish History in New York City was only recently established in 2000 when the five partner organizations collaborated on bringing their repositories together, the associations being: the American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS), American Sephardi Federation, Leo Baeck Institute, Yeshiva University Museum, and YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. Together the collections equal more than 500 million documents, as well as textiles, art pieces, ritual objects, film, photographs, and more.

While the prestigious Center of Jewish History in NYC—an affiliate of governmental Smithsonian studies and Google Cultural Institute—is enticing to be sure, the five partner organizations deserve a second glance. The AJHS was first established in 1892 under the plight to record and collect American Jewish History, the American Sephardi Federation focuses on the Sephardic movement and history originating from the Iberian Peninsula, and the Leo Baeck Institute is an international research institute that devotes to the study of the history and culture of German-speaking Jewry, the Yeshiva University Museum preserved traditional Jewish educational transcripts focused on the study of Rabbinic literature and orthodoxy, primarily the Talmud and halacha (Jewish Law), and YIVO is an organization that preserves, studies, and teaches the cultural history of Jewish life throughout Eastern Europe, Germany, and partly Russia.

The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives (AJA) in Cincinnati, Ohio, was established with Dr. Jacob Marcus's mission in mind that Jewish history in the United States would flourish, even 'intelligently and consciously' to reflect and preserve Jewish 'past, and future'. Located on the small campus of Hebrew Union College, it has grown to consist of well over fifteen million documents, narrating histories in countless ways, and preserving artifacts under more private conditions. On the plaque in front of the building, it reads:

During the winter of 1947, Dr. Jacob Rader Marcus persuaded his colleague and friend, Dr. Nelson Glueck, President of the Hebrew Union College (HUC), to authorize the establishment of the American Jewish Archives in the original library building of HUC. He appointed Dr. Marcus to serve as director; Rabbi Bertram W. Korn, to serve as associate director; and Dr. Selma Stern-Teubler, the well-known historian of German Jewry, to serve as archivist.⁵

It is important to note the year in which the archive was established, and the people involved in its establishment. The fact that Dr. Marcus persuaded his colleague months after WWII and brought in a 'well-known historian of German Jewry' is more than coincidence. It was an inherent attempt to preserve Jewish history based on the effect and fear of Nazism and antisemitism. The items collected, accepted, exchanged, etc., were at first an attempt to preserve Jewish identity after the Holocaust, no matter the material. Over the last 70 years, families in the Midwest have submitted military journals, personal letters, lineage papers, and many associations have sought the AJA to preserve business catalogs. And as this study will detail, Graenum Berger needed a place to protect his story—away from an all too present political grip.

⁵ "Preserving the Continuity of Jewish Life and Learning for Future Generations." American Jewish Archives. Accessed November 12, 2022. <https://www.americanjewisharchives.org/>.

The Center for Jewish History in New York has a large collection from Graenum Berger and his correspondence with other countries concerning Beta Israel and the drive for exodus movements back to Israel. The collection there is in fact, larger than the one in Cincinnati, but as will be discussed later, the boxes sent were only documents from the American Association of Ethiopian Jewry (AAEJ), under the disbandment of the Association and at the close of Berger's career. The AJA in Cincinnati, albeit smaller than the Center for Jewish History in NYC, had a larger collection of recreational, personal documents, and intimate correspondences surrounding Berger's topics of Ethiopian Jewry. It was the best place to safeguard a more personal narrative of minority Jews beyond the confines of Eurocentric/Ashkenazi/American associations. Overall, Cincinnati was granted favor on this research and I collected the bulk of primary evidence for this thesis from the AJA in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Starting from antiquity and bringing it into a contemporary discussion, this thesis is a comparative study of Ethiopian Jews with the Westernized norm of contemporary Judaism that created a pluralistic world that was not inclusive of Ethiopian Jews. Based on my research, European Jews who were granted stewardship of Israel by Britain, France, and the United States, still hold identity biases in the Israeli economy, religion, politics, society, and culture.

The method that I chose to employ is laid out in three chapters. The first chapter grapples with the long-debated question of the extent to which Ethiopian Jews are legitimate Jews. I will discuss characteristics that Ethiopian Jews assimilated to based on their environmental conditions and how scholars believed the tribes retained ancient Jewish practice. As well as taking a firm stance on primordial Jewish existence in Ethiopia before the fourth century CE. The second chapter focuses on Israel's creation, demonstrating international powers that were involved in Israel's creation indicate the Jewish identity biases that resound today. And finally,

chapter three dives into the intimate narrative of Graenum Berger and his unequivocal involvement in the plight of Ethiopian Jews.

This thesis pulls together an extensive repository of scholarly research, scientific reasoning, historical artifact, judicial correspondences between governments, secondary research, theology, social sciences, legend, and more that extends through the complexity of Jewish identity and the engaging topic of ‘belonging’. I hope that this study will offer narratives into how global events and dominating identities not only fragmented people into the shadows but secured their dismemberment with more than race, society, and communal ties that continue in Israel today. Indeed, Ethiopian Jews are a diaspora within a diaspora.

CHAPTER ONE

Beta Israel, Antiquity to Contemporary

JEWISH IDENTITY

According to Biblical Judaism (2100 BC – 331 BC) as recorded in the Hebrew Bible, Jews first fled from the Babylonians around 587-586 BC.⁶ Because the Babylonians conquered the Kingdom of Judea, it rendered the Jewish people vulnerable, lacking any authority, power, or place to call home. Large populations of Jews were exiled to outlying lands where over the course of two-and-a-half thousand years there has been a constant push and pull—politically and religiously—of these populations splitting in number, reestablishing, and splitting again, trying to find refuge and legitimacy.

Sephardic Jews, for example, is a variation of the word ‘Sefarad’ which means ‘Spain’ in Hebrew. The Sephardic Jews were those who re-established themselves on the Iberian Peninsula. Ashkenazim meaning ‘Germany’, were Jews settling in Germany and Poland. Mizrahi, or ‘Orientals’ ventured further into the Middle East, Indian, and parts of Asia. And there were Beta-Israelis, also known as ‘Ethiopian Jews’ who migrated into Africa. The lasting populations of different Jewish communities are not limited to these four groups, but this is an important factor in Jewish history that offers a brief insight into how geographic separation influenced different Jewish identities. Jewish communities that were able to establish in different parts of the world adopted specific characteristics based on their geography.

Before diving into the complex question of modern Judaism in Israel, I must discuss the issue of Jewish identity. Jewish identity cannot be defined simply, as it embodies more than religion itself. Eliezer Ben-Rafael and Yochanan Peres in their work, *Is Israel One?* undergo an intense discussion of the effect that religion, nationalism, and multiculturalism have played on

⁶ Hebrew Bible, “Yirmiyahu” (“Jeremiah”), chp. 51, *Tanakh*. English Translation, online: https://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/63255/jewish/The-Bible.htm.

Jewish identity.⁷ Modernity can give misleading guidance into who can be included within a specific population or group. Like what will be discussed in this thesis, while the Western world progressed into modern science, math, and even religion, those who were not exposed to modern concepts were left behind. Part of the modernity complex also has to do with modern nation-states.

Before nationalism and politics were popularized as the historical components that divided populations into decipherable and geographical areas, political scientists reach beyond the modern perspective of structural society. Social cleavages, according to the sociological principle, are societies that ‘imposed central authorities or established traditions that were umbilically linked to the nature of social life’.⁸ Rather than determining a ‘citizen’ on the aspects of allegiance to modern nation-states, membership in a group can be legitimized through authentic or primordial bonds. Ben-Rafael and Peres implore Jewish studies to be approached through the lens of social cleavages rather than nationalism and politics.⁹ I concur with using the same approach simply because Jewish populations that were successfully established around the globe did not congregate based on political state lines; they gathered based on shared beliefs.

Steadfast Jews who retained orthodox practice did not protect their Jewish communities from being influenced by the environments surrounding them. Becoming established in various parts of the world guaranteed cultural assimilation—influencing and influenced by fashion, ethnicity, language, and religious practice. Therefore, despite strict adherence to Jewish practice,

⁷ Ben-Rafael, Eliezer & Peres, Yochanan, *Is Israel One? Religion, Nationalism, Multiculturalism Confounded* (Brill Academic Publishers, 2005).

⁸ Ben-Rafael et al., *Is Israel One?*, pg. 3.

⁹ Ben-Rafael et al., *Is Israel One?*, pg. 12-14.

diverse methods of Judaic practice emerged. How dispersed populations began to practice, and language and culture are still widely debated, causing a Jewish identity conundrum.

What then keeps Judaism together? Eliezer Ben-Rafael and Yochanan Peres express that even though there can be multiple cultures and social categories in a single identity, collective identity solidifies the society as a whole through ‘the ways individuals perceive themselves and what they delineate as a particular group’.¹⁰ Despite being forced into a diasporic state and undergoing centuries of social, religious, and multicultural change—Jewish populations have shared a collective desire to return to the Holy Land and regain a long-awaited place of home and worship. Over the last century Israel has been reclaimed a Judaic homeland due to WWII, to the extent of State legitimacy in 1948. Be it Ashkenazim, Sephardic, Mizrahi, or Beta Jewish populations, there remains an identifiable collective idealism of ‘returning to Israel’ (Aaliyah).

Breaking through the confines of modern society, culture, ethnicity, and nation-states will therefore draw Ethiopian Jews more accurately into the Jewish narrative. This thesis will not navigate the grounds of what constitutes the (most correct) Jew, but to demonstrate the internal questions that have preoccupied Jews for centuries and have inherently drawn biased lines. In eliminating the perplexing question of identity and establishing an inclusive people based on religious components alone, we can stop the idea that Jews should be defined by nationality or ethnicity (even if the Israeli government must determine Jewish identity because of its national organizing principle as a homeland for Jews).

Overall, this approach will directly investigate Ethiopian Jews from antiquity. This allows their narrative to be tied to Judaism linearly. Furthermore, I deduct the component of race,

¹⁰ Ben-Rafael et al., *Is Israel One?*, pg. 6.

ethnicity, and nationalism to observe Ethiopian religious practice and its congruences to Judaism at the origin. When bringing the study into a contemporary timeframe, I recognize that there is still the consideration of modernity. So after establishing Ethiopian Jews as legitimate descendants of biblical Judaism, I will then reinvoke the modern concepts of race and ethnicity into the discussion. Those concepts will set the mood for the contemporary question of Ethiopian Jewish absorption into Israel and why their treatment is unequal to Jews of other races and identities.

A TRIBAL COMMUNITY

Historians gravitate to a few theories explaining the origins of Judaism in Ethiopia. One suggests Jews were not part of the original Agaw Tribes,¹¹ but rather, the religion was introduced by Arabian invaders who diffused Jewish culture and belief among indigenous populations who already settled in Ethiopia.¹² The other is based on Ethiopia's *Kebra Nagast*, an ancient national epic that serves as a foundational text of monarchical lineage.¹³ Composed of 117 chapters in ancient Ge'ez, the text (at least 700 years old) suggests a Solomonic Dynasty in Ethiopia during the 10th century BC. The Dynasty was ruled by Menelik, son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba (Makeda). Makeda raised Menelik under Jewish law and ruled Ethiopia as Queen until Menelik succeeded the throne after her death.

The *Kebra Nagast* has been and continues to receive heavy criticism about its authenticity. Many theories support it to be a fabricated relationship to King Solomon, namely

¹¹ Agaw (Agau, Agew), refers to ancient tribes who settled in the northern and central Ethiopian Plateau. The tribes are believed to have developed agriculture and animal husbandry in the area. The term Agaw also implies that the groups are culturally linked by a Cushitic language and its cognates.

¹² Malkiel, David, "Imagination and History Converge: The Danites in the Middle Ages." *Jewish History* 36, no. 1/2 (June 2022): 125–38.

¹³ An ancient national epic, believed to have been originally written in ancient Ge'ez then later translated after the first millennium AD.

because of Menelik's absence in Christian Scripture with no scriptural reference that Solomon had a child with Makeda, or that when Yekuno Amlak reclaimed the Solomonic dynasty after overthrowing the Zagwe Dynasty in the 13th century CE, it was relative to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity. Essentially suggesting that the national epic may have been edited to combine a foreign historical character with Jewish tradition for religious prestige. Dr. Gizachew Tiruneh, Associate Professor and Political Scientist at the University of Central Arkansas, recently published *The Rise and Fall of the Solomonic Dynasty of Ethiopia*, an analysis of ancient Ethiopia.¹⁴ Tiruneh's study aimed to test the plausibility of such a dynasty, the *Kebra Nagast* authenticity, Queen Makeda as a historical figure, and a time frame extending before Christian introduction into Ethiopia.

Examining those components with an expansive and multi-factored plausibility test, Tiruneh supports the idea of 'Ethiopia's historic peculiarity' and combats modern skepticism. The test shows positive results that the *Kebra Nagast* was written in Ethiopia before the sixth century CE, that Queen Makeda was an Ethiopian Queen and real historical figure and based on political, cultural, and economic historical evidences—Solomonic Dynastic conditions were present and could have been supported in the first millennium BC. He further examines early political history in Ethiopia during the first century CE, where political clues indicate Axumite rulers as very plausible descendants of a Solomonic Menelik. African Studies tend to agree that ancient Agaw tribes of this area employed Pentateuchal Law: the Jewish practice of, monogamy, cleanliness, worship, reverence to the sabbath, and prayer¹⁵—another indication that Judaic practices predated the fourth century CE when Christianity was established in Ethiopia.

¹⁴ Tiruneh, Gizachew, *The Rise and Fall of the Solomonic Dynasty of Ethiopia: Is the Kebra Nagast a Time Bound Document?* (Los Angeles: Tsehai Publishers, 2015).

¹⁵ Kaplan, Steven B., *The Beta Israel; Falasha in Ethiopia, From Earliest Times to the Twentieth Century* (New York University Press, 1995).

As Christianity was popularized in Ethiopia, religious hostility heightened, forcing Jews to disperse from coastal areas and independently settle in Lake Tana and the northern regions of Semyen and its mountains. Despite separating and maintaining an independent cleavage from the central Christian authority, it did not protect Beta Israel from centuries of civil conflict with their Christian counterpart or forced conversion. During the sixteenth century, Christian Ethiopia turned their attention to Arab Muslim forces who sought to conquer Ethiopia with the help of Ottoman armies. Many members of Beta Israel joined each side of the cause (Ethiopian Christian Orthodox and Arab-Muslim Islam) being promised with different proposals of freedom and authority.

When Ethiopian forces succeeded and the Jews of Ethiopia had proven to be devout players of war success, their freedom was again lost being subjugated to the crown, thereby forcing the tribes of Jewish descent even further into the Dembia region and Simien Mountains. Ethiopia's modern history (18th-20th century) entangles the narrative more as the country engaged against the occupational advances of Italians and Egyptians, while still combating the threats of Ottoman forces and Portuguese/European religious missions.

Cultural influences pushed differing populations of Jews to assimilate to their economic and social surroundings. It is essential to establish Ethiopia's timeline when tracing the ancestry of primordial Judaism to better understand the ebb-and-flow of demographics and religious worship. Each historical event and process, ancient to modern, has influenced and shaped the contemporary practice of worship that remains today. Guiding questions in this thesis are: in what ways were Ethiopian Jews separated from the general Jewish collectivism, how, and despite Beta Israel's committed worship, what are the leading causes of dislocation that continue today? Many populations would grow through persecution, antisemitism, genocide, holocaust, and come

to embody their own culture and language. Most would maintain an inheritance to the Holy Land of Israel. Ethiopian Jews may have (literally) been lost in translation.

In the Book of Genesis from *The Holy Bible*, everyone on earth was drowned except for Noah and his family. Since then, everyone on earth is hereby descended from one of Noah's three sons: Shem, Ham, or Japheth. Therefore, the major racial and linguistic groups ancestrally link to one of the sons. Later explained in Chapter 10 of Genesis, Shem's lineage is believed to settle areas in Syria, Chaldea, Assyria, Persia, and the Arabian Peninsula. Shem, which was later translated to 'Sem' (feeding the term semitic), suggests that this singular lineage was father to *Hebrew* origin and secular to the cognates that followed.

The modern misconception of 'anti-semite' or 'anti-semitic' is often referred to the singular sentiment of 'anti-Jew' or the persecution of Judaism only. Because modern antisemitic is focused so heavily on connection to WWII Holocaust and Ashkenazi Jews, it has influenced the global opinion of Jewish recognition, i.e. light skinned, Middle Eastern-European, cultured around selective religious practice and Hebrew orient. To remain objective and unbiased, this thesis looks beyond the confines of modern definitions, and that 'semitic' must be looked at scientifically, recognizing cross cultural connections and pseudo-Hebrew relations.

In the 1780s, two German philosophers/philologists, Gottfried Wilhelm von Leibniz and August Ludwig Schlozer, questioned the origin of semitic languages.¹⁶ They believed that the practice of 'proto-semitism' or Ursemitisch, where language descends from only one origin, has caused considerable confusion in all realms of science. Leibniz identified a group of (semitic) cognate languages which included Hebrew, Carthaginian, Chaldaean, Syriac, and

¹⁶ Lewis, Bernard, *Semites and Anti-Semites: An Inquiry into Conflict and Prejudice* (W. W. Norton & Company, 1999).

Ethiopic—noticing the close connection they all displayed to Arabic, which was the language most spoken within their geographical scope. Schlozer continued the work, focusing on oriental literature where he testified that, “From the Mediterranean Sea to the Euphrates and from Mesopotamia down to Arabia, as is known, only one language reigned. The Syrians, Babylonians, Hebrews, and Arabs were one people. Even the Phoenicians who were Hamites spoke this language, which I might call the Semitic.”¹⁷

The French scholar, Ernest Renan, another scientist of Semitic philology, spoke of his discontent about ‘the name Semitic labeling the family of Syro-Arab languages’, suggesting that the label ‘will long remain the cause of a multitude of confusions’.¹⁸ Using biblical literature as empirical evidence alone, or depending solely on the written lineage of Genesis chapter 10, disregards any neighboring dialect which was—or has come into existence. Renan held many controversial views about Jews and Judaism, but he was steadfast that language confusion alienates ‘ancestors of the Africans, in addition to Egypt and Ethiopia, Canaanites and Phoenicians, who lived in the Syro-Palestinian area and spoke a language very similar to Hebrew’.¹⁹

The 2021 annual global report of languages spoken in Ethiopia, including roughly 80 languages spoken, are primarily Oromo (33.80%) and Amharic (29.10%).²⁰ Furthermore, the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, Office of Population and Housing categorize their statistical census on language demographic into four subgroups: Semitic, Cushitic, Omotic, and

¹⁷ Varga, Benedek M., “From Pennsylvania to Transylvania: August Ludwig Schlozer and the decentering of Enlightenment” *Modern Intellectual History*, Volume 19, Issue 2 (Cambridge University Press, June 2022), pp. 349 – 374.

¹⁸ Renan, Ernest, *Studies of Religious History and Criticism* (New York: Carleton Publisher, 1864).

¹⁹ Renan, Ernest, *Renan's Letters from the Holy Land* (New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1904).

²⁰ “Language Data for Ethiopia.” CLEAR Global, August 16, 2022. <https://clearglobal.org/language-data-for-ethiopia/>.

Nilo-Saharan.²¹ The Semitic subgroup lists thirteen languages: Adarigna, Amharigna, Argobba, Birale, Gafat, Ge'ez, Guragigna, Chaha (and its cognates), Inor (and its cognates), Silt'e (and its cognates), Soddo (and its cognates), Tigrigna, and Zay.

None of the languages listed fall under the modern-contemporary label of Syro-Palestinian-Hebrew cognation. Or generally, Hebrew. Unless one becomes a philologist themselves, connection through language becomes almost passive and undetectable. While King Solomon may have been a Semite reflecting Hebrew language and its cognates, it does not account for Menelik—whose mother did not relate to Shem, but to Ham—a lineage that developed Cushitic-speaking cognates. Early modern scholars and scientists who relied on biblical history alone blinds the significance of language ethnology, especially because of a Eurocentric-Christian influence that remains relative in religious history and politics today.

Philologists separate the science of linguistics from anthropology and history, taking language as its own entity and tracing the links without human narration. By their standard, Semitic languages include three consonants which root to all verbs, nouns, and adjectives. The insertion of the vowels gives the word its context and meaning. This type of language is called “inflected”, whereas other languages might be of the “agglutinative” type, where meaning is constructed from smaller units—or words.

Beta Israelis at their origin spoke ancient Ge'ez, a unique language linked heavily to the Sabeian alphabet of southern Arabia. The alphabet consists of 33 letters, each of which denotes 7 characters, making a grand total of 231 characters. Rules of the Ge'ez language inherently comply with the philologist's definition of semitic linguistics. Anthropologically, and

²¹ “Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.” The United States Department of Justice, December 7, 2022. <https://www.justice.gov/eoir/country/ethiopia-contents>.

scientifically. The official language of Ethiopia today, although not the most spoken, is Amharic: a cognate of ancient Ge'ez. Semitic languages in Ethiopia are not only supported by the fundamentals which linguistics provide, but again by the 2021 census that recognizes Amharic being primarily spoken in northern, central, and eastern regions—the regions that Beta Israelis sought refuge and established independence from Arab and Christians imperialists.²²

In their remote villages, Jewish tribes of Ethiopia practiced Judaism under ancient laws. Beta Israeli Liturgy and Holy Scripture in ancient Ge'ez preserved biblical customs from the five books of Moses. The ways in which Ethiopian tribes observed Jewish worship, and continued to, was secluded to these contents alone. Since the ancient tribes are believed to have settled before the destruction of the Second Temple in Jerusalem and the establishment of the Mishna, it would support a religious split from Israel as early as 70 CE.

When the Ethiopian Empire proclaimed itself a Christian Nation in the 4th century and denounced Jews for not accepting Christian belief, Beta Israel dispersed to secluded locations. Not only have those locations blocked their communities from scholarly enlightenment, scientific achievement, industrialism, and other forms of modern human progression—Ethiopian laws restricted travel through the areas in which Ethiopian Jews lived.²³ The consequence of severe isolation from centralized Jewish populations separated Ethiopian Jews from a collective Jewish identity that continued to progress past Mishna practice and into Rabbinical and Talmudic law. By the 20th century when the Western world accepted Beta Israel as part of ‘the fold’, centuries of cultural assimilation came to be one of the greatest conflicts.

²² “Language Data for Ethiopia.” CLEAR Global, August 16, 2022. <https://clearglobal.org/language-data-for-ethiopia/>.

²³ Kaplan, Steven B., *The Beta Israel; Falasha in Ethiopia, From Earliest Times to the Twentieth Century* (New York University Press, 1995), page 312.

In the 1960's, global movements for Ethiopian Jews began requesting the right of acceptance into Israel because of Jewish identity. Although the history is riddled with contradictions and chronological flaws, my analysis shows Ethiopian Jews have been lost (purposefully and by accident) somewhere along the lines. Israel and the 'Law of Return' was established in the late 1940s and early 1950s. Political officials around the globe were forced to confront the claims of an alienated group. And even though Rabbis had accepted Beta Israelis as their brethren in the early 1900s, their responses often demonstrated doubt, concern, or sheer negligence. Assimilation to Ethiopian culture separated its Jewish populations from the rest as with their societal norms, yes, but skin color tested the modernized identities of Judaism who held stewardship of Israel.

DIASPORA WITHIN A DIASPORA; WESTERN NEGLIGENCE

Archives expose cases where people were not only aware of Beta Israeli tribes, but perhaps well informed. Rabbi David ibn Zimra (1479-1573) wrote concerning a black-skinned Ethiopian woman who was taken captive then sold as a slave to a Jewish family in Egypt.²⁴ The woman claimed to be of Jewish descent to her owners, leaving them perplexed to the point of conferring with religious officials. Rabbi Zimra documents the local circulation of negative sentiment about Jewish counterparts in Ethiopia among Jews in Egypt. He further concurred in his writing the same sentiment, that even though there are 'likely ties to Israelites and the tribe of Dan, they know only a few of the biblical commandments, are unfamiliar with the Oral Law, nor do they light the Sabbath candle'. The conclusion in Zimra's responsum leaves an authoritative,

²⁴ Abi-Zimra, Rabbi David Ibn, *The Responsa of the Radbaz, Responsum no. 9*, Aharon Wolden (ed.). Vol. 2. (Warsaw English print 1888).

and a potentially influential opinion: to deny Ethiopian Jews Aaliyah (an inheritance into the fold) unless they ‘convert to Rabbinical Judaism’. While at the same time that if conversion is denied, it passively justifies Egyptian Jews to possess Beta Israelian slaves because ‘war ceases not from amongst them, and every day they take captives from one another’.²⁵

Paper trail through the Gondar period (1632-1855), Kaplan once again refines a narrative of Beta Israelis serving as craftsmen, masons, and carpenters for Emperors.²⁶ Visitors from Portugal, France, and Britain, including merchants and diplomats, claim the communities were vast and reaching up to a million in population.²⁷ Albeit sparse in number, some accounts go as far as describing Hebrew language to be present. A Portuguese diplomat, Manoel de Almeida, wrote of his Ethiopian travels saying:

“There were Jews in Ethiopia from the first. Some of them were converted to the law of Christ Our Lord; others persisted in their blindness and formerly possessed many wide territories, almost the whole Kingdom of Dambea and the provinces of Ogara and Seman” ... “The majority and the flower of them were killed in various attacks and the remainder surrendered or dispersed in different directions. Many of them received holy baptism, but nearly all were still as much Jewish as they had been before. There are many of the latter in Dambea and in various regions; they live by weaving cloth and by making zargunchos, ploughs and other iron articles, for they are great smiths” ... “mingled together with each other are many more of these Jews who are called Falashas here. The

²⁵ Abi-Zimra, *The Responsa of the Radbaz, Responsum no. 9*, (Warsaw English print 1888).

²⁶ Kaplan, Steven B., *The Beta Israel; Falasha in Ethiopia, From Earliest Times to the Twentieth Century* (New York University Press, 1995) page 554.

²⁷ Beckingham, C.F., & Huntingford, G.W.B., *History of High Ethiopia or Abassia*, Transportation and Education (London: Hakluyt Society, 1954), page. 54.

Falashas or Jews are of [Arabic] race [and speak] Hebrew, though it is very corrupt. They have their Hebrew Bibles and sing the psalms in their synagogues.”²⁸

Neglecting the empirical evidence of physical contact with Ethiopian Jews, modern literature vastly reflects western populations were not informed of Beta Israel until the 19th century when Christian missionaries began to document proselytizing Jewish communities in Africa. The success of Christian conversion influenced European Jewish authorities to question the legitimacy of African Jews once again, fearing the loss if the tribes were in fact Beta Israel. Eventually, several European rabbis proclaimed that they recognized the Jewishness of the Ethiopian Jews as Beta Israelis and formed the "Alliance Israélite Universelle " in 1868, sending Joseph Halévy to Ethiopia to study the current condition of Ethiopian Jews.²⁹ Halévy was able to ward off Christian missionaries and establish Jewish camaraderie, although it proved to be difficult, and documented their discrepancies. After returning to Europe, his report called aid to the Beta Israel community, wishing to establish schools and churches that would raise them into modernity. By 1912 the alliance had successfully opened 71 schools for boys and 44 for girls in Baghdad, Jerusalem, Tangier, Istanbul, Beirut, Cairo, Damascus and Salonica—but not in Ethiopia.³⁰ Halévy was successful in documenting an important study of early contact but his work at the time failed to gain support.

Towards the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century when Ethiopian officials opened up general travel, Professor Jacques Faitlovitch was one of the first successful pioneers in Beta Israeli cause. His visits that started in 1904 documented extreme environmental

²⁸ Beckingham et al., *History of High Ethiopia*, page 55.

²⁹ Gilman, D.C., Peck, H.T., Colby, F.M., "Alliance Israelite Universelle", *New International Encyclopedia*; 1st ed., (New York: Dodd, Mead Publishing, 1905).

³⁰ Alcalay, Ammiel, *After Jews and Arabs: Remaking Levantine Culture* (University of Minnesota, 1993), page 200.

ABYSSINIAN JEWS

ASK FOR AID

Special Telegram to The Star.

PARIS, February 17.—M. Taitlovitch, who was charged with the mission to Abyssinia, came into contact there with the Falashas and brought with him to France two young men belonging to that interesting sect. He was asked at the same time to transmit to the Jews in civilized countries an appeal written in the Ethiopian language, of which I give a translation in accord with the naive simplicity of the text:

"May the Lord God of Israel be praised. Letter sent from Abyssinia by Israelites called Falashas in order that it may reach our brethren in Jewish communities, to the great doctors in Jerusalem, as well as in the land of the Franks, and in countries where there are Jewish communities. Peace! Peace! How are you? We are in a state of profound misery. Have pity on us. In the time of the Kings Theodore and John attempts were made forcibly to convert us. We gave our hearts, and the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob has saved us. Thanks to your prayers, a small number of us still remain. Formerly we were very numerous; formerly there were 200 synagogues, now only thirty remain. In the time of the Dervishes a frightful number of people died from famine.

"Thanks to your prayers, we have today a good king. Menelik has said to us: 'Remain like your fathers.' May God grant him long life! Nevertheless, the disciples of Fird are travelling all over Abyssinia, and are urging us to be baptized. They say that whoever is not baptized will be condemned to perdition. He who is baptized will be saved. But we are fighting for the laws of Moses. In the name of the Lord of Israel, help us by your prayers. The present letter has been written by Abba Aroden, Abba Thelma, high priests, and by the Scribe Dehatera Tekla, in order that it may reach Israelite communities and the great doctors, through the hand of Jacob, son of Moses, who has come to see us. This has given us great pleasure. When an Israelite comes to us we are pleased.

"Peace! Peace! Much peace to you, sons

of Israel, our brothers who are in the law of Moses. Oh! our brethren, do not forget us. We are in great misery. Our books have been destroyed; the Dervishes have burnt them by fire. We have no longer any schools; they are destroyed. Pray to God to help for us. Written at Gouraba-Bekelt on the 18th day of the month in the 12th month."

The two young men who were brought here by M. Taitlovitch were present recently throughout the whole of a service at the synagogue in the Rue de la Victoire. They are healthy-looking and bronzed, and were the object of general curiosity, as our coreligionists here were not aware of the existence of negro Jews.

conditions that rendered once-successful tribes vulnerable.

The population that was once claimed to reach over a million was nowhere near that number. After the Alliance Israélite Universelle re-prioritized from Ethiopia, the tribes suffered famine, disease, and pestilence in the later decades of the 19th century. Without aid from the local Christian government or from centralized Jewish powers—Beta Israel was isolated once more with their dilemma. Scholars estimate the total population loss to be up to one half – to – two thirds of the population.³¹

Jacques Faitlovitch led the efforts of bringing Ethiopian Jews into the global Jewish conversation with his novel 'The Falashas'.³² Over the first two decades in the 20th century, newspaper forums discussed topics like, 'Assyrian Jews found in Ethiopia'³³, a French Jew brining 'black Jews to synagogue in France' and asking for aid (picture displayed),³⁴ and attempts for Ethiopian Organizations claiming to be tied to Judaism.³⁵ Historical narrative suggests that it was at this time (1908) when over 45 European Rabbis

³¹ Pankhurst, Richard, "The Great Ethiopian Famine of 1888-1892: A New Assessment." *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 21(2): page 95–124.

³² Faitlovitch, Jacques, *The Falashas*, English ed., (Wentworth Press, 2016).

³³ *The Liberal Democrat* (Liberal, KS, Oct. 10, 1913), page 3. <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn85029856/1913-10-10/ed-1/>.

³⁴ *Evening Star* (Washington, DC, Feb. 18, 1906), page 21. <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn83045462/1906-02-18/ed-1/>.

³⁵ *New-York tribune* (New York, NY, Jun. 22, 1920), page 4. <https://www.loc.gov/item/sn83030214/1920-06-22/ed-1/>

came together to concretely establish Ethiopian Jews as part of the fold, even to the point where Rabbi Abraham Yitzhak ha-Cohen Kook—a highly favored Ashkenazi authority—declared in writing a testimony of their belonging.³⁶

It would seem that the global opinion of [most] Jewish communities, finally gave Ethiopian Jews a foothold in the conversation. Including the most populous, Sephardic and Ashkenazi Jews. However, time suppressed conversations to a lull, and economic depression mixed with world wars I and II would drive the matter into another dark period of over 30 years. Dr. Graenum Berger was the individual who brought the issue back to light, when stumbling upon black Jews of Ethiopia by chance in 1955. Berger began asking religious authorities the same questions from decades before about their communal belonging. After dedicating his life to the cause, Berger dedicated over 30 years of his life to the plight of Ethiopian Jews, immigrating more than 100,000 back to Israel and shaping contemporary Israel today.

Considering the history of powerful Jewish centers and their perspective of Ethiopian Jews needs to be included in Beta Israel's history of isolation. The narrative of western negligence, a period of over three centuries, describes more than ignorance or simply, 'gaps in history'. Intentional actions, or the lack thereof, describes the intolerable difference that decentralized communities had from centralized ones. Not only in religious norms, but in ethnicity, culture, and language. And being that centralized powers held global authority, inherent biases created a new collective identity that the decentralized groups had no apparent original connection. In the following chapters this issue will be investigated deeper, using

³⁶Naor, Bezalel, *Lights of Prophecy* (New York, NY: Union of Orthodox Jewish Congregations of America, 1990), page 145-150.

Graenum Burger as a case study to demonstrate relativity in modern Israel and how modernity has influenced movements like Zionism and Aaliyah with identity politics.

CHAPTER TWO

The Creation of Israel

CONFLICT OVER THE HOLY LAND

The desire of Jews to regain a homeland did not reside only with Jews, but governments around the world weighed on the conflict with their own interests. The obsession over the territory reaches centuries back, considering how it became a monotheistic capital for three major religions. First settled by the Jewish biblical patriarchs, Abraham, Issac and Jacob, the territory first approximated what is modern day Israel, West Bank, the Gaza Strip, parts of Syria, Lebanon, and Jordan.³⁷ The region's religious groups adopted the names, “The Land of Israel”, “The Holy Land”, and “The Promised Land”.³⁸ In 1000 BC, King David established the region as an Israeli Monarchy, landing it into King Solomon’s hands two generations later.³⁹ King Solomon sanctified the capital of Jerusalem by building its first temple (Solomon’s Temple).⁴⁰

After the death of King Solomon, the kingdom was split into two. The north territory became the Kingdom of Israel, and the south became the Kingdom of Judah.⁴¹ The region hosted the majority of Jews on the planet until the Holy Land was subject to multiple conquests. The conquering empires began to drive Jews all over the world, decreasing their numbers significantly and creating the diasporic phenomenon as discussed in the introduction. One of these major conquests was conducted by the Roman Empire in 63 BC, where the Emperor

³⁷ Hebrew Bible, “Bereshit” (“Genesis”), chp. 25, *Tanakh*. English Translation, online: https://www.chabad.org/library/bible_cdo/aid/63255/jewish/The-Bible.htm.

³⁸ Hebrew Bible, “Yechezkel” (“Ezekiel”), chp. 45, *Tanakh*.

³⁹ Lusted, Marcia Amidon, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (Essential Library Publishing, 2018), pp. 18.

⁴⁰ Lusted, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp. 18.

⁴¹ Lusted, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp. 18.

changed the Kingdom of Judah's name to Palestine, with the intent that it would break the apparent Jewish connection it had to the Kingdom of Israel.⁴²

Christianity, which started as a Jewish religious sect, gained massive attention in both Palestine and the Kingdom of Israel. Jesus Christ—founder of the religion—is recorded in the New Testament of the Bible to perform “great works”, through his ministering, miracles, and fulfillment of God's law.⁴³ In the year 33 CE, the Romans crucified Christ in Palestine's capital city, Jerusalem, giving the land reverence amongst Christians.⁴⁴ With an internal angst against the Roman rulers, Jewish-Christian residents revolted, expelling them from the city and regaining control. Only four years later, Roman General Titus retaliated, expelling all Jewish-Christian worshippers from the city.⁴⁵ Jews especially mourned the loss of the city, incorporating its devastation into Jewish tradition and practice.⁴⁶

After Judaism and Christianity, the religion of Islam accepted the land as holy by the 7th century. Caliph Omar, Islamic successor to Prophet Muhammad, “extended his rule to Jerusalem because it was considered the third-holiest city in Islam, following Mecca and Medina”, reasoning further that, “Prophet Muhammad was said to have ascended to Heaven from Jerusalem's temple mount”.⁴⁷ Thus, Islam legitimized their religious presence by building the Dome of the Rock on the ruins of the Second Temple (the second temple built after Solomon's

⁴² Lusted, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp. 20.

⁴³ Christian Bible, “Matthew”, “Mark”, “Luke”, “John” *New Testament, Holy Bible* (New York: American Bible Society, 2002).

⁴⁴ Lusted, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp. 20.

⁴⁵ Lusted, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp. 21.

⁴⁶ Lusted, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp. 20.

⁴⁷ Lusted, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp. 22.

temple was destroyed) in the site where Islam believes Prophet Muhammad ascended.⁴⁸ Overall, Jerusalem and the Holy Lands of Palestine and Israel became the epicenter of three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam by the 8th century.

When the Seljuk Turks of central Asia moved their attention to the Holy Land with their ambitions to grow into an imperial power, Christians in Europe launched several crusades to secure the Holy City of Jerusalem against all non-Christians. Their attacks targeted Jews as well as the Turkish invaders, but the Seljuk empire ultimately possessed the region.⁴⁹ At this time, the numbers of Jews continued to dwindle, the persecution once felt from Roman rulers was being repeated by Christians crusaders. The Seljuks, now in power, absorbed Islamism and secured a strong imperial foothold that would last centuries. From the 16th century to WWI (1517-1917), the Turkish Ottoman Empire, which grew to be an Islamic superpower, controlled a massive territory consisting of the Holy Land, most of the Middle East, and parts of Africa. Ottoman-Turkish rule collapsed in 1917 when the British entered Jerusalem during WWI.⁵⁰

As a result of the devastation of war, the Paris Peace Conference created the League of Nations to prevent such devastation from happening again.⁵¹ Some of the major powers who initially joined, or joined soon after its establishment, were Italy, Britain, France and Russia. The collective mentality of the League was to settle international disputes by methods like

⁴⁸ Lusted, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp. 18.

⁴⁹ Lusted, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp. 23.

⁵⁰ Lusted, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp. 25-26.

⁵¹ Oltean, Anca, "Aspects from the Activity of the League of Nations (1919-1932). The Covenant of the League of Nations", *International Relations and European Studies*, no. 12 (University of Oradea), pp.51.

disarmament and negotiation.⁵² As well as declaring their authority with a mandate system that would divide captured colonies between the Allied Powers. Not only was the proposal of a mandate system for peace and security reinforcement, it stated that “nations unable to create and maintain their own governments would be overseen by “advanced nations”” .⁵³

When the Ottoman Empire crumbled, the land in the Middle East became subject to the British and French Allied Powers under the mandate system. The British took control of the southern region that included what was unofficially known as Palestine. By the early 20th century, the territory did not only consist of Ottoman Turks, tens of thousands of Jews were making their way back to the Holy Land under the global Zionist movement.⁵⁴ Therefore, with the League's vision in mind, the British Empire promised to establish a Jewish National Homeland whilst sustaining the Palestinian population. To mitigate rising conflicts, Jews were mandated to settle west of the Jordan River in Palestine, and Arabs on the east in Transjordan (Jordan).⁵⁵

In 1917, British Foreign Secretary Arthur Balfour of the League, sent a declaration to Herzl that stated his ‘intent to create a Jewish national home in Palestine’ .^{56, 57} The enticement of a Jewish national home enlisted more immigration of Jews into the territory. British officials

⁵² Oltean, “Aspects from the Activity of the League of Nations (1919-1932)”, pp. 51.

⁵³ Oltean, “Aspects from the Activity of the League of Nations (1919-1932)”, pp. 52.

⁵⁴ Lusted, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp. 28.

⁵⁵ Lusted, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp. 30-31.

⁵⁶ Lusted, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp. 31.

⁵⁷ Mach, Tomas, “From the Balfour Declaration to the Creation of the State of Israel: The Issue of Legal Importance of This Declaration, Its Historical Role, and Consequences of the Arab Attack upon the Newly Proclaimed State of Israel on the Plane of Public International Law.” *Journal on European History of Law* (2019), 10 (2): 128–32.

established security forces in the territory and tentatively named it the ‘Mandatory Territory of Palestine’.⁵⁸ The native population who resided in the territory were heavily opposed to the mandate, leading to massive riots throughout the 1920s and giving rise to Palestinian conflict against European imperialists and Jewish immigrants.⁵⁹ Jews formed militia groups while the League of Nations tried to renegotiate terms that would grant the British their Mandate with Balfour’s Declaration, while still acting provisional to Arab-Palestinians.

Regardless of the League's action to mitigate peace, an organization called “The Arab Higher Committee” formed in April of 1936 to represent Palestinian Arabs and their demands against the British for Mandate Palestine.⁶⁰ This action bolstered Arab nationalism, demanding the cessation of Jewish immigration and prohibition of Jews buying Arab land. However, those conditions did not persuade conclusive action from the Allied powers and ended in the Arab nationalists taking a stand.

Even though the Palestinian Arabs were a native population who established in the territory prior to Mandate Palestine and Jewish Immigration, they were forced to reconcile the threat of invasion and displacement. Their faith in the British government floundered after British officials granted several thousand more permits to Jewish immigrants.⁶¹ British negligence to the conflict, lost Palestinian confidence and created the sense that they too were leaning to Jewish Zionism. Ultimately, the conflict resulted in violence when strikes against the

⁵⁸ Medoff, “Israel’s Moment: International Support for and Opposition to Establishing the Jewish State, 1945–1949,” pp. 283.

⁵⁹ Medoff, “Israel’s Moment: International Support for and Opposition to Establishing the Jewish State, 1945–1949.” The research article describes multiple incidents where hostility influenced more resilience from native residents in Palestine at the time.

⁶⁰ Lust, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp. 35.

⁶¹ Lust, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp. 35-36.

British and the death of two Jewish Men. The crisis unraveled into what would be known as the Great Revolt, or Arab Revolt of 1936-1939.⁶²

Because of their promise to a homeland, Jewish volunteers who previously immigrated to Mandate Palestine offered to aid the British in taking control from the Arab-Palestinian of the territory.⁶³ The conflict continued to escalate, killing patrons from all groups: the Jews, British military personnel, and Palestinian Arabs.⁶⁴ In an effort to ease the tension and regain good faith with Palestinians, the British government issued The White Paper Document of 1939.⁶⁵ The gesture assured the Arab population that that mandate did not mean Palestine would become a Jewish state. Even so, the gesture slowed the conflict to a lull that would remain quiet until after WWII.

At the close of WWII in 1945, the Jewish question of home was once again brought to the forefront of international affairs when hundreds of thousands of Jewish Holocaust survivors were left with destroyed communities. Albeit a hostile environment, floods of Jews directed their attention to the Holy Land. The Arab League formed in 1945 to strengthen and coordinate economic, cultural, political, and social disputes among Arab populations and its opposing parties.⁶⁶ One attentive focus of the League was to levy Arab weight in Mandate Palestine, to aid

⁶² Lusted, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp. 36.

⁶³ Medoff, Rafael "Israel's Moment: International Support for and Opposition to Establishing the Jewish State, 1945–1949," *Israel Journal of Foreign Affairs* (2022) 16 (2): 281–86, pp. 282.

⁶⁴ Anderson, C.W., "State Formation from Below and the Great Revolt in Palestine", *Journal of Palestine Studies* (2017), 47(1 (185)), 39–55.

⁶⁵ Lusted, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp. 37.

⁶⁶ Lusted, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp. 40.

their brethren who were consistently being suppressed and pushed from their homes despite the British efforts under the mandate.

Costly to Palestinians, the League of Nations was being dissolved at the time. And Allied powers who once sought peace like Switzerland, Spain, Britain, and the United States were less than enthusiastic to accept Jewish immigration into their borders. Limited visas only allowed small amounts of Jews into the allied countries, leaving thousands unaccounted for. In an effort to control a massive immigration to Mandate Palestine, British officials placed restrictions on Jewish immigration into the territory.⁶⁷ The restrictions did not sway the Jewish want for home in the Holy Land, neither was it received well by Jewish populations. Thousands of Jews tried to sneak in through a secret organization called the Aaliyah Bet.⁶⁸ The British Royal Navy intercepted many of the refugees and placed them in detention camps, which only prompted an increase in Jewish activism against the British.⁶⁹

The Jewish Agency originally established in 1929 as the operative branch of the World Zionist Organization (WZO), an operation that was created with rising Zionism.⁷⁰ At conception, it was formed on the premise of Aaliyah, to return Jews to the Holy Land of Israel. However, its methods adapted to the political demands and hostilities that Jews faced to combat their opposition. Therefore, the organization popularized with rising Jewish immigrants into Israel, and even more so from the devastation of WWII. The surge in Jewish want for home granted the

⁶⁷ Lusted, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp. 41.

⁶⁸ Yaacov, Yadgar, *Sovereign Jews : Israel, Zionism, and Judaism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2017), Introduction. The objective of Yaavoc is primarily to discuss the role of sovereignty in Jewish identity. The *Aaliyah Bet* organization is mentioned to establish the historiography of Jewish migration to Israel.

⁶⁹ Lusted, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp 39.

⁷⁰ Lusted, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, pp. 36.

organization power and authority to combat the General Assembly over Mandate Palestine stewardship, giving a start to Israeli Jewish nationalism. By the time WWII ended, the voice of the agency grew louder with a newfound momentum toward independence from the British.

When the League of Nations dissolved, international powers created a new chapter to absorb the intent of the League, called the United Nations.⁷¹ The organization's main policy-making organ was assigned as the UN General Assembly (UNGA). On the UNGA agenda, focus turned to solving the issue of displaced Jews of WWII, and the continued discontentment of Arab-Palestinians.⁷² Despite the efforts of a special committee designed by the UNGA over Mandate Palestine, no agreements were accepted unanimously by the Jewish Agency or the Arab League and Arab Higher Committee. And being that neither party could accept negotiations, the Arab community proclaimed riots that evolved into a devastating civil war at the end 1947 that ultimately gave rise to a Jewish state.⁷³

In May of 1948, the head representative of the Jewish Agency, David Ben-Gurion, declared Palestine to be '*Eretz Israel*', and the 'State of Israel' was created.⁷⁴ When the United Nations voted Israel to be recognized as a legitimate State on May 11, 1949, Jewish forces had already expelled an estimated three-quarter million Palestinian Arabs from the region.⁷⁵ From 1949 to the 1960s, the Jewish Virtual Library population census of Immigration shows Israel to double from 700,000 to over 1,400,000.⁷⁶

⁷¹ Oltean, "Aspects from the Activity of the League of Nations (1919-1932)", pp. 59.

⁷² Oltean, "Aspects from the Activity of the League of Nations (1919-1932)", pp. 61.

⁷³ Yadgar, *Sovereign Jews : Israel, Zionism, and Judaism*, see citation 27 annotation.

⁷⁴ Bard, Mitchell, *The Founding of the State of Israel* (Greenhaven Press, 2003) pp. 15.

⁷⁵ Yadgar, *Sovereign Jews : Israel, Zionism, and Judaism*, see citation 27 annotation.

⁷⁶ Jewish Virtual Library, "Total Immigration to Israel by Continent and Year." Total immigration to Israel by continent and Year: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/total-immigration-to-israel-by-continent-per-year>.

A territory that once hosted three monotheistic religions, resulted in a Jewish National State after WWII. The creation of modern Israel demonstrates a paradoxical narrative. Jews who were once expelled from the region, became the conquerors. The fashion in which Jewish populations regained the Holy Land demonstrated imperialistic traits, like colonizing to obtain land. Not to mention that Jewish forces allied closely to British Imperialists until they made their own movements for independence. These methods not only forced their placement back in Israel, the Jewish populations exuded westernized characteristics from Europe onto their newfound state. In essence, primarily creating a home for European Jews above all.

HASKALAH AND ZIONISM

Often used as a term to describe Jewish Enlightenment, Haskalah in Hebrew means ‘education’ or ‘erudition’.⁷⁷ In the latter half of the eighteenth century and almost spanning to the twentieth century, Haskalah was an intellectual movement that sparked a rise in Jewish nationalism. In an elevating world, Jewish populations near centralized governments were no exception to modern practices of science, math, medicine, technology, and religion. Reiterating the sentiment of chapter one, this is a leading cause of ongoing debate about Jewish identity and dysphoria among groups. The larger Jewish populations that led the global norm progressed toward modernity, creating the sense of indifference to Ethiopian tribes who didn't.

⁷⁷ Ungyarsky, Janine “Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment)” (*Salem Press Encyclopedia*, 2022). <https://search-ebscohost-com.libpublic3.library.isu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=ers&AN=87995622&site=eds-live&scope=site>

In October 1961, Alexander Altmann gave a lecture at the University of Chicago about ‘faith and reason in western tradition’.⁷⁸ In retrospect, Altmann attributed the western powers to develop more rapidly from industrialism and therefore cast influence onto other world regions. Using his professional experience in philosophy and with the help of another scholar, Leo Strauss, Altmann argues that because the West progressed more rapidly and because the leading populations of Jews are closely located to Westernized Europe, there is a modern perversion in orthodox Judaism.⁷⁹

Using the debates of philosophy vs. theology, the lecture goes into great detail to explain that even European orthodox Jews had been long disconnected from its ‘authentic root’; the organic nature of where orthodox Judaism originated. Since the most predominant Jewish populations were dispersed throughout Western empires, the ability to retain practical or revelatory truths were all but ‘unintelligible’ or ‘unattainable’.⁸⁰ The point that I draw from Altmann and Strauss is, once again, not to accuse one identity of Jews to be more legitimate over another, but to express the detachment of one group to another because of modernity. And furthermore, that because of this, the foundation on which Israel was created was not unique to Israel and Judaism, but was rather Westernized.

Altmann ultimately debated the ‘current standard of Jewish practice’, how ‘Jewish religion had abandoned its true origin’, and how it ‘had formed an unintended union with

⁷⁸ Wussow, Philipp Von, “Alexander Altmann, ‘The Encounter of Faith and Reason in the Western Tradition and Its Significance Today,’ Introduction by Leo Strauss.” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 112 (4): 1–25. doi:10.1353/jqr.2022.0037.

⁷⁹ Wussow, “Alexander Altmann, ‘The Encounter of Faith and Reason’”, pp. 19.

⁸⁰ Wussow, “Alexander Altmann, ‘The Encounter of Faith and Reason’”, doi:10.1353/jqr.2022.0037.

western civilization and Christianity’. Again, I do not wish to comment on the overall lecture. I see Altmann’s lecture as an indication of the larger issue of contemporary Judaism. This lecture theorizes why Jewish identity is a cause for major debate. Altmann admittedly uses modern Jewish practices to explain the disconnect of traditional religious practice. In a developed world, traditional Judaism is no longer practical. His supporting scholar, Strauss, uses his “rational critique of reason” to explain that even the small everyday situations could influence religious practices—like western imperial ‘teatime’ and other norms that Jewish populations absorbed.⁸¹

Using the discipline of Altmann and Strauss, the Haskalah would not only be a term to describe Jewish enlightenment, but in theory, would describe much more. Due to the fact that diaspora planted the largest populations of Jews in western European countries, enlightenment would inherently reflect western characteristics and therefore influence popular orthodox Judaism. To date, the Ashkenazim Jews who had originally centered in Germany and Poland remain exponentially the largest population in the world. Therefore, global leaders in Judaism are not only substantially more Ashkenazim than any other identity, the mentalities they display

⁸¹ Wussow, “Alexander Altmann, ‘The Encounter of Faith and Reason’”, doi:10.1353/jqr.2022.0037.

Strauss has also published in length about the ‘rational critique of reason’, more citations include:

Strauss, "Religious Situation of the Present," in *Reorientation: Leo Strauss in the 1930s*, ed. M. D. Yaffe and R. S. Ruderman (New York, 2014), 225–35; Strauss, *Philosophy and Law: Contributions to the Understanding of Maimonides and His Predecessors*, trans. E. Adler (Albany, 1995), esp. 38–39.

Strauss, "Progress or Return? The Contemporary Crisis of Western Civilization," in *Jewish Philosophy and the Crisis of Modernity: Essays and Lectures in Modern Jewish Thought*, ed. K. Hart Green (Albany, 1997), 98, 104, 117; compare in that same volume his "Jerusalem and Athens: Some Preliminary Reflections," 377–405.

reflect the same western modernity. Ethiopian Jews were neither modernized nor within the sphere of western influence to hold familiar characteristics, nor did they resemble noticeable Jewish practices to Israeli Jews who were influenced by western power.

Ethiopian Jews were not only displaced culturally and religiously, this disconnect is what fed their dismemberment to the collective Jewish community. In the third chapter, the idea of disconnect will be revisited. But the importance here lies within the construct of Israel and glimpses into how westernized Judaism did not readily accept decentralized Jews. It has been well established that religiously, Ethiopian Jews were hard to recognize. Culturally, their norms were sheltered from modern progress. And in the conflicts of WWI and WWII, Jews operated under and with British alliances with the majority of Jewish immigration to Israel coming from Europe. Another route to investigate the Jewish mentalities that hindered Beta Israeli acceptance, is to look more closely at the movements of Zionism. Doing so, will further explain the question of why? Why did it take decades longer for Ethiopian Jewish acceptance? And what traits did Ethiopian Jews have that delayed their right to return?

First officially organized in 1897, Zionist movements formed on a variety of disciplines.⁸² The primary objective of Zionism was to establish the legitimacy of Jewish stewardship of [their] homeland, the Holy Land, a territory that was under Ottoman control at the time.⁸³ During the first half of the twentieth century, global revival movements emerged on behalf of *kibbutz*

⁸² Patai, Raphael, *Encyclopedia of Zionism and Israel* (Herzl Press, 1971). <https://search-ebscohostcom.libpublic3.library.isu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat06825a&AN=isu.b1070682&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

⁸³ Jewish Virtual Library, "Total Immigration to Israel by Continent and Year." Total immigration to Israel by continent and Year: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/total-immigration-to-israel-by-continent-per-year>.

galuyot (ingathering of exiles) where Jews everywhere were endowed with the right to *aaliyah* (return to Israel). Like Jewish identity, Zionism does not have one singular definition. Rather, different Jewish mentalities used Zionism to fit into [their] specific agenda. The focus here will not seek to investigate the many branching forms of Zionism, but will use the common denominator of Zionism to investigate its powerful Jewish leaders and how it relates to the formation of Israel.

Analyzing the fundamentals of Zionism gives great insight into the characteristics of Israel and how it evolved based on the specific components with which it was structured. The Zionist movements that spanned over the first half of the twentieth century came to a pinnacle when Israel gained state legitimacy in 1948. And the idea that Israel was legitimized at this time and in accordance with specific Zionist characteristics becomes most prevalent to whom would be included under the Law of Return. First, because modern Jewish leaders inherently influenced the movements of Zionism, and second, that those mentalities created a state that excluded Jewish populations who did not fall within a specific category. Of the different Zionist expressions—religious Zionism, political Zionism, and cultural Zionism are the only movements that will be used in this analysis.

Precursing 1897 when Zionism was officially established, orthodox German Rabbi, Zvi Hirsch Kalischer published the *Derishat Tziyon veHevrat Erez Noshevet*, a novel describing an agriculturally based Jewish settlement in Eretz Israel, or the Holy land.⁸⁴ In his works, Rabbi Kalischer promoted a very secular view; that the most correct way to establish a Jewish state and

⁸⁴ Lehman-Wilzig, Sam N., “Proto-Zionism and Its Proto-Herzl: The Philosophy and Efforts of Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer.” *Tradition: A Journal of Orthodox Jewish Thought* (1976), 16 (1): 56–76. ebscohostcom.libpublic3.library.isu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=edsjsr&AN=edsjsr.23258454&site=eds-live&scope=site.

receive the salvation promised to Jews by the prophets, was not only by agriculture, but through an orthodox religious approach. Therefore, religious Zionism is a combination of strict adherence to orthodox Judaism and establishing a Jewish state by way of land cultivation.

In order to successfully return to (or to gain) Eretz Israel, Kalischer also testified that agriculture was closely associated with the redemption of the Jewish people.⁸⁵ The idea of agricultural security was a way in which Kalischer saw a healthy foundation for economic stability, one that would support a Jewish homeland and inherently the Yishuv.⁸⁶ The driving force for Rabbi Kalischer and Religious Zionism is based on adherence to religious Judaism and upholding an orthodox religious identity. And altogether, that divine redemption would only come to the uprightness when land was first agriculturally cultivated.

Theodor Herzl, born in Austria, is considered to be the founding father of Zionism altogether, being the person who established Zionism as an organization in 1897.⁸⁷ His Zionist method, however, was based on the preconception that Zion, or Israel, could not survive as a nation based on religion alone. Not only did Herzl organize Zionism as a political organization, but he was also the founder of the First Zionist Congress, and later the President of the World

⁸⁵ Lehman-Wilzig, “Proto-Zionism and Its Proto-Herzl: The Philosophy and Efforts of Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer”.

⁸⁶ Defined by Rabbi Kalischer, *Yishuv* was a general term applied to the combination of all Jewish people integrated into the population already settled in Palestine. In other words, one large and single community.

⁸⁷ Sam N. Lehman-Wilzig, “Proto-Zionism and Its Proto-Herzl: The Philosophy and Efforts of Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer”.

Zionist Organization.⁸⁸ Herzl was a leading figure who brought politics into Zionism, believing it to be the most legitimate way to gain land and security.

In February of 1896, Herzl published a pamphlet titled *Der Judenstaat* (The Jewish State)⁸⁹ where he discusses the socio-economic factors and political solutions of a Jewish State. Due to the rising fear of modern antisemitism, the pamphlet considered the ‘Jewish question of antisemitism’ and how class structure in Europe had vastly discriminated against Jews. Therefore, the pamphlet guides readers into considering a Jewish state, which would be established by Jewish families who were called to strategically purchase and settle the land. Herzl also calls on European Powers to act as protectorates if they ‘prove friendly to the plan’.⁹⁰ Unlike religious Zionism, Herzl did not believe that the independent state had to be in the territory of Israel/Palestine; he thought Argentina could also serve as a homeland for Jews.⁹¹ Herzl’s authority influenced multiple families to take up the cause and purchase land in the Ottoman territory.

Cultural Zionism formed as a response to combat political Zionism. Unlike Herzl, Ukrainian Rabbi Asher Ginsberg (Ahad Ha’am) aspired to create ‘a Jewish State and not merely

⁸⁸ Avineri, Shlomo, and Haim Watzman, *Herzl’s Vision : Theodor Herzl and the Foundation of the Jewish State* (BlueBridge, an imprint of United Tribes Media Inc., 2014).
<https://search-ebscohost-com.libpublic3.library.isu.edu/login.aspx?direct=true&db=cat06825a&AN=isu.b2076745&site=eds-live&scope=site>.

⁸⁹ Balabkins, Nicholas, “Providing Infrastructure for a Future State: Reading Herzl’s *Der Judenstaat* in 1996.” *European Journal of Law and Economics* (1996), 3 (2): 167–74.

⁹⁰ Balabkins, “Providing Infrastructure for a Future State: Reading Herzl’s *Der Judenstaat*”, pp. 172.

⁹¹ Balabkins, “Providing Infrastructure for a Future State: Reading Herzl’s *Der Judenstaat*”, pp. 170.

a state for Jews'.⁹² The main objective of Ha'am was to secure a 'spiritual center' named Israel, where a religious community would safeguard historical language, culture, and practices. Ha'am also believed that the creation of a spiritual center would allow a more communal identity in Judaism than in other forms of Zionism. Cultural Zionism is rooted in the idea that a Jewish state would regenerate a Jewish commitment, especially from youth, to reach for a national heritage rather than a religious-political system or complete orthodox Judaism.⁹³

Recognizing the complexity of political relations at the time, Ha'am also understood the territory to be extremely hostile. The Mandatory State of Palestine had been controlled by European colonial powers since 1922, yet there remained a native Arab population who was more Muslim than it was Christian or Jew. Therefore, to mitigate some of the issues of assimilation, Ha'am heavily emphasized cultural Zionism to bring in traditional practices like language, while searching for a new culture that could be created together by diverse populations. In effect, it would also allow diversified Jewish populations to intermingle, free from the negative connotations that evolved because of diasporic differences.

In Zionism, there is unique insight into opposing mentalities that formed around the Jewish practice of Aliyah. Religious Zionism centered on the retention of strict adherence to orthodox practices and agricultural sustainability, political Zionism believed a homeland could only be created after a state was recognized as politically legitimate, and cultural Zionism

⁹² Ha'am, Ahad (1897), translated by Leon Simon, "The Jewish State and Jewish Problem", *Jewish Virtual Library* (Jewish Publication Society of America, 1912).

⁹³ Silver, Matthew Mark, "Cultural Zionism or Altneuland: Ahad Ha'am, Herzl, and the Problem of Russian Jewish Modernization" *In Zionism and the Melting Pot: Preachers, Pioneers, and Modern Jewish Politics* (The University of Alabama Press, 2020).

supported the need to establish a new collective heritage based on traditional and unique characteristics that would tie all Jews together. The components that each Zionist mentality emulated are important factors of daily life, even today. Political legitimacy, agricultural systems, nationalism, and cultural norms act as a glue in what ties modern nation-states together. Israel was created on those terms, but furthermore, was influenced by its creators.

The three leading pioneers discussed above were from western European countries, therefore each school of Zionism reflected Westernized Jewish mentalities and practices. Begging the question: under which circumstances did Israel emerge as a state? The most influential perhaps, was that of Theodore Herzl. By the time he established Zionism as an organization in 1897, almost 35,000 Jews had heeded the call to buy land and immigrate to the Holy Land.⁹⁴ When the year of 1914 approached, another 40,000 Jews had also immigrated to the homeland.⁹⁵ According to the Jewish Virtual Library on “Immigration by Continent per Year”, 57% of the world's Jewish Population lived in Europe.⁹⁶ After Israel was legitimized in 1948, the census shows that that percentage dropped to less than 35% with a rising population of over 500,000 Jews in Israel. Given the population influx in Israel and the number of European Jews decreasing in Europe, the majority of Jewish immigrants to Israel were significantly more European than any other origin.

Like mentioned before, Zionism is a useful concept to investigate under which conditions Israel came into existence. The fact that Israel was indeed established politically, economically,

⁹⁴ Jewish Virtual Library, “Total Immigration to Israel by Continent and Year.” Total immigration to Israel by continent and Year: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/total-immigration-to-israel-by-continent-per-year>.

⁹⁵ Jewish Virtual Library, “Total Immigration to Israel”.

⁹⁶ Jewish Virtual Library, “Total Immigration to Israel”.

and religiously by heavy European influences suggests the presence of other modern conflicts like racism. Other Jewish identities like Russian, Sephardic, and Mizrahi Jews, found forms of their own struggle when absorbing into Israel. However, the negligence in religious leaders from accepting Beta Israel into the State for decades after it was established begs to find reason. That reason being that Ethiopian Jews held one trait that set them apart from most of the rest: dark skin.

INVENTING JEWISH WHITENESS

Ben Halpern and Jehuda Reinharz give provoking arguments in their *Zionism and the Creation of a New Society* and investigate upon which grounds the new society was created.⁹⁷ Using the declaration given by David Ben-Gurion in 1948, Halpern et al. imply from the start that the declaration was an authentic expression of the fundamental Zionist deriving from the 1880s idea to confront the ‘Jewish question’ and secure a Jewish state. According to Halpern and Reinharz, the institutions that were presently presiding Jewish affairs during the 1940s before Gurion made the declaration embody party structures, political practices, and principles that followed suit after the World Zionist Foundation (WZO). In fact, he served on the WZO committee in 1935, and through its capacities created the declaration. Therefore, Gurion fashioned the declaration to mirror the same Western mentalities that the foundation was built on.

Although Gurion had settled in Israel long before it gained independence, he was native to Russian-ruled Poland where he was raised in a Jewish orthodox home. His role in Israel’s foundation is more than prominent, being the preeminent leader of the Jewish community during

⁹⁷ Halpern, Ben, and Jehuda Reinharz, *Zionism and the Creation of a New Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

its status as the Mandate Territory of Palestine and largely leading the struggle that secured its legitimacy. Gurion is thus referred to as Israel's founding father, the primary national founder, and the first Prime Minister of Israel. The attitudes of Gurion's Zionist advocacy still echo in the political halls of Israel today.⁹⁸

Like Gurion who had European origin, Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer of religious Zionism was German, Rabbi Asher Ginsberg (Ahad Ha'am) of cultural Zionism was native to what is now modern-day Ukraine, and Theodor Herzl of political Zionism—known as the father of Zionism—was born in Austria. The leaders of both Jewish communities and of Zionism portray political views informed by their European origins. Moreover, by the 19th and 20th centuries it is important to note that the term 'European Jew', refers to Ashkenazi Jews more than any other group.

Sephardic Jews who dispersed to the Iberian Peninsula and northern Africa began to display uneasiness about themselves vis-a-vis 'whiteness' during the 17th century.⁹⁹ By the mid 17th century, various Spanish colonies set up systems of segregation called the Sistema de Castas, a social structure to separate solely on skin color.¹⁰⁰ The epicenter of Jewish power during this time was in Amsterdam under the watch of European colonizers. Therefore, European modern practice of 'nation' and 'state' constituted the demographic of dark skinned Jews as 'other' and class segregation quickly spread throughout Dutch, English, French, and

⁹⁸ "1973: Israel's founding father dies" (BBC NEWS), 1 December 1973.

⁹⁹ Schorsch, Johnathan, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 166.

¹⁰⁰ Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World*, pp. 167.

other colonies.¹⁰¹ Not only did the industrialized European powers subjugate the dark skinned as ‘Blacks / negros’, the term predominated amongst planters, merchants, travelers, missionaries, and politicians in Africa and the Americas as well.¹⁰²

Unsurprisingly, the importance of ‘whiteness’ rose with the global participation in slave trading. Plurally among nations, but also within Judaism. Whiteness provided acceptance into the dominant Jewish class where the quality and antiquity of their European appearance gave them power and authority over others. This early-modern perception on race therefore manipulated who was seen as Jewish. Sephardic Jews, a majority who were absorbed into the Netherland nation, became prominent players in Slave trading with their Ashkenazim counterparts. Thus dealing in slave trade and labor themselves.¹⁰³

The practice of circumcision among negro Jews saw significant decrease in the 17th and 18th centuries.¹⁰⁴ Rabbi David ibn Zimra (1479-1573), the same leader mentioned in chapter one who justified a family in Egypt to possess a Jewish Ethiopian woman as a slave with his *responsum* is echoed here:

“There are three kinds of slaves besides a Hebrew slave and they are these: A. One who circumcised and immersed for the sake of enslavement; he is responsible for all the *mitzvot* [a precept or commandment] as is a woman...; Second, one who did not circumcise or immerse but took upon himself the seven mitzvot of the sons of Noah, for

¹⁰¹ Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World*, pp. 166.

¹⁰² Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World*, pp. 167.

¹⁰³ Faber, Eli, *Jews, Slaves, and the Slave Trade: Setting the Record Straight* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

¹⁰⁴ Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World*, pp. 169.

he is like a resident alien...; C. One who did not circumcise or immerse and worships as an idolator, within the land of Israel it is forbidden to retain him even one day, but outside of Israel it is permitted to retain him.”¹⁰⁵

Jewish lay leaders in shipping companies recognized the presence of black Jews, needing reason to justify their actions.

Judaism employs a strict adherence to halakhot (also known as halakhah, halachah, and halakah), the legal system to regulate religious adherence to Jewish laws and ordinances. Circumcision is a law laid out in the Hebrew book of Genesis, commanding to “circumcise all males within the tribe”.¹⁰⁶ So to mitigate the issue of breaking commandment, Sephardi and Ashkenazi Jews purposefully disbanded the practice of circumcision amongst dark skinned Jews in order to continue their enslavement. The most comprehensive guide of this discrimination is perhaps found in Johnathan Schorsch’s *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World*.¹⁰⁷ Schorsch recognized that early circumcision records for Sephardim-Ashkenazim communities kept in London and Amsterdam become difficult to “tell whether slaves continued to be circumcised or converted and pose certain difficulties”.¹⁰⁸

The terminology black and negro once again becomes an indicator to determine the different adherence to halakhot during the premodern-early modern period. In Amsterdam, Schorsch notices a shift from the terms “sephardic descent,” “proselytized [convert]”, and “ger

¹⁰⁵ Ibn Zimra, *Sh’elot*, pt. 4, responsum no. 50. See citation no. 25.

¹⁰⁶ Hebrew Bible, Genesis, 17:9-14, *Tanakh*.

¹⁰⁷ Schorsch, Johnathan, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

¹⁰⁸ Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World*, pp. 177.

[also a name for convert]” to “slave”, “black”, “mulatto”, and “servant”.¹⁰⁹ English data in the years 1680-1716 reflects a shift in burial rights, where ‘domesticized staff’ that were uncircumcised and immersed were no longer welcome to be buried in Jewish cemeteries.¹¹⁰ And finally, Schorsch admits that by the 18th century, dark skin became almost non-existent in the *halakhot* records of Jews.¹¹¹ Per contra, black Jews were no longer included into the narrative.

The Law of Return promised by Israel granted any Jewish person the right to gain Israeli citizenship and immigrate to the Holy Land.¹¹² However, being that the leading powers of Israel hailed from European origin, their westernized view of race proved to be hindering to decentralized Jewish populations from different corners of the earth. Even though slavery had been abolished for over a century, racial prejudice neglected Jews with dark skin to be considered under the Law of Return because of the repercussions from slavery. The concept of European whiteness and their imperial power in the modern era maps the evidence that shows a separation of Jewish centrality. The same divide that Ethiopian Jews would suffer in newly established Israel from their skin color.

¹⁰⁹ Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World*, pp. 177.

¹¹⁰ Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World*, pp. 177.

¹¹¹ Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World*, pp. 178.

¹¹² Ben-Rafael, Eliezer, and Yochanan Peres, *Is Israel One? Religion, Nationalism, Multiculturalism Confounded* (Brill Academic Publishers, 2005).

CHAPTER THREE

Contemporary Judaism

GRAENUM BERGER

Graenum Berger (1908-1999) was born and raised in Gloversville, NY. His parents were orthodox immigrant Jews that remained active members of their synagogue and taught Graenum, along with his siblings, the practice of orthodox religion. He first started college at New York University, transferred to the University of Missouri, then back to the Graduate School of Jewish Social Work in New York where he received his PhD in 1932. Upon his graduation, Berger was appointed the Executive Director of Jewish Community Center of Staten Island where he began working with underprivileged men, women, and children. New York officials later appointed him as a headworker on the Bronx Settlement House where he continued to work with underprivileged, diverse, multi-ethnic, and non-Jewish communities . By 1949, Berger had joined the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies of New York as consultant for Jewish Community Centers and Camps.¹¹³ It was after this occasion where he would begin to travel and counsel Jewish agencies (and government organizations) on social work ethic and effectiveness. His work built a repertoire of experience that would later enlist his help all over the world.

Berger's exposure to different demographic groups was vast. Reports that he had filed, found in the archival folders from the Bronx House mention (but are not limited to), "elderly women", "paralyzed", "negro", "blind", "homeless", and "orphan" cases.¹¹⁴ Therefore, he disclaimed in his documents that he wished to reflect unbiased analysis on an individual's physical and mental treatment needs, despite religion or race. Much of this experience was later referenced in his book *Black Jews in America*, where he reflects on the nation's black communities and inherent biases and negligence of the nation.¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Berger, Graenum, *Graenum; an Autobiography* (Ktav Pub & Distributors Inc, 1987).

¹¹⁴ Graenum Berger Papers, *The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Collection Number: MS-352, Box 2, Folder 2/6.

¹¹⁵ Berger, Graenum, *Black Jews in America* (New York, N. Y., Commission On Synagogue Relations, Federation Of Jewish Philanthropy, 1978).

One requirement of Graenum's social work was devoted to visiting community centers, schools, synagogues, and other agencies to observe their current functionality. He would then analyze the organization and diagnose any needed treatment plans. After making vast inquiries into social structures and power dynamics within the facilities, he would rewrite production manuscripts to optimize production management and overall morale in the institution. This would often cause contentious exchanges between agencies, between him and the agencies, or even between him and his coworkers.

When Berger was not working, he was deeply committed to a continued education and involvement in religion, community, and country. His interest would extend to the latest government reports, Jewish literature, scientific journals, humanitarian works, newspaper stories, and ongoing debates about Jewish identity. In many cases, Berger corresponded with professors, politicians, and religious authorities alike.¹¹⁶ The tone of writing that he used in his positive correspondences would seem light and affectionate, with a natural question-answer based pattern. However, when there were opposing views on matters, be it religion, politics, or business, Berger was known to be harshly direct and also passively cynical.

One such exchange was written August 21, 1951, to a Mr. J. M. Kaplan, where Berger wrote a three-page personal note attached to an additional seven-page 'plan that should take action'.¹¹⁷ The intention of Berger was to present to Kaplan the need for one organization that would lead all philanthropic agencies in NY, and potentially, the Jewish world. He defined this need by explaining that 'all organizations act prematurely', are 'done in a very uncoordinated, and certainly, unevaluated manners', and further, 'no single federation is properly constituted to provide an overall approach'. His tone is presumably more professional at the start but through

¹¹⁶ Graenum, *Graenum, an Autobiography* (Ktav Pub & Distributors Inc, 1987).

¹¹⁷ Graenum Berger Papers, *The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Collection Number: MS-352, Box 4, Folder 3/4.

the letter Graenum starts to use passive terminology like ‘controversial’, ‘pitifully weak’, ‘unappealing’, ‘uninspired’, ‘incompetent’, and then ends it by suggesting if it ‘need be done under more rigorous supervision?’.¹¹⁸ These aggressive remarks added into the hostility of his letter recipients.

Through his career, the tone of his letters became even more aggressive and accusatory. Despite his good intention for most things, how others perceived Berger seems to outweigh other behaviors that manifested in personal journals or intimate letters and influences a general reputation that lingers today.¹¹⁹ The same behavior seen in the letter to Kaplan, would reflect in countless correspondences all over the world for over three decades and would eventually cause Berger to lose employment, friendship, respect, publishing rights from editors, journals, newspapers, and being stripped of awards that he had won from humanitarian accomplishment.¹²⁰ Historic literature grants Berger the accomplishment of creating the American Association for Ethiopian Jews (AAEJ) and aiding Ethiopian Jews in their return to Israel. But the counter narrative not shown, is his extreme passion to combat modern Judaism's biases of race and identity which led to great personal losses.

In his personal diaries, Berger was remarkable at detailing daily activity, things learned, people talked to, and keeping a log of travel and appointments. Personal journals were kept light and direct, with things that he needed to remember or people he had talked to. One trip records

¹¹⁸ Graenum Berger Papers, *The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Collection Number: MS-352, Box 4, Folder 3/4.

¹¹⁹ An inference to the silence of his historic narrative and contribution.

¹²⁰ *Some examples include: Graenum Berger Papers, *The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Collection Number: MS-352, Box 10, Folder 3/2. Rejection letter from New York Book Review stating, ‘no plan to review your work’.
Box 2, Folder 2/8.

Dale Lewis uninvited Graenum to the Usdan Center Gala after Graenum was invited to be an honorary guest for the occasion. (letter marked July 7, 1986).
Box 4, Folder 2/3.

At the request to reserve seats during a High Holy Days ceremony, Rabbi Citrin denied the request to reserve seats for Graenum and his wife, Emma Berger.

Berger and his wife spending time traveling from Jerusalem to Tel Aviv. He was there with the primary purpose of checking on community centers and investigating the conditions of the environment to better understand their social norms. Israel, still being a new state, was completely different from the United States. Therefore, Berger indicated in his journal that he would walk and observe main streets and back alleys, or occasionally visit local coffee houses and listen to general chat.¹²¹ One particular page stands out that is not completely explicit and does not have extensive writing. It simply holds the date July 10, 1955, and states, “children playing ball in street”, “they are friendly”, “12 black Jewish children”, with “Falasha?” underlined.¹²²

In the following decade, Berger's personal writings shifted to bring attention to Beta Israelis. Mostly found in personal letters and Newspaper publications, he would discuss his research and found documentation to prove their connection to Judaism. Interestingly, the historical proof that Berger used were the same individuals discussed in the first chapter: Joseph Halévy from the "Alliance Israelite Universelle" who traveled to Ethiopia to ward of Christian missionaries in 1868, and 19th-20th century leading pioneer for Ethiopian Jewish cause, Jacques Faitlovitch.¹²³

When Berger stumbled upon “Falasha” Jews, a term they deem derogative, there were already a few in number living in Israel. According to the Jewish Virtual Library on

¹²¹ Graenum Berger Papers, *The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Collection Number: MS-352, Box 7, black travel log with red ribbon.

¹²² Graenum Berger Papers, *The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Collection Number: MS-352, Box 7, 1955 Travel Journal.

¹²³ Graenum Berger Papers, *The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Collection Number: MS-352, Box 1, Folder 3.

“Immigration by Continent per Year” used in chapter two, roughly 8,000 African Jews immigrated to Israel before it was established in 1948.¹²⁴ The largest number, reaching over 4,000, first immigrated in the early 1900s until dropping dramatically to less than 1000 in the following 20 years. This surge in immigration supports the movement of Ethiopian Jews under the efforts of Jacques Faitlovitch, who secured their acceptance into Jewish schools for boys and girls in Jerusalem after bringing negro Jews to Paris in 1906. After the death of Faitlovitch and with the rising conflicts of WWI and WWII, Ethiopian immigrants decreased substantially.

When the global Zionist movement ushered Jews to settle the territory of Palestine and after Israel was legitimized as a state, the European presence had boomed tenfold when a majority of the immigrants were Ashkenazic and Sephardic. Therefore, the increase of westernized menatilities during the early to mid twentieth century stalled the immigration of Ethiopian Jews and gave them little to no legitimacy, even with there being a small presence of dark-skinned Jews in Israel already. This inequality in race and social structure confounded Berger to the point where he traveled to Ethiopia in 1965 and became fully committed to Ethiopian acceptance into Israel.¹²⁵

THE THIRTY-YEAR WAR OF CORRESPONDENCE

While working for the Federation of Jewish Philanthropies in New York as consultant for Jewish Community Centers and Camps, Berger oversaw the construction of community centers in Israel. In 1965, the same trip he visited Ethiopia, he spent over 30 days in Israel doing a

¹²⁴ Jewish Virtual Library, “Total Immigration to Israel by Continent and Year.” Total immigration to Israel by continent and Year: <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/total-immigration-to-israel-by-continent-per-year>.

¹²⁵ Berger, *Graenum, an Autobiography*, 1st ed. (Ktav Pub & Distributors Inc, 1987) pp. 11.

lecture series for the newly built community centers management team where Berger kept a separate travel log recording everyday activities.¹²⁶ The lectures were designed to train a group of leaders into effectively accepting the underprivileged/newly arriving refugees into the community and then allowing them learning-based opportunities that would consequentially make them independent and valuable to the community.¹²⁷ The lecture series did not go as planned. The participants who began the course would either miss the weekly lectures or fail to read assigned material. Berger wrote of this frustration to the Community Center Director, suggesting that the lectures be postponed until ‘those enrolled were prepared and ready’.¹²⁸

Berger continued to record his frustration at the management's motivation but realized that the negligence of the participants, as well as the management, had to do with select biases. While Berger was trying to train the community center to receive all refugees despite their ethnic background, management was selective on ‘class and status’.¹²⁹ According to the employment records at the Community Center in lower Jerusalem, Berger noticed that employment positions were offered to Jews of light skin, even if a Jew of dark skin was more qualified for the

¹²⁶ Graenum Berger Papers, *The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Collection Number: MS-352, Box 8, 1965 Travel Journal.

¹²⁷ Graenum Berger Papers, *The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Collection Number: MS-352, Box 10, Folder 1/6. Letter to Moshe Arie dated July 24, 1975.

¹²⁸ Graenum Berger Papers, *The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Collection Number: MS-352, Box 10, Folder ⅞. Letter to David Ben Menachem dated July 7, 1975.

¹²⁹ ^ continued from the Letter for D. Mechanem.

position.¹³⁰ In an effort to correct the discrimination, he consistently brought attention to the inequality anytime he could.

On April 22, 1966, Berger wrote to a man named ‘Jerry’ of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.¹³¹ In the second paragraph, Berger openly admits that he aims to ‘attack the whole social work basis for the Jewish Community Centers. They are injured, and they do not assist the Jewish movement of developing Jewish life.’ Just in the following two months, Berger accepted the invitations to speak of employment at the American Histadrut Cultural Exchange Institute,¹³² and the NYC Jewish Philanthropic board meeting,¹³³ and began to receive criticism about his stance on Ethiopian Jews from vast audiences. Charles Arnell of Sherman Oaks, California wrote Graenum the following April with the letter opening with, “You’re getting national. The AP wire service picked up your remarks and I read it here in Los Angeles.”¹³⁴ Arnell was not entirely against Bergrers opinions, but did strike a change in tone when commenting on ‘ethnic folk’. From his perspective, Arnell thought Berger had “eccentric ideals about a faked western idealism

¹³⁰ Graenum Berger Papers, *The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Collection Number: MS-352, Box 8, 1965 Travel Journal.

¹³¹ Graenum Berger Papers, *The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Collection Number: MS-352, Box 1, Folder ⅙, A-B general. Letter to Dr. A. J. Auerbach, dated April 22, 1965.

¹³² Graenum Berger Papers, *The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Collection Number: MS-352, Box 1, Folder 2/6.

¹³³ Graenum Berger Papers, *The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Collection Number: MS-352, Box 1, Folder 2/6.

¹³⁴ Graenum Berger Papers, *The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Collection Number: MS-352, Box 1, Folder ⅙, A-B general. Letter from Charles Arnell M.D., dated April, 1966.

concerning brotherhoods of man”. A sure statement that supports Berger to notice a racial difference sparked by western ideologies.

Arnell’s letter was not the only incident where Jews around the globe were stirred enough to write Berger on the matter. The more he decided to advocate and use Ethiopian Jews as the focal point in his lectures and publications, the more resentment there showed in his archival repository. The depth that these correspondences go, are beyond my count. The most significant letters that lashed on Berger, called him a “lone prophet”,¹³⁵ “impertinent”,¹³⁶ and “alone in his self-righteous cause for dismantling God’s work”.¹³⁷ The hateful sentiment that is documented in the letters gained enough attention and momentum, they evolved into physical acts against him.

On top of the conferences, organization meetings, social work functions, and publications, Berger continued personal correspondences with a conglomeration of people. To date, his work holds interaction with over 30 countries, 10 political governments, over 100 rabbis, and countless residents from around the world.¹³⁸ When leaders failed to write, he would write again. In one of his later visits to Jerusalem, Graenum had written to Israeli President, Ephraim Katzir (served 1973-1978), and made an appointment to discuss Ethiopian Jews over

¹³⁵ Graenum Berger Papers, *The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Collection Number: MS-352, Box 4, Folder 1/7. Letter from Rabbi Ira Eisenstein.

¹³⁶ Graenum Berger Papers, *The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Collection Number: MS-352, Box 4, Folder 1/7. Letter from Sandra A. Garcia.

¹³⁷ Graenum Berger Papers, *The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Collection Number: MS-352, Box 4, Folder 3/7. Letter from Irving Brodsky.

¹³⁸ Narrative pulled from *Graenum; an Autobiography*, self-acclaimed statement that should be considered objectively.

lunch.¹³⁹ His journal indicates there was an appointment made¹⁴⁰, but a letter to the AAJEJ elaborates that ‘Katzir did not keep the appointment as promised’, but ‘sent two people in his stead, and it wasn’t known their political role’, and ‘neither did it seem progressive for our Beta Israeli brothers’.¹⁴¹

That same year in 1973, Graenum Berger retired from the Jewish Agency of New York Philanthropies. It is unclear if the retirement was an ultimatum or if he did it voluntarily. What is known, is that a letter to one ‘Bob’ on October 20, 1974, states that he offered the Federation to ‘continue to work part time if they needed’ followed by ‘but apparently the Federation preferred to get its council elsewhere’.¹⁴² Later in the letter Berger confides to Bob that he was prohibited from returning to his office at the Federation ‘where there are numerous boxes filled with letters and essays about Falasha Jews’, that ‘currently have unknown whereabouts’ and that he would ‘never see again’.¹⁴³ This imperative detail informs that archives—and this thesis—only consist of documents that were transferred from Bergrers home to archives and weren’t potentially destroyed. Whether or not those boxes were preserved is unknown. It is also an intriguing concept that this came less than 10 years after he committed to African Jews.

¹³⁹ Graenum Berger, *Graenum; an Autobiography*, page 599.

¹⁴⁰ Graenum Berger Papers, *The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Collection Number: MS-352, Box 8, 1976 Journal.

¹⁴¹ Graenum Berger Papers, *The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Collection Number: MS-352, Box 10, Folder 3/6.

¹⁴² Graenum Berger Papers, *The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Collection Number: MS-352, Box 4, Folder 4/1.

¹⁴³ ^continued from letter to ‘Bob’, last name unknown.

After Berger retired, his full attention turned to the American Association for Ethiopian Jews (AAEJ) that he personally established in 1974.¹⁴⁴ Separating from the Federation did not cut off all his social work, even after retirement he would occasionally attend conferences in Israel, New York, and Europe, being asked to speak, or discuss social work. When allowed, he would include Ethiopian Jews and use a religious dialect to convey how non-secularism and correct pluralism was in fact, a Jewish principle. It was this consideration and Bergers's excellent talent for debate that gave new light into the global Jewish conversation of Ethiopian Jews.

In small steps, Berger began to personally recruit friends, family, and acquaintances to offer funds that would secretly relocate (approx.) 300 Ethiopians at a time to Israel. Many of the transactions shown in the AAEJ log books were often financed by himself.¹⁴⁵ Government officials later claimed they would compensate the AAEJ for its large donations to rescue missions but whether the AAEJ was compensated is unlikely. On April 17, 1987, Berger sent a letter to "Phil and Hanna" exclaiming how delighted the AAEJ was with its success of "over 16,000 Ethiopian Jews Rescued", but "he and Emma [his wife] still worry and lose sleep over the remaining thousands in Ethiopia that are starving, dying, and discriminated against in Ethiopia."¹⁴⁶ Berger notably commented on how "sad" he was that "the Jewish World and Israel are likely to forget about their [Beta Israel] existence. Except for our organization [AAEJ] no government assistance has been provided and the money that was promised has not yet made it

¹⁴⁴ Graenum Berger Papers, *The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Collection Number: MS-352, Box 10, Folder 1/3.

¹⁴⁵ Graenum Berger Papers, *The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Collection Number: MS-352, Box 10, Folder 3/3.

¹⁴⁶ Graenum Berger Papers, *The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Collection Number: MS-352, Box 2, Folder 1/7. Letter from Phil and Hanna, no last name listed, April 17, 1987.

to our Agency.” The final financial statements of the AAEJ up to its disbanded in 1993 do not reflect government assistance from any recognizable financial institution.¹⁴⁷

In a letter written to a “Bernie” and “Fran” in 1988, Berger began to express that it may be time to let go of the AAEJ.¹⁴⁸ The letter describes how Berger had just sent off 14 boxes of material to the ‘archive’, where he “adieu’d material that he had been after for years”. In painful admittance, Berger followed the statement by saying:

“I have no further need of this material, most valuable in my estimation, for I shall not write further on this subject. Let the scholars dig out what they need, but they will have to go there instead of coming to my home, where I spent many pleasant hours trying to educate them about the truth of the issues. I was not surprised that the Jewish Agency did not have it on their Agenda, because neither Israel nor the Jewish world, and that includes all of the American Jewish Organizations, ever wanted to rescue them in the first instance and certainly won't do more than make verbal gestures about saving the remaining ethnic Jews around the world.”¹⁴⁹

Against the struggles, Bergers plight for Ethiopian Jews did find its successes. Even though many of the efforts fell on deaf ears and unwilling people, Jewish immigration from Ethiopia increased in the late 1970s to the 1990s.

¹⁴⁷ Graenum Berger Papers, *The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Collection Number: MS-352, Box 11, Folder 3/6.

¹⁴⁸ Graenum Berger Papers, *The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Collection Number: MS-352, Box 2, Folder 2/7. Letter to Bernie and Fran, no last name listed.

¹⁴⁹ ^Found in the same letter to ‘Bernie and Fran’, see citation 148.

The immigration of Beta Israelis gave many Ethiopian Jews the idea there was a safe passage treading north through Sudan. When Ethiopia was impacted by the 1980s hunger crisis, a disaster that the United States Agency for International Development estimated to have over one million deaths, thousands of Ethiopians began to physically walk through the north African deserts in an attempt to make it to the Holy Land.¹⁵⁰ Ethiopian officials fought the idea of losing infrastructure and their northern citizens, even though Beta Israelis lived in the harsh climates of northern Gondar's territory. Those able to escape would often suffer the decision, and many would die in the hostile desert where thousands were forced to live in refugee camps.¹⁵¹ In dire necessity, Israeli officials finally declared that the Law of Return was applied to Beta Israel in 1977. Between 1979-1990 massive rescue missions like Operation Moses, Operation Joshua, and Operation Solomon brought more than 100,000 Ethiopian Jews to Israel. It may never be known to what extent Graenum Berger helped create a voice for the decentralized Beta Israeli population, but his efforts and the situation of natural disaster eventually led to their acceptance.

Berger was well known for his outspoken views about equality among all people and Jewish pluralism that ultimately led to the decline of his career. In spite of the aggressive actions and remarks against his character, his mentalities never waivered. Most of his publications—newspaper, essays, pamphlets, and books—wrote about modern Judaism and how the Jewish identity crisis is based on religious practice, orthodox vs. unorthodox and culture that is inherently flawed. In his perspective, this conflict was based on one secular belief against another; secular meaning the conduct of religious affairs based on singular, naturalistic, and

¹⁵⁰ Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance, "Ethiopia Drought/Famine (1983–1985)", *United States Agency for International Development*: https://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PBAAH005.pdf

¹⁵¹ Graenum Berger, *Rescue the Ethiopian Jews!* (John Washburn Bleeker Hampton Publishing Co., 1996).

relative considerations to oneself. In other words, identity was never going to be recognized or collective because every Jewish population would hold its own unique cultures and norms against the others.

Before his passing in 1999, Berger published a personal autobiography¹⁵² and his final book titled, *Rescue the Ethiopian Jews!*.¹⁵³ These two final books were greatly debated between him and the publishing companies. Berger was asked to cut *Rescue the Ethiopian Jews!* total pages down by two-thirds, and that he could not mention specific things.¹⁵⁴ If he wasn't able to comply with the publishing terms, he would not receive their support or business.¹⁵⁵ Many of his narratives are kept out of the general historical account because of this fact. Being aware of the fact that he is also biased and relative to himself, I recognize that his perspective must be considered objectively. The conclusion of my analysis confirms that many of his short-lived claims in both the autobiography and the plight for Ethiopian Jews are accurate and supported by archival documents. Not only that, but to echo the statements at the beginning of this chapter, the narrative not shown, was Berger's extreme passion to combat modern Judaism's biases of race and identity which led to great personal losses. This narrative was time and again shielded by authoritative figures who wished to silence Graenum Berger and keep Ethiopian Jews in minority. And furthermore, when Ethiopian Jews were finally admitted into Israel, they did not receive a brotherly welcome.

¹⁵² Graenum Berger, *Graenum, an Autobiography*, 1st ed. (Ktav Pub & Distributors Inc, 1987).

¹⁵³ Graenum Berger, *Rescue the Ethiopian Jews!*

¹⁵⁴ Graenum Berger Papers, *The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Collection Number: MS-352, Box 6, Folder 2/4.

Found in the correspondence between him and 'Jewish Agency Publications'.

¹⁵⁵ Graenum Berger Papers, *The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Collection Number: MS-352, Box 13, Folder 1/2.

ETHIOPIAN ABSORPTION INTO ISRAEL

Located in the southern region of Israel lies the Negev (or Negeb) desert. David Ben-Gurion, Israel's first Prime Minister delegated the Negev to act as the settlement region for incoming Jews needing to be absorbed into Israel. Gurion believed that the settlement of the Negev was essential to the future of Israel and institutions of Zionism, politically and agriculturally.¹⁵⁶ After Gurion retired, the region's purpose was discarded and what originally housed incoming Jews, degraded into the term 'Jewish refugees'.¹⁵⁷ In 1989 and 1991 when approximately 40,000 Ethiopian Jews immigrated, they were placed in the Negev before undergoing absorption processes that would grant them full citizenship. What the refugees found is that Israel was not based on Jewish equality, but was secular in its Jewish practice and harbored prejudices against their race and culture.

Richard Isralowitz set out in 1998 to bring together a comprehensive interview of the Nehal Beka and its immigrants.¹⁵⁸ The Nehal Beka was a caravan absorption center located outside of Be'er Sheva and was one of the largest centers that processed Ethiopian Jews. In an effort to include all the traits of Nehal Beka, Isralowitz interviewed over 20 refugees of all ages, ranging from Russian and Bedouin, to Ethiopian.¹⁵⁹ He noticed a common thread throughout the interviews, with Ethiopian Jews being the brunt of all negativity. Uri, a 42 year-old Russian Jew,

¹⁵⁶ Isralowitz, Richard, and Jonathan Friedlander, editors, *Transitions: Russians, Ethiopians, and Bedouins in Israel's Negev Desert* (Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1999), pp. 7.

¹⁵⁷ Isralowitz and Friedlander, *Transitions*, pp. 7.

¹⁵⁸ Isralowitz and Friedlander, *Transitions*, pp. 51.

¹⁵⁹ Isralowitz and Friedlander, *Transitions*, pp. 51-63. The interviews are recorded, at least in part, throughout chapter 4.

became hostile at Isralowitz's questions. At one point, he mentions how Uri hushed as if imparting a secret, saying, "There is no such thing as black Jews".¹⁶⁰

Despite their conditions as equal refugees in Nehal Beka, Russian Jews and Boudins did not accept their dark skinned neighbors as legitimate Jews. Of the 10 interviews that Isralowitz had with Ethiopian Jews, eight of them mentioned how they were unhappy with the absorption process. Merely summing it up that they were happy to be in Israel, but there was harshness from Hebrew Language teachers and an issue with employment.¹⁶¹

Absorption centers and Transit camps, like the Nehal Beka found in the Negev, are established to provide immigrants with 'a soft-landing' and to facilitate needs like human services, social work instruction, and reemployment placement. Esther Herzog, however, believes it to be something completely different.¹⁶² Herzog was a female immigrant who was [lucky] enough to work as a volunteer helper at the Galuiot Absorption Center. At her time of employment, the center would process and place European immigrants quickly into Israel's economy. Herzog admitted that the treatment of European Jews and their ability to leave the centers did not strike a second thought, until the center received a large number of 330 Ethiopian Jews in 1990.¹⁶³

It was at this time Herzog realized that with the surge of Ethiopian Immigration, the center received a huge staff of social workers, instructors, and 'others' within a week of their arrival. The way in which these immigrants were treated, as opposed to the European ones, was

¹⁶⁰ Isralowitz and Friedlander, *Transitions*, pp. 59.

¹⁶¹^see citation 159.

¹⁶² Isralowitz and Friedlander, *Transitions*, pp. 73.

¹⁶³ Isralowitz and Friedlander, *Transitions*, pp. 73.

different “physically, organizationally, and conceptually by nature”.¹⁶⁴ Israel’s absorption plans from the outside, give an illusion that they facilitate a humanitarian response to traumatized refugees. That these systems act analogous to displaced persons, with bureaucrats acting as concerned parents. When really, Herzog describes it as a system that forced all identities to assimilate to what Israel wanted, as well as made “all her person’s codependent upon her”.¹⁶⁵

This account from Herzog is recorded “only from her perspective”, but calls scholars to pay attention to the studies of absorption centers anyway, claiming “there are only few and it is dire”.¹⁶⁶ The interesting part of Herzog’s analysis is that she details the programs that Ethiopian Jews were expected to participate in: language school, employment, kindergarten, schooling assistance, housekeeping instruction, garbage disposal, postal service, and an arrangement of religious rituals—like circumcision.¹⁶⁷ The absorption centers to Herzog’s disgust, demonstrated placement patterns that employed Ethiopian refugees to be glued into society as “isolates”.¹⁶⁸

This small detail of which programs the absorption centers placed for Ethiopian Jews opens up another unique glimpse into how Israel’s labor market discriminated racially to black immigrants. The same discrimination that Berger dealt with in the Jewish Community centers was not unique to just them, but the whole of society demonstrated the same labor discrimination. In 2021, Ameen Saabneh and Rebecca Tesfai published their research exploring how policy making in Israel and the United States is built to place racial minorities as the least

¹⁶⁴ Isralowitz and Friedlander, *Transitions*, pp. 74.

¹⁶⁵ Isralowitz and Friedlander, *Transitions*, pp. 79.

¹⁶⁶ Isralowitz and Friedlander, *Transitions*, pp. 82.

¹⁶⁷ Isralowitz and Friedlander, *Transitions*, pp. 74.

¹⁶⁸ Isralowitz and Friedlander, *Transitions*, pp. 74-75.

qualified for employment.¹⁶⁹ Saabneh and Tesfai use the United States as comparison, arguing that there are unequivocal similarities between the US and Israel in terms of unemployment, race, and gender discrimination. Therefore, they evaluate why there are such similarities by using the ‘queuing theory’ (Lieberson, 1980).¹⁷⁰ The queuing theory states “that when applicants apply for a job, employers rank-order the individuals based on their evaluation of the applicant”, including “race/nativity”.¹⁷¹ This process which is utilized in both the US and Israel has therefore used race to rank applicant acceptability based on skin color.

Due to Israel’s controversial beginnings, its society was continually organized and reorganized with ethnic-national lines. The primary conflict being Jew against Palestinian, where Palestinians eventually fell into the subordinate position under European Jews. By the time Ethiopian Jews arrived in bulk, Saabneh and Tesfai also express that the system that was used to subjugate Palestinians also adapted to make the minorities “subject to higher levels of institutional control”.¹⁷² Ethiopian Jews would not only be placed with subordinate jobs, their dependence was forced onto Israel's unforgiving policy makers.

Saabneh and Tesfai unravel the policies of employment, absorption, and society placement in a myriad of ways. From investigating the ranking systems within different employers, finding Ethiopian Jews were left without opportunities to rise,¹⁷³ to the prohibitions

¹⁶⁹Saabneh, Ameen, and Rebecca Tesfai, “Does Immigrant Selection Policy Matter? Labor Market Integration of Ethiopian Immigrants in Israel and the United States”, *Population Research & Policy Review*, 40, no. 5 (October 2021), pp. 955-985.

¹⁷⁰ Saabneh and Tesfai, “Does Immigrant Selection Policy Matter?”, pp. 961.

¹⁷¹ Saabneh and Tesfai, “Does Immigrant Selection Policy Matter?”, pp. 961.

¹⁷² Saabneh and Tesfai, “Does Immigrant Selection Policy Matter?”, pp. 962.

¹⁷³ Saabneh and Tesfai, “Does Immigrant Selection Policy Matter?”, pp. 963.

of Ethiopian Jews of being self-employed.¹⁷⁴ Overall, the takeaway from Herzog, Saabneh, and Tesfai is that the absorption process of refugees into Israel discriminated against race and ethnicity. The programs in place absorbed immigrants with the intent to keep minority populations subjected to westernized and European Jewish mentalities in Israel.

¹⁷⁴ Saabneh and Tesfai, “Does Immigrant Selection Policy Matter?”, pp. 964.

CONCLUSION

Modern societies are riddled with exponential cultures, all managing to belong to legally defined institutions. Contemporary scholars have recently explored the phenomenon that society is ‘no longer a monopoly of the privileged’.¹⁷⁵ Meaning that medieval and patriarchal views on a single ‘dominant culture’ can no longer dictate an entire society or government. I find that statement to be far from the truth. The modern development of westernized Judaism influenced the whole concept of Jewish identity, religion, and belonging.

By the 7th century CE, Ethiopian Jews dispersed to the environments of Ethiopian mountains and deserts in an attempt to flee Christian and Arab invaders. Their populations formed tribal communities that faced discrimination for centuries. Country dictators forced language assimilation as well as Christian conversion. Able bodies wishing not to convert receded further into Ethiopia's outer rims where ultimately the tribes were cut off from modern progress, like math, science, and medicine. The only way that the tribes were able to observe Jewish worship was with what they inherited from earlier Jewish tribes.

The ancient Bible written in Ge’ez that Jewish tribes used for worship and study, employed the ancient rituals of Pentateuchal Law: the Jewish practice of, monogamy, cleanliness, worship, reverence to the sabbath, and prayer. And their political and societal patterns, as well as the ancient Kebra Nagast script, present very plausible proof that Jews in Ethiopia are direct descendents from King Solomon (970-931 BC). Therefore, the legitimacy as ‘real’ Jews should not be contested.

¹⁷⁵ Ben-Rafael et al., *Is Israel One?*, pg. 4.

By the time Ethiopian Jews (Beta Israelis or 'Falashas') were brought to the global discussion in the 15th-18th centuries, their tribes had not been exposed to the developing world or the adaptations of Judaism in other parts of the world. Therefore, their legitimacy was questioned. There was great concern to those who employed Ethiopian Jews as house servants, since it is against the law for a Jew to own a Jewish slave. But Rabbi Zimra ultimately reasoned that their enslavement was justified due to their 'state'. This mentality was not soon to change.

When the western world boomed with industrialization, it gave European countries power and authority over a majority of the world. This dynamic fed into the modern concept of nation and state, where ideological lines gave a sense as to who was included within the European identity. These lines created the illusion of 'other', where those with dark skin did not fit into what Europeans thought of as 'the dominant class'. This elitist mentality gave the Jews of Europe the same perspective: white Jews were supreme over dark skinned Jews.

Ashkenazim and Sephardic Jews, established in Germany, Poland, Spain, and Portugal, flocked to the demanding industry of the Netherlands for ship building and mercantilism. The industry became colossal when the merchandise that lay leaders traded across the transatlantic became human slaves. Jewish halakhah records of adherence to religious laws and ordinances dramatically shifted for Jews of dark skin. The terminology shows that those once referred to as 'convert' or 'descendant of...' changed to 'slave', 'servant', 'black', or 'mulatto'. Another interesting change is that the religious records show a sudden decline in circumcision for black Jews. Establishing firm proof that light skinned Jews disbanded dark skinned Jews from the fold.

After the abolition of slavery, Jewish pioneers and missionaries from Europe set out to *save* the Ethiopian tribes from their primitive state and educate them in 'the right ways'. At the

end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th, leading pioneers like Joseph Halévy and Jacques Faitlovitch established Jewish schools for boys and girls, and began to educate the world on the conditions of Jews in Ethiopia. Faitlovitch brought a group of ‘falasha’ Jews to Paris which later instigated a small movement of Ethiopian Jews into Israel to be educated in the schools. Before Israel was established, over 8,000 Ethiopian Jews made the same jump and immigrated to Israel.

However, the sudden drive for Zionism in the 20th century influenced far more European Jews to immigrate than any other group. Zionism itself originated in Europe, but the important fact is that those who were involved in its leadership, are those who helped secure Israeli legitimacy in 1948. The policies from ‘The Jewish Agency’ and ‘The World Zionist Organization’ were used to draft the nation's political agenda and declaration of independence. And being that the mentalities and identities of westernized Jews were heavily influenced on modern concepts from Europe, Israel was more of a product of European Jewishness.

When the state was legitimized in 1948, Israel proclaimed the Law of Return where every Jew had a right to Aaliyah. And even though Beta Israels were accepted as Jews from the early 20th century, they were not included under the Law of Return. Graenum Berger, a social worker and philanthropist from New York City, saw this discrepancy. After traveling to Israel and discovering a small population of ‘Falasha’ Jews that had been there since before 1948, he began to seek out why the remaining thousands were not allowed to migrate from Ethiopia.

Berger spent over 30 years of his life addressing the plight of Ethiopian Jews. The same elitist mentality that placed light Jews over dark Jews, was just as present in the 20th century as it was in the early-modern period. At every available opportunity, Berger would research, lecture,

advocate, and publish on the topic of Ethiopian Jews. His outspoken opinion for their equality gained him hatred from Jews all over the world. To combat the hate, Berger never wavered from being an example of plurality. He thought that his philanthropic social work and establishments of community centers in Jerusalem would create an environment where people from all demographics could engage in extracurricular activities and come together as one community.

Despite his efforts, the employees at the centers in Jerusalem were not open to creating an environment welcome to all demographics. Even to the extent of ripping the plaque of Graenum Berger off the wall at the public pool, a pool he raised funds for, and segregating the days for ‘light’ and ‘dark’ use.¹⁷⁶ This was not the only backlash Berger faced. The resentment of Berger grew so much that he lost awards that were once granted, seats in Synagogue worship, invitations to banquets, and Israel’s Prime Minister refused to meet Berger when he asked to discuss Ethiopian Jews...potentially leading to the loss of his career.

The constant drive from Berger to include Ethiopian Jews into Israel did see some success. Usually using his own personal funds, Berger was able to recruit small amounts of money to begin transporting Beta Israelis through his organization, the AAJE. When Ethiopia faced its Hunger Crisis in the 1980s, Israel opened its doors and finally allowed Ethiopian Jews under the Law of Return. Tens of thousands were brought to the Holy Land.

Israel had a system of absorption in the lower Negev Desert, where refugees were to be housed until they were absorbed into society. The principles and programs of this system did not only place minority groups, like Ethiopian Jews, into subordination. It was a racially

¹⁷⁶Graenum Berger Papers, *The Jacob Rader Marcus Center of the American Jewish Archives*, Cincinnati, Ohio. Collection Number: MS-352, Box 3, Folder 1/3. Letter to the Community Center in Jerusalem expressing his extreme disappointment in their treatment of him after he was the one to raise over \$100,000.00 to build a public swimming pool.

discriminative system that placed dark skinned Jews into the low-end jobs with poor wages, little opportunity to rise, and little-to-no opportunity to be self employed. The other programs that were instilled in the Absorption centers forced refugees to assimilate by language, religious practice, and education. The intention of Israeli bureaucrats was not to absorb Ethiopian Jews into society as equal citizens, but to convert them as subjects to western Jewish authority and fill the need for disgruntled manual labor.

The question that led this thesis was to explore why it took over 30 additional years for Ethiopian Jews to be accepted under the Law of Return after Israel became a state. What I found is: much of it still has to do with the repercussions and discrimination of race. The conditions of Israel today are still etched with racial prejudice and intolerance. And the attention that these issues deserve can be mapped by historical truths.

Most of the institutions, agencies, and archives were created and are maintained by Ashkenazi/Sephardic Jewish communities today. Many of the scholars and authors that this study uses either practice Jewish religion or are strongly linked in one form or another—i.e. familial ties, biblical interest, or religious aspirations. This control over agencies and the field of Judaism theoretically filters decentralized Jewish history into silence. Ethiopian Jews for example. The need for scholarly attention to Jewish History further requires research from unbiased sources and non-Jewish scholars.

Graenum Berger's narrative has received little credit to the general history of Israel, Beta Israel, and Jewish culture as a whole. Most likely because his story was drowned when Jewish leaders and publishing companies refused his opinion. Therefore, this thesis used Graenum Berger as a case study to prove Jewish collective identity is influenced by modern, authoritative,

and secular biases. The historical account preserved by Graenum Berger proves that the early modern concept of racism and racial inequality persisted in Israel up to the 21st century, and arguably still to this day.

Absorbing one identity into another forces the decentralized population to assimilate and assume the identity of the larger centralized population. It then adapts the decentralized history into fitting centralized narratives, silencing any authentic narrative to itself and assuming authoritative relativity. In a literal sense, merging the weaker to the stronger automatically creates a disadvantaged population who has no say for itself. Ethiopian Jews have been the victims of great injustice. Not only were they dispersed like all other populations of Jews, their dislocation lodged them into extreme environments that detached them from a modern society who refused to see how they might be connected religiously and ethnically. Even so, it did not change the fact that light skinned Jews in the 18th century were more than willing to justify slave trading dark skinned Jews. After finally accepting Ethiopian Jews under the Law of Return toward the 21st century, it still did not grant Beta Israel full rights into the fold.

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