Fall 2009

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Introduction

In the fall of 2006, Lesley's director of international and collaborative projects, Professor Vivien Marcow-Speiser, together with the author, began a project to investigate how Lesley University could contribute to the better integration of Ethiopian immigrants into Israeli society. We understood that the issue of Ethiopian immigrant absorption was extremely complicated (and for this reason, the solutions implemented have only been partially successful).

Israel is an already-complex polity with a plethora of fissures along religious, national, economic, linguistic and cultural axes (to name just a few). The immigration of Ethiopian Jews added new dimensions of complication to the national puzzle.

For many years, the leading religious authorities did not even consider the Jews of Ethiopia to be legitimately Jewish. Although the chief rabbinate has since changed its stance, and many Ethiopian Jews have undergone symbolic, partial-conversion ceremonies, the authenticity of the community's Jewishness is still doubted by some (Wagner, 2006; Ribner and Schindler, 1996).

The Ethiopian Jews' conceptions of nationhood also diverged from the normative versions pre-existing in Israel. Most Israeli Jews readily accepted the classic division of the Jewish nation into two or three parts. These included the *Eidot Hamizrach* (Peoples of the East) who resided in the Middle East, North Africa and Asia for over 1,000 years since the first Diaspora of 586 BCE, the *Sephardim* who joined them in these areas and others after their 15th century expulsion from the Spanish Empire and the Ashkenazim who dwelled mainly in Western Europe and later, the New World. The Ethiopian immigrants fit into none of these categories (Kaplan, 1999). Many Ethiopian Jews consider themselves descendants of the union of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon, hinted at in the Bible, or members of the lost biblical tribe of Dan. However, this narrative of a parallel and hitherto unacknowledged piece of the Jewish nation was treated as fanciful or even fabricated by many Israelis (Ribner and Schindler, 1996). As we would find out, the perception of rejection by normative Israelis led the Ethiopian immigrants to some fascinating reconfigurations of their nationality. The Ethiopian immigrants came from a starkly different economic system

as well. In Ethiopia, many Jews were relatively well-off. However, they lived in an agrarian society with little access to the technology available in a second world country like Israel (Joint Distribution Committee, 2001). After arriving in Israel, the overwhelming majority of immigrants were poorly-equipped for employment in Israel's economy, which was transitioning from agriculture and light industry to international services provision and export of high-tech products. As such, since their arrival, the Ethiopian immigrants have faced the most challenging circumstances of any of Israel's Jewish ethnic groups, as measured in economic output, education and social mobility (Israel Association For Ethiopian Jews, 2006; Tebeka, 2007; Wertzberger, 2003).

Partially stemming from their economic orientation, Israel's Ethiopian immigrants were, culturally, very different from their native-born compatriots. As is consonant with the agrarian economic paradigm, Ethiopia's Jewish families were organized along a very patriarchal structure. Women and children played a very subservient role to the dominant male family leader. These characteristics clashed with the relative equality enjoyed by Israeli women, and the almost venerated status that Israeli society affords to its children (Kaplan & Salamon, 2003).

Like many immigrant groups that preceded them, Ethiopia's Jewish immigrants had to struggle to learn Hebrew. Similarly, many of the Ethiopian immigrants who arrived as adults never acquired a conversant level of Hebrew. This problem interacted with and exacerbated the already-difficult economic and cultural crises that the Ethiopian immigrants faced.

The immigration of Ethiopian Jews also introduced (according to some, for the first time) racial tensions in the State of Israel. Cleavages always existed between Israel's Sephardic and Ashkenazic populations, as described above. While these social tensions bore similarities to the racial strife that exists in other countries, most Israeli Jews (on both sides of the divide) considered these fissures to be along communal or ethnic (Adati, in Hebrew) but not racial lines. In the national consciousness, the more important distinction was always between Jews and Arabs (Kaplan, 1999). The mass Ethiopian immigration in the mid to late 1980's introduced a clear racial divide into the society. Israel's Ashkenazic and Sephardic populations were united in viewing the Ethiopians a separate "black" race. However, as Kaplan notes, this perception was tempered by society's view of the Ethiopian immigrants through the prism of the Jewish/Arab divide in which the Ethiopians were seen as Jewish and hence "not black" (pp. 535-536).

Aware of these difficulties that had thwarted many previous attempts to assist with the integration of Ethiopia's Jews, Professor Speiser and the author hoped to devise a new model to be applied on a small scale.

Lesley's Partnership with Ethiopian Immigrant Communities in Israel

In 2006, Lesley University began working on a community organization project with the Nes Ziona, Israel municipality in order to improve the quality of life of the city's Ethiopian immigrant population. In the context of this cooperation, Lesley has held numerous fact-finding meetings with various office holders and employees in the Nes Ziona municipality. Lesley's senior faculty conducted a town meeting with a cross-section of Ethiopian immigrants in order to identify the community's needs. The extension also brought representatives of potential funders to Nes Ziona in order to get a first-hand understanding of the situation.

On its own, Lesley University sponsored a leadership training seminar for Ethiopian youth following their mandatory military service. This group was identified by the municipality as most at-risk for social alienation. The extension followed up by conducting a day-long seminar at a middle school with an Ethiopian student population on the subject of "Building Dreams." This event featured performances and workshops by an African singing duo. Lesley recently completed an art therapy support group for young Ethiopian mothers of small children.

In parallel, Lesley has begun working with Ethiopian immigrants and their children at the Hadassah Neurim Youth Village's boarding school, located to the north of Netanya. The students at this state boarding school come from particularly difficult backgrounds and we decided to try and apply the expertise we developed in Nes Ziona to the problems of the Ethiopian and other pupils at Hadassah Neurim. We conducted a smaller version of the "Building Dreams" workshop on the Neurim Campus. Later, we involved some of the school's Ethiopian young women in a women's empowerment seminar and are planning therapeutic and leadership development programs in the coming year.

Our experience in implementing these programs was eye-opening on many levels. It highlighted the initial problems that had plagued previous integration initiatives.

First-person cross-cultural insights into the nature of the Ethiopian immigrant experience in Israel sharpened our perception of fascinating linguistic, national/religious and musical aspects of the immigration that continue to be palpably felt.

Cross-Cultural Observations of Linguistic Issues

One thing we immediately noticed was that young Ethiopian immigrants hardly ever converse among themselves in Amharic or other Ethiopian languages. In all of our encounters, I did not hear one conversation in Amharic conducted by anyone under

40. This phenomenon is in sharp contrast to the immigrants from the former Soviet Union, who arrived roughly around the same time as the Ethiopians. Former Soviet immigrants of all ages, as well as the children of immigrants, openly converse in Russian. This dynamic seemed to be indicative of the Ethiopian immigrant community's eagerness to acclimate to Israeli society through the adoption of the host culture's language.

Some of the Ethiopian youth I questioned about this phenomenon told me that they are not fluent in Amharic, so they speak in Hebrew to one another. While I could not assess the veracity of this claim, if true it seems to indicate a conscious decision on the part of parents/children not to teach/learn their native language. If false, this claim is indicative of a desire to erase their past and assimilate into Israeli society. I suspect that both of these dynamics were in operation.

As an interesting counterpoint to my observations of Ethiopian linguistic usage patterns, I found myself freely conversing in Russian with the Russian-born director of the Nes Ziona community center that serves a majority Ethiopian-immigrant population. At my visits to the center and at municipality meetings at which she was present, I found our conversation naturally transforming into Russian. While I (and apparently she) were somewhat concerned by the potential rudeness of speaking in a language not understood by those around us (though in some cases, that was the point), we did not feel embarrassed speaking a language that marked us as belonging to an inferior group. My conversations with the Ethiopian immigrants and their children impressed upon me that such a stigma does exist regarding the use of Amharic in public.

Cross-Cultural Observations of Ethiopian-Israeli Nationalism

Some of our most fascinating observations related to the way that the Ethiopian immigrants perceived their national identity. On the one hand, the Ethiopian immigrants and their children seemed determined to fit into Israeli society even at the cost of sacrificing their unique heritage (as noted above regarding the use of Hebrew). On the other hand, many immigrants perceived that Israeli society rejected them.

Israeli anthropologists have consistently documented the alienation toward Israeli society felt by Ethiopian immigrant youth and Israeli-born children of immigrants. One of the experts we consulted for our project, Dr. Malka Shabtay, noted that, "The young Ethiopians feel lost in Israeli society. . .They cannot manage to get out" (Avrahami & Barak, 2005). Many Ethiopians believe that veteran Israelis think of and treat them as second-class citizens (Adaga, 2007). The fact that some sectors of the society continue to harbor questions about the Ethiopians' Jewishness, has also contributed to their alienation and lowered self-esteem (Ribner & Schindler, 1996).

One of the ways in which young Ethiopian immigrants reacted to this perceived rejection was by creating their own hybrid national identity that contrasted sharply with the national self-identity of older immigrants.

Prior to beginning our project we interviewed a number of immigrants from the first and second wave of Ethiopian immigration to Israel and they told us that they viewed their Jewishness as their primary identity. They saw their immigration within the context of the biblical promise of the ingathering of the exiles (Schwartz, 2006).

However, as a result of their alienation, newer immigrants, younger immigrants and children of immigrants have minimized the importance of Jewishness and Israeliness in the construction of their identity.

Shabtay wrote about the formation of an "Afro-Jamaican/American-Israeli-subculture" among Ethiopian immigrants around a core of venerated Jamaican reggae and American rap music (Shabtay, 2003, p. 95-96; Shabtay, 2001).

We were able to observe some of these fascinating permutations of the Ethiopian immigrants' nationalistic thought. Sometimes these insights came to light in amusing ways.

The centerpiece of the "Building Dreams" program which we conducted both at the Nes Ziona middle school and the Hadassah Neurim boarding school was the musical act, the "Peace Train." In 1993, the original "Peace Train" traveled around South Africa transporting 150 musicians by train, promoting the peaceful transition from apartheid to democracy. The "Peace Train" brought together children and adults, representing nine conflicting racial and ethnic groups, using musical productions to dissolve conflicts and violence. Since then, peace train founder, Sharon Katz, and her ethnic Zulu partner, Shophi Ngidi, have been perpetuating the "Peace Train's" message in programs spanning several continents.

Having internalized the work of leading anthropologists and our own findings that Ethiopian immigrants suffer from feelings of inferiority regarding their African heritage (as a result of, or at least reinforced by, their reception from Israeli society), we hoped to present the Ethiopian youth in our program with an alternative model. We hoped that exposure to a proud example of strong African women who used the arts to effect significant social change might bolster their self image.

Our experience during the "Peace Train" workshops demonstrated that while this approach had merit, the situation was much more complicated than we initially understood. During the presentation at Hadassah Neurim, Sharon Katz asked the

students if anyone was from Africa. Despite the fact that half of the pupils were born in Ethiopia or were children of Ethiopian parents, no one raised their hand. Eventually, one Ethiopian student admitted to hailing from Africa. When Sharon asked him what part of Africa he came from, he answered, "Jamaica." Sharon tried (and apparently failed) to convince him and the rest of the group that Jamaica was not in Africa (eventually enlisting the help of a hastily hand-drawn map of the world, to comic effect).

This episode seemed less important as a demonstration of the students' faulty knowledge of geography and more as an indication of the prioritization and veneration of the Jamaican/American model of black national consciousness over both the Pan-African or Israeli-Jewish models. Such scenes repeated themselves frequently in different contexts during the workshops.

Cross-Cultural Observations Related to Music

As noted above by Shabtay, the nationalistic self-image constructed by Ethiopian-Israeli youth is strongly connected to Jamaican and North American music. Jamaican reggae's appeal derives in part from frequent allusions to a noble past in Ethiopia. Rap music is popular due to its description of the racism faced by blacks in North America, an experience that Ethiopian-Israelis perceive as commonplace in their lives as well (Shabtay 2003). Our experiences with the "Peace Train" confirmed these claims and put into question our hypothesis that exposure to authentic African music might raise the self-esteem of the Ethiopian pupils.

For instance, in Nes Ziona, Shophi Ngidi asked one of the Ethiopian students his name and he responded, "Tupac," in homage to the slain African-American rap-star. Later, another pupil, who had not participated actively in the presentation of the authentic African songs and dances, approached the "Peace Train" performers and wanted to play them a recording of the song "Crank Dat/Superman" recorded by the U.S. rapper Soulja Boy.

Similarly at Hadassah Neurim, the students initially showed little curiosity about the authentic African music played by Sharon and Shophi. They seemed to be embarrassed or at least uninterested in the African origin of the traditional songs and dances (though they seemed to thoroughly enjoy the musical interlude). At one point, close to the end of the workshop, they requested that Sharon and Shophi perform Bob Marley songs. When the "Peace Train" singers played the opening notes to "Three Little Birds (Every Little Thing Is Gonna Be Alright)," the students immediately got out of their chairs and began dancing and singing.

This is not to say that the exposure to authentic African music and dance was totally lost on the Ethiopian pupils. For instance, at the end of the second workshop in Nes Ziona, one Ethiopian 7th grader who was not particularly coordinated and who did not demonstrate interest during the formal presentation, came up to Sharon and Shophi and asked for some special tutoring regarding the song and dance. Sharon and Shophi were only too happy to comply and spent 10 minutes giving her a private lesson. The pupil eventually learned the steps of the dance and was proud to show her non-Ethiopian friends her mastery over the material, despite the fact that earlier, she seemed too embarrassed to identify with these manifestations of African culture.

Lessons Learned

Our experiences working with Ethiopian immigrants in Israel solidified some of our earlier preconceptions but also challenged some of our bedrock understandings. We learned several important lessons that will guide us in our future work in the community. On frequent occasions we observed strong indications that the history and culture of the Ethiopian immigrants had not preserved through the absorption process. While this has been the standard outcome of previous waves of immigration to Israel since the 1940's, it no longer appears to be a viable method of absorption (if it ever was in the past). The parallel, contemporaneous experience of immigrants from the former Soviet Union, who maintained their language and culture, including their belief in the superiority of their culture (Gomel, 2007), serves as a marked contrast to the Ethiopian situation.

The importance of the Ethiopians maintaining a connection to their previous history and culture is even more acute in light of their very traumatic immigration experience. The Ethiopians who arrived in the 1980's had to travel on foot to Sudan before they were able to be airlifted to Israel. An estimated 4,000 Ethiopian Jews died on the "Sudanese Route" and many others were separated from their families. Those who survived to reach the Sudan were often victimized in refugee camps by Sudanese criminals.

The collective trauma experienced by Ethiopian immigrants on their way to Israel is a story that has never been told. Currently, there is a poorly- funded organization called Bahalachin (Our Home), the Ethiopian Jews Cultural Center that is attempting to document the history of the Ethiopian community and in particular their painful exodus through Sudan. However, lack of resources is not the only thing preventing their story from being told. The humiliation associated with the trauma as well as a possible lack of interest on the part of the general society have contributed as well. When we consulted with Dr. Shabtay, she stressed the importance of telling this story as a means to connect the Ethiopian immigrants with their past and through this, to promote greater ethnic pride and self-worth.

Our experience with the Ethiopian youth in Nes Ziona and Hadassah Neurim reinforced our belief that the community is in desperate need of connecting with its past. Lesley's expertise in using the arts as a means for expression and discovery may provide it with a uniquely useful advantage in helping to tell this story.

Another important lesson that we learned through our work was the centrality of music in the lives of the Ethiopian youth we encountered. Scholars like Shabtay (2001, 2005) and Kaplan (1999) have noted the importance Afro-Jamaican-American music plays in the development of Ethiopian-Israelis' self-image. These claims were borne out in our observations. The successful portions of the "Peace Train" proved that music is a language that speaks very strongly to Ethiopian youth.

In our future programs with the Ethiopian community, we intend to use this medium, both therapeutically and educationally. In the long run, Lesley may be able to play a positive role in helping Ethiopian immigrants develop an authentic Ethiopian-Israeli music that allows them to connect with their past, express themselves in their current situation and develop a way for successful integration into Israeli society in the future.

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