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I am Black and Beautiful, Oh Daughters of Jerusalem (Song of Songs 1:5): The Development of the Music of Ethiopian Jews

By
Shayna Rae Peavey

Advisor Dr. Mark Kligman
Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion
School of Sacred Music

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Introduction

> As Ethiopian-Yemenite Jew and Princeton scholar Ephraim Isaac says in the documentary *Judaism and Race in America*, whenever people tell him, "You don't look Jewish," he responds, "Friend, Ethiopia is mentioned in the Bible over 50 times, Poland not even once."[1]

This striking quote highlights the irony and illogicality of the widely accepted prejudices that exist against Jews of color all over the world. In our time, it is common that Ashkenazi, white Jews are considered the norm, and any other prototype of Judaism is subject to question. Contrary to this conception, for most of Jewish history, Ashkenazi Jewry was not the standard by which all other Jews were judged. In fact, Sephardic Jews were the majority of Jews in the world until the middle of the 19th century, and many of our great commentators, including Maimonides, were from Arab descent. From these historical facts arise many questions: Why is there explicit discrimination against Jews not of the Ashkenazi model? What are the historical and sociological implications of such unfounded alienation of certain sectors of the world Jewish population?

This phenomenon is exemplified by the controversial English translations of the line "*Shechora Ani V'Nava*" from *Shir HaShirim,* the words that inspired the title of this thesis. The verse is commonly mistranslated as "I am black BUT beautiful" instead of the clear and literal translation "I am black AND beautiful". This seemingly small mistranslation entirely changes the intended meaning of the line, implying a descriptive

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[1] "Get Down Moses: Upstart local Jewish musicians weave a coat of many colors," *Village Voice,* 20 December 2005, Elena Oumano.

anomaly rather than presenting the two adjectives as complementary and positive descriptive words.

As with many groups in the past, the Ethiopian Jewish community is feeling this misinterpretation and prejudice in recent times. Although the community has been in Israel for almost twenty years, in present day Israel, the Ethiopian Jews are still trying to find their place in society. There have been changes, advances, and new levels of acceptance, but overall the Ethiopian community still lives as a separate entity within greater Israeli society. This is very difficult for any community, especially one that moved so abruptly from one place to another, like the Ethiopian Jews. They have even greater obstacles to overcome than previous immigrant groups, because the culture from which they came was so vastly different than that of modern Israeli culture, in addition to the fact that the color of their skin makes their new immigrant status impossible to hide.

Many programs and projects have been implemented in Israel to help the Ethiopian Jews adjust to their new lives, however, none of them have been successful in changing the overall status of the community in Israeli culture. Despite this fact, the way other Israelis view the Ethiopian-Israeli community has begun to change in recent times, due to a trend that has occurred throughout Israel's past. New groups of people immigrate to Israel and are looked at as outsiders for a period of time. Then, slowly, people gain interest in the exotic elements of this new culture living in their midst, and begin to accept their existence as part of society. This phenomenon usually begins with the music of the immigrant culture. Middle-aged and older Israelis, who experienced the initial *aliyah* (immigration to Israel) of the Ethiopian Jews, have a difficult time getting over the clash of cultures that occurred from the start. However, right now in Israel, there are new

musical trends occurring, which are being led by a new generation. Young people such as Idan Raichel, a twenty-seven year old musician who has created a new genre of music by mixing existing Israeli styles with Ethiopian music, are from a new generation of people who support the integration of various Jewish cultures into Israeli society as well as equality for all Jews in Israel. Raichel, and others from his generation, see the Ethiopian Jews as a new cultural ingredient to Israel, and want to incorporate the beautiful elements of their traditions into already existing traditions. As more people, young and old, are exposed to this new attitude and method of making art, there will be a greater level of acceptance of this culture.

These changes, of course, do not happen quickly. The Ethiopian community has now been in Israel for over 20 years, and these progressive trends are just starting to be prevalent. At the start of Ethiopian immigration, there was little to no attention paid to the traditional music of the Ethiopians. After the first Ethiopian *aliyah*, when composers such as Shlomo Gronich, with his album *Shlomo Gronich and the Sheba Choir,* 2003, claimed to use Ethiopian elements in their music, when in reality they were writing Western compositions with little or no connection to Ethiopian music. This is understandable and a venerable first effort as it takes time for one culture to grasp the concepts of a foreign culture. The two ethnicities need time to absorb, stretch, and blend before they are ready to incorporate one another and find commonalities.

This progression is not new to the situation of the Ethiopian Jews, as it has occurred with each past group *aliyah.* In their article, "The Dynamics of Change in

Jewish Oriental Ethnic Music in Israel",[2] Amnom Shiloah and Erik Cohen describe this progression through nine typologies of stylistic dynamics in Jewish Oriental music, many of which can be perfectly applied to the music of the Ethiopian Jews. The following are the four typologies that best illustrate the establishment of Ethiopian Jewish music in Israel, as headway into the absorption and inclusion of Ethiopian Jews into Israeli culture:

Traditional: This category refers to the continuation of pre-immigration musical forms. This category pertains mostly to liturgical music, used in the synagogue and in ethnic festivities, as well as some secular songs and dances connected to major family rituals (birth, circumcision, bar-mitzvah, wedding ceremonies, death).

> In the first period after immigration, under the impact of the exhilaration of arrival in the Promised Land and of the more prosaic hardships experienced there, some novel themes appeared in the secular music of the purely traditional type. A major example is the '*Aliyah Songs*', which were created spontaneously and informally performed for an internal audience. . ." [3]

This typology can be more easily illustrated in general terms than with a specific example since traditional music is generally performed in closed ceremonies, involving only members of a particular community. This is especially true in terms of Ethiopian Jewish music, as the liturgical music is not sung by every member of the community, but rather only by the priests. Ethiopian Jews do not have a culture of community religious singing and they rely on those who are trained to sing their liturgy to perform at life-cycle events. The most authentic example that exist are the recordings and transcriptions done by Kay Shelemay in her book, *Music, Ritual, and Falasha History,* 1986, which she wrote by

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[2] Amnon Shiloah and Erik Cohen, "The Dynamics of Change in Jewish Oriental Ethnic Music in Israel." *Ethnomusicology,* vol. 22, no. 2 (May 1983): 238.

[3] Ibid., 238.

traveling to Ethiopia to interview religious leaders and observe religious ceremonies. Also, in 1950, Professor Wolf Leslau went to Ethiopia to do field research on unstudied and unrecorded Semitic languages. He spent considerable time with the *Beta Israel* (the name the Ethiopian Jews gave themselves, meaning the House of Israel), and he made many recordings of the community in religious ceremonies. Leslau compiled his recordings and created an album called "Music of the Falashas", 1979. This album, like Shelemay's recordings, shows the Ethiopian Jewish liturgical practices in a way that the general public would not be able to experience.

Conserved: This category refers to the traditional music that is deliberately preserved in pre-immigration styles, but is edited and adapted for a new, external audience.

> Though members of the ethnic group maybe be interested in the dissemination of their music, the editing and adaption is usually done by outsiders, professionals with a Western education. [4]

This exact phenomenon occurred in 1990 when Simha Aaron, a Western-educated musician, recorded thirteen *kessim* (priests) singing their traditional liturgical music for the Sabbath as well as for festivals, just as they did in Ethiopia. This album, "*Liturgies Juives D'Ethiopie*", 1990, was made for the National Sound Archive of Israel in an effort to preserve Ethiopian music traditions for community itself as well as for outsiders. While this recording is also of traditional music, it was made by professionals in a studio in Israel rather than in the field. Aaron did not go to a religious ceremony to obtain these recordings, but rather brought Ethiopian priests into a studio to recreate their liturgical practices for the album.

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[4] Ibid., 239.

Pseudeoethnic: This category refers to music that is drastically changed, by the work of outside performers and producers for the entertainment of audiences outside the ethnic group from which the music came.

> While the works are presented as ethnic music, their form has undergone such far-reaching changes to Western stylistic patterns that, properly speaking, they no longer belong to the realm of ethnic music. . . .The "ethnic" label on music of this type refers, at most, to superficial imitations of traditional elements incorporated in the new songs. The outsider composers, arrangers, and performers are most anxious to meet the standards of the commercialized light music currently popular on the market, rather than render traditional ethnic musical patterns. [5]

The music made by Shlomo Gronich is a perfect example of this typology. Gronich considered himself to be making "Ethiopian" music when he made his album *Shlomo Gronich and the Sheba Choir* because he used Ethiopian children to sing the music he wrote. His music, however, had little to no actual Ethiopian influence, as it used Hebrew words, Western keys and modern instrumentation. Also included in this typology is the song written by Cantor Robbie Solomon called "*Falasha Nevermore*", 1986. Solomon listened to the recordings of Wolf Leslau and used elements of Ethiopian music that he heard there to write this powerful song. While the beautiful melody by itself reflects Ethiopian music, its English lyrics and Western piano accompaniment put it in the category of pseudoethnic.

Ethnic Fine: This category includes the work of musicians from within an ethnic group, who use their own, authentic musical traditional, but fuse them styles and nuances from the new culture to which they now belong. This results in a new genre, producing "...works of essentially innovative, heterogenetic character. While often spontaneously initiated, the musical production of such artists is later frequently sponsored by

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[5] Ibid., 242.

outsiders."[6] This category can be seen in the music made by *Ras Dashen: From Ethiopian Music to Contemporary Jazz,*2005, where Ethiopian saxophone player Abatte Barihun uses traditional Ethiopian modes, and prayers, and mixes them with modern jazz. Also, the music of Idan Raichel, 2002, can be described with this typology. Even though Raichel himself is not Ethiopian, he works directly with his Ethiopian band members to obtain traditional, authentic elements of Ethiopian music, and mixes it with Israeli song.

In the following chapters, I will show how Shiloah and Cohen's typologies explain the phenomenon of the "musical *aliyah*" of the Ethiopian Jews. The progression of these typologies over time illustrates how music is the means through which this immigrant culture is moving from its place as a small, overlooked part of Israel towards being a fully accepted part of the Israeli melting pot. Many people believe that education, both for Ethiopians and all of Israel, is the key to the successful integration of the Ethiopian Jews. While multi-cultural education is essential for the long-term success of the Ethiopian Jews in Israel, the breakthrough of integration and acceptance is coming from trends of authentic cultural integration. These trends can now be seen, tasted, and heard on the streets of Israel as Ethiopian clothing styles, restaurants, and nightclubs playing Ethiopian music are beginning to be more common around the country. While Israeli citizens are still becoming accustomed to seeing Ethiopian Jews as fellow Israelis, they have an easier time accepting aspects of Ethiopian culture, which are enticing due to their exotic nature. Cultural elements give people an authentic experience through which to see a foreign tradition. Music has continually been the medium through which Israel has taken in the new cultures that are introduced into their society. Music is the vehicle

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[6] Ibid., 243.

through which Ethiopian Jews will find their place within Israeli culture, similar to Yemenite, Moroccan, and other Sephardic immigrant groups. Communities come to a new place, bringing with them the traditions they kept in their former home, and music is usually the most portable of these traditions. Music is a common denominator between various cultures, and has served as a foothold for groups of Jews who have immigrated to Israel. While education increases sensitivity and knowledge, music allows for cultural validation and mutual identification. Music allows minority groups to reach the public, and create cultural revolution.

One cannot understand the intricacies of musical change of a culture without understanding the background of the culture in question. In their article, Shiloah and Cohen point out that "Traditional art and more particularly music reflect the life of a society and its culture."[7] Music represents and follows the history of a culture, and therefore one cannot be understood without the other. We need to look back to the origin of Ethiopian Jewish history, and the events that have shaped Ethiopian Jewry in the past and present. Only then will we be able to acknowledge the reality of where the Ethiopian Jewish people is today and the possibilities of their growth and development in the future. In the following chapter you will read an historical account of the Ethiopian Jews, describing their origins, life in Ethiopia and *aliyah* to the State of Israel. Chapter two includes an historical study of traditional Ethiopian music, both secular and religious. Chapter three moves from history, and into modern times and the present, surveying the music that has been made in Israel and United States in response to exposure to Ethiopian Jewish music. Upon reaching the conclusion, it will be found that the social and cultural

[7] Ibid., 228.

history of this immigrant group are of direct influence to their current social situation in the state of Israel. The historical trend shows an initial apprehension of the new group, followed by a period of piqued curiosity and interest, an ultimate acceptance and integration of the culture into society. The integration of Ethiopian music into mainstream Israeli culture will be the major source of equalization of Ethiopian Jews in Israeli society.

Chapter 1
"Falasha Nevermore"

Long before "Operation Moses" (1984), long before "Operation Solomon" (1990), even long before the creation of the State of Israel, there were Jews living, learning, and worshipping in Ethiopia. The history, as well as the current situation, of this group of Jews is a complex, difficult, and controversial one, and deserves much more attention than it often receives by the Jewish world overall.

Part of the problem many people have with Ethiopian Jewry, is that its exact origins are impossible to trace, putting their authenticity in question. Historical data concerning how a Jewish population first settled in Ethiopia is scarce, due to the lack of written records and the prevalence in their culture of oral traditions. While there are many theories that try to explain their origins, only three were common in all of the sources I surveyed, Shelemay, Kaplan, Waldman, and Gruber as well as many others:

1. The Ethiopian Jews are descendants of the lost ancient Israelite tribe of Dan.
2. They may be the descendants of Menelik I, the fabled son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, as set down in the folkloric, biblical, and *aggadic* Ethiopian Kebra Negast (meaning "The Glory of Kings", a book known as the Ethiopian nation epic story).
3. They might be descendants of Jews who left Israel for Egypt following the destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE.

Unfortunately, none of these theories can be proven as fact, which often generates skepticism about the Ethiopian Jewish community. "It must be remembered that this question of origin and 'authenticity' is important for legal reasons: Israel's 'Law of Return' specifies that citizenship is automatically granted to Jews coming to the country from the Diaspora." [8]

In any case, regardless of their exact origins, the Jews of Ethiopia have had a rich Jewish culture, and maintained strict Jewish lives for hundreds, even thousands of years. The rabbis based their decision about the authenticity of the Ethiopian Jews on similarities between them and other Jews around the world. "For example, the religious leaders found that, like all other Jewish, the Ethiopians' most holy scriptures are the first five books of the Bible, whose laws and rules they observe. Like other religious Jews they have strictly observed the regulations of the Sabbath, considering it the most holy day on the Jewish calendar."[9] However, as they lived in isolation from the rest of the Jewish world for a long time, Rabbinic Judaism was not a part of Ethiopian Jewry, meaning they maintained a strict pre-Talmudic, biblical Judaism. "They kept *kashrut,* the laws of ritual cleanliness, and observed the Jewish Sabbath and festivals".[10] The leaders, or rabbis, of the community were called the "*Kessim"* (the *kohanim*), and they were the most respected members of society. Although most of the traditions and teachings of the community were maintained orally, some communities had a few Jewish books as well as "*Orit*" (Torah) scrolls, written in *Ge'ez*, an ancient Semitic language.

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[8] Brian Weinstein, "Ethiopian Jews in Israel: Socialization and Re-education." *Journal of Negro Education,* 54, no. 2 (1985): 214.
[9] Ibid.
[10] Israel Association for Ethiopian Jews, available from http://www.iaej.co.il/index.htm; accessed May 2006; Internet.

The religious practices kept by these Jews separated them from the Christian villages surrounding them. The Ethiopian Jews lived primarily in villages in the north and northwest of the country, far from their Christian neighbors, with separate social and economic institutions. Ethiopian Christians were always very suspicious of the Jews and were against their "unusual" religion. Christians even called the Jews *Falasha,* (meaning "stranger" or "outsider") because of their vast differences, while the Jews called themselves *Beta Israel* (House of Israel).

> The Beta Israel was a people long isolated from the rest of the Jewish world. That separation was so complete, that at one point, the Ethiopian Jews thought themselves the only remaining Jewish community in the world - the last guardians of Jewish knowledge, tradition and the 'Torah of Moses.' The Ethiopian Jews struggled mightily to retain that tradition and guard it from outside forces that would see it assimilated, conquered and destroyed. As a result, throughout Ethiopian history, they often fell sacrifice to Christian kings, wars and oppression.[11]

For centuries now, the living conditions of Jews in Ethiopia have been miserable. All of the freedoms they were granted in the past were taken away in the 1600s and since then, they have lived as prisoners in their own homeland. Jews were taken captive and sold into slavery or forcibly baptized. Their lands were confiscated, their writings and religious books were burned, and the public practice of any form of Judaism was forbidden for a period of time in Ethiopia. The Jews were pushed into the hills outside of Gondar, and became even more isolated in order to continue their Jewish way of life, despite the danger involved in doing so.

The modern world discovered the Ethiopian Jewish community through reports that were initially published by non-Jews. The first modern contact with the oppressed

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[11] Ibid.

community came in 1769 when the Scottish explorer James Bruce stumbled upon them while searching for the source of the Nile River (which happens to be Lake Tana in Ethiopia).[12] In the 19th century, the Ethiopian Jews were suffering greatly from the oppression of missionaries determined to convert them all to Christianity. These missionaries also returned with reports of Jews in Ethiopia. The coercion of the missionaries brought the Ethiopian community to the attention of rabbis from around the world, who then began to pay attention to the Jewish community in Ethiopia, and publicly recognize them as Jews. This positive attention and recognition was in large part due to the work of Professor Jacques Faitlovitch.

Professor Jacques Faitlovitch studied Amharic and Tigrinya at the Ecole des Hautes etudes in Paris under Professor Yosef Halevi. Halevi first visited the Ethiopian Jews in 1867.[13] Upon his return to Europe he many spoke on behalf of the Ethiopian community and wrote articles imploring the world Jewish community to save the Ethiopian Jews. He also formed an organization called *Kol Yisrael Chaverim* ("All Israel are Friends"), which was to actively advocate on behalf of Ethiopian Jews for years to come.[14]

Faitlovitch continued the work of his mentor and traveled many times to Ethiopia for varying lengths of time. He also traveled often to Europe to advocate on behalf of Ethiopian Jews and establish "pro-Falasha" committees there. He realized that if something were not done to preserve their culture, they would soon be non-existent, as

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[12] Steven Kaplan, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia.* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 23.

[13] Avraham Kushner, *Treacherous Journey: My Escape from Ethiopia.* (New York: Shapolsky Publishing, 1986),11.

[14] Kaplan, *The Beta Israel (Falasha) in Ethiopia,* 23.

they were suffering from poverty, disease, conversion, and assimilation.[15] In 1920, Faitlovitch returned to Ethiopia and opened a Jewish village school, and then Jewish boarding school in Addis Abba. Faitlovitch was also responsible for sending a small group pf Ethiopian youth to Jerusalem, to study and learn "modern Judaism", in the hopes that they would return to Ethiopia to teach others what they had learned.[16]

The "discovery" of Ethiopian Jewry by the Western world raises significant issues and questions. Was Faitlovitch a hero for the Ethiopian Jews, or was he in fact a manipulator of their culture who forced modernity upon them? It is easy to see that Faitlovitch had a true interest in and love for the Ethiopian Jews, but it is also evident that in some cases he bent the truth in order to do what he thought was best for them—bringing them closer to other Jewish communities. His means of bringing the Beta Israel closer to world Judaism was by refining their Jewish practice and knowledge as well as by raising their educational standards. Faitlovitch "sought to create a Western-educated elite capable of interacting on a more or less equal basis with their foreign Jewish counterparts. In no small part, however, he also tried to project an image of Ethiopian Jewry that would be both familiar and attractive to European and American Jewish audiences."[17] He tried to portray them as a modern, established Jewish community, drastically out of place in their African environment. Faitlovitch was definitely not the first, or last, historian to warp the public's perception of the Beta Israel, but he was possibly the most influential. "The mythic image of the Falasha as a pre-Talmudic "Lost Tribe" that migrated to Ethiopia was accepted with remarkable readiness throughout the

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[15] Louis Rapoport, *Redemption Song: The Story of Operation Moses* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Publishers, 1986), 39.

[16] Kaplan, *The Beta Israel (Falsha) in Ethiopia,* 25.

[17] Ibid., 155.

world and it dominated discussions of their religion, literature, culture, and history." [18]

Some of Faitlovitch's actions can be seen as suspicious, both because of his embellished writings and because other rabbis who were sent to Ethiopia brought back different reports. The French Jewish community sent Rabbi Haim Nahoum to Ethiopia in the early 1900s, and he reported that the Beta Israel were happy where they were and he saw no reason to teach them modern Judaism.[19] However, in response to this, Faitlovitch wrote a report calling the Beta Israel the "martyrs of Judaism" and he strengthened his commitment to helping them become part of the Jewish world. Although some of Jacques Faitlovitch's actions may have been subversive, he had the best of intentions toward the Ethiopian Jews. Though critics of his work with the Ethiopian Jewish community may believe that his work was detrimental to Ethiopian Jews, I believe that he ultimately helped them by bringing the community to the consciousness of world Jewry. Faitlovitch died in 1955, the same year that the first group of Ethiopian Jewish students were brought to Israel to study.

Life was not good for the Jews of Ethiopia in the twentieth century, specifically under the rule of Haile Selassie (1930-1974). In addition to the fact that they were not allowed to own land (which was considered the most important means of livelihood), their Christian neighbors were very suspicious of them and attributed to them every misfortune that befell them. "In the struggles following the deposition of Haile Selassie,

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[18] Ibid., 156.
[19] Rapoport, *Redemption Song: The Story of Operation Moses*, 39.

an estimated 2,500 Jews were killed and 7,000 rendered homeless."[20] Selassie was replaced by Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, whose Marxist-Leninist dictatorship only increased the threat to the Beta Israel and led to awful massacres and poverty. Soon Mariam instituted a policy of "villagization," relocating millions of peasant farmers onto state-run cooperatives. This greatly harmed the Ethiopian Jews by forcing them to "share" their villages with non-Jewish farmers, which resulted in increased levels of anti-Semitism throughout the Gondar Province.[21] By 1977 the situation had become so unbearable that groups of Jews began to flee, establishing refugee camps in Sudan. Those caught trying to leave Ethiopia were imprisoned and tortured. "In the early 1980s, Jews caught traveling were charged and imprisoned, but still the exodus continued, bringing the number of Jews living in squalid refugee camps in Sudan to the hundreds."[22] During this time the practice of Judaism was forbidden as well as the teaching of the Hebrew language. May Jews were put in prison on fabricated charges of being "Zionist spies" and even the *Kessim* were harassed and monitored by the Ethiopian government.

When Israel became a state, word of this news eventually traveled to Ethiopia, and for the Jews, this was a sign that they would soon be "redeemed" and would return to their religious homeland at last. In the early years of the twentieth century however, only a small trickle made their way to Israel. In 1954, the Jewish Agency sent an educational emissary to Ethiopia with the task of training groups which would eventually travel to Israel for study and return home as teachers of Hebrew and Jewish studies in their

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[20] Jewish Virtual Library, The American-Israeli Cooperative Enterprise, "Ethiopian Jews"; accessed September 2006; available at http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/ejtoc.html; Internet.
[21] Ibid.
[22] Israel Association for Ethiopian Jews, http://www.iaej.co.il/index.htm.

villages. The first group arrived at Kfar Batya in 1955 and when they returned home and brought news of life in Israel, the dream of going to the Israel was made very real for the Jews. In the 1970s, Jews began to leave Ethiopia on foot and enter Israel via Sudan. These Jews risked unbelievable dangers in order to reach the holy land. At this time, there was very little action being taken by Israel to help the Beta Israel. Then, in 1973, Israel's chief Sephardic Rabbi, Ovadia Yosef ruled that the "Falashas" were Jews according to Halacha, because they were definite descendants of the tribe of Dan.[23] Two years later, in 1975, the Israeli government ruled in favor of Ethiopian "*aliyah*" based on the Law of Return, and were entitled to citizenship and benefits. Quickly, Israel organized the first clandestine attempts to bring the Ethiopian Jews to Israel. This attempt was thwarted, however because someone informed the press of the operation.

Later that year, Menachem Begin and the Likud party took over the Knesset, and Begin became the first government leader to have serious meetings with Beta Israel already living in Israel. In addition to feeling the pressure from many different activist groups, Begin believed that the Beta Israel were Jews that deserved to be brought home to Israel. Israel decided to work out an arms deal with Haile-Mariam, who needed weapons to fight Somalia, and he agreed to let small groups of "*Falashas*" fly to Israel as long as it was kept completely secret. On August 25, 1977 sixty Ethiopian Jews arrived at the military section of Ben-Gurion Airport. However, once again these secret operations were halted, this time due to Foreign Minister Moshe Dayan, who informed the press about the arms deal they had made with Ethiopia. Haile-Mariam became angry that the secret was not kept, and allowed no more Jews to leave his country. Begin's government

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[23] Rapoport, *Redemption Song: The Story of Operation Moses,* 49.

tried over the next couple of years to reestablish connections with the Ethiopian government, but he had little success. Then, in 1979, Israel was informed about the "Sudan route". Due to famine and war, many groups of Ethiopians were moving west toward Sudan and it was thought that the Jews could do the same and then be taken out of Sudan instead of Ethiopia. Although they tried many paths of negotiations with Sudan president Gaafar Nimeiry, Begin's government had little luck in their negotiations, and decided to continue their plans secretly, without the help of the Sudanese government. "In the six years of Menachem Begin's administration that ended in 1983, a total of around 3,000 Ethiopian Jews were brought to Israel. But more importantly, Begin set things in motion in the government, paving the way for the much larger influx that was to come."[24]

Under Begin's successor Yitzhak Shamir, the Israeli Mossad and key leaders within the Ethiopian Jewish community helped to set up a sort of "underground railroad" to bring Jews from Ethiopia to refugee camps in Sudan. The Jews had walk through rough terrain and weather conditions to reach Sudan, but they did so with Israel on their minds and in their hearts. With the help of the *Mossad,* a total of around three thousand Ethiopian Jews were brought to Israel via various routes in 1982 and 1983. A large number were flown directly to Israel in IDF planes that landed multiple times in the desert near the refugee camps. All of this was done without the cooperation of the Sudanese government or police, although President Nimeiry did choose to ignore those things he did see and hear. Unfortunately, these frequent plane trips were becoming risky, and Israel finally called them to a halt for fear of being discovered.

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[24] Ibid., 69.

By 1984, the refugee camps in Sudan had been almost emptied by the hard work of the *Mossad*. The problem was that only the Jews from the *Tigre* Province and *Wolkait* region were in Israel, while the Jews of the *Gondar* and *Woggera* areas remained. There were horrible famines and drought going on at that time, and the Jewish population was in dire need of rescue. It became clear that the *Mossad* could not rescue the eight to ten thousand Jews still left in Ethiopia in time to save them from disease and starvation with the method they had previously been using. At this point Israel turned to The United States for help with negotiations within Sudan. This request created a major dilemma for the United States because, unlike Israel, which was technically at war with Sudan, the United States enjoyed very close relations with President Gaafar el-Nimeiry. The United States provided Sudan with large amounts of aid and, consequently, had a great deal of leverage over Nimeiry. In 1984, the Sudanese president was particularly in debt to the USA because he had requested additional aid due to the many problems occurring in his country at the time. The State Department bargained with Sudanese officials, offering more aid if the Jews were allowed to leave Sudan. Word was sent through messengers to the small villages in the Gondar region to make their way to the Sudan in any way possible. Entire villages left their homes and started the trek to the border. What was later to be known as "Operation Moses," began on November 21, 1984, and continued until January 5, 1985. Every night during that period, except on Shabbat, buses would pick up groups of about fifty-five Ethiopian Jews from the refugee camps and take them to Khartoum where they would board Boeing 707s. The planes belonged to Trans European Airlines, a Belgian company owned by an Orthodox Jew, and were often used as charter planes to carry Muslim pilgrims to Mecca. Altogether, thirty-six flights

carrying approximately 220 passengers flew to Brussels and then on to Tel Aviv, bring a total of 7,800 Ethiopian Jews to Israel.[25]

News of the airlift eventually leaked out and, when the Israeli government confirmed the stories, the Sudanese government ordered the operation stopped. "Sources say that all of the Jews in the Sudanese refugee camps would have reached Israel if the airlift had continued for only two more days. Instead, officials believed, perhaps as many as two thousand Jews were left behind in the camps."[26] In an attempt to finish the rescue, the operation codenamed "Sheba" began on March 28, 1985. Ethiopian Jews from Israel worked for the *Mossad* identifying the Ethiopian Jews in the camps and taking them by truck to the airstrip. At the end of Operation Sheba, Israeli officials believed that all of the Ethiopian Jews had been evacuated from the refugee camps in Sudan. They were to find out later that not only were a handful left in the camps, but thousands were still living all around Ethiopia. In 1985, Vice President George Bush initiated a CIA follow-up to the rescue mission called "Operation Joshua", which brought another 800 Ethiopian Jews to Israel.

After these operations, the Ethiopian Jews in Israel could not enjoy their new home for many reason, the most pressing being that many had been separated from family members and loved ones in the chaos of their *aliyah*. The awful prospect of thousands of children growing up as orphans in Israel seemed that it would become a reality if more Jews were not rescued from Ethiopia. It seemed that nothing could be done to convince the Ethiopian government to let more Jews leave, until 1990 when

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[25] Jewish Virtual Library, http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/ejtoc.html, Internet.
[26] Ibid.

Israel and Ethiopia reached an agreement that allowed Jews to leave the country in order to reunite with their families. The Ethiopian government decided to let only a limited number of people leave every month, but at least it was a start.

> As the news spread that Jews were able to leave, thousands left their homes in Gondar and made their way to Addis Ababa. At the time of renewal of relations between the two countries there were 2,500 Jew in Addis. They were cared for by American organizations such as the JDC and prepared for *Aliyah* by the Jewish Agency. A school was set up for the children, which eventually served as many as 5,000 students.[27]

The political situation in Ethiopia was deteriorating during this time, and Israel began to worry about the slow pace of the rescue mission. It was clear that drastic measures needed to be taken, before the rebel parties took over in Ethiopia, making it impossible to continue. Representatives of the Jewish Agency, JDC, ministries of the government of Israel, and the IDF began secret preparations for an emergency airlift and absorption of more than 14,000 Jews. On Friday May 24th 1991, as the rebels started to close in, Operation Solomon was put into motion in absolute secrecy.

Over the course of 36 hours, a total of 34 El Al Hercules c-130s - with their seats removed to maximize passenger capacity - flew non-stop. 14,325 Ethiopian Jews came home to Israel, to be greeted by thousands of Israelis who gathered at temporary absorption centers, hotels and hostels to welcome their brethren. Operation Solomon saw the rescue of twice the number of Ethiopian Jews than in Operations Moses and Joshua put together.[28]

Prime Minister Shamir gave the pilots special permission to fly on the Sabbath in order to complete this secret mission.

Upon arrival in Israel, Ethiopian families who had been separated for a decade

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[27] United Jewish Communities of MetroWest New Jersey, "The History of the Ethiopian Jews"; available at http://www.ujfmetrowest.org/content_display.html?articleID=7964; Internet; accessed in June 2006.

[28] Israel Association for Ethiopian Jews, http://www.iaej.co.il/index.htm.

were once again whole. However the joy felt over these long-awaited reunions was not too long lasting, as these new immigrants faced life in a totally foreign place. "Ethiopian Jews arrived in Israel with myriad obstacles hindering their successful absorption into Israeli society. Foremost among these obstacles are community members' limited abilities to advocate on their own behalf for their social rights opposite the Israeli establishment."[29] The rapid relocation of this people from a rural Amharic or Tigrinya-speaking environment into an urban, technologically advanced, Hebrew-speaking environment necessitated a carefully planned process re-education and socialization. Unfortunately, this process was not well planned, and the Ethiopian community has subsequently suffered in Israel. Steven Kaplan writes in his book *Surviving Salvation: The Ethiopian Jewish Family in Transition*, "Rachamim Elazar, one of the leading spokesman for Ethiopian Jewry, defines the problem succinctly: 'Israelis love the dramatic. But whenever anything takes too long, politics take over. This ministry fights that ministry; this party, that party. Everyone looks out for himself, and forgets the immigrants.'"[30] Even today, 14 years after Operation Solomon, the 80,000 plus Ethiopian Jews living in Israel are not fully integrated into Israel's society. Most of the Ethiopian community is living below the poverty line as defined by the Israeli government because the parents cannot find work. This is due mainly to two very important factors: the Ethiopian *olim* came from a developing nation into an industrialized one and therefore did not posses the skills needed to work in Israel, and they had came to a place where they did not know how to speak the language.

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[29] Ibid.
[30] Steven Kaplan and Ruth K. Westheimer, *Surviving Salvation: The Ethiopian Jewish Family in Transition*, (New York: New York University Press,1993), 35.

"Socialization of adult and adolescent Ethiopian Jews requires maintenance of a delicate balance between teaching what is necessary to live and work satisfactorily in a new environment and avoidance of denigration of those valued elements of African Jewish traditions which are different in some details from the traditions of Jews returning from Europe, the Americas, or Arab countries."[31] As this community is so far unique in Israel, they needed to be treated in a manner specific to their background. This fact was somewhat overlooked upon their arrival and has lead to some overarching problems for the Ethiopian Jews in Israel.

Many of the Ethiopian families live in distressed neighborhoods in concentrated Ethiopian pockets. This situation resulted from special government programs to get people out of the caravan sites when they first arrived in Israel. These programs specified that Ethiopians must buy apartments in the center of the country but only gave them enough financial assistance to buy in the least desirable neighborhoods. This has lead to an increase in disrespect for elders and crime among the Ethiopian youth, which is very ironic since, in Ethiopia, their culture stressed respect, and there was little incident of crime. The parents often feel they have little control over these problems because they have many children whom they no longer know how to discipline, due to cultural and language barriers. While the children know very little of their native, Ethiopian, language the parents know little of the street Hebrew now spoken by their children.

With half of all Ethiopians in Israel under the age of 18, education becomes the key to this community's long-term absorption, and raising their quality of life. Unfortunately the Ethiopian community is lacking in this area. Nurit Tzizazu, Executive

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[31] Weinstein, "Ethiopian Jews in Israel: Socialization and Re-education", 213.

Director of the Israel Association for Ethiopian Jews articulated the problem, saying, "Ethiopian students face a number of obstacles in the Israeli educational system, and as a result, increasing numbers of frustrated Ethiopian youth are dropping out of school. This perpetuates the poverty cycle." One major problem is literacy. In these communities it seems that a very high percentage of the children are not learning how to read, and this is one of the core problems leading to a high dropout rate. This is very difficult because many of the children are living in homes with parents who are illiterate and or simply cannot help them to learn to read Hebrew. Part of the problem begins in elementary school because only about 50 percent of Ethiopian three-year-olds attend pre-school, so they are behind from the beginning. In addition, about 80% of the younger children are still in the religious school system, which is smaller and weaker (especially the areas in which the Ethiopians live). According to officials at the Ministry of Education, this happens because the secular school system does not want the Ethiopian children, makes little effort to recruit them, and may even make it difficult for them to enroll. The school systems in Israel have exactly mirrored the consistent prejudice shown toward the Ethiopian community as well as other minority groups in Israel's past. "Until recently, the history, sociology, religion, and music courses in Israel's public schools reflected the experience of Jews from Europe. . . . The history of other Jews was neglected. Such practices contribute to feelings ethnic inferiority."[32] The government recognized this problem with past *olim* and therefore set up the Center for the Integration of Oriental Jewish Heritage at the Ministry of Education (*Shiluv Moreshet*), which has been in charge of updating teaching materials to include information about other Jewish cultures. These

[32] Ibid.,223.

materials were not required and were available for sale to those teachers who felt the need to include information about other cultures in their classroom teaching. Gradually some of the material is becoming part of required curriculum, but as of today Ethiopians are absent from the Center materials. Rabbi Joseph Hadana, the first Orthodox ordained Ethiopian rabbi, has spoken to the Center, in hopes of making progress in this matter, and to have material available about Ethiopian history to the public schools.

On a positive note, the Joint Distribution Committee started a committee called the Coalition for Advancing Ethiopian Education, whose goal is to deal specifically with the educational issues facing the Ethiopian Jews. The Coalition is working in partnership with the Jewish Agency and various other Israel-based organizations, in developing *A Ten-City Plan for Integration in Israeli Society*. This is a multi-year plan that will address the needs of children from ages one to 18 in the 10 cities and caravan sites with the largest Ethiopian populations.[33]

Of course, education is not the only area where Ethiopians are suffering in Israel. Religious life in Israel was a great shock to them. The Judaism they saw practiced, or not practiced, around them was not the faith they had been used to in Ethiopia. "When the first waves of Ethiopian Jews came to Israel they had to face a country which bore no resemblance at all with the mythic vision of the Land of Israel which they had dreamed about for centuries."[34] They had to learn the traditions of Rabbinic Judaism, and often have found it very hard to get used to. "In Ethiopia they had no knowledge of the

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[33] Daniel Kurtzman, "The Jewish News Weekly of Northern California", January 16, 1998.

[34] Christian Buckard, "Ethiopian Jews in Israel: Findings of Research, November-December 2001", 2.

Talmud, nor did they know anything about Purim, Chanukah or the Bar Mitzvah. Wearing a *Kipah* or *Talit* was also not part of their tradition."[35] Many of the Ethiopians were very religious and observant Jews and had to adjust to the fact that Israel was a modern, Western, partially secular state. It is hard to tell what was harder for them to accept: the secular culture or the unfamiliar form of rabbinic Judaism they were brought into and the non-compromising, insulting way in which they were treated by the Rabbinate. "The immigrants had to face the fact that their unique, pre-Talmudic Judaism was not respected by the rabbinic authorities, and that the spiritual leaders of the Ethiopian community – the Kessim –would not receive any legal status in Israel, so therefore would not be permitted to perform weddings, divorces and burials. . . ."[36] One of the most surprising parts of Israeli society for the Ethiopian Jews was the role of women in society. In Israeli society, women are much freer that in Ethiopia so the community needed to be informed of this difference, so as not to be surprised by women's involvement in the workforce, universities, and army in Israel.[37] While some of the Beta Israel became part of the religious community in Israel despite all of the obstacles and changes, others have become secular Jews, much less observant than they were in the villages in Ethiopia (Kushner). Joseph Hadana, the first Orthodox ordained Ethiopian rabbi in Israel, works hard to encourage his people to keep religious lives in Israel. He believes that the Ethiopians came to Israel in order to be better Jews, and that they should therefore give their children a Jewish education.[38]

Ethiopian Jews also have to struggle to fit into the social structure of Israel. They

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[35] Ibid., 3.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Weinstein, "Ethiopian Jews in Israel: Socialization and Re-education", 219.
[38] Ibid., 217.

are still thought of as different from the rest of Israeli society, and often remain within their own community for social interaction. "Ethiopians in Israel see themselves – and are seen by many others – as a community unequipped to climb Israel's social pyramid," says Anat Penso, regional head of the Education Division For Immigrant Youth of the Joint Distribution Committee-Israel and a member of the Coalition for the Advancement of Ethiopian Education. The Jewish Agency tried to help ease the gap between the two cultures by assigning each Ethiopian Jew a Hebrew name. But the community had little interest in giving up their culture in this way, and most chose to keep their own, African names. They were however, required to pick a family name, which is not a part of Ethiopian tradition. In Ethiopia a person is given a name, plus the name of this father, so there is no one family name that is passed down through the generations.[39]

The Ethiopian community has several specific complaints about living in Israel. These complaints, while valid, are very complex. If and when Israel attempts to fix these problems, it will be a very difficult process, which will take much time and effort. In a publication put out by the Israel Association for Ethiopian Jews, the community was able to voice their complaints and frustrations with their current status in Israel.

(1) There is a perceived national disinterest in preserving Ethiopian-Jewish culture and history and familiarizing Israelis at large with it; a memorial to the estimated 4,000 who perished en route from Ethiopia to Israel, at the southern entrance to Jerusalem, remains a community, rather than a national venture. (One year saw two breakthroughs on this front, however: At the end of 1997 nine "Ethiopian" synagogues were under construction around the country and, on Nov. 27, 1997, the entire education system noted the occurrence of an important Ethiopian-Jewish festival, the *Sigd*.)

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[39] Ibid., 215.

(2) There is bitter resentment of the collective aspersions cast on Ethiopian immigrants because of their high incidence of HIV infection relative to the population at large.

(3) The community is impatient with the prolonged bureaucratic stalling about bringing over the *Falasha Mura* (Jews who were forced to convert to Christianity), nearly all of whom have relatives long landed in Israel. The last of these complaints points to the end that Ethiopian Jewry seeks for itself and its *aliyah*: full resettlement and integration in Israel

Although it is true that the Ethiopian community encounters many problems in Israel, it would be wrong to say that no progress has been made toward their acceptance into society. As with all new immigrants groups, time alone helps them to be a more normalized part of the social order, and this is beginning to happen in Israel as the second generation of Ethiopian Jews is being born. Some of the outright racism that met the Ethiopians when they first arrived has begun to subside and some sensitivity toward them has emerged. The main evidence of this can be seen in the language used to talk about the Ethiopians. The originally socially accepted terms "*Cushim*" and "*shechorim*" that were used to denote Ethiopians have now been deemed derogatory slurs which are socially unacceptable.

There have also been actions taken by the government to help Ethiopian acceptance, although these programs have not always been entirely successful. In preparation for the absorption of the Beta Israel, the Israeli government put in place two "Master Plans" through the Ministry of Absorption. The first plan, which was put in place in 1985 after the first large scale *aliyah* of Ethiopian Jews, contained an elaborate program dealing with issues including housing, one-parent families, education and special guidelines for women and youth. The subsequent plan was simply meant to update the first plan, responding to the needs of the second wave of immigrants. As stated in the article "The Evolution of the Ethiopian Jews: A History of the Beta Israel (Falasha) to 1920" by James Quirin,[40]

[40] James Quirin, *The Evolution of the Ethiopian Jews: A History of the Beta Israel (Falasha) to 1920.* Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1992.

> Like earlier absorption policies, [the plan] adopted a procedural approach, assuming that the immigrants were broadly similar to the existing majority population of Israel. The 'master plans' were no doubt formulated with the best of intentions and a firm belief in the underlying principles of absorption. However, . . . the results have been disappointing and suggest that much greater attention needs to be paid to issues of ethnicity.

In more recent times there have been other, more successful programs started in Israel. One such program is called *Atidim* (meaning "futures") and was started at the *Haifa Technion*. While this pre-university program is not made specifically for Ethiopians, the goal of *Atidim* is to "narrow the socio-economic gap between different segments of the Israeli society and to give qualified youth equal opportunities to reach higher education and a marketable career in an in-demand profession"[41] Because of the goes of *Atidim* is functional education, it is especially beneficial for Ethiopian *olim* trying to succeed in society. Ethiopian youth who participate in the program are educated in both their native language and Hebrew, and are trained in three major focus areas:

> 1) Educational Reinforcement (mainly in subjects such as mathematics, English and sciences).
> 2) Enrichment activities for building self-esteem, strengthening social responsibility, Jewish identity and the student's connection to his/her community.
> 3) Exposure to the academic world, science, technology and role models through tours, visits to industrial companies, summer camps and other activities.[42]

"SHAHAM" is another helpful project that was started by the Joint Distribution Committee. SHAHAM is a program designed to provide support to families dealing with high levels of social distress, including single parent families and families in which one or both parents are unemployed. SHAHAM has especially targeted Ethiopian-Israelis who have incredible difficulties integrating into Israeli society. Many of the SHAHAM volunteers are Ethiopian themselves, and are able to very successfully serve as a bridge to

[41] http://www.atidim.org/english/vision.asp, accessed September 2006.
[42] http://www.atidim.org/english/preatidim.asp, accessed September 2006.

Israeli culture and society the families with whom they work. One of the main projects of SHAHAM has been organizing programs to teach about the celebration of *Sigd*, a holiday unique to the Ethiopian Jewish community, commemorating both the giving of the *Torah* and the communal gatherings held in Jerusalem in the days of the prophets Ezra and Nehemiah, celebrated on the 29th day of *Cheshvan.* One of the volunteers, Yael, explained why SHAHAM so strongly supports the celebration of *Sigd* by saying, "One of the points of SHAHAM is to cultivate pride in [Ethiopian Jewish] traditions and build bridges between the younger and older generations, allowing [the younger generation] to see the traditions as something nice...we want to introduce cultural pride, so we learn about the Ethiopian holidays. This is one of the only holidays that's unique to Ethiopian Jews, so we want to mark it, to give [the younger generation] a taste of what life was like in Ethiopia." [43]

Adding to the positive actions being taken in Israel right now, there is a museum showcasing Ethiopian Jewish culture and history being built in *Rehovot.* This museum is planned to be a "research center, interpretive and spiritual center, is the brainchild of *Tomer,* an association of whose members are veteran Ethiopian immigrants and former *Mossad* agents who took part in the first operations to bring Ethiopian Jews to Israel." [44] Moshe Bar-Yuda, the chairman of the *Tomer* stands up for the Ethiopian community saying,

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[43] The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee, *Bridging Generations: A Sigd Pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the Ethiopian-Israeli Community* [article on-line] (JDC Inc. 2003) available from http://www.jdc.org/p_is_ps_vulnerable_3.html; Internet.

[44] "Museum on History of Ethiopian Jewry to be Built in Rehovot", *Ha'aretz,* 18 July 2005.

> The Jews of Ethiopia have a rich cultural heritage, and are the only Jews who strictly kept their Judaism although they were entirely cut off from the Jewish people. The museum will present Ethiopian Jewish culture to Israelis who are not familiar enough with it, and also to young Ethiopians who fall between the cracks-on one had they are not connected to their parents' culture, and on the other, they sometimes find it hard to become part of the dynamics of life in Israel. When they see the ancient culture of their forbearers, they will be filled with pride, and it will be easier for them to become part of the veteran Israeli society. [45]

Another noticeable change has been in Israeli newspapers, that now carry an increasing number of positive, helpful articles about Ethiopian Israelis. *The Jerusalem Post*, May 19, 2004 reported that the Chief Rabbinate Released a disc of Ethiopian music called "A Collection of Songs for our Brethren, the Immigrants from Ethiopia". This fourteen-track disc was an effort by the Israeli Rabbinate to reach out to the Ethiopian immigrant community. *The Jerusalem Post* went on to quote Rabbi Eliyahu Maimon, Director of the Chief Rabbinate's Conversion Courts, who said that the production of the CD was aimed at:

> Reconnecting Ethiopian immigrants to contemporary Judaism as it is practiced in Israel and preserving the very important traditions they brought with them from Ethiopia. Past experience, particularly from the 1950s and 60s shows that when attempts are made to erase the old traditions of an immigrant group, it can impair their successful absorption in the country, and that is something we wish to avoid at all costs. . .We very much hope that this will help, in some small way, to improve their absorption here in the country. [46]

Hopefully, through the implementation of these various programs and efforts made by the government, the Beta Israel will continue to become a more familiar part of Israeli culture. As proof that these programs are helpful, and that they are helping the

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[45] Ibid.

[46] "Ethiopian Music CD", 19 May 2004, *Jerusalem Post.*

lines between colors start to fade, is that there have recently been a small number of marriages between black and white Israelis.

While the Beta Israel face many obstacles in Israeli society, these difficulties do not to stop them from trying to blend in, making Israeli culture their own. Ethiopians are known to be some of the most dedicated soldiers in the Israeli Defense Force-fighting for a country that has not yet fully accepted them-to prove their dedication to Israel. While the minimum is being done to educate the country at large about the culture and background of the Beta Israel, the army has taken major strides in making a level environment for all soldiers. "In the Israeli army, a very important institution, over one hundred Ethiopians have been integrated into White units. The army holds lectures on Ethiopian Jewish history to educate all soldiers."[47] For many young Israelis serving in the army is their first exposure to their Ethiopian peers and they create bonds that go beyond their differences. Army service has helped a new generation of Israelis to be more open and accepting of the Ethiopian Israelis in their midst. As will be discussed later in detail, his peers in the army first introduced Idan Raichel, the young musician making strides toward cultural fusion with his music, to Ethiopian music.

The history of the Ethiopian Jews is complex and unique from that of any other community in the world. It is in part because of the intricacies and difficulties of their history that others have had such trouble identifying with the Ethiopian Jews. Regardless of this difficulty, it is essential to study their history in order to gain any true insight into the live of Ethiopian Jews today. Equipped with knowledge and understanding of their past, one can look at the possibilities that exist for the Ethiopian Jewish community in the

[47] Weinstein, "Ethiopian Jews in Israel: Socialization and Re-education", 218.

future. When coming to a new environment, cultural facets of a particular ethnic group are commonly the most accessible element for other ethnic groups to grasp. Considering the complex nature of their history, this is especially true for the Ethiopian Jews. Their rich and beautiful culture is the key to their integration into modern-day Israeli society. In a country containing so many different cultures, Ethiopian culture will serve as the strongest connecting factor between Ethiopian Jews and other Israelis.

Chapter 2
"A musical history"

"As Merriam (1964:296) has pointed out, music is a language of feeling deeply rooted in the subconscious of an individual steeped in a given cultural tradition. Music not only accompanies and enhances major events in man's life, but also plays an important role in all social happenings."[48]

Music is not only the one of the most intriguing facet of a culture, but it can also be the most powerful connecting factor between ethnic groups that have little else in common. In Israel the musical landscape changes with each new wave of *aliyah* as the musical culture stretches to absorb the elements brought by the new culture. Ethiopian Jews immigrated to Israel bringing with them a musical culture that was hard for other Israelis to understand, as their musical language was different from that which already existed in Israel. Composers and musicians began to grapple with this new music but until recently, none of them created music that was truly representative of Ethiopian music. It is nearly impossible to understand Ethiopian music in Israel today without knowing the details of traditional music, as it existed in Ethiopia. Without prior knowledge and understanding of the theory and practice of authentic Ethiopian music, it is unfeasible to create new music that is accurately representative of Ethiopian culture.

The first of Shiloah and Cohen's nine typologies focuses on the traditional music of a community. For any modern composer to deal seriously with a foreign musical genre, and to use elements from it, they must understand the traditional music of that culture. It is important to first focus on the traditional music of the ethnic group, as this

[48] Shiloah and Cohen, "The Dynamics of Change in Jewish Oriental Ethnic Music", 228.

often gets to the root of their culture. Traditional music includes folk songs, which are often the most honest representation of any society, and liturgical music, which is also crucial to understanding the root of the culture.

Ethiopian music is extremely diverse, due to the fact that that there are eighty-plus tribes in the country, and each of them is associated with a unique sound and musical influence. Much of the religious music in Ethiopia contains an ancient Christian element, which can be traced back to Saint Yared, who was a priest and composer in the 10th century. The musical notation system is also attributed to St. Yared.[49] Arabic influence can also be seen in Ethiopian music. Sometimes the similarities are so striking that scholars have trouble separating Ethiopian music from that of Arabia, because they both possess such a melismatic nature.

Singing Style

Traditional Ethiopian music uses a unique pentatonic modal system that is characterized by seemingly random large intervals between certain notes. This gives the music an anticipatory feel and, to a Western ear, makes it sound somewhat unfinished. In Ethiopia music is divided into categories of song. "There are types of song for each different part of life. "Ethiopian music is defined as 'music and recreation', 'music and work', 'music and politics', or 'music and spiritual belief'".[50] There are multiple forms of music in Ethiopian culture, including textual or vocal music, mimes or expressive dances, and instrumental music.

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[49] Ashenafi Kebede, "Saint Yared: Ethiopia's Great Ecclesiastic Composer, Poet and Priest" *African Urban Studies*. 6. 77-87, 1979.
[50] Zenebe Bekele, "Music in the Horn: A preliminary analytical approach to the study of Ethiopian music", *Yearbook for Traditional Music*, Stockholm: Royal Swedish Academy of Music, Vol. 21, 1989, pp. 118-119.

As in every culture, over time different styles of music have developed in Ethiopia. Each style has its own character and its own place in the musical culture. In Ethiopian music the earliest style is a personal lament of *Ingurguro*, which has a simple form, with small ranges of undulating movement. *Ingurguro* is sung mostly in high falsetto vocal style by female singers and deep vocal range for male singers. The second style is *Mezmur*, which has its own unique character of singing, performance style, and rhythmical restrictions. *Mezmur* is sung in a full voice - *woreb* songs (ceremonial songs sung along with a dance) and songs that are used after sport games are put in this category. The third style is *Zefen,* which is the most popular musical style within all the ethnic groups. It differs from the other two styles due to its performance style and irregular meter-it contains both isometric and hetero-metric patterns. *Zefen* is sung in a relaxed manner and usually accompanied by a dance. The fourth style is *Zema,* which contains only ecclesiastical songs and hymns.[51]

Ethiopian singers tend to be very versatile. They are expected to use different parts of their voice (chest, larynx, head) when singing different types of music. "Ethiopian singers are considered to be good if they have a melismatic and loud voice, but if one shouts without wavering tones in the style of *ingurguro* and *zefen* music - he is called *`chuahi* or *gagano'* (vociferous). If one sings in a deep or low growling voice in *zefen* style, he won't deserve the name of *tiru zefagne or zemari.*" The best singers are the singers who are considered to be the best are those who know the characteristics of all of the musical styles, as well as knowing know a variety of song texts as well.

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[51] Ibid.

Musical Instruments

Ethiopian music is generally accompanied by one or more of the traditional instruments used in most of the country, played by musicians called *zemari.* The traditional musical instruments in widespread use include the *masenqo*, a one-stringed violin, played with a bow; the *krar*, a six-stringed lyre, played with the fingers or a plectrum; the *washint*, a simple flute; and three types of drum - the *negarit* (kettledrum), played with sticks, the *kebero*, played with the hands, and the *atamo*, tapped with the fingers or palm. Another important instruments include the *begena*, a huge, multi-stringed lyre, which is often referred to as the Harp of David; and the *qachel, which* is a bell or a gong. "Out in the community, musical instruments play a social and entertaining role. The single-stringed *masenqo* is played by minstrels who sing of life around them and invent calypso-like, topical verses on the spot. The *krar* is a lyre-like plucked instrument with 5 or 6 strings while the *begena* is the portable harp".[52]

Musical Notation

Printed Ethiopian music uses a dual notation system, which was introduced in the 16th century. It employs both *milikitoch* (neumatic signs: curves, dots, dashes, etc.) and *siraye* (letter notation taken from the Ethiopian *Ge'ez* alphabet). To keep the two systems apart, the *siraye* are often placed above, while the *milikit* are printed below the text of the manuscripts. The *siraye* consist of small letters usually written in red ink; the *milikitoch* are easy to recognize, because of their distinct shapes, so they are often just written in

[52] Ibid.

black ink.[53]

The *milikit* signs are interpretation marks. Ethiopian music notation contains the following signs:


Yizet: to stop, or pause, or breathe


Deret: to drop the voice to deep chest register


Defat: two notes of the melody dropped to a lower voice register


Chiret: a descending glissando on 'aha'


Kinat: ascending glissando on 'aha'


Hidet: accelerando


Kurt: to cut the note short, staccato


Rukrik: repeating the note several times in rapid succession on the same syllable

This notation is treated in Ethiopian music notation as the combination of **Difat** and **Hidet**. It means to drop the voice and move more quickly.[54]

Beta Israel Performance Practices

All of the above musical information pertains to music in Ethiopia at large. While the music of the Ethiopian Jews is very similar in many ways to that of the rest of Ethiopia, and included many of the same elements, there are certain traditions that were specific to Jewish culture. The singing of sacred music in Ethiopian Jewish culture was sung almost completely by the *kessim,* instead of by the community. "The ritual is

[53] Ashenafi Kebede, "Music in Black Jewish and Christian Communities". http://www.dolmetsch.com/musictheory2.htm.

[54] Zenebe Bekele, "Music in the Horn. A preliminary analytical approach to the study of Ethiopian music", 119.

exclusively performed by the *kessim,* the congregation remains passive during the services"[55]. This is one of the key reasons why the community has had trouble maintaining their religious customs after leaving the world where the *kes* was the head of each village. The Ethiopian priests study from the time they are very young, in order to learn all of the religious traditions they need to know to lead the community. "As students--or *dyaqon*--young boys were instructed in the religious traditions, the ritual and the liturgical language during part of the day, but transmission of the *zema*--the religious music--normally took place at night".[56] The priests sang the prayers on behalf of the community, using *zema* (music) and *qalocc* (words) in each of their rituals. There are many different types of *zema* used for various holy days, special occasions, and time of day, each with its own distinct sounds and techniques. The *kessim* often use antiphonal singing, alternating between one soloist and a choir of other *kessim*, in the performance of these ritual songs.[57] Because of its simplicity, the antiphonal technique is the archetype of oral traditional music. "In the Beta Israel tradition, the musical statements appearing in the antiphonal pieces are the longest. That is why the *kessim* of the choir do not reiterate exactly the melodic statements of the solist, although their intention is clearly to do so"[58] An example of this performance practice can be seen in Apedix A, Fig. 1, where a solo line is transcribed (S) and below it the slightly varied choral response (C). In Shelemay's book, she interviews a *kes* about liturgical practice. The priest explains, "First we go on one side and then the other. . .When one speaks first the other responds.

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[55] Tourny, *The Liturgical Musical Heritage of the Jewish Ethiopian Tradition,* 1.
[56] Ibid., 2.
[57] Shelemay, *Music, Ritual, and Falasha History,* 160-164.
[58] Tourny, *The Liturgical Musical Heritage of the Jewish Ethiopian Tradition,* 5.

The first is the guide and the second is the follower".[59] At times the "choir" repeats exactly the line of the soloist while at other times they take liberties with the repetition. In addition to these discrepancies, there are often variances between the vocal lines of different member of the choir. The melodic phrase of the choir is scarcely sung exactly the same and at the same time by all the singers in the choir.

Beta Israel liturgical melodies are often lengthy and in strophic form as they are used to intone Biblical passages and Psalm texts. There are many different categories of *zema* in the Beta Israel tradition, and even until recent times, the *kessim* maintain the knowledge of various types of *zema.*

> As late as the 1970's, Beta Israel priests still performed the complete liturgy in village prayerhouses and were able to name three categories of *zema,* two of which (*kaffettanna:* 'high', 'lofty', and *qwami:* 'steady', 'usual') could be defined through ethnographic observation and analysis of recordings. *Keffettanna zema* is based on a hemitonic pentatonic pitch set, while *qwami zema* may be described as outlining a series of 3rds of variable inflection.[60]

An illustration of these key concepts can be seen in Appendix A, Figures 2 and 3. Figure 2 illustrates the scales that make up *kaffettanna* and *qwami zema,* as transcribed by Kay Kaufman Shelemay in her book *Music, Ritual, and Falasha History.* Figure 3, also transcribed by Shelemay, shows the use of *qwami zema* in practice. The mode is made of the a pentatonic scale, in this case made of up the notes ACDEG.

Music in Ethiopian culture is modal. The various Ethiopian modes, both secular and religious, are not solely described by their intervals, but rather also by the emotion generated by the mode, the content of the song, and sometimes the place from where the mode originated. Abatte Barihon is a Beta Israel musician who immigrated to Israel

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[59] Ibid., 183.
[60] Kay Kaufman Shelemay, "Jewish Music: Liturgical & Paraliturgical: Ethiopia", in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians,* 2001 ed. Vol. 7, 71.

seven years ago, and now plays saxophone and sings in the band *Ras Deshen*. The band includes Abatte, Israeli pianist Yitzchak Yedid, Ethiopian Israeli singer/dancer Tezata Geramay, and contrabass player Ora Boasson-Horev. This band has taken Ethiopian music and mixed it with contemporary jazz. This is done by using four traditional Ethiopian modes, or *qenet*, which Abatte explains in the liner notes of the album.

> **Anchi Hoye**--is used in prayers in the *Masgid,* or synagogue of the Ethiopian-Jewish village and as well as in the Coptic Church. It can be found as the base of wedding, love and courting songs. It is used also in battle songs.
>
> **Batti**--is named after a town in the Welo region. It is used in songs of praise to rulers or for distinguished sages but also in songs of yearning for a beloved.
>
> **Tezeta**--also originates in Welo. It is used to give expression to wishes and dreams, even ones that are wild and impossible. It was the mode in which the Jews of Ethiopia expressed their longing for Jerusalem and now use it to tell of their nostalgia for Ethiopia. There are also wedding and love songs sung in this mode.
>
> **Ambassel**--this mode is named after a small place in Welo that was the birthplace of many musicians and music lovers. It is used to sing traditional and historic texts and also children's songs. As the wife of Emperor Haile Selassi was a native of this town, this mode became popular in the whole country and in the palace.

Each of the songs on the album utilizes the above modes, and weaves them into the sounds of instrumental jazz music. By using the traditional modes, Abbate and the other musicians are able to truly fuse the Ethiopian sound to the very contrasting sound of Western jazz. Abatte speaks of these modes emotionally, while ethnomusicologist Kay Shelemay speaks about them more mechanically. "The four *qenet*...are derived from two basic interval sets, each of which can be permutated by transpositional techniques."[61] Two of the modes, *tezeta* and *bati,* are closely related as they both contain different

[61] Kay Kaufman Shelemay, "Ethiopia: Traditional Music", in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians,* 2001 ed. Vol. 7, p 356.

transpositions of the hemitonic pentatonic scale. The other two, *ambasel* and *anchihoy* share the interval of a second, "although *anchihoy* is often characterized by additional microtonal inflections of the 1st and 4th pitches".[62] The melodic scale used in the Beta Israel music, like that of secular Ethiopian music, is a pentatonic scale. "Like in much African music, the pentatonic *anhemitonic* scale (without semi-tone) prevails in this liturgical tradition. The succession of two major seconds, named *pycnon* by Constantin Brailoiu (1953), leads to the sole major third of the system".[63] For further insight into these concepts, an example of Beta Israel liturgical music, as well as an analysis of that music, can be found in Appendix A, Figure 4.

In the music sung by the Ethiopian priests, the pitch often rises during the course of a song, which has made it difficult for researchers to transcribe exact melodies heard in the community. The priests are probably not aware of this rise in pitch, as melodic instruments are not a part of their culture. "Due to the lack of melodic instruments which could represent a term of reference, the pitches are often approximate. This imprecision can be explained by the fact that in this type of scale the smallest interval is one tone and the largest is a tone and a half."[64] Even though Ethiopian music does not deal with exact pitches the way Western music does they do use the concept of a tonic note. "Terminology related to tuning systems incorporates a concept of tonic or central pitch, termed *malash,* a 'returning tone', which can be heard repeated at phrase endings."[65]

Non-melodic instruments are an integral part of the Beta Israel musical culture, as they are in Ethiopian culture at large. Beta Israel *kessim* make a distinction between

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[62] Ibid.
[63] Tourny, *The Liturgical Musical Heritage of the Jewish Ethiopian Tradition* 3.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Shelemay, *Ethiopia: Traditional music,* 356.

accompanied and unaccompanied *zema* (songs). "Most common prayers can be sung with or without accompaniment because musical instruments are not used on fast days or the Sabbath."[66] However, when it is appropriate, the *nagarit* (kettledrum) and the *qachel* often accompany the liturgy. The definition of *qachel* is usually a "small bell", which often means the bell worn by sheep or cattle. But the Beta Israel *qacel* is a "flat circular hand-help metal gong struck in the center by a metal rod".[67] There are very few metal instruments found in Ethiopia, but "the Falashas, being ironsmiths, possessed a flat iron disc almost a foot in diameter, which they suspend from a string from a finger, and beat with an iron spike, achieving a distinct gong sound".[68] During times when the *zema* are accompanied, the gong and the drum are often played in a repeating five-beat patter, "with beats one, three, and four articulated by the instruments"[69] (See Fig. 5). Often times, the syllables of the liturgy are pronounced on the beats accented by the instruments, as the role of instruments in liturgical music is to highlight the text.

In listening to the recordings of Beta Israel liturgical music, it is difficult to discern a true pattern to the use of the musical instruments. In every song the instruments seem to follow a different pattern, and often times they sound almost completely ad lib and randomly placed, which makes defining the role of the instruments much more difficult. In a study done by Oliver Tourny at Hebrew University, he listened to the recordings done by Simha Arom of *kessim* singing their liturgy. He observed,

> When comparing all the recordings we have, one can ascertain that the differences we noted between the versions affect the *numbers* of strokes rather than their *location* in the musical statements. In most cases, the instrument is used at the

[66] Shelemay, *Music, Ritual, and Falasha History,* 185.
[67] Ibid., 77.
[68] Ibid., 78.
[69] Ibid., 184.

> end of each statement, in the last melodic sections. The other strokes are *ad libitum.* If a priest wishes to make a number of strokes, he generally does it on each descending concluding figure of the statement. In any case, the instrument has no influence on the music. Its function is purely ceremonial.[70]

Another essential element in Ethiopian music is the use of liturgical dance. "Beta Israel priests dance in rituals, especially at the end of vigils. The Beta Israel dance is traditionally said to 'come from the life of Moses in the *Orit* (Torah). After Moses and children of Israel crossed the Red Sea, the danced. It is a way of thanking God'. The Beta Israel expression for dance, *la'amlaka mesgana* (thanks to God), is said to derive from this tradition"[71]

[70] Tourny, *The Liturgical Musical Heritage of the Jewish Ethiopian Tradition,* 4.
[71] Shelemay, *Music, Ritual, and Falasha History,* 188.

Chapter 3
"Imbuing Israeli Popular Music with Ethiopian Sound and Spirit"

When a way of life undergoes very rapid change during political periods, tradition or folklore of which music is also a part, has an uphill struggle in retaining its original properties. . . Music is affected by historical process- acculturation, transculturation, and interculturation.[72]

More than any other country in the world, Israel takes new populations into its borders and must recalibrate its social atmosphere in order to accommodate these new additions. All cultural aspects of Israel are affected by this phenomenon, but it can be seen most clearly in the area of music. Music in Israel is constantly being rearranged as new peoples are introduced into its cultural arena. When a new Jewish ethnic group makes *aliyah,* musical trends and styles begin to evolve to include the nuances of this new group. In private ceremonies and life-cycle events, ethnic groups tend to preserve the traditional music from their country of origin. While this is very important for the sake of cultural history as well as for their adjustment to their new environment, it does not aid the larger society in accessing these ethnic traditions. It is therefore, in the area of popular music where progress in cultural fusion occurs. In the arena of popular music, musicians feel they can experiment and create without having to hold to the exact traditions of the ethnic group. This creativity leads to the creation of new genres of music, incorporating pieces from the new tradition and therefore making it less foreign to the people who encounter it.

Ethiopian music has followed this pattern as Ethiopian Jewry has gradually gained a presence in the State of Israel. For the Ethiopian Jews, the process began slowly with the introduction of such musical work as Sholmo Gronich's album *Shlomo Gronich*

[72] Bekele, "Music in the Horn. A preliminary analytical approach to the study of Ethiopian music", 118.

and the Sheba Choir. Gronich's music, as well as other early compositions, was a start to incorporating Ethiopian culture into Israeli culture, but integration of the two cultures has reached new heights in recent times with the work of Idan Raichel. When Raichel created his first album, *The Idan Raichel Project* in 2002 he immediately and permanently altered the place of Ethiopian Jews in Israel. He went further than anyone before him had dared in the arena of interculturation resulting in a profound shift in the way society views the Ethiopian community. There were many stages in the journey from *aliyah* to Idan Raichel, and each step forward was an important one for the Ethiopain Jewish community.

Since the mass *aliyah* of the Ethiopian Jewish community to Israel, various factors have slowed the natural progression of their acceptance into Israeli society. Even so, during their now 20-year presence in the country, they have slowly become part of the fabric of society, while still not accepted in all arenas. They have changed the definition of what it means to be Israeli, as the attitude of the first generation of Israelis who had to cope with the newness of Ethiopian Jewry is being replaced with the viewpoint of a new generation that sees Ethiopian Jews as a natural piece of the Israeli puzzle. Cultural elements such as Ethiopian food, hairstyles and fashion have helped the community reach this stage of their process. By the new generation, these elements are considered exotic rather than imposing, and are being increasingly incorporated into the national community.

Israel has begun to see this poignant progression even on an institutional level. The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs wrote a touching article in on their home-page in 2003 about the different cultures that exist within Israel, specifically mentioning

Ethiopian culture.

> As with every immigration to Israel, the Ethiopians brought with them a rich and distinct cultural tradition that has added new color to the Israeli palette. In song, dance, painting and sculpture, theater and music, a unique Ethiopian style is making its mark, finding expression, and often doing so in their new language, Hebrew. By giving voice to their experiences, past and present, Ethiopians are reaching out to Israeli society and introducing themselves. The result is a moving and eye-opening experience.[73]

Of all the factors that have influenced this change in attitude between generations in the state of Israel, music has shown the most positive results. Throughout Israel's history, music has served as the foothold for new immigrant groups to integrate into greater society. Until recently, the process of Ethiopian absorption was considerably delayed as compared to these other historical examples.

> In Israel, world fusion music began in the 1950s, as Jewish refugees and immigrants streamed in -- mixing traditional sounds from countries such as Morocco, India, Turkey and Hungary. Mizrahi music, or "Oriental" music, excelled in this fusion and is the number one selling music genre in Israel. However, when the rescue airlifts Operation Moses and Operation Solomon brought the bulk of Ethiopian Jews to Israel in 1984 and 1991, respectively, Ethiopian music remained on the margins of Israeli society for complex political, economic and social reasons. Although Ethiopian clubs popped up across the country, the songs performed there never made it past the confines of club walls.[74]

Until recently, because of Israeli society's inability to accept the very foreign facets of Ethiopian culture, attempts made by Israelis to use Ethiopian elements in their music were confined to Shiloah and Cohen's "conserved" and "pseudoethnic" categories. While these attempts were well intended and did, in fact, create beautiful music, they did

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[73] Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/1990_1999/1995/7/PANIM-%20%20JULY-AUGUST%201995, accessed November, 2006; Internet.

[74] "Music Group Brings Multiculturalism to Bay Area", *The San Francisco Chronicle.* Friday, February 11, 2005 written by Loolwa Khazzoom page F-1.

not further the incorporation of Ethiopian Jewry in Israeli society, as they did not encompass true ethnic elements of Ethiopian culture.

British born Israeli musician Judy Axelrod and Israeli musician Mikhal Matar took the early initiative to visit one of the makeshift absorption centers, set up in the Diplomat Hotel, for the arriving Ethiopian Jews set up in Jerusalem in 1991 to ask if anyone would sing into their tape recorder. They found most of the new *olim* to be too scared, shy and overwhelmed to agree to their request. The women realized that it was going to be more difficult than they hade expected to obtain musical examples from the new immigrants. They returned home and began to search their own musical collections for any Ethiopian music. Matar eventually found one Ethiopian melody in a book of lullabies. Equipped with the title of this melody, the women returned to the Diplomat Hotel to see if any of the Ethiopians would be brave enough to sing it for them. "They just giggled and hid. Their faces lit up so we knew that they knew the piece but they were much too shy. Each one was pointing to the other, as if to say 'try her, try her'. You know, they didn't speak Hebrew and we didn't speak Amharic".[75] Finally, after much persistence, they found one of the women who was willing to sing for them. This woman was a *madricha* (a leader) of the group, who already spoke a little bit of Hebrew. The woman sang for Axelrod and Matar the song *Ushururu,* which they discovered was a traditional Ethiopian lullaby, with the following words:[76]

Ushururu mama ushururu, Ushururu lijeh ushururu
Siferu ruru mama ushururu, Ushururu lijeh ushururu
Si fechim azi ye, Si fetlim azi ye
Jer baye te la te, Na wured mamu ye

[75] Judy Axelrod, interview by author, 21 May 2006, Jerusalem, Israel, digital recording.
[76] Ibid.

Ye ma mil ye-e nat tolo ne yi let
We te tum be gu yada bo wun ba hi ya
Li je deh nae der tih e der[77]

Although they did not get a word-for-word translation, they were given the basic meaning of this lullaby. A mother speaks to her small child and says to him, "Child, you are on your mother's back. When I go to get the water, you are on my back. When I go to cook, you are on my back. When I go to wash, you are on my back. Everything I do, you are on my back. I am tired, get off my back" (See Fig. 6).[78]

Axelrod and Matar composed a song entitled "Ushururu", using the text and melody of that Amharic lullaby. While this authentic recording could have been a great way to introduce Israelis to the traditions of Ethiopian music in the early days of their arrival, it was instead turned into a European, classical quartet, with the Amharic language as the only remaining Ethiopian element. In a personal interview Axelrod stated that she and Matar did not attempt to make Ethiopian music when composing "*Ushururu*" but rather intended to write a piece in the musical language with which they were accustom, the European style of harmonization. "There would be no point in trying to sounds like an Ethiopian. We don't look, sound or have their tonal language".[79]

As mentioned previously, the music of Shlomo Gronich is also included in the category of "pseudoethnic" music. In 1991, Gronich assembled a choir of eighteen Ethiopian children, all but two of who came to Israel during Operation Moses. The album he released, *Shlomo Gronich and the Sheba Choir*, touched the Israeli public with the sweet voices of Ethiopian children, and the story of their perilous journey to Israel through the Sudanese desert, during which two of the singers were born. The English language newspaper, *Ra'anana Now,* of Ra'anana, Israel, praised Gronich for his first

[77] Axelrod, Judy, "*Ushururu*".
[78] Axelrod, interview, 21 May 2006.
[79] Ibid.

album with the Sheba Choir. "'The Sheba Choir' offers a new encounter of musical expressions, thus creating an original and exciting presence on stage. The combination of the nuances of the children's voices and Gronich's own particular musical style is a unique fusion in Israeli music and represents the ideal aspects of cultural and social integration."[80] While it was, in fact, a movement in the direction of sensitivity toward and validation of Ethiopian Jewish culture, the songs on the album showed their pseudoethnic nature as they made no use of Ethiopian language and very little use of true Ethiopian musical elements. While Gronich's effort was important and resulted in a beautiful collection of songs, his album suggested an unrealistic social atmosphere, where everyone embraced the Ethiopian Jews once they arrived in Israel, and yet his music did not succeed to move either side closer to that ideal. The Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in an article praising Gronich for his work with the Sheba Choir, admitted that his end product was an album that "exemplified an idealized social bond"[81] and an unrealistically united Israel. This is best shown in the song *"Shir Yisraeli"*:

> Your snow and my rain-fall, your *wadi* and my river,
> Finally meet on an Israeli beach.
> With all the dreams and the longings, with all the memories, good and bad.
> In a new/old song, that celebrates the wonders, how good it is, and how pleasant.
> With a Greek step and a Polish accent,
> with a Yemenite twirl and a Roman violin.
> Who am I? Who am I? Yes, me!
> My God, Dear God - an Israeli song.
> Your valley and my mountain, Your forest and my desert,
> Finally meet in an Israeli landscape.
> My "*lamed*" and your "*chet*", my "*ayin*" and your "*reish*"

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[80] "Shlomo Gronich and the Sheba Ethiopian Children's Choir", *Ra'anana Now,* 11 January 2006, Ra'anana, Israel, H-6.

[81] "PANIM: Faces of Art and Culture in IsraelJuly/August, 1995", Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, available from http://www.mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/1990_1999/1995/7/PANIM-%20%20JULY-AUGUST%201995, Internet.

Finally meet with an Israeli drum beat.

These beautiful, and wistful words are set to a melody written in a major key, with a very metrical beat, and uses Western instruments such as an electric guitar, drum set and synthesizer. The song does not show the true experience of the Ethiopian Jews in Israel, nor does it push the envelope of musical fusion in Israeli culture. The beautiful ideas shown in Gronich's "*Shir Israeli*" represent what people around the world want to see in Israel, or what they believe the actual social climate to be. Because of this desire, Gronich and his choir of Ethiopian youngsters have gone far with their music, performing in countries all over the world in multiple festivals, and have been included on many compilations of Jewish ethnic music. The Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs highlighted Gronich and Sheba Choir in an article called "PANIM: Faces of Art and Culture in Israel" in 1995.

> The group has performed in the United States and Belgium and performs regularly throughout Israel, in schools and before various international Jewish organizations. Three years ago, they released a CD recording and last year their video of the song "Hot Earth" written by the children, took sixth place at the MTVision contest. More recently, the Choir members participated in a ten-minute video, "Israeli Suite," composed by Shlomo Gronich. The clip brought together 80 Israeli children representing a wide range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds in a piece that reflects the diverse musical influences in Israel. The clip was chosen by Israel Educational Television to represent Israel in the "Young Europe Sings"[82]

After this pseudoethnic music entered Israeli society, for almost two decades, the climate in Israel has been one of resistance towards the full integration of Ethiopian culture. This phase has seemed to last somewhat longer than with past immigrations. Perhaps this is due to the sharp differences between the Ethiopian culture and already

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[82] Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs "*Panim*-July-August 1995". 1 July 1995. Available from http://www.mfa.gov.il. Internet.

existing Israeli culture. Regardless of the reasons for this resistance, there is now real forward movement for the Ethiopian culture, and they are becoming an organic part of Israeli culture. Perhaps this surge forward is due to the current worldwide sensitivity toward suffering African peoples, brought on by the genocide in Darfur as well as crisis in other African nations. More likely, it is a matter of time passed combined with the present awareness of oppression in Israel and around the world.

At the forefront of this current stage in the process, new genres of music are being born within Israeli culture as musicians dare to use the diverse nature of their environment to create music that is representative of that environment. This is a trend that has happened repeatedly in other immigrations, as can be seen by this quote from Shiloah and Cohen, written in 1983.

> There is now a trend away from the idea of mere amalgamation of the different ethnic traditions into an overall "national musical style", but rather the gradual emergence of legitimate pluralism in music on the national level. This shows that the emergent Israeli cultural identity is becoming less monolithic and more pluralistic than it has been conceived of in the past.[83]

In exactly that spirit, Idan Raichel, a twenty-seven year old of Eastern European descent, entered the Israeli music scene in 2002. Unlike other musicians that came before him that made Ethiopian music sound like Western music, Idan Raichel was very interested in using authentic elements from Ethiopian music, creating a new genre. The music of Idan Raichel fits into Shiloah and Cohen's "ethnic fine" category as it exists today, a slightly broadened and adapted version of the original typology, which accommodates for the changes and advances that have occurred in the Israeli music scene

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[83] Shiloah and Cohen, "The Dynamics of Change in Jewish Oriental Ethnic Music in Israel", 248.

in the last twenty years. Raichel himself is not an Ethiopian Jew, but rather identifies and collaborates with indigenous musicians in order to create innovative music representing the Ethiopian culture where as historically, cultural music was only considered "ethnic fine" if it was created by a member of that ethnic group. "Israeli artists have been influenced by other cultures before, but none has woven them so distinctly into his songs as Idan Raichel, who entered the music scene four years ago. With his Rastafarian 'do, his love for reggae, and his mission to merge cultures, he is, in a way, an Israeli Bob Marley."[84]

Raichel's musical background came from serving as a keyboard player in the Israeli army band, as well as being the music director in a boarding school, where there were many Ethiopian students.

> Idan Raichel recalls the time when he was the music director at the boarding school in Netanya: "I noticed that the Ethiopian community changed their names; they don't keep their roots." He wants them to "remember that they like hip-hop but they are not from Harlem, they like reggae but they are not Bob Marley. The Ethiopians have a real great culture." "The Idan Raichel Project's" fusion of Israeli and Ethiopian-Israeli singers has given many Ethiopians a reason to be proud of their identity in the context of Israeli society.[85]

Raichel had been personally drawn to global music from a young age and as he was exposed to the Ethiopian community, he developed an interest in Amharic and Tigrean music. "I started to hear lots of cassettes from Addis Ababa--village music, like Ethiopian pop and reggae, or the native village songs. Then I started to ask teenagers in my program where I could hear live Ethiopian music in Israel. . ."[86] As Raichel began to

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[84] Dara Yaskil, "The Israeli Bob Marley: 'Out of the Depths' by the Idan Raichel Project", *The Michigan Israel Observer,* No. 2, p 71, Spring 2006.
[85] Ibid., 72-73.
[86] "Music Group Brings Multiculturalism to Bay Area", San Francisco Chronicle, 3.

search for places to hear this music, he found it difficult to come by. The only place he was able to find live Ethiopian music was in Ethiopian restaurants in Tel Aviv, where small groups of musicians would play traditional music. As he attended these live performances whenever possible and began to get a feel for their music, his interest and love of the music grew. Raichel began to form ideas of how to mix the traditional Ethiopian flavors with Israeli music. "He worked with Ethiopian musicians and producers, blending their lyrics, chants, melodies and instruments with songs he had written over the years." [87]

When Raichel first brought his music to Helicon records, the largest record label in Israel, he did not have high expectations. Surprisingly, the head of the company was enamored by the unique and wonderful sounds found in Raichel's music. "This kind of mix," says Gadi Gidor, head of Artists & Repetoire for Helicon Records in Israel and Raichel's manager, "was never tried before in Israel. When I heard Idan's demo the combination of Amharic and Ethiopian culture within contemporary Israeli culture was striking".[88] Raichel's album, which went triple-platinum with four number one singles in 2003, put the Ethiopian community in a place in Israeli society that they had not previously been able to reach. The music on the first album, "The Idan Raichel Project", showed the beauty of Ethiopian music, and emphasized the exotic elements that had already begun to attract the attention of individual Israelis. "All of a sudden there was a light put on this culture, this small, wonderful culture living among us, which not many people in Israel had come across. [The album] had social and artistic significance",

[87] Ibid.
[88] Ibid.

recalled Gidor.[89] Raichel's success in his first album encouraged him to compose a second album within the 'ethnic fine' category, called '*Mima'a 'makim*', which went gold two days after it was released.

Raichel's songs represent an accurate depiction of present-day Israel, showing the mixture of various cultures and backgrounds that make up the Israeli mosaic. His songs are not political, in contrast to much of the other popular music in Israel. Many of his songs connect to biblical text and themes of love and human connection.

> Love is a universal language; it helps with his mission of merging different cultures. It is a common theme that all cultures can both relate to, and feel as if they have gone through, regardless of their background. Love songs, especially the way Idan Raichel presents them, create a peace and understanding that each culture is built on the same foundation as all the others.[90]

There were several factors that made Raichel's music such a success and allowed him to push Ethiopian language and musical motifs into Israeli pop culture. His album was backed by the very popular Helicon Records, and his long dread-locks and exotic head wraps attracted and intrigued young Israelis. Another factor in Raichel's success was the timing of the release of his album. With such a large Ethiopian community in Israel, when half of Israel's population is made up of indigenous African and Middle Eastern Jews, Israelis need a venue through which to experience and accept these communities. Above all though, the music of Idan Raichel is simply unique and amazing. As in Israel's past with other groups of immigrants, music and musicians have been the first to progress in this arena.

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[89] Ibid., 4.
[90] Yaskil, "The Israeli Bob Marley", 73.

> This is the type of music that takes my breath away-maybe the way that Ofra Haza burst on the Israeli and world music scene decades ago...this music, a fusion of Israeli pop, hip hop, Hebrew and Ethiopian texts, is stunning in its range and emotional intensity. Texts range from the traditional: the opening music is from the Rosh Hashana service, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs-fascinating that the Biblical texts consulted are those attributed to Solomon, from whom Beta Israel trace their Jewish ancestry. Just as Haza's music was an explosion of traditional Yemenite fused with world beats, Raichel's gentler, no less intense melodies likewise seem to bring African and Israel and world-beat together.[91]

The members of the Idan Rachel Project represent Raichel's conception of the ideal melding of cultures in the state of Israel. On his first CD, he worked with Ethiopian singers and musicians both in the composition of his music as well as performance. In his second album, Raichel collaborated with over seventy artists coming from various cultural backgrounds in Israel to create this work of art. The Sudanese-born Cabra Kasai, a leading singer in the band, came to Israel as a baby during "Operation Moses" in 1982, and met Raichel while serving in the army's Education Corps singing band. Kasai commented in an interview with the San Francisco Chronicle, "Israelis didn't listen to Amharic music before this. Everyone knows Amharic now."[92]

Many Ethiopian Israelis are proud of the Ethiopian musicians who perform with Idan Raichel Project and are grateful for what they have done for the community. As in delicate situation like this one, there has certainly been some controversy over the fact that it took a white European male to put Ethiopian music in the spotlight of mainstream Israeli culture. Alamu Baleta, who is the youth programs director at the Ashdod Community Center which has a large Ethiopian population was interviewed quoted as saying, "People are listening to Idan Raichel because he is European Israeli, because he is

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[91] Davidow, Ari. *Tzarif Klezmer*. June 4, 2006. Available at http://www.klezmershack.com/bands/raichel/project/. Internet.
[92] San Francisco Chronicle, 4.

white. The Ethiopians have him all the ideas and words from our culture, but it's as if it's the voice of Idan Raichel. . .Israelis don't recognize the many talented musicians from our community, don't relate to them as they do to other Israeli artists"[93] While this frustration exists for a number of Ethiopian Israelis, on the whole the success of the Idan Raichel Project has been positive for the community, giving them a real chance at the acceptance they crave and deserve. Gadi Gidor, Raichel's manger described the touching nature of seeing the Idan Raichel Project perform. "You see all of these different shades and colors of Israel through the people onstage and music being played. If you want a firsthand glimpse of the Israeli melting pot, then this is the show to see."[94]

There are many factors that make the State of Israel unique in the world: its tenuous political situation, its geographical position in the world, its size, and its greatly varied cultural landscape are just a few of these factors. Despite these sometimes-insurmountable obstacles, Israeli continues to be a vibrant country, with an amazingly rich culture. Music is at the core of this culture, as each immigrant groups brings its past into the present of Israel and adds another layer of depth to the musical language of the country. Music is the venue through which these new cultures can first make their mark on their new home and begin to be considered Israeli by the already existing society. This process is now occurring in the Ethiopian Jewish community and will now, no doubt, keep advancing until they feel they are fully accepted in Israel. Regardless of ethnicity, Israel is a difficult country to navigate and the Ethiopian Jews have felt this as much or more than any other immigrant group. However, there is more to Israel than conflict; there is a reason why people from all over the globe long to visit or live within

[93] Ibid.
[94] Ibid., 5.

Israel's borders. Many people around the world have an incomplete view of reality in Israel, as they often only see the strife depicted on the news or hear of the political conflicts that exist there. But this is only a part of the Israeli story, and the rest is much more worthy of being told. Dara Yaskil of the *Michigan Israel Observer* poignantly described how the music of Idan Raichel is making strides in this matter in her article "The Israeli Bob Marley: 'Out of the Depths' by the Idan Raichel Project".

> While Israel is entangled in a messy web of politics, it continues to breed life, music, and culture. Idan Raichel's tour in the U.S. exposes Israel's unique culture and shows the American audience that there is more to Israel than the central conflict at hand. His music forces people to rethink the societies they live in, to become more tolerant of others and to realize that every culture has something unique and wonderful to contribute. By doing this, people can learn not to judge others by their face value, and hence, tear down the barriers to peace among differing societies. Some music for thought.[95]

Epilogue

This idea of melding the many cultures coexisting in Israel was beautifully exemplified in 1995 when the Jewish Music Heritage Project organized a gathering of musicians from many cultures living within Israel. Invitations went to musicians from Persia, Turkey, Bucharia, Georgia, India, and Ethiopia.

> For thousands of years, Jews from all over the world dreamed of coming here (Jerusalem). They arrived with their bodies and souls, but not with their music. That was preserved only by various ethnic communities at the fringes of an Israeli society that preferred to seek new values. We suggested that various ensembles come to Jerusalem with their music to listen and to be heard. This way perhaps we'll be able to breech the walls that keep us apart.[96]

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[95] Yaskil, "The Israeli Bob Marley", 74-75.

[96] Asher Tlalim, Jewish Music heritage library. "A People and its music: One Day the Heart Opens, A Concert of Ethnic Music". Israeli Music Heritage Project. Jerusalem, Israel: Ergo Media Inc., Video series, Vol. 8, 1995.

The musicians all came to Jerusalem to play and sing together and to learn from one another about the beautiful differences between their cultures. Watching this amazing video is truly an eye-opening experience, as it seems to be an oasis of coexistence and acceptance that was not the reality in Israel when the event took place in 1995. Symbolically, each group traveled from their different homes to one central location, David's Citadel in Jerusalem, and began the day separately from one another. Each ethnic group congregated together and played and sang the music that came from their particular culture. As time passed, their interest in the other groups around them was piqued and they began to venture into other parts of the Citadel to observe what was happening with other musicians. New groups began to form as musicians from musical cultures mixed--Persian music with Indian, Ethiopian with Yemenite, etc. The music of the Ethiopian Jews, who had only recently made *aliyah,* was unlike any other performance, especially with their non-melodic, foreign instruments and the rhythmic dancers who accompanied the musicians. This was the first time an Ethiopian musical group had been invited to an Israeli stage, treated on the same level as the other musicians. Music became the language through which the groups communicated between their different cultures as the musicians spent the day experiencing Jewish music from all over the world. The divisions that existed between these cultures melted away as they began to understand one another through their music. "That night marked a new opportunity; an old/new direction that could transform our differences into a unique and

innovative unity, yielding a richer, Israeli culture."[97] At this event, a perfect simulation of *aliyah* to Israel occurred; arrival, social isolation, sporadic and individualized mixing, mass curiosity, gradual acceptance of differences and similarities, and an ultimate micro-simulation of cultural integration and fusion. Music, as in the example of Ethiopian immigration to Israel and in each historical *aliyah,* was the key guide in this phenomenal process.

[97] Asher Talalim, "A People and its music: One Day the Heart Opens, A Concert of Ethnic Music", Video.

Appendix A
Musical Examples

Figure 1.

Tourny, Oliver, "The Liturgical Musical Heritage of the Jewish Ethiopian Tradition", p. 5.

Biqulu gizie (*Sigd* pilgrimage)

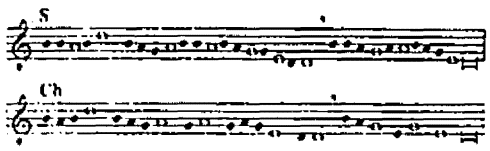
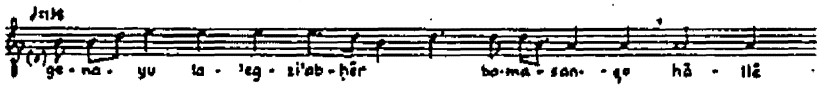


Figure 2.

Shelemay, Kay Kaufman, Music, Ritual, and Falasha History, p. 163.

kaffetaññā demz



Falasha *zema*

qwāmi *zēmā*

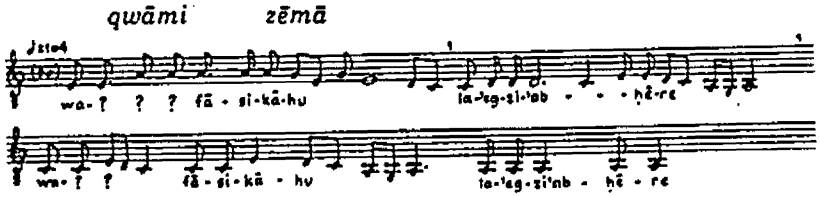


Figure 3.

Shelemay, Kay Kaufman, "Jewish Music: Liturgical & Paraliturgical: Ethiopia", in *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians,* 2001 ed., p 71.

Beta Israel prayer *Kalhu kwellu mala'ekt*

set in *qwami zema,* as performed by *kes*

Gete Asrass, 12 May 1973.

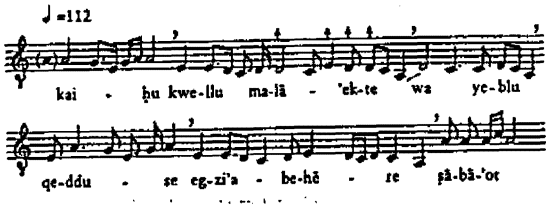
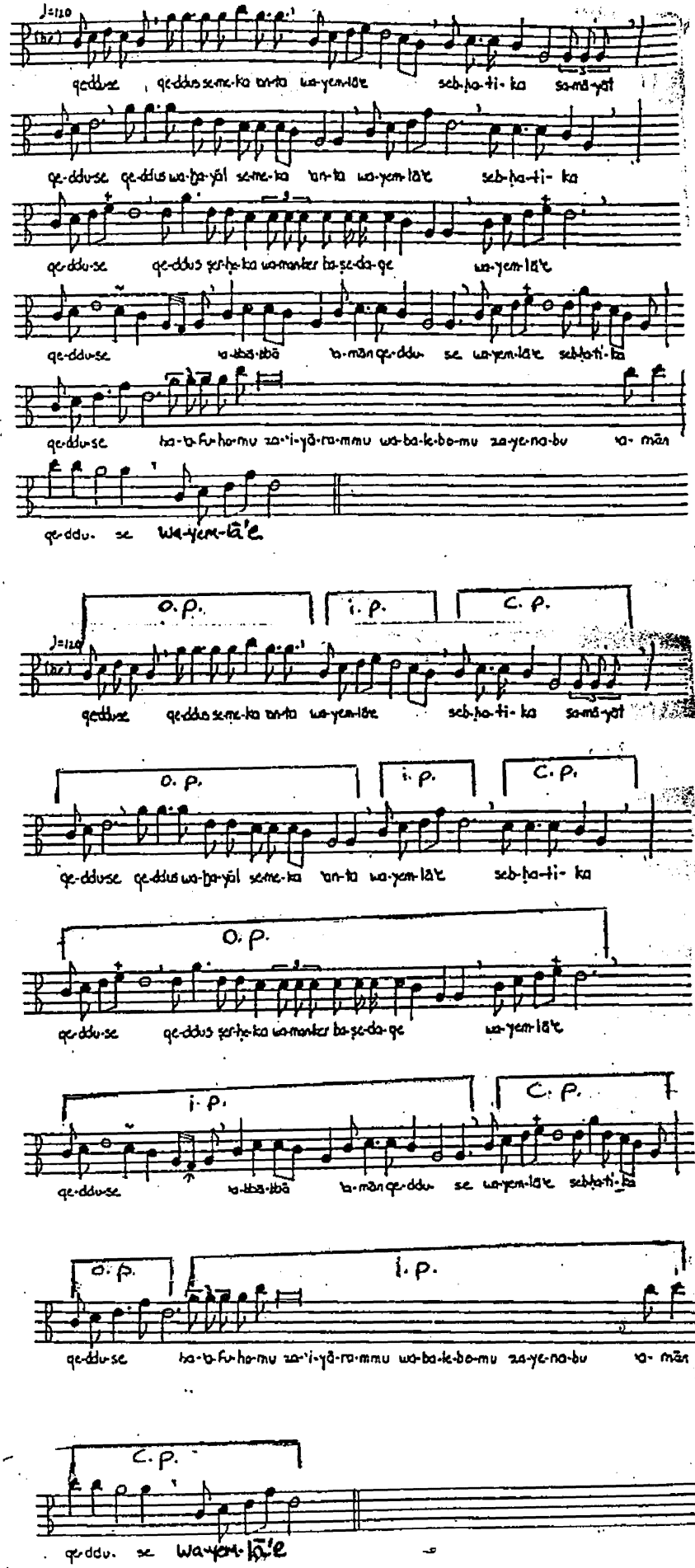


Figure 4.

Shelemay, Kay Kaufman, "Jewish Liturgical Forms in the Falasha Liturgy? A Comparative Study". *Yuval* 5 (1986), pp 392-393.

Sa'atat (hours), performed daily at approximately three o'clock in the afternoon

Translation:
Holy, holy, is your name and let your praise fill the heavens
Holy, holy and powerful is your name and let you praise be full
Holy, holy is your palace and wonderful in righteousness, and let it be full
Holy Father, truly holy, and let you praise be full
Holy in their mouths which are not silent and in their hearts which speak
Truly holy and let you praise fill the heavens.



Analysis of Figure 4 by Shayna Peavey:

This melody begins with an ascending opening phrase (o.p.) on the word *qeddus* (holy). In almost every instance there is an ascension on the word *qeddus. Qeddus* is sung once and then repeated, for emphasis, on a high pitch. The leap of a 6th places particular emphasis on this word in the opening phrase. The intermediate phrase (i.p.) of the line is rather simple, rising up four notes, and then immediately descending with no ornamentation. The closing phrase (c.p.) is characterized by a marked triplet on the word *samayat,* which means "heavens". The first phrase ends a third lower than the piece began, giving it a very anticipatory feel and which often characterizes pentatonic music to the Western ear.

The second line (2), also opens with an ascending three-note line, and then rises to the same repeating tone above the staff (A). Again, the intermediate phrase is simple, this time including a jump of a 3rd instead of going directly up and down the scale. The 2nd phrase closes again on the low A, a 3rd below the starting note of the phrase.

There is a variation in the third line (3), as there is a held note at the end of the first *qeddus*. The note is held for the duration of a whole note, making a marked difference in the momentum of the line. The phrase then continues similarly to the others, with a jump to the note A but this time there is no repetition of the note. This phrase is also different because it is longer than the previous phrases. The opening phrase of this line lasts all the way to the word *wayemla'e* (let it be full). Then the phrase goes on to introduce new text in the intermediate phrase in line four (4): *qeddus abba, bman qedduse* (Holy Father, truly holy). Interestingly, in this phrase the piece reaches its lowest note (G) on the word *qeddus* which has been characteristically the nigh note of the

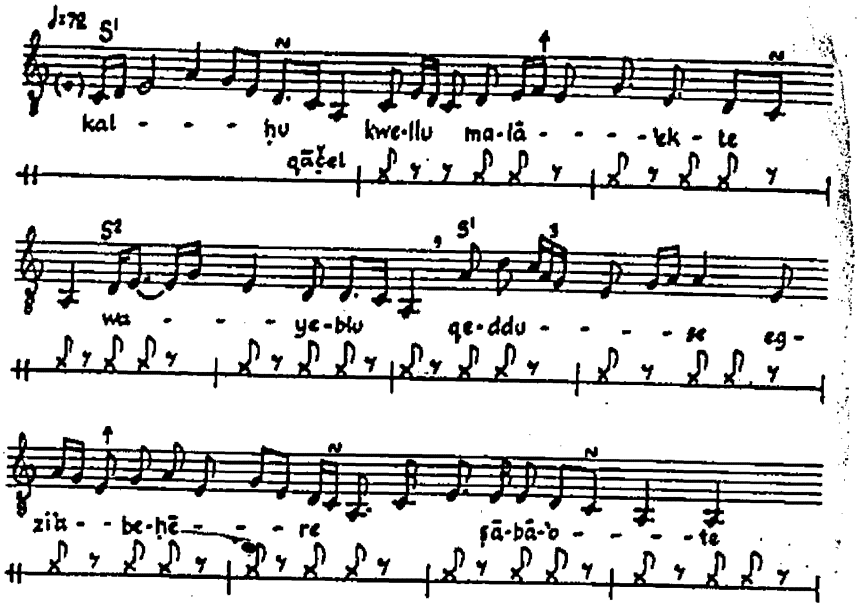
preceding phrases. This low note comes before the rise on the word *abba* (Father). Perhaps the purpose of this low note on the word "holy" is to emphasize the importance of the word "Father" above all else. The end of line 4 has a dramatic feel, with a four note ascending scale, followed by an upward jump of a 4^{th}. This closing phrase ends like the others on the low A.

Line five (5) is the climax of the piece. The opening phrase is like the others, with an ascending phrase on *qeddus*. It is followed by a dramatic intermediate phrase, beginning with an emphatic triplet on the high A and continuing with a recitative style line on the highest note of the piece thus far (C). This phrase, "in their mouths which are not silent and in their hearts which speak" is sung in a spoken tone, on a high pitch. It is the pinnacle moment of the prayer. Line six (6) is also part of this phrase and acts as the closing phrase for the whole piece. The last words of the prayer are, "Truly holy and let your praise be full". The final musical phrase is simple, and does not sound like a final cadence, as it ends on the note E, which has not been a common concluding note throughout the piece.

Figure 5.

A. Shelemay, Kay Kaufman, Music, Ritual, and Falasha History, p 270

Ba'ala masallat morning (*sukkot*)



B. Ibid., pp 390-391

Qeddus (Holy) within *yetbarak, berhan saraqa* evening (*Rosh Ha'shana*)

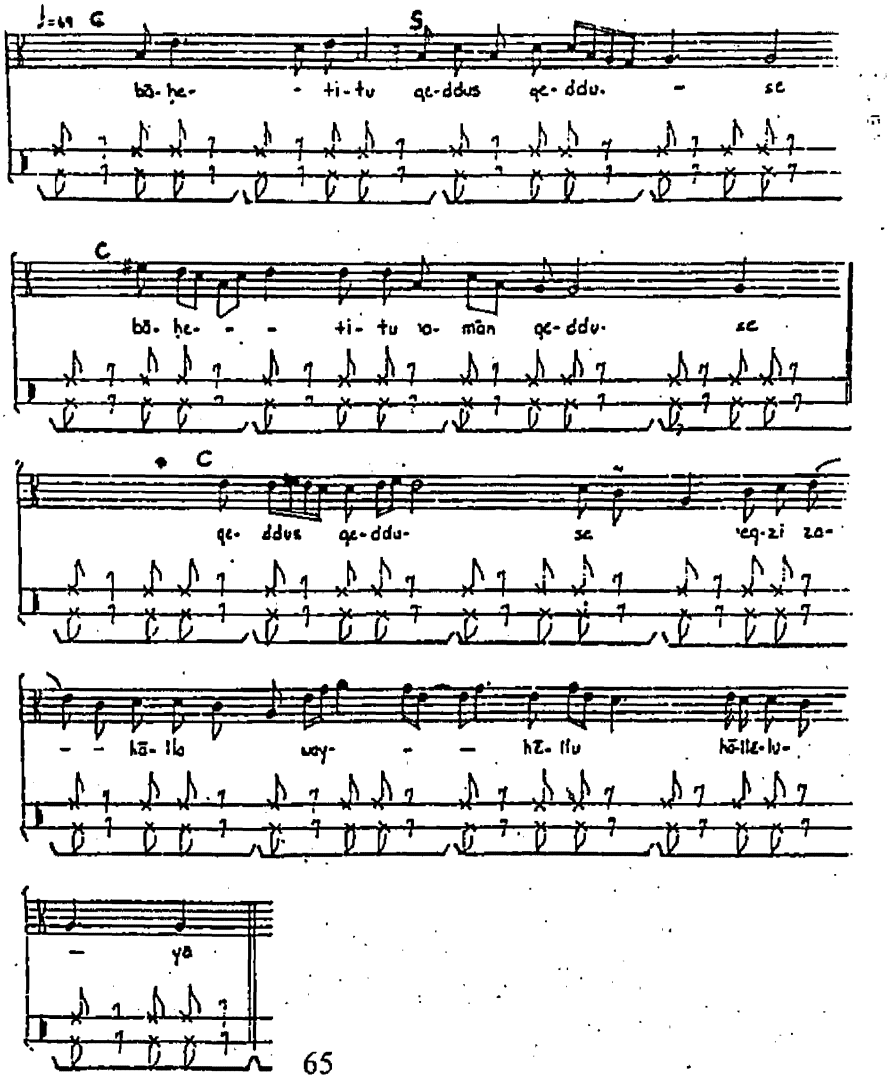
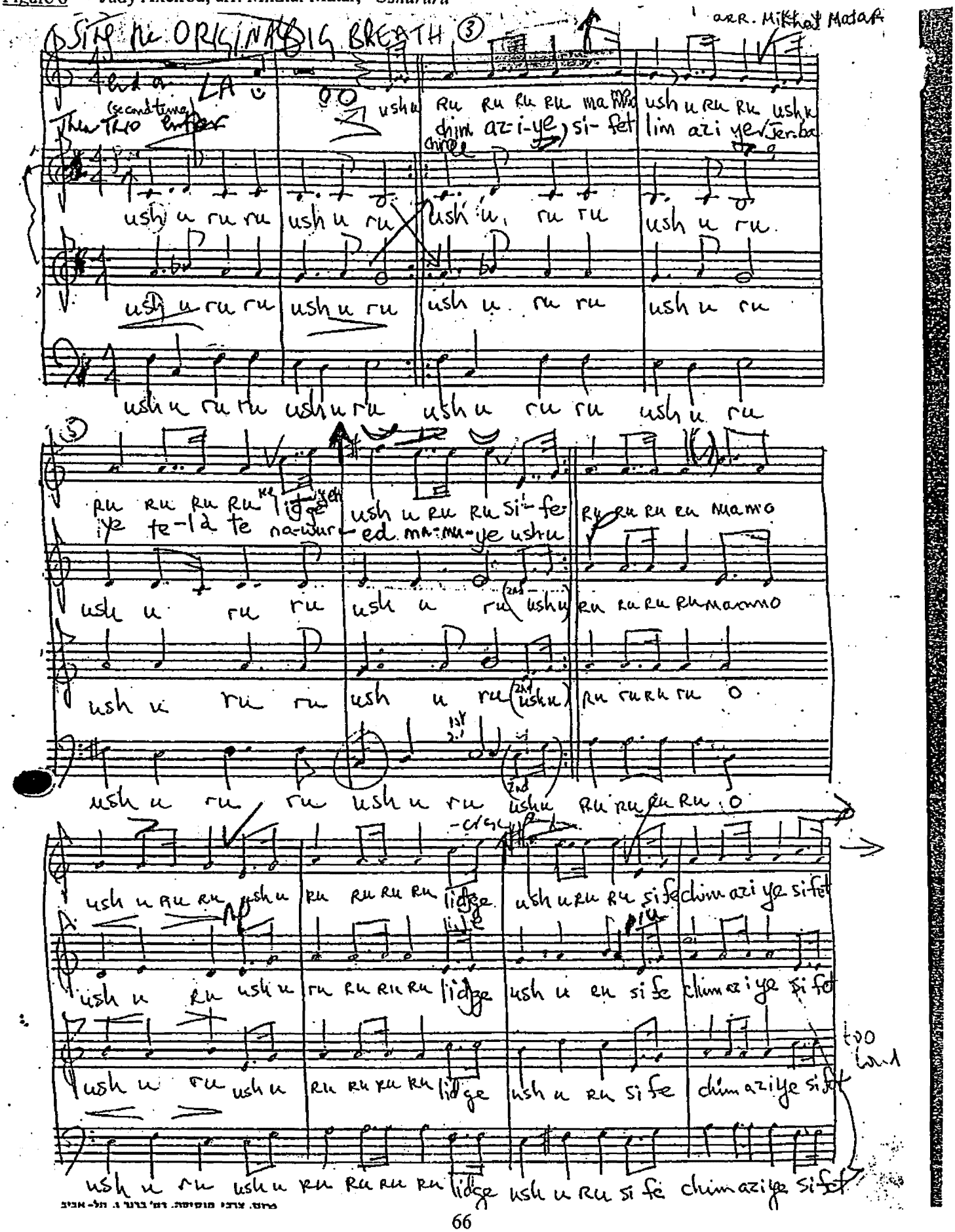
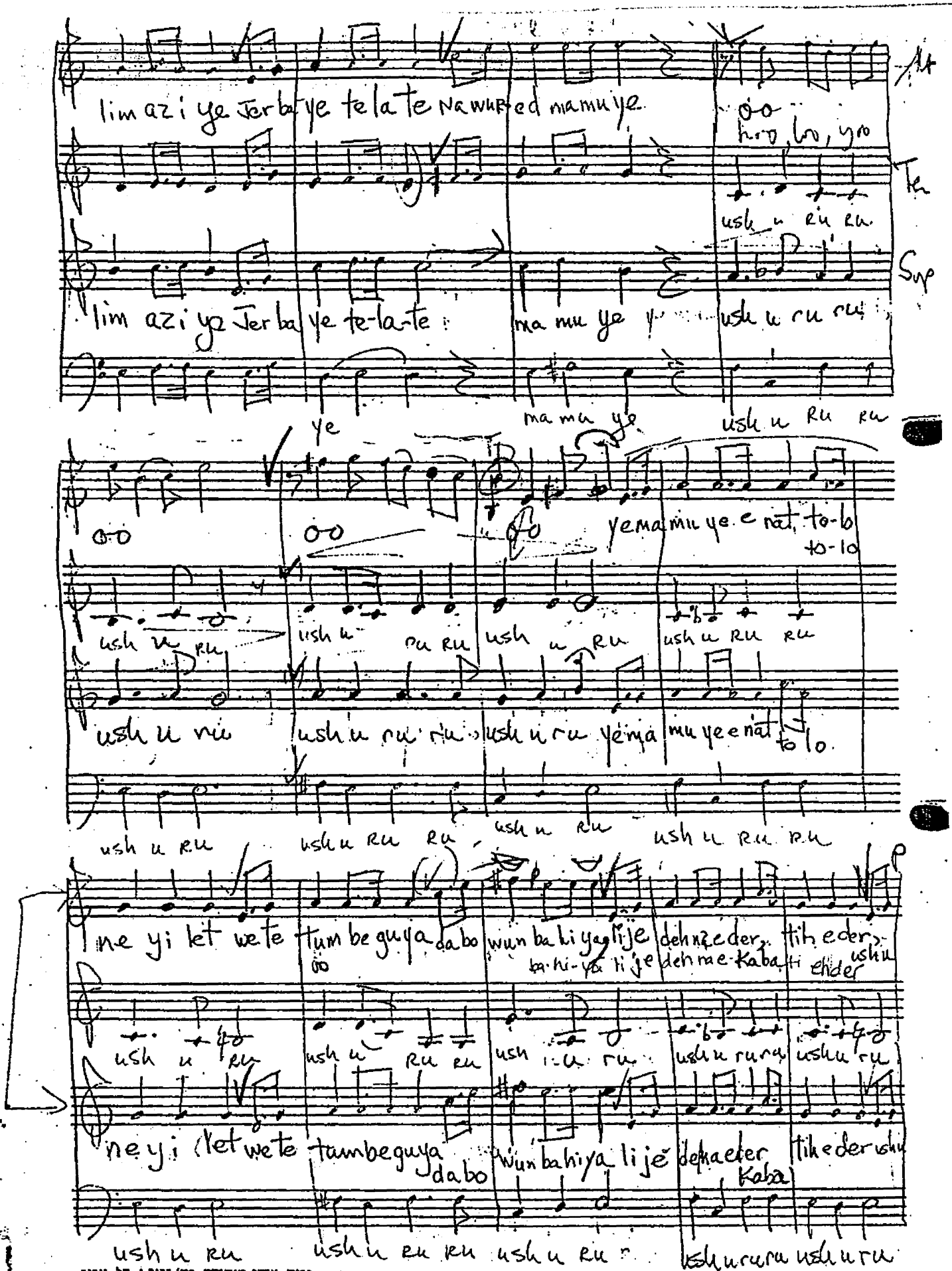
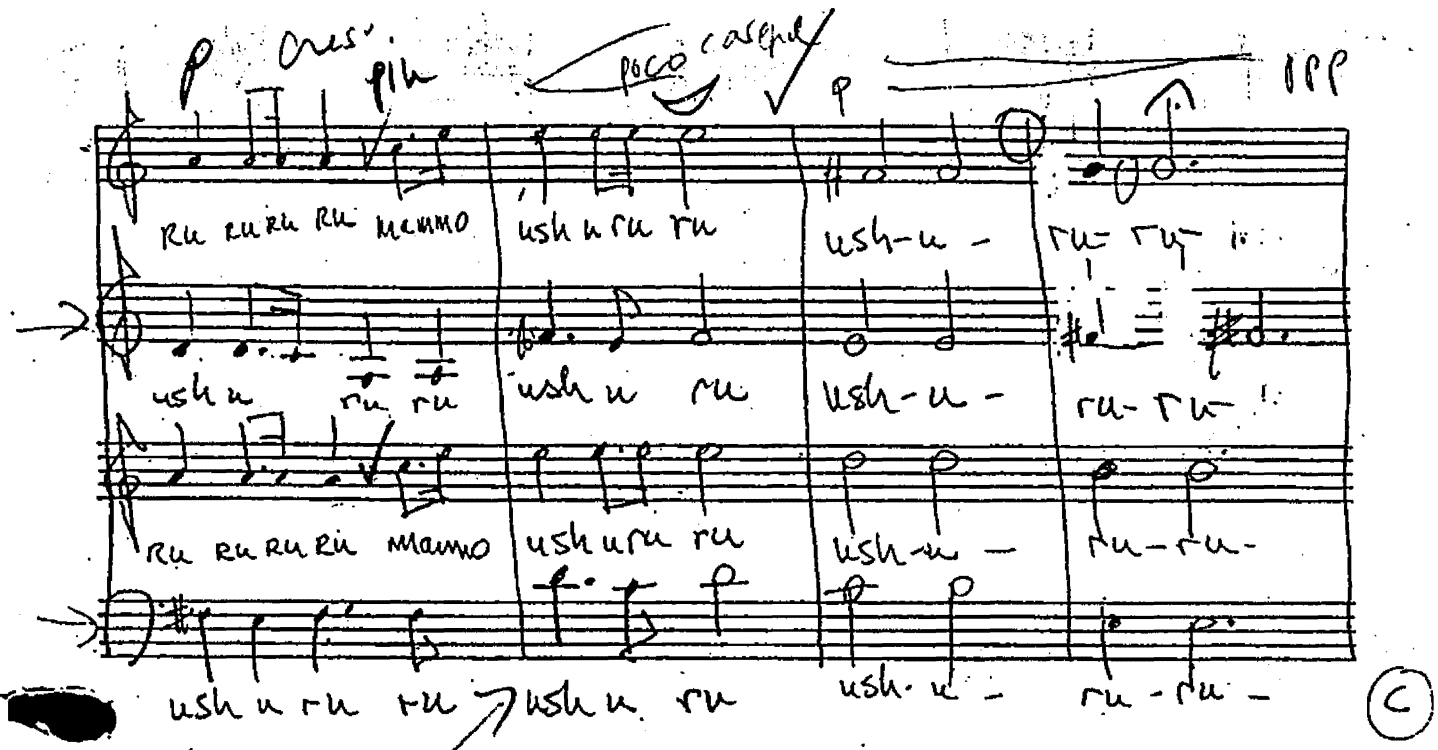


Figure 6 Judy Axelrod, arr. Mikhal Matar, *"Ushururu"*







M+M more desc

Duration: 2.15 mins

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