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“ONE PEOPLE, ONE BLOOD”: PUBLIC HEALTH, POLITICAL  
VIOLENCE, AND HIV IN AN ETHIOPIAN-ISRAELI SETTING

**ABSTRACT.** Between 1984 and 1996, public health authorities in Israel maintained a secret policy of discarding blood donations made by Ethiopian-Israeli citizens and immigrants. Officials later attempted to justify this policy on the grounds that immigrants from Ethiopia were subject to high rates of infectious disease (especially HIV). In 1996, this led to an explosive and violent confrontation between Ethiopian-Israeli protestors and agents of the state, including police and public health authorities. This essay explores the cultural and political context of that confrontation, including the discourse of political violence which it occasioned. The conflict between Ethiopian-Israelis and the state was located within a wider set of political contexts, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which was linked to it through a shared trope of “spilled blood” common to both. Cultural analyses which ignore this dynamic political context are in danger of seriously misrepresenting the meaning of the “Blood Affair” to its participants. At the same time, this essay also engages a critical analysis of the public health policies which led to the crisis. Public health and nationalist discourse reinforced one another at the expense of Ethiopian immigrants in general, and so-called “Feres Mura” Ethiopians in particular.

They have spilled their blood like water round about Jerusalem, and there is none to bury it; We have become a taunt to our neighbors, a scorn and a derision to those round about us – How long, Lord?

(Psalms 79: 3–5, recited at afternoon prayers, Neve Carmel immigrant center, Feb. 25, 1996)<sup>3</sup>

INTRODUCTION

On January 24, 1996, a report by investigative journalist Ronal Fischer in the Hebrew daily *Maariv* revealed that for the past twelve years, the Israeli blood bank administered by *Magen David Adom* (MDA)<sup>1</sup> had been routinely destroying blood donations made by Ethiopian-Israelis.<sup>2</sup> Blood bank and Ministry of Health officials were quick to announce that they had acted to prevent contamination of the blood supply by high rates of infectious disease among Ethiopian immigrants, most notably HIV-AB, but also (as was later made clear) malaria and Hepatitis-B. Ethiopian-Israeli citizens, however, were not convinced. The ensuing furor led to



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an unprecedentedly violent clash between Ethiopian-Israeli demonstrators and police, which emphasized the deep, often unrecognized connections between public health policy, strategies of nation building, and ethnic politics. My argument in this essay is that effective analysis of a controversy such as this one requires acknowledgment of the bloody rhetorical (and not so rhetorical) strategies by means of which nationhood is continually being constructed, defended, and subverted, in Israel as elsewhere. Given the importance of (pure) blood to primordialist ethnic and bureaucratic discourses (Aretxaga 1995; Herzfeld 1992), as well as to the discourse of public health (Sapolsky 1989; Mann, Tarantola and Netter 1992: 421–37; Berkley 1994), it should come as no surprise that this investigation leads deep into the terrain of identity politics. It leads, in other words, to a consideration of the ways in which blood, violence, and suffering have come to constitute the shifting stakes of experience in a complex and highly contested “local moral world” (Kleinman and Kleinman 1991).

These considerations make the Israeli case an important addition to the growing literature on AIDS in its social, cultural, and political contexts (Borneman 1988; Brodwin 1996; Farmer and Kleinman 1989; Farmer 1992, 1996; Forman 1986; Porter 1989; Ward 1993). It is also relevant to the anthropology of social suffering more generally (Das 1994; Kleinman and Kleinman 1991; Kleinman 1995). The Israeli public health establishment’s failure to come to terms with the broad ramifications of its AIDS policy has not only undermined public health efforts, but left a deep scar on the political and cultural topography of Israel. At the time of writing, these issues are still being decided “in the field,” and this essay must be read as an attempt to analyze multifaceted social and cultural activity in progress. The Blood Affair (*parashat ha-dam*) as it has come to be known in local media, is far from over and forgotten.

### ETHIOPIANS IN ISRAEL

Some 65,000 Ethiopian Jews currently reside in Israel, a country of over five million citizens. Formerly known as Beta Israel or Falasha (see Kaplan 1992; Quirin 1992), many of them migrated to Israel in two dramatic waves, and are still arriving in relatively small numbers today. The first of these waves, popularly known as “Operation Moses,” took the form of a secretive airlift of some 7,800 Beta Israel who had gathered in Sudanese refugee camps in 1984. An additional two to four thousand Beta Israel perished from a variety of causes along the way (Kaplan and Rosen 1994), including thirst, predation by bandits, and attempts by the Ethiopian military to halt their emigration (Kessler and Parfitt 1985: 11). The grief of

survivors, often unable to care for their dead properly, was compounded by the fact that political pressures brought to bear on Sudanese President Numeiri forced him to withdraw permission for the airlift before its completion, leaving already traumatized and now divided families in a situation of grave uncertainty (Arieli 1988; Munichin-Itzigsohn and Hanegbi 1988). This situation was not rectified to any appreciable extent until 1991, when, literally hours before the final collapse of Ethiopia's Mengistu regime, a second Israeli airlift transported 14,200 more immigrants from a gathering place in Addis Ababa. At that time, a decision was taken by the Israeli government to leave approximately 2,800 of the Beta Israel who had gathered in Addis Ababa behind, on grounds that they or their ancestors had compromised their right to automatic Israeli citizenship by converting to Christianity (Kaplan and Rosen 1994: 64–69; see Salamon 1994; Seeman 1997).

The Ethiopian community in Israel, meanwhile, has suffered from a number of persistent and painful dilemmas. Israel's state sponsored religious establishment, although supportive of Beta Israel immigration as Jews under the 1951 "Law of Return," has nevertheless continued to seek their formal (or "symbolic") conversion to Judaism once in Israel, a policy which underscores the uncertain "betwixt and between" quality with which Beta Israel claims to Jewishness have often been apprehended by non-Ethiopian Jewish groups (Dominguez 1989: 70–91; Kaplan 1988, 1995; Seeman 1991). In addition, there have been continuing complaints of discrimination and under-achievement in education (Wagaw 1993; Odenheimer 1995), and protracted difficulties associated with housing, military service and employment (Shabtay 1995; Benita and Noam 1995; Westheimer and Kaplan 1992; Kaplan and Rosen 1994). Most to the point of this article, the state health services in Israel have also been identified as a site of unequal contest between doctors and immigrant patients over cultural insignia like names or styles of dress, as well as divergent constructions of illness, suffering, and the efficacy of healing (Reiff 1995, 1996; also see Bental, Gersten and Alkan 1993: 430; Pliskin 1987).

Not until the blood bank controversy, however, was the medical establishment explicitly drawn to the center of explosive conflict between Ethiopian immigrants and the state.

It is my contention that this crisis derived part of its overwhelming salience for Ethiopian-Israelis from the way in which it forced a public confrontation with the most unsettling elements of their recent experience. The Blood Affair laid bare a contingent, morally charged, and multiply contested social field; one normally rendered invisible by the unifying

tropes of nationalist discourse on the one hand, and ethnic cultural reification on the other. In this sense, the Blood Affair can be considered a “diagnostic event” (Moore 1987) of major proportions, opening a window on the diachronic fault lines of social process. It may also however be considered a “critical event” in the sense recently suggested by Veena Das (1995). As a critical event, the Blood Affair not only *reveals* social process, but has come decisively to inform it. Through the Blood Affair, new modes of action may be coming into being in Israel which challenge popular contemporary constructions of purity, illness, and ethnic or national belonging.

The Blood Affair as an *event* therefore, is the focus of this essay, which will provide a concrete ethnographic setting in which to assess the intersection of public health and political violence in a context of traumatic migration, contested participation in the nation building project, and the threat (both real and imagined) of HIV. Rather than begin with an account of the rationalized medical discourse which defined Ethiopians in Israel as a “risk group” for AIDS, however, this essay begins with an account of the public protest launched by Ethiopian-Israelis. My hope is that this approach will foster a more concrete appreciation of the contradictory significances which the Blood Affair has come to assume for its different participants, and will help to forestall premature judgement of the theoretical categories in which their controversy ought to be framed.

#### GRIEF AND A STONE THROWER’S RAGE

*“Of course I threw rocks! Don’t you realize they are killing us?”* These are the words of a relatively unusual stone thrower, a woman in her late twenties who was studying for a professional degree (most stone throwers, from what I could see, were young men). Her response, however, was far from atypical. On Sunday, the twenty-ninth of January, 1996, an estimated 8,000–10,000 Ethiopian-Israeli demonstrators converged on the offices of the Prime Minister in Jerusalem. The police had issued a permit for only 850 protesters, and despite newspaper predictions that thousands would arrive, they were clearly unprepared for the scale of the event. It is interesting to note, however, that they did not call for reinforcements even when they realized the scale of the actual demonstration. Police spokespersons later claimed that they had not seen any need to do so, because they “knew the Ethiopians to be a quiet and retiring community.”<sup>4</sup> That kind of cultural reification was among the first of many casualties on that day, which saw at least sixty-one people injured, including forty-one police officers.

Chastened as we are by Rosaldo’s (1989) critique of anthropologists’ penchant for seeking “deeper” symbolic realities behind straightforward expressions of grief and rage, I will avoid reducing the anger expressed by members of the Ethiopian-Israeli community to other terms. What remains for cultural analysis, however, is to plot the construction and expression of such emotions, the varied rhetorics which they deploy, and their political or moral cachet in particular contested social fields. In this case, the arousal of passions like rage has been central to the development of the Blood Affair as a “critical event,” (Das 1995: 92) and is identified by participants and onlookers alike as key to its unfolding significance.

It is 10 A.M., outside the offices of the Prime Minister in Jerusalem, and it is obvious that this will not be a demonstration like all the others. Thousands of Ethiopian-Israelis line the streets and cover the steep rock-bank which faces the building. What first catches my eye is a row of older women, in their white *shammas* and colorful kerchiefs over graying hair. They are slowly shaking their fists in the direction of the government building. Already the faces of government workers can be seen lining the windows. Until today, the well known icon of Ethiopian protest had been the silent sit-in waged at the offices of the Chief Rabbinate in 1985.

Everyone is here, representatives of every family with whom I am in contact. During the course of the day, I meet Yossie, Taddesse, Almaz. . . They have come from Upper Nazareth and from the immigrant “absorption center” near Haifa, by public transportation and in buses chartered by the Ethiopian “umbrella organization” chaired by Addisu Messele. Students have taken off from school, soldiers have left their bases without leave. This is one of those jarring moments in which people whom I have come to know in very different settings suddenly come together, representatives of a small community in a small country. They are carrying placards in Hebrew and English with messages like “One People, One Blood,” “We are Jews Like You,” “Stop the Racist Apartheid,” “Our Blood is Also Red,” and “We Will Not Allow Our Blood to go Ownerless.” Many boys are wearing wool ski-hats reminiscent of African-American fashions, while others sport knitted yarmulkes. Some also display the Ethiopian national colors. In an unusual gesture, a group of monks from the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Jerusalem have come bearing an Ethiopian flag in an effort to make common cause.

On the other hand, there are not many white faces in the crowd – a handful of anthropologists and long time political activists, reporters, a few sympathetic members of religious youth groups, and some secular teenagers with their Ethiopian friends or sweethearts. Sometimes these visible outsiders are challenged to justify their presence here. It is young Ethiopian men with hand-held megaphones who are directing the crowd, and this is their day.

Within an hour of my arrival the demonstrators have forced their way past police and soldiers into the inner parking lot of the offices of the Prime Minister. Another fence still separates them from the entrance to the building. At a point not visible to me, a group of people have tried to force the fence and we are all pushed back with short blasts of water. An old man, dripping and laughing, says “Bring on the gas!” and those of us who are nearby chuckle. Even the police seem to be laughing as a couple of young girls, shrieking, dodge to avoid the water. Then, off to my left, a stone goes sailing towards the police. More stones. Other demonstrators are yelling at the stone-throwers to stop. Police charge with batons. Choked by tear gas, we run with closed eyes, accompanied by the sound of stones

bouncing off of parked cars. . . . Later, while picking ourselves up off the grass, coughing, an older man to my right extends his hand with a look of sympathy. But from the young man to my left, I hear the startled and angry question: "What are we, Arabs?" The crowd begins to regroup. I go to search for people I know.

### *Ownerless Blood*

One of the most popular slogans chanted at the demonstration was *lo nitan dameinu hefker*, "We will not allow our blood to go ownerless (or to be abandoned)," an elegant condensation of several important messages which the protesters had come to bear. On its most explicit level, *lo nitan dameinu hefker* meant simply that the secret destruction of Ethiopian blood donations would no longer be tolerated.<sup>5</sup> "Our blood will not be treated as if it were ownerless," however, meant by extension that Ethiopian-Israelis would no longer tolerate being treated as if they were less than full and capable owners of their own bodies, charged with the responsible disposition of their own blood (and, in the context of HIV, their own sexuality), just like other adult citizens. Repeatedly, in the context of the demonstration and its aftermath, the insult of having been *lied to* by public health officials vied in importance for Ethiopian-Israelis with the insult of having had their blood donations summarily rejected.

Talk of "ownerless" blood, however, is a highly charged and overdetermined metaphor in Israel, as the Ethiopian-Israelis who deployed it in this case well knew. The Hebrew word *hefker*, which I have translated here as "ownerless," implies not just lack of ownership but wildness, irresponsibility (including sexual promiscuity) and abandonment (Alcalay 1965: 565). *Shetah hefker* is literal no-man's land in Hebrew, and property which has been declared *hefker* is free for the taking. Allowing a child to remain *hefker* means abandoning parental responsibility, with a strong implication that he or she will come to lawlessness as a result. But *dam hefker*, or ownerless blood, relates in mainstream Israeli-Jewish discourse to the cry of the defenseless victim whose blood has no avenger. A victim's blood is free for the taking, in the sense that her murder will not be opposed nor her killer brought to justice. In particular, the phrase *dam yehudi hefker* (ownerless or abandoned Jewish blood) has become a potent shorthand expression for pervasive physical insecurity, evoking the holocaust and contemporary political violence (especially terrorist violence) in a single, easily recognized semantic network (Good 1977).<sup>6</sup> This is the sense in which "ownerless blood" is often deployed in nationalist rhetoric as evidence for the overwhelming moral imperative to establish and defend a majority Jewish nation-state.<sup>7</sup>

By saying that they refused to allow their blood to remain *hefker*, therefore, Ethiopian-Israeli protesters were able to stake an ironic claim on Jewish history. They were able, in effect, to portray themselves as prototypical Jews, whose non-Ethiopian opponents were cast in the role of the dangerous enemies of the Jewish people. A similar rhetorical device was evident in placards which read: “Remember what Hitler did!” and “Stop the second holocaust!” When I stopped to speak with a young man who was shouting: “I thought that this people learned something 50 years ago – this is a second *Shoah!*” he explained to me that he was protesting generalized racism. He refused to repeat that claim just a moment later, however, for a persistent foreign journalist, who asked him leading questions about racism in Israel. Certain accusations, apparently, were still meant for local consumption only. He told me that he was a recently deactivated soldier, who had given blood “every day” while in the army.<sup>8</sup>

Elsewhere in the crowd, teenagers and young adults were also shouting comparisons between the Blood Affair and the holocaust, although at one point someone called out “Let’s not talk about that!” and was ignored. When I asked one woman what such a comparison could mean, she told me angrily, “We have all come here today because it hurts so much – in the stomach it hurts.” I was then given to understand that such questions were unwelcome, and my friend Mulat pulled me on further through the crowd, making excuses in Amharic as we went.

*“Sweet Ethiopians”*

One of the striking things about the Jerusalem demonstration was the way in which some protesters seemed intent on breaking apart the widespread stereotype of Ethiopian passivity. A demonstrator in his twenties began to chant “Death to Racists! Death to [Minister of Health] Ephraim Sneh!” One of his colleagues seized the megaphone from him to explain that he had *really* meant “death to racism.” In the wake of a prime minister’s assassination earlier that year, such expressions had led to arrests and charges of incitement to violence in other contexts. The police in this case, however, did not intervene, and so the chant was soon picked up again with only slight variation: “Death to Racists! Ephraim Sneh is a racist!”

In another corner, a young man with a megaphone was calling out “We are as Jewish as the Yemenites, and more Jewish than the Russians!”<sup>9</sup> Throughout the day, it was made clear that the policy regarding blood donations had been understood by Ethiopians as a direct attack on their membership in the imagined community of Israeli Jews (Anderson 1991), a violent repudiation which called for violence in return. “They all think of us as ‘sweet Ethiopians (*etyopim nehmadi*),’ the same young man

continued. "Today we have come to show them a different face . . . If it takes violence, then we will use violence. We will raise them up another Uzi Meshullam!"

Uzi Meshullam, of course, was the well known leader of a Yemenite Jewish underground which had made the "stolen Yemenite children" into a cornerstone of its confrontational ethnic and religious politics. In May, 1994, Meshullam and forty armed followers had barricaded themselves into a house to demand yet another government investigation of charges that Yemenite children by the hundreds had been "stolen" from new immigrants by the public health establishment during the 1950's, declared dead, and then sold for adoption in Israel or abroad. It is significant that according to one version of this story, the Yemenite children were actually sold to childless, Ashkenazi holocaust survivors, a pointed expression of resentment expressed in ethnic terms. At the time of the Blood Affair, Meshullam and several followers were serving prison terms, and a series of articles on the "stolen children" had recently appeared in the popular Hebrew press. The historical suffering of the Yemenite-Israeli community, like that of Jewish holocaust victims in Europe, was appropriated by Ethiopian-Israelis as a vehicle for the expression of their own particular outrage and grief.

Varying ways of talking about violence, emotion, and ethnic identity were implicated in the Blood Affair from its start, and served as grounds for the rhetorical reconfiguration of collective existence. Viewed in this way, the symbolic appropriation of holocaust suffering or of Yemenite anger at Israel's ruling elites emerges as more than an effective political maneuver; it is also an exploration of divergent possibilities for the configuration of self in a nationalist context (see Gabrielle 1992; Good and Good 1988). For Ethiopian Israelis, an important component of all these configurations has been a new willingness to talk about (and to threaten) violence as a technique of self presentation. Note the terms of this account, which appeared in a Hebrew newspaper on the day after the demonstration:

You can't argue with emotion. I took part yesterday in the demonstration outside the Prime Minister's office. I am Ethiopian. Black. This was a demonstration of blacks. We never imagined ourselves in such a difficult situation. Jews against Jews, blacks against whites, and ultimately we are all Jews. Only a simpleton would believe that the "Blood Bank Affair" was the main issue. This was a powerful explosion of emotions. Ten thousand extremely angry people are a terrifying image of great power. For a long time we have been quiet. This time I saw people weeping, angry, opening up.<sup>10</sup>

In this passage Maski Shibu-Sivan, an actress in her twenties, invokes an identity as "black" which has not, until recently, been publicly affirmed by many Ethiopian-Israelis (Salamon 1995). She is careful, however, to couch that claim in a rhetoric of shared Jewishness, lest she be misunder-



stood. The “Blood Bank Affair” was not the main issue, she claims, and proceeds to elaborate a set of broader concerns which allowed the rejection of blood donations to be experienced by Ethiopian-Israelis as just “one more thing” (Farmer 1992), or, in the words of a demonstration organizer, “the straw that broke the camel’s back.” Aside from specific claims for redress, it is the explosion of emotion itself which marks something new about the way Ethiopians have begun to reorganize their relations with the state, with “the Jewish people” broadly conceived, and with other communities in Israel whom they have come to perceive as similarly subaltern (i.e. Yemenite-Israelis). Shibu-Sivan continues:

We will not be satisfied with an investigatory panel into the events concerning the blood bank. We are demanding treatment of the real problems: education at an appropriate level, a substantial change in the way our soldiers are treated, and equal treatment by the Ministry of Health. We will not accept the publication of new surveys and statistics concerning the numbers of AIDS carriers in the Ethiopian community as long as not even one additional person has been tested from among the general population, or among immigrants from the former Soviet Union, from Brazil, from France, or from any other part of the enlightened world where AIDS can be found. We will demand the publication of full statistics not only for homosexuals and Ethiopians, but for general society.

This time we want not just an investigatory panel to investigate the Blood Bank Affair, but an investigatory panel to investigate why our Ethiopian soldiers committed suicide.<sup>11</sup> Yesterday there were students from the boarding schools and older students, and friends of the Ethiopian soldiers who committed suicide. The hidden power of anger and insult was palpable.

What happened yesterday was not preventable. It pains me that police officers were wounded at the demonstration, and I wish them a speedy recovery. It is too bad that this happened, but it must be understood that this was the outcome of an impossible reality, according to which the Ethiopian community has not been “heard” until today, and relations with it have not been conducted in a proper manner.

I hope that from now on people will be more attentive and will display more understanding of the problems facing the Ethiopian community. And I hope that there will never, never again be a need for another demonstration of this kind.

It is significant that for all of her anger and critique, the author also expresses some discomfort with violence against the police, and positions herself indisputably as both Israeli and Jewish.

Addisu Messele, chairman of the Ethiopian “umbrella organization” which organized the demonstration, proclaimed the protest a success after he received a promise from Prime Minister Peres to establish a public investigatory commission. “We have accomplished in one day what it took the Yemenites 40 years to accomplish!” The demonstration, in other words, was framed by establishment figures like Messele and Shibu-Sivan as a coming of age for former immigrants, now tested in the core of Israeli politics – no more would they be seen as “sweet” and acquiescent subjects. It is more than a little noteworthy that Messele himself

was elected to a position in the Labor party list for Knesset within a few weeks of this demonstration. At the protest itself, he had served as spokesperson both for the demonstrators and for the government, in his ironic role as demonstration organizer as well as Amharic translator for Minister of Immigrant Absorption Yair Tzaban, who was called to the scene. Figures like Messele worked to turn the Blood Affair into an occasion for consolidating a recognizable Israeli political discourse, one compatible with the mainstream narratives of the state even when sometimes critical of contemporary policy. This was not, however, the only option available to Ethiopian-Israelis. A consideration of these more radical strategies will lead us beyond the demonstration itself, to the complicated ethnographic field of which it was a part.

### CONTEXTS OF VIOLENCE

On the morning following the Jerusalem demonstration, major newspapers carried stories with headlines such as “Like Gaza During the Intifada.”<sup>12</sup> Of the forty-one police officers who had been injured, one was partially blinded by a stone. A young demonstrator’s skull was also fractured by a stone that had missed its mark. One police officer was reported in a newspaper to have wondered aloud: “What happened to the quiet Ethiopians? Even on the worst days in Gaza during the Intifada we didn’t see scenes so difficult as those the Ethiopians prepared for us today in Jerusalem.”<sup>13</sup> Nizav Aryeh Amit, Jerusalem Police Commander, said that “since the days of the Intifada, I don’t remember such a range of stones and clubs.”<sup>14</sup> A ranking member of the Israeli police establishment later told me that he had not been surprised by the violence of the demonstrators per se (as an officer, he had intervened in violent domestic quarrels among Ethiopians before), but by the fact that this was the first time that “violence had been directed against us, the representatives of the State.”<sup>15</sup> It was the perceived directionality of violence on both sides, rather than merely its intensity, which provoked critical reflections by many participants in the events of that day, including Ethiopians. This would seem, for instance, to be the force of the complaint uttered by the young man who demanded, as he stood up after being tear-gassed: “What are we, Arabs?”

Both police and demonstrators mobilized images from the Intifada to describe and cast aspersions on the violence exercised by the other side. This already reveals something significant about local knowledge presumptions concerning the legitimate uses of force and its limitations. Each side complained that the other had behaved *as if* this had really been an episode of the Palestinian Intifada, rather than a political dispute internal

to both the nation (in its ethnic sense) and the nation-state. Such usages, however, are notoriously multi-vocal. Once voiced, they can be turned in directions which the immediate participants did not explicitly intend.

The following comment, written by Palestinian-Israeli Riad Ali, and first published in the Hebrew daily *Davar Rishon*, deserves extended consideration:

Palestinians and Ethiopians in Israel: “We are Kindred”

When I was watching the demonstration of the Ethiopians on television and witnessed the outbreak of their rage, I could not help but compare our situation to theirs.

[...] The scenes were the same: police, clubs, tear gas, water hoses and lots of violence. Only the actors were different, and instead of police confronting Arabs, they were now confronting Ethiopians. It was exactly 20 years ago – in 1976 – that the Arab masses in Israel answered the call of their leaders and demonstrated their rage with a fury that then, too, astonished the country.

That day, later to be known as Land Day, the Arabs came out to demonstrate the issue of land expropriations.

[...] Both of us, the Arabs and the Ethiopians, have felt on our own flesh and in the most humiliating way possible, the difference between theory and practice. In theory, we are all equal citizens of the state, regardless of differences in religion, race and gender. In practice (“surprise! surprise!”) we are treated as alien corn. . . .

They are the blacks among the Jews and we are the country’s Arabs! They are “HIV-carriers,” and we the victims of “hereditary knife-wielders syndrome”. . . .

They are forced to prove their Jewish identity, which was obliterated after they were flown to Israel from Addis Ababa in a grueling journey. We are forced daily to atone for our original sin: not having abandoned our homeland with the coming of the white Jews. . . .<sup>16</sup>

Ethiopians have proven “good to think” (Levi-Strauss 1966: 149) by many groups in Israel, and this was not the first time that attempts had been made to use them as emblems for the failure or success of the state. This, however, was the first direct appeal I had seen by a Palestinian-Israeli to a popular Hebrew readership. The author claims that Ethiopians have more in common with Arab citizens of the state than with Jewish citizens, and that their anger against the state resonates within a wider or different context of conflict than that which the demonstrators themselves actually chose to emphasize.

Ali’s comments are revealing in other ways as well. The similarity between Ethiopians and Palestinians is indexed in terms of violence levied or suffered in interactions with the apparatus of the state, and by emotional qualifiers like “rage” and “wrath” (*za’am*). These are also key terms for other kinds of ethnic and state politics in Israel (Gabriel 1992), and are embedded in official discourse as justifications for violence against external enemies, especially when non-military targets are involved.<sup>17</sup> The language of fury is mobilized in the name of state power as well as against it, in response to perceived victimization on all sides, and in service of

ethnic and national identities which are fostered by state hegemony as well as those (such as Palestinian nationalism[s] and confrontational Jewish ethnic affiliations) which seek to locate themselves in the state's porous symbolic borderlands. "Rage" and "fury," with their associated naturalization of violence, become the intelligible fault lines along which groups establish the contours of collective identification in Israel (see Good and Good 1988).

In his bid to establish an identity between Ethiopians and Palestinians, Riad Ali refers to both peoples as having been displaced by the Zionist state, but refers only to the "coming of the white Jews," suppressing recognition of the fact that most Ethiopians also came to Israel as eager participants in the Jewish nationalist project. Although Ali writes that claims against Ethiopians as "HIV carriers" and against Arabs as "knife wielders" are expressions of entrenched state racism, he ultimately does so as a citizen protesting the state's unfulfilled equalitarian ideology. As groups defined by their victimization, he implies, both Palestinian-Israelis and Ethiopian-Israelis are entitled to demand their rights from the state by force.<sup>18</sup>

Palestinians' and Ethiopians' occasional appropriation of one another as icons of suffering and/or violence is of course complicated on the level of daily interactions, where both groups need to orient themselves practically with regards to one another as well as the state. This is crucial to an understanding of the Blood Affair as a "critical event" in the life of the Ethiopian Jewish community, because it can help us to see how responses to the Blood Affair were selected from a broad repertoire of possibilities, each grounded in the flux of social experience (Kleinman and Kleinman 1991). As a critical event, the Blood Affair projected some options for self-configuration into bold relief, while closing off or diminishing others. A certain amount of ethnographic illustration at this point is called for.

### *Inconstant Nationhood*

On a Saturday night in the fall of 1995, a brawl broke out at a local discotheque between Jewish and Arab youths in the northern Israeli city of Upper Nazareth. A group of Ethiopian boys (all of army age or slightly younger) returned home later that night laughing and excited. From the way they told the story, it was clear that they were not impartial: "The Arabs just come here looking for fights, they always do," offered Taddesse, and the rest agreed. The details of the event need not detain us here, but when I asked the boys whether they had joined in the fight themselves, I was told without hesitation: "It was just between Jews and Arabs. Both sides leave us alone." "But aren't you Jews?" "Do I know?" he said, with

a typical Israeli shoulder shrug, giving me to understand that he was not willing to relate to that question in the terms in which I had asked it.

None of the boys seemed especially troubled by the implication that they were not viewed in this context as "Jews," although in many other contexts those would almost certainly have amounted to fighting words. Brawls in the discotheque are apparently not infrequent, and although these boys attended religious high schools, serve with due enthusiasm in the IDF, and tend to vote for right-of-center parties, they also did not feel called upon to take part in the informal, but culturally patterned and gendered violence of Jews and Arabs in a local setting. On the other hand, they did tell me that they were troubled because some Ethiopian-Israeli girls had recently been "ruined" by dating Arabs at the disco, adding one more layer of deep ambivalence to their position.

Sensitized by this event, I began to notice comparable patterns elsewhere. Another example is a conversation which took place between three Ethiopian-Israelis who had come to visit their new immigrant relatives in Haifa, where I was conducting fieldwork at the time. Two of the visitors had immigrated in 1985, were religiously observant men in their middle ages, and were defending a Likud oriented political platform. The third was in his twenties, secular, and had immigrated in 1991. He argued that despite continuing terrorism, the Labor party had been correct to enter into accords with the PLO at Oslo. These kinds of informal debates take place constantly in Israel, and both of these positions were well within the political mainstream. But the two older men assumed that something more was going on as well: "Don't think that just because you're an Ethiopian that you'll be safe, just because they don't bother *us*, just because they think we're *miskenim* (pitiable sufferers)." "Look," the younger man replied, "if they want to curse, I can curse, if they want to fight, I can fight; if they want to make peace, I can go with them for peace." He denied, in other words, that his political sympathies had been influenced by a sense of exclusion *as an Ethiopian* from threats of violence directed at other Jews, or that his political views were incompatible with loyalty to an exclusively Israeli and Jewish construction of self.

Conversations like this one begin to reveal something of the contestation that goes into the making of national selves, the different ways in which Ethiopians are able to think of themselves as "belonging to" the category "Israeli," for instance. In some contexts, Ethiopians may be conscious of falling into the interstices of national identity, such that neither "Jews" nor "Arabs" expect them to join a discotheque brawl conducted along ethnic lines.<sup>19</sup> In other contexts, they are called upon (and call upon each other) to affirm their loyalty to an unproblematized

construction of Israeli and Jewish identity. These kinds of subtle, positioned, exchanges affirm nationhood even while revealing its inconstant texture. The inconstant texture of nationhood is precisely what was brought into painful public scrutiny by the events of the Blood Affair, and this is an important part of why it was able to arouse and sustain the passions which it did.

*One People, One Blood*

On Friday February 16, 1996, the Norwegian newspaper *Dagen* reported a speech allegedly made by Palestinian Authority President Yassir Arafat to Arab diplomats in Stockholm on January 30, just two days after the fiery demonstration in Jerusalem:

Arafat said he expects civil war to erupt in Israel, in which Russian immigrants, “half of whom are Christians or Moslems,” will fight for “a united Palestinian state.” He also asserted that the “so-called Ethiopian Jews” are Moslems. . . . Outlining his strategy, he said, “The PLO will now concentrate on splitting Israel psychologically. . . .” If the Jews can import all kinds of Ethiopians, Russians, Uzbekians, and Ukrainians as Jews, we can import all kinds of Arabs. . . .<sup>20</sup>

Whatever the veracity of this report (the Jerusalem Post reported that Arafat’s office in Gaza labeled it “false and inaccurate”), its reception within the Ethiopian community is what concerns us here.

On the same day that accounts of this speech appeared in the Israeli press, I showed one to a group of teenagers with whom I had stayed up late into the night talking. A few of them laughed when I read the comment about “so-called Ethiopian Jews” but Ashagre was indignant: “He’s right! For sure he’s right! You know why? It’s because this is a racist country. They don’t want to accept us here.” After Ashagre left, another boy said to me: “Don’t pay attention to what Ashagre said about Arafat. We don’t really feel that way.” It was clear to me, in fact, that Ashagre’s comment had been a performance of extreme anger rather than a carefully formulated position. Nevertheless, both his outburst and the discomfort it aroused among others were signs that something of deeper collective import was being negotiated. Subsequent events made this dramatically clear.

On Sunday morning, February 25, two civilian buses were blown up in Jerusalem and Ashkelon by suicide bombers associated with the Palestinian *Hamas* organization, killing over twenty people. The Ethiopian family with whom I was living at the time spent that whole morning in front of the big television set in their cramped immigrant’s trailer home, weeping and silent in turns as we watched the horrific scene repeating itself on the screen: frantic women searching hospital emergency rooms for their family members, young men from the Ultra-Orthodox “True Kind-

ness Society,” hunting through the wreckage of the buses (as well as in nearby trees and windows of buildings) for identifiably human remains which could still be brought to burial, and statements of grief and rage by politicians across the spectrum.<sup>21</sup>

Somewhat cryptically, a television journalist asked a spokesperson for MDA whether in light of the tragedy, he thought that people would now resume donating blood in greater numbers. The MDA spokesperson did not elaborate, but replied that he hoped this would be the case. To my knowledge, the matter was never raised in public again, but the obvious reference had been to negative press received by MDA in the wake of the Blood Affair. None of the family members who heard this televised exchange said a word about it, and public critique of MDA by Ethiopians and their sympathizers throughout the country was in fact abruptly muted. Donor stations were flooded beyond capacity, and some Ethiopian-Israelis began to complain that in the context of repeated terror attacks, it was especially painful not to be able to donate blood like everyone else. “After the attacks, we need to be able to give: it isn’t enough just to receive,” argued a young man who had been in Israel for over ten years. The blood bank is not just a symbol of national unity in Israel but, by means of the exchange of precious, inalienable gifts (Bourdieu 1977: 191–92), a privileged site of its enactment (see Sapolsky 1989).

The blood spilled in the streets of Ashkelon and Jerusalem on that day and days following (over fifty people were killed in a little over a week) put many Ethiopians in an impossible bind. Blood “spilled” by terrorists was experienced as a call to affirmation of shared personhood in suffering, even while rejected donations “spilled” at MDA stations around the country were experienced as a refutation of those claims. Angry performances of rejection, including acts of violence and indexed references to Palestinians, the Intifada, and anti-state Jewish undergrounds like that of Uzi Meshulam, were suddenly made intolerable by the force of events. The demand for moral response (partly in the form of identification with the victims of terrorism and with the national collective) simply could not be put off.

Later that same afternoon, we were visited by Mulegeta, a middle aged, well educated man – sometime employee of the immigration authorities – who had been in Israel since 1985. I asked him whether he had seen Yassir Arafat’s comment about “so-called Ethiopian Jews” really being Muslims. Based on my acquaintance with him, I found the vehemence of his response somewhat surprising:

That’s true! [shaking his finger at me and speaking angrily] Do you want to know why? I’ll tell you – in Ethiopia, they didn’t want us, and here they won’t have us either. Someone who isn’t wanted at the church and can’t go to the synagogue, what is he – he’s a Moslem! They have been throwing away our blood because they don’t want us here. But I don’t care

what they think any more. They are going to tell us to drop our pants, even old men!<sup>22</sup> [he makes a dismissive gesture] The Torah says to circumcise once, at age eight days, not twice. . . . They have a rabbi who is dead and they say he is the Messiah<sup>23</sup> – is that what the Torah says? That is just idolatry. I know who I am, and if someone doesn't accept me, I don't care about them. I have children and that is what I tell them too. . . . [extended pause as he gazes towards the television set still playing in the corner. After a moment he reaches forward and touches my knee]: I am sorry. I don't really mean all that. I am just so upset. *That's* what I am upset about [pointing to the television]. *They are just killing us.*

During the course of the next hour, Mulegeta apologized to me again, and once more before he left.

Political violence enters the intimate spaces of daily life in Israel – often through the technological medium of television – forcing certain narratives underground, and compressing them into hidden transcripts of social critique (Scott 1990). This is not accomplished by virtue of overwhelming state power, but by virtue of the overwhelming moral demand made by the intrusion of history on local worlds. Directly and indirectly, the series of deadly attacks which began on February 25 pushed the Blood Affair from the front pages of the newspapers and from the forefront of public consciousness, changing the boundaries of what could appropriately be spoken, and closing off, for the time being, any possibility for radical reconfiguration.

#### AIDS, BLOOD, AND CULTURE

Response to the Blood Affair by non-Ethiopians in Israel has been sufficiently diverse to make generalization difficult. On the day of the demonstration in Jerusalem, Prime Minister Peres apologized to the Ethiopian community “in his own name and in the name of the government,” and promised that an official commission of inquiry would soon be established.<sup>24</sup> A media poll conducted that week revealed that 40 percent of the 440 citizens polled were willing to justify the blood bank's policy towards Ethiopian-Israeli donors, while 38 percent opposed it.<sup>25</sup> The same poll revealed that 52 percent of respondents were critical of the Ethiopian-Israeli community's violent response, whereas 48 percent approved, and 54 percent approved of the measures taken by police. It was only during the course of the proceedings of the investigatory commission established under former president Yitzhak Navon, however, that an official construction of the Blood Affair, opposed in large part to that expressed by many Ethiopian-Israelis, was forcefully enunciated.

The commission formed was somewhat less than what Addisu Messele had promised protesters on the day of the demonstration. It lacked the



power of subpoena, was conducted only partly in open hearings, and limited itself in practice to an investigation of the blood issue, narrowly defined. There was no significant exploration of religious issues, alleged discrimination in education, or the perceived problems of Ethiopian soldiers. This narrowing of perspective to a set of largely technical, medical considerations was accompanied by a trope of opposition between objective medical concerns and those of an essentialized Ethiopian culture. Conflict, in other words, was to be located in a juxtaposition between the rationalized demands of public health policy – “purely professional medical considerations” (Navon 1996: 19) – and the black box of “Ethiopian culture,” a juxtaposition which ought at the very least to be problematized by anthropological writing.

*Blood as a Cultural Symbol: Writing Against Culture*

“The blood is the life” declares the Hebrew Bible (Deuteronomy 12:23), and an equivalent phrase is at least as current in contemporary Amharic: *dematchin nefisatchew*. A phrase which arose repeatedly in the course of the blood bank controversy, however, can only be understood as a modern gloss on that theme: “the blood is our identity” (*ha-dam zeh zehut shelanu*). “Throwing out our blood is like throwing out our identity” is the way one young man testified before the committee of inquiry.

It has in fact been shown that for Beta Israel in Ethiopia, blood served as a key symbol of distinctive and oppositional social identity (Salamon 1993). In self-conscious contradistinction to their politically and economically dominant Christian neighbors, Beta Israel maintained an absolute prohibition on the consumption of blood, and on physical contact between men and menstruating women. Difficulties in maintaining customs related to the purity of blood in Israel have been among the most painful of dilemmas for new immigrants, underlining the (for them surprising) discrepancy between their own moral and religious norms and those prevalent in their adopted state (Anteby forthcoming; Salamon 1993; Seeman 1990; Trevisan-Semi 1985).

Although they did not reference the available anthropological literature, members of the Navon Commission seemed well aware of the cultural importance of blood to the Ethiopian-Israeli community. My impression, however, was that they may have grasped it in ways which closed off understanding rather than enhancing it. Asked to account for their outrage, Ethiopian witnesses tended to offer summary explanations like, “for us, honor is more important than life.” One witness, when asked why people had become so angry about the destruction of their blood donations said, “For us, the blood is like the life (*hayyim*),” which one member of

the Commission (chief hematologist at Jerusalem's Hadassah Ein Kerem Hospital) impatiently translated aloud into its correct Biblical Hebrew idiom, "*ha-dam hu ha-nefesh*," making it clear that this kind of testimony held no revelations for him, and was in fact out of place. "Yes," he was reassured by another committee member, "but [that is true] for *them* even more than for us."

In other words, the wide ranging expressions of rage and despair evident at the demonstration and in its aftermath had been translated into mechanical reactions to the transgression of reified cultural boundaries. "Honor" [read here culture] became a way of talking about dehistoricized and univocal rules of practice, torn from their lived experiential contexts. In effect, this became a strategy for the dislocation of contemporary political and social conflict onto an imaginary landscape of unchanging tradition, whose locus was not contemporary Israel but the rapidly receding Ethiopian past.<sup>26</sup>

During a break in the hearings, Addisu Messele (who was then serving as a member of the Commission<sup>27</sup>) said to me: "They are constantly trying to define the issue as 'public health versus the honor of the Ethiopian community' . . . I am trying to say that this is a mistake – it wasn't honor that brought us out there. . . . This is about public health versus the *social problem*, not public health versus honor." Messele may not have been willing to admit how many Ethiopians also participated in the logic of cultural reification,<sup>28</sup> but his point is still of more than rhetorical significance. It corresponds to Farmer's observation about the conflation of structural violence with cultural difference sometimes made by social scientists (Farmer 1997: 354). In this case, objections by a group of citizens to a form of marginalization which has had real economic, medical, and political effects on their lives have been reduced to cultural-symbolic terms which, by framing the concerns of Ethiopian-Israelis as emotional rather than rational, have forestalled effective debate.

Without denying the significance of blood as a key cultural symbol for Ethiopian-Israelis (Salamon 1994) therefore, the challenge of ethnography in this case is to "write against culture" (Abu-Lughod 1991) as it has been appropriated in local political and medical discourses. History, multivocality and dynamics of power must be reinserted in the consideration of culture and systems of meaning. One way of accomplishing this is to recognize that the evocative power of blood as a "primordial symbol" (Aretxaga 1995: 125; Turner 1967: 28) derives from the way it has been deployed in fluid ritual *and* political contexts.<sup>29</sup> The meanings of blood for Ethiopian-Israelis, as I have tried to show, gained resonance from their social context, and *shifted* in response to the Blood Affair, terror attacks on

Israeli buses, and the bureaucratic forum offered by the Navon Commission. Seizing hold of any of those moments in isolation, or as culturally predetermined responses to objective, decontextualized decisions made elsewhere, cannot help but contribute to a misrecognition of what is vitally at stake in local contexts.

In the context of AIDS, however, it must also be acknowledged that ethnography of the "local" needs to be rather broadly defined. It must encompass the social and political boundaries which put some populations at risk more than others, and which shape the relative attention or lack of attention by responsible authorities to the control of mortality due to infectious disease in specific communities (Farmer 1996b, 1997). The delineation of such communities and their boundaries in bureaucratic logic links the study of infectious disease necessarily to that of nationhood and nationalism, as well as transnational migration.

#### *AIDS, Risk, and Immigration*

One of the most persistent themes in the cross-cultural study of AIDS has been the perception in many local settings that AIDS is a disease of immigration, or more baldly stated, of immigrants or migrants themselves. Farmer (1992) has shown how the coincidence of being immigrants, poor, and black (also see Comaroff 1993) helped to make Haitians in the US into natural subjects of AIDS related suspicion in both popular and scientific literature, and how that suspicion helped to further devastate already disadvantaged groups. In Addis Ababa, in 1993, some educated local people told me that AIDS had been brought to their country by refugees from Somalia, who should be denied freedom of movement. In Jerusalem in 1996, migration was again at issue, although this time the culprits were taken to be Ethiopians. AIDS is almost never envisioned by local people, anyplace, as simply endemic. The construction of AIDS as an immigrant disease, however, takes on specific characteristics in the context of Jewish migration to Israel.

One thousand four hundred and thirty nine samples of blood were collected at random from among the 7,800 Ethiopian immigrants to Israel in 1984–85. These samples were not tested for HIV at the time, but for other blood borne diseases such as malaria and hepatitis. A decision was taken at that time to avoid using blood donations made by Ethiopian immigrants. By 1988 however, AIDS had been recognized as a threat of major proportions, and the original 1,439 samples were retested, this time for HIV antibodies. None of the samples tested positive, and the matter was dropped.

In 1991, all 14,500 immigrants from Ethiopia – most of whom had spent significant periods of time in Addis Ababa awaiting the chance to emigrate – were subject to blood tests for HIV upon arrival in Israel, and this time between one and two percent of immigrants above the age of nine years tested positive. Two additional facts, however, are noteworthy in this regard. The first is that no other ethnic or immigrant group was or has been subject to mandatory testing for HIV antibodies, so that Ethiopians who immigrated since 1991 are the only ethnic community in the country for whom more or less *complete* statistics regarding HIV infection are currently available.<sup>30</sup> The difficult ethical issues raised by targeted, mandatory testing of this kind are beyond the scope of this essay, although it should be clear that the matter is problematic (Bayer, Levine and Wolf 1989; Mann, Tarantola and Netter 1992: 747–59).

On the other hand, it is also significant that no attempt was made to block the immigration of individuals who had tested positive for HIV, as had been the case with Haitian immigrants to the United States. Furthermore, in an apparent bid to prevent stigmatization of Ethiopian immigrants (such as that observed in the Haitian case by Farmer 1992: 208–229), efforts were made to keep facts about their rates of HIV infection clear of the public domain (see Navon 1996: 17). The media and medical establishment were both enlisted to resist publication of damaging statistics. Blood bank policies regarding the non-use of Ethiopian-Israeli blood donations were also meant to be kept secret. The paternalism inherent in this approach, however, proved damaging. First of all, the secret got out, as it ultimately had to in a media-oriented country like Israel (*ibid.*: 34). Navon Commission member Natamar Hillel, in her dissenting report (*ibid.*: 33), called the blood bank's policy of secrecy well-intentioned, but noted that it constituted "a blow to the civil rights of the donors, and an understandably harsh insult."<sup>31</sup> In addition, it is arguable that secrecy was counterproductive to public health efforts, in that it diminished the urgency with which already limited preventive and educational efforts were undertaken.

It is important to recognize that a strong ideology of national "ingathering" has mediated the response by health and immigration authorities to the perception that Ethiopian immigrants are vectors of risk for HIV infection in Israel. As the Navon Commission report concludes, "it is unnecessary to emphasize that the full integration of Ethiopian immigrants touches on the basis of the mission of the State of Israel, and serves as a supreme test for it" (*ibid.*: 47). AIDS was viewed, for the most part, as just one more difficulty to be overcome in furthering the immigration of Jewish communities held to be at risk in the diaspora, including Ethiopia. Since 1991, however, the increasing risk of HIV infection among Ethiopian

immigrants has coincided with a complication in the terms of nationalist ideology in Israel which may portend wide ranging reevaluations. To put the matter bluntly, current immigrants are considered to be less Jewish and more at risk of HIV than were their predecessors.

The airlift of 1991 marked a practical end to communal life in Ethiopia for Jewish Beta Israel. Remaining in Ethiopia were only those individuals or families who had been unable or unwilling to come to Addis Ababa, and whose gradual emigration has continued on an individual or family basis. At the same time, however, approximately 2,800 Beta Israel who had come to the capital in hopes of emigrating with the others were denied a place in the final airlift because of a last minute decision taken by Israel's government under then Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir. These so-called "Feres Mura" had been bureaucratically designated as descendants of Beta Israel converts to Christianity, and were judged ineligible for automatic citizenship under Israel's Law of Return (for more on "Falasha Christians," see Kaplan 1987, 1992; Messing 1982; Salamon 1994; Seeman 1997).<sup>32</sup> Most of these families have since been admitted to Israel, but others continue to wait with deep uncertainty.

They have been granted subsistence level support by American Jewish philanthropies like the Joint Distribution Committee (JDC) and the North American Conference on Ethiopian Jews (NACOEJ). Their ultimate fate, however, remains a subject of high-level debate in Israel. The Ethiopian-Israeli community has also shown itself divided on the issue of Feres Mura immigration, depending partly on whether or not particular individuals still have relatives in Ethiopia. While most public voices have supported the immigration of those who are willing to repudiate Christianity, there are also those who argue that apostasy, once committed, is irreversible and unforgivable.

Addisu Messele, the first Ethiopian-Israeli Knesset member, and head of the Ethiopian-Israeli "umbrella organization," has consistently argued that Feres Mura in Addis Ababa should be brought to Israel before the rate of HIV infection there climbs even higher, leading to further loss of life. The secretary of Addisu's organization, Shlomo Mola, however, has been quoted as opposing further immigration because "Five hundred HIV carriers [among Ethiopian-Israelis] are 'enough.'" Messele, in turn, responded that Mola "has always been opposed to [the Feres Mura] because they are Christians."<sup>33</sup> It is important to note that such objections do not necessarily represent religious scruples, but the widespread sense among even avowed secularists that conversion to Christianity constitutes a breach of loyalty to the ethnic and national community of Jews.

In an interesting turn of events, Israel's Chief Rabbinate was willing for several years to endorse the immigration of Feres Mura, on condition that they undergo a Rabbinate sponsored program of "return to Judaism," which is essentially a streamlined process of (re)conversion. From a bureaucratic point of view, this compromise allowed individuals with first degree relatives in Israel to enter the country under "family reunification" provisions, and then, once their own status was normalized, to bring their own relatives to Israel (Waldman 1996). Under political pressure, however, that compromise solution broke down in late 1996 (Seeman 1997).

At the rate of 100–150 persons a month (only about half of whom, it should be noted, were drawn from the community of people gathered in Addis Ababa), it would have been some time before the transit camp in Ethiopia's capital had been emptied. Now that the Rabbinate has withdrawn its approval from the "Return to Judaism" program however, it is unclear whether another mechanism will be found to complete their immigration.<sup>34</sup> HIV rates in Ethiopia, meanwhile, have continued to climb, putting displaced Feres Mura in the capital especially at risk. In northern Israel between 1990 and 1992, 143 out of 4,746 Ethiopian immigrants above the age of 16 (3 percent) were tested positive for HIV. By 1994, the number had risen to 5.8 percent (31 out of 534 immigrants tested) and in 1995 when approximately 530 people were tested, it had reached 7.2 percent (38 immigrants). In the first three months of 1996, 8 percent (14 out of 175) Ethiopian immigrants were tested positive for HIV (Navon 1996: 9).<sup>35</sup>

During the course of testimony before the Navon Commission, open arguments erupted between expert witnesses regarding the advisability of HIV-linked restrictions on immigration. Members of the Commission itself were able to draw opposite conclusions. Addisu Messele, for instance, argued that "these people [the Feres Mura] are our families and we are very concerned about them." At the other extreme was Committee member Eliezer Rachmilevitch, then chief of Haddassah Hospital's hematology unit. Rahmilevitch made it repeatedly clear during the course of the hearings that he was scandalized by continued immigration of people who had been identified as members of a group at high risk for HIV infection (i.e. the Feres Mura), and whose claims to immigrate were not formally based on Jewish nationality. He asked nearly every medical witness who testified whether it might not be wise to curtail Feres Mura immigration, a question which drew assent from some and attack from others. Israeli law, including the Law of Return, already grants the Minister of Health the right to exclude potential immigrants based on the danger they represent to public health. Several witnesses emphasized, however, that this clause had never

been applied by Israel to Jews in difficult straits – it was simply unthinkable that holocaust survivors with typhoid, for instance, should have been denied entry to the Jewish State.

Nevertheless, when Minister of Health Ephraim Sneh testified, he was explicitly charged by Yitzhak Navon to clarify, in consultation with the government, what ought to constitute official policy on the immigration of seropositive individuals or high risk groups for HIV. This was a strong, if muted signal that current policy was in need of review. It is significant that although tourism in Ethiopia by newly affluent Ethiopian-Israeli men has also been identified as an important route for the potential transmission of HIV, it was Feres Mura immigration which received almost exclusive attention from Navon Commission members. That no mention of Feres Mura immigration appeared in the Commission’s published report does not mean that this discussion was without ramification – neither in terms of government policy nor of public perception.

Furthermore, although AIDS was figured throughout these proceedings as a disease of immigration, it has fairly been asked why the blood bank’s policy on blood donations applied to all Ethiopians, no matter how long they had been in the country, and even to the Israeli-born. Such questions were also central to the Navon Commission, largely because of its mandate to establish responsibility for the decision making process at MDA’s blood bank and its Ministry of Health overseers. Who had made the decision to discard all Ethiopian blood donations without informing donors, and why? In this essay, of course, I am less concerned with assigning responsibility than with teasing apart the relationship between different forms of local knowledge in a weighted bureaucratic context.

It is striking, for instance, that while the medical rationale for discarding Ethiopian blood donations shifted dramatically between 1984 and 1996, MDA policy on the subject remained static and (to all appearances) unquestioned during that time. While no explicit written or oral directive from the Ministry of Health has yet been discovered, a 1984 letter to MDA directs field workers to “mark” blood samples with the words “Ethiopian immigrant” (Navon 1996: 15).<sup>36</sup> MDA officials claimed, despite Ministry denials, that this was tantamount to a directive not to use such samples. Be that as it may, however, all are agreed that the perceived risk to the blood supply in 1984 was not primarily from HIV, but from malaria and infectious hepatitis.<sup>37</sup>

The majority report of the Navon Commission found that under these circumstances, the decision not to make use of Ethiopian blood donations had been fully justified at the time it was made (*ibid.*: 20). They do not, however, take up the argument made by Ethiopian-Israeli social worker

Natamar Hillel, who argues in her dissenting report that at least until 1991, there were reasonable policy alternatives to the collective exclusion of Ethiopian blood (ibid.: 33). Unlike HIV, she points out, hepatitis is easily detectable upon testing, and there is no “window period” (as in the case of AIDS) during which testing is inconclusive. As for malaria, many countries (including the US) have adopted a three year waiting period for persons who have spent time in malaria endemic regions before they are permitted to donate blood. Ethiopians who had been in Israel for more than three years and had been tested for hepatitis, therefore, might presumably have been considered eligible donors. That they were not so considered gave force to Hillel’s critique: “It is doubtful,” she writes, “whether, in a free society, there is room for the adoption of policy on an exclusively ethnic basis” (ibid.). It should be noted that ethnicity as a defining feature of “risk groups” for HIV has been challenged in the US not just on social policy grounds, but also on epidemiological grounds (Oppenheimer 1988; Farmer 1992: 210–28).

While defending the decision taken in 1984 to exclude Ethiopian-Israeli blood donors, the Navon Commission majority report goes on to criticize the secrecy of such directives, and even to argue against the adoption of such all-embracing policies in the future. (Navon 1996: 23). My own impression is that this represents a strategy to shift discussion away from the critique of previous *medical policy*, and towards the critique of *social policy* (i.e. the policy of secrecy), which corresponds to the distinction between objective public health considerations and soft cultural issues which the Commission fostered. While questioning the judgement of public health officials regarding social policy therefore, and tacitly urging that their medical policies be reviewed, the Commission ultimately concludes that they acted out of purely professional motivation, “without any trace of racism” toward Ethiopian immigrants (ibid.: 20, 45).

It is not my intention to cast doubt on the private attitudes of public officials, but it should be clear that their claims to transparent, objective, and culture-free decision making are not supportable in light of Navon Commission testimony. Just as the unconstrained expression of grief and rage was central to the construction of the Blood Affair by Ethiopian-Israeli demonstrators, so too was the absence of emotional engagement central to its construction by policy makers and care providers. This is not just the predictable, after-the-fact (and in part plausible) defense by bureaucrats and doctors of decisions made on “purely technical, medical grounds.” It is also the largely unstated, but profound disconcert manifest in a public health policy which had remained unchanged and unreviewed



for twelve years while public health conditions changed drastically and repeatedly in the field.

Current MDA chair, Dr. Amnon Ben-David, testified before the Navon Commission regarding the decision to exclude Ethiopian blood which he had inherited from his predecessors (Ben-David was appointed in 1991):

This whole issue of written material and documents came practically to expression, and we dealt with it, only once [the Blood Affair] had exploded; until then, we did not search for one piece of paper or another. The matter [concerning treatment of Ethiopian donors and donations] was clear. It passed from generation to generation in the blood bank (Navon 1996: 35).

Despite claims to transparent medical logic, therefore, the blood bank policy concerning Ethiopian donations had an important cultural dimension, whereby indifference was produced and transmitted through a bureaucratic hierarchy over time (Herzfeld 1992). If testimony is to be believed, no one in either MDA or the Ministry of Health made any attempt to clarify or update policy in over a decade, despite clear knowledge of a changing epidemiological profile (Navon 1996: 21–22, 32, 36).

Not only was the sweeping exclusion of Ethiopian blood donors never questioned, but the implications of high HIV infection rates for the Ethiopian-Israeli community itself were not significantly explored beyond the exclusion of Ethiopian-Israelis from the state-wide donor pool. Once again, it is instructive to cite from the dissenting report of Natamar Hillel, who does not so much disagree with the majority of the Navon Commission in this instance, as make her case in a more aggressive manner:

I am of the opinion that the policy of hiding the facts regarding the number of AIDS carriers among the immigrants of Operation Solomon [i.e. 1991], even if it was done from good and pure intentions, was a mistake.

I am of the opinion that the policy of silence prevented, after the fact, serious treatment of AIDS carriers. I see in this negligence a kind of fatalistic attitude, whereby this group was abandoned [*hafkara*] to its fate, and a lack of commensurate understanding that hiding from this disease and from its bearers, leaving [carriers] without knowledge and without explanation [concerning their illness], would be likely to lead to spread of the disease beyond the boundaries of the infected group (Navon 1996: 38).

The “fatalistic attitude” which Hillel diagnoses has had a debilitating impact on AIDS prevention efforts. An anthropologically informed AIDS education program, utilizing the skills of Ethiopian trainees, was actually created in the early 1990’s. Funding, however, dried up after only a few months, leaving the program largely unimplemented (Chemtov, Rosen, Sharkshall and Soskolne 1993; also see Etzioni, Pollack and Ben-Ishai 1994). The Navon Commission’s call for just such a program in 1996

highlights the tragedy of missed opportunities and official distractedness from vital issues to which Natamar Hillel calls our attention.

This lack of focus on prevention of HIV within the Ethiopian-Israeli community can be contrasted with the attention granted during hearings to the supposed danger of Feres Mura immigration. Because Ethiopian-Israelis were presumed to remain largely endogamous sexually, it was argued that all Ethiopian-Israelis were put at risk of infection by contemporary immigrants, and that this in turn justified the exclusion of Ethiopian-Israelis as a group from the blood donor pool, no matter how long they had been in Israel. The claim of sexual endogamy was never accompanied by statistical or ethnographic verification, but was repeated by both Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian witnesses, including Addisu Messele on the first day of testimony, who claimed that Ethiopian-Israelis were endogamous because of rejection by the surrounding society.

Whereas blood bank policy was portrayed as necessary to the protection of all of Israeli society ("including Ethiopians," as Yitzhak Navon repeatedly emphasized), the concern over Feres Mura immigration was presented in such a way as to endorse action by state authorities in their role as *parens patriae* (compare Das 1995: 62) of the Ethiopian-Israeli community alone. Rhetorical concern for those "within" translates here as justified and routinized indifference to those on the outside of national boundaries (Herzfeld 1992). Although the published report of the Navon Commission itself makes no recommendation regarding immigration, a December 1, 1996 letter to the Minister of Health, and signed by all active Navon Commission members, includes a single sentence calling "for the closure of the camp in Addis Ababa." There is no discussion about the implications of such a step for the health and welfare of those whose sole means of support would thereby be eliminated.

As Mary Douglas (1992: 114) has written concerning HIV infection in another context, "The product of science, its knowledge, is made into a resource for claims and counter claims about how citizenship is to be defined." More strongly stated still, "So long as the class at risk can be kept in the margins, the public concern to pay for the research and the welfare of the victims will be the weaker . . . [The central community's] risk aversion is part of its political defense against its own margins" (ibid.: 117). Formerly Christian Beta Israel immigrants are marginal in a double sense, depicted as ethnic and religious renegades, as well as vectors of deadly illness. These two constructions, as I have shown, are not unrelated.

The potential of official attitudes to resonate with local knowledge presumptions within the Ethiopian-Israeli community itself is best illustrated by the testimony of witnesses like *Kes Ayellegn*, an important Beta

Israel religious leader, who argued that Ethiopian Jews had been free of AIDS in Ethiopia because they did not mix (sexually or socially) with Christians. The reportedly high incidence of AIDS among a group of immigrants whose reputation was precisely that they *did* mix (sexually and religiously) with Christians, could only serve therefore to reinforce the dangerous and troubling liminality of their position. On this score, powerful discourses on risk in both the Ethiopian and non-Ethiopian Israeli communities converged to locate illness in the midst of those whose “right” to be in the country was already subject to the greatest degree of formal and informal dispute, and whose wherewithal for resisting that discourse is currently the weakest.<sup>38</sup>

### CONCLUSION

This essay does not presume to cast final judgment on all of the difficult political, medical, and moral issues which arise from a consideration of The Blood Affair in Israel. One of the goals of ethnography, however, is to contextualize local worlds whose significance is typically ignored, and to show how concrete, often local events, both inform and take part in large scale social process. I have chosen, therefore, to focus on those aspects of the Blood Affair which are most likely to be lost in official accounts – the shifting meanings of blood and its relationship to personhood in an emotionally ramified political context; the stakes of migration and of political violence for groups differently positioned with respect to AIDS; and the ways in which cultural and political considerations always inform supposedly objective, rationalistic efforts to define and apportion the risks and costs of illness.

For Ethiopians in Israel, AIDS has more to do with contested participation in the national project than it does with reified cultural conceptions of blood, even though these are invoked by participants in that contest for a variety of purposes. A de-politicized “cultural account” of Ethiopian-Israelis would therefore confuse, rather than elucidate, important issues. On the other hand, “culture” needs to be forcefully asserted in the analysis of bureaucratic function, policy debate, and the logic of public health, from which it is often presumed to be absent or to play an inconsequential role. This essay attempts to move discussion in both directions at once, by focusing on what is at stake for differently positioned participants to the controversy (Kleinman and Kleinman 1991), and by insisting that all participants are engaged or embedded in a single social and political field of action.

The politics of rage that accompanies protest on the streets of Jerusalem are parallel to the disavowal of engagement that often grounds bureaucratic claims to expert (“dispassionate”) control of risk, but which also may foster official neglect (Herzfeld 1992; Lutz 1990). Both emotional strategies are implicated in long term negotiations of belonging, empowerment, and exclusion in a nationalist context, and are lent heightened poignancy by the AIDS pandemic. The context of Ethiopian-Israeli outrage over spilled blood must be located in a moral economy of violence and emotion whose interpretive net is cast as broadly as possible, over the nation-state at large, including the discourse of its professional classes, and not just over a circumscribed cultural or ethnic enclave (Abu-Lughod and Lutz 1990).

The Navon Commission may have been correct in opposing accusations of articulate and deliberate racism which were made against individual public health officials. At the same time, Ethiopian assertions that the stakes of MDA policy were legitimately broader than the circumscribed set of issues that the Navon Commission chose to consider should have been taken more seriously. The life and death implications of public health policy are not restricted to transmission of HIV through blood, however vital that concern, and however well or poorly MDA and the Ministry of Health in Israel may be thought to have fulfilled their charge in that regard. Other important stakes include, for example, the shifting of nationalist taxonomies (and hence, of immigration policies) in accordance with policy-makers’ culturally informed beliefs about the spread of infectious disease. As one Ethiopian-Israeli activist told me succinctly towards the conclusion of Navon Commission hearings, “We don’t live in a health clinic.” The Blood Affair and its interpretations will continue to inform both social experience and social policy in Israel for some time to come.<sup>39</sup>

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NOTES

1. *Magen David Adom*, “The Red Shield of David,” is an Israeli equivalent of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies which operate in other countries. It is overseen by the Ministry of Health, but operates with wide autonomy. MDA has been denied official recognition by the International Red Cross-Red Crescent because of the latter’s refusal to expand their repertoire of recognized religious symbols to include the “Star of David.”
2. Fully ninety percent of blood collected in Israel in 1995 was collected by MDA, the remainder being collected by hospitals. Between 1990 and 1995, an average of 200,000 persons donated blood each year (around 4% of the total population), including an average of 400 Ethiopian-Israelis (less than 1% of their total population). In 1995, 225,000 units were collected from 190,000 donors. Projected needs for the year were 275,000 units of blood (Navon 1996: 11). In light of these figures, it is clear that discarding all of the blood collected from Ethiopian-Israelis in any given year would have had a negligible impact on overall blood supplies, and may have been considered a path of least resistance by public health officials concerned about possible infection.
3. The immediate context for the insertion of this psalm into afternoon prayers was the occasion of a terror attack on Israeli civilian buses earlier that day (see below).
4. *Yediot Aharonot*, January 29, 1996, p. 2.
5. Ethiopian blood was not of course discarded on the spot, as some media reports implied (Navon 1996). All samples were tested for HIV antibodies and then autoclaved before disposal. Samples from especially rare blood types were also exempted.
6. This was the significance, for instance, which “ownerless blood” took on at a political rally which I witnessed in the Jerusalem’s Old City in the summer of 1993. A nationalist group (the Temple Mount Faithful), protesting Muslim control of the holy site, attempted to link contemporary terrorism to Nazism – “this is a continuation of Hitler” – and then claimed that the government’s negligence in this matter was contributing to a situation of *dam yehudi hefker*.
7. It is instructive in this context to note that a small group of former Jewish partisans came together in Lublin after WWII for the express purpose of avenging themselves on German targets. The group was known by the acronym DIN (*dam yisrael noter*) which means “the blood of Israel avenges” (Lang 1996); this is a literal reversal of the shameful charge of abandoning the blood of one’s own people.
8. The army is a common site for donation of blood. According to MDA statistics, 33% of all donations are collected at army bases (Navon 1996: 11).
9. This trope can be contrasted with themes which characterized Haitian demonstrations against exclusion of their blood in the US, during the early 1990’s. Paul Farmer (1992: 219) identifies one such trope in the Haitian context as “Let’s fight AIDS, not nationality.” Haitians argued that national difference should be irrelevant to the fight against AIDS, and to blood donor policy. Ethiopians in Israel, by contrast, argued that public health policy constituted a racist denial of their common Jewish nationality; they called not for wider pluralism, but for recognition of their own claims to essential belonging.
10. *Ma’ariv*, January 29, 1996, p. 1.
11. A reportedly high rate of suicide by Ethiopian-Israeli soldiers became a secondary focus of the Blood Affair demonstration, as some demonstrators blamed the suicides on anti-Ethiopian discrimination in the army or in society at large (see Kaplan and Rosen 1994: 105–106). This is an issue which transcends the scope of this article, and has not yet received the attention it deserves. It is instructive, however, that mothers

- of suicide victims were included in the Ethiopian-Israeli delegation which met with Prime Minister Shimon Peres on the day of the demonstration. For just one account of reactions to an unexplained suicide by an Ethiopian-Israeli soldier, see Yehudit Winkler, "Something Bad Happened at Night," *Ha'aretz*, January 3, 1997, p. 16.
12. *Yediot Aharonot*, January 29, 1996, p. 3.
  13. *Ibid.*, p. 2.
  14. *Ha'aretz*, January 29, 1996, p. 1.
  15. This was not in fact, strictly true. In 1995, for instance, stone throwing and tear gas caused injury to three police officers and three Ethiopian-Israelis at a demonstration over allegedly substandard housing for new immigrants near Netanya. In contrast to the Jerusalem demonstration described here, the Netanya demonstration involved only a few dozen protesters who were met by an unusually large contingent of Border Police, prompting an investigation about why so many officers were sent. See *The Jerusalem Post* City Lights section, August 18, 1995, p. 1. Also see Kaplan and Rosen (1994: 75, 109).
  16. This essay was originally published in Hebrew in the daily newspaper *Davar Rishon*, February 1, 1996. This translation is from an excerpt which appeared in the magazine *News from Within*, vol. XII no. 2: February 1996, p. 18.
  17. In 1996, for example, an IDF shelling campaign of civilian areas in southern Lebanon, which was undertaken in response to escalating Katyusha rocket attacks on the cities of northern Israel, was officially named "Operation Grapes of Wrath." The implication was that the action, though harsh and directed at civilian areas, was justified by rage grounded in prior victimization. Similar emotional qualifiers were used to justify IDF attacks in the early 1960's on Jordanian villages from which *fedayeen* attacks on Israeli civilians had been launched (see Leibowitz 1992).
  18. Earlier in 1995, Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin had actually been evacuated from his office during a violent demonstration by members of the Druze minority, protesting what they perceived as unfair distribution of public resources to their communities. Striking to me at the time was the general sympathy which their claim generated, even from the Prime Minister of the offending government. My recollection is that the Druze were granted part of their demands. This may explain the comment, often made tongue-in-cheek, that the fury of the Ethiopian protest only proved that Beta Israel immigrants had in fact become true Israeli citizens. I do not dispute this interpretation, but argue that the consolidation of a stereotypical Israeli civil identity was only one of several interpretive options that were called upon by participants and observers of that event. For more on the place of Druze-Israelis in Israeli conceptions of people and nationhood, see Dominguez (1989).
  19. A similarly ambivalent position has been described by Jakubowska (1992) in the case of Israeli Bedouin. Because some Bedouin serve in the IDF (although most do not) and have also tended as a community to remain aloof from the Palestinian national movement, Bedouin are sometimes treated as marginal or as objects of suspicion by both Israelis and non-Bedouin Palestinian Arabs. Here again, levels of participation in different forms of patterned violence – that of the IDF or of the Palestinian national movement – are key to the negotiation of social boundaries.
  20. *The Jerusalem Post*, February 23, 1996.
  21. According to Jewish law, any blood or flesh separated from the corpse at the time of death must be collected and buried. This sensibility, often referred to as "honor of the dead," and is somewhat at odds with the rationalized, technological, discourse on blood and body parts assumed in most medical contexts. Thus, in testimony before the

- Navon Commission, an MDA spokesperson reported (I thought disingenuously) that she had been shocked by the Ethiopians’ anger over the destruction of their blood. “I thought that they gave us their blood as a gift,” she said, “to use just as we see fit.” A later Ethiopian-Israeli witness responded to this construction by asking, “How would you feel if your gifts were thrown in the trash again and again?”
22. This is a reference to the Chief Rabbinate’s demand (actually dropped in 1984) that Ethiopian men be “re-circumcised” by having a drop of blood drawn from the penis, out of concern that their original circumcisions were not performed in accordance with Jewish law (Kaplan 1988; Seeman 1991, 1997).
  23. This is a reference to the Hasidic Habad-Lubavitch movement, whose leader, Rabbi Menahem Mendel Schneerson, died in New York in 1994. Habad has been a vocal opponent of extending religious recognition to Beta Israel so long as they refuse to undergo full conversion.
  24. *Ma’ariv*, January 29, 1991, p. 3.
  25. *Yediot Aharonot*, January 31, 1996, p. 9.
  26. Thus the Navon report (1996: 51–53), for the sake of “context,” provides a few translated prayers from the traditional Beta Israel liturgy, and a brief account written by a contemporary Ethiopian Jew of religious martyrdom in Ethiopia from the sixteenth century!
  27. He was subsequently ordered by the High Court to resign from the Commission, in response to a suit brought by MDA chairman Amnon Ben-David, over his previous political involvement and public statements regarding the case. His replacement, Shlomo Mola, was later disqualified in the same way. Ultimately, only the Ethiopian-Israeli social worker Natamar Hillel (renowned for having been in Israel for many years and being married to a non-Ethiopian) remained on the Commission as a representative of the Ethiopian-Israeli community.
  28. See for instance *Yediot Aharonot*, January 29, 1996, p. 2.
  29. Aretxaga (1995: 125) defines “primordial symbols” as those symbols which “resort to physiological material of great psychological significance and that are elaborated in one form or another in all cultures.” She is also careful to point out (*ibid.*: 126) that primordiality does not fix meaning but rather encourages the “condensation of different strands of meaning, none of which are necessarily determinant.”
  30. Testimony given on May 11, 1996 by Dr. Z. Ben-Ishai, head of the Committee on AIDS at Rambam Medical Center, indicates that Israeli doctors now assume that for every case of HIV infection which they identify before the onset of AIDS related illness, one other case will also surface later. Given the size of the country and the general level of health care in Israel, he presumes that *all* cases of AIDS related illness will ultimately be identified. In 1996 there were 1386 individuals in Israel known to be seropositive, with Ben-Ishai estimating that this translates into 2500–3000 actual cases (see Navon 1996: 7–8).
  31. The Navon Commission was also at pains to point out that “heads of the Ethiopian community” were aware of the government decision to suppress statistics concerning HIV, and had approved that suppression (Navon 1996: 19, 21, 22). This is a problematic claim. The “community heads” cited by name (Addisu Messele and Shlomo Mola) are non-elected leaders of an Ethiopian “umbrella organization” established by the government to avoid having to deal with numerous smaller organizations (Kaplan and Rosen 1994: 80). Many of the latter do not recognize the umbrella organization, and some have boycotted it. It is unclear, therefore, in what sense Addisu and Mola can be considered “heads” of a 65,000 person community that has no unified decision making

apparatus. The Commission's designation of them as such seems to have had two purposes: the first is to discredit some leading Ethiopian critics of public health policy by making it known that they were consulted about certain aspects of the decision making process. It should be noted in this context though, that they were not privy to the decision about secretly discarding donated blood.

The second effect of this claim is that it seems to shift responsibility for public health decisions from duly empowered officials to their advisors in the Ethiopian community. Needless to say, this is questionable from the viewpoint of law and professional ethics. No matter what policies the Ethiopian "heads" allegedly acquiesced in, they were *not* responsible for setting public policy.

32. The Law of Return, as currently amended, allows automatic citizenship to Jews as well as to those who can demonstrate descent from at least one Jewish grandparent. A "Jew" is defined as anyone who has converted to the Jewish faith or who is born to a Jewish mother, and who is not a member of another religion. The latter clause was directed specifically towards ethnic Jews who had converted to Christianity, like the Feres Mura.
33. Bathsheva Tsur and Judy Siegel, "Ethiopian Leaders Divided Over Bringing Falash Mura Here," *The Jerusalem Post*, October 18, 1996.
34. Subsequent to my submission of this article for publication, the government and chief rabbinate of Israel revived and re-implemented the "Return to Judaism" program for Feres Mura immigrants. During 1998, the Addis Ababa compound run by NACOEJ was officially closed, and its remaining population brought to Israel. Controversy over the fates of those individuals and communities who had not been registered in time, or who remain in other parts of Ethiopia, continues.
35. As of 1996, the rate of overall infection for adult Ethiopian-Israeli males in Israel was 2.8 percent; 1.6 percent for adult Ethiopian women. This compares with 4.0 percent for intravenous drug users, 1.1 percent for male homosexuals, and 0.0002 percent for the general population (Navon 1996: 8). Statistics are not available for other ethnic or immigrant groups, nor have any other groups been subject to mandatory testing upon arrival.
36. Only in 1986 did MDA policy take a more explicit form, requiring that donations by Ethiopians be marked "for research purposes only" (Navon 1996: 16).
37. In 1983, 50% of the malaria cases in Israel were diagnosed among Ethiopian immigrants. In 1984, tests among new immigrants also revealed the presence of antibodies to HBs Ag (infectious Hepatitis-B) in an estimated 8–12% of the immigrant population (Navon 1996: 15). In addition, Human T-Cell Leukemia Virus (HTLV) antibodies were found, according to a 1984 study, in 37% of Ethiopian immigrants, as opposed to 4.2% among North African Israelis, and 2% among Ashkenazim (*ibid.*: 16). "Despite the public's impression, there is no connection between the decision taken . . . in 1984 [to exclude Ethiopian's blood donations] and the AIDS disease" (*ibid.*: 30).
38. A plan for more aggressive prevention and education among Ethiopian-Israeli citizens was made by Navon Commission members in their December 1, 1996 letter to the Minister of Health. The proposed budget of these programs was NIS 5, 895,000, or about US \$1,965,000.
39. Specific policy recommendations of the Navon Commission (1996: 27–28) include: 1) rejection of the policy of silence concerning HIV among Ethiopian-Israelis and establishment of a media advisory committee to help avoid public stigmatization of Ethiopians; 2) an updated questionnaire for blood donors which will discriminate high risk candidates on the basis of behavior and length of time since immigration



(in practice, Ethiopians who have been in Israel for over ten years [a growing minority] and are not engaging in high risk behaviors, would be eligible to donate blood); 3) an aggressive educational campaign concerning AIDS for the whole Ethiopian community, giving attention to appropriate methods for educating different age groups; in a subsequent letter, Navon Commission members drafted an estimated budget for these programs of NIS 5,895,000, or about US \$1,965,000; 4) establishment of a broad inter-ministerial committee to oversee these efforts; 5) government efforts to secure religious recognition for Ethiopians from the Chief Rabbinate. Which if any of these recommendations will be taken seriously at the policy level remains to be seen.

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