

when it was stiffened by combat veterans from the French army returning from Europe. These new insights are based on a re-reading of the substantial archive assembled by Tronchon, research in French military archives and, most particularly, the most effective use yet made of the archives of the British military administration and of the intelligence unit it left behind.

There is no doubt that the rising was anti-colonial, but it also contained a number of complex sociological and psychological strands. Broadly speaking, Kent sees the rising as a class struggle, in the sense that it tended to be the socially junior sections of insurgent groups that took the lead; it also contained elements of a civil war and a peasant revolt. He points to the role played by Antemoro clerics, a prestigious group who had played an important role in precolonial statecraft in various parts of Madagascar but who were routinely dismissed by colonial officials as charlatans. The rising marked a reassertion of honour by people who had been routinely humiliated and abused during two generations of colonial rule.

In analytical terms, the main problem posed by the version of events presented here concerns the interpretation of ethnicity. Professor Kent holds to the view that Madagascar contains 18 distinct ethnic groups that have remained fairly stable throughout recent centuries, and that successive major kingdoms before the French conquest of 1895 therefore represented formations of an indigenous imperialism. Apart from being debatable on purely historical grounds, such an interpretation makes it difficult to explain how it was that people from the east coast were able to work with people of highland origin in the 1947 rising. Professing allegiance to the leaders of the Merina-dominated MDRM, the insurgents sometimes expressed a commitment to Madagascar as a whole. French colonialists often explained this by representing the insurgents as the naïve dupes of cunning Merina politicians. A more likely explanation, in view of recent work on the history of ethnicity, is that ethnic distinctions were never as rigid as colonial ideology would have us believe.

Professor Kent would do a great service to historians of Madagascar and of nationalism more generally if he were to edit his text thoroughly and have it published by a conventional publishing house.

Afrika Studie Centrum, Leiden

STEPHEN ELLIS

THE MAKING OF THE ETHIOPIAN JEWS' RESCUE POLICY

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Black Jews, Jews, and Other Heroes: How Grassroots Activism Led to the Rescue of the Ethiopian Jews. By HOWARD M. LENHOFF. Jerusalem: Gefen Publishing House, 2007. Pp. iii + 324. No price given (ISBN 978-9-65229-365-7).

KEY WORDS: Ethiopia.

Howard Lenhoff considers his book *Black Jews, Jews, and Other Heroes* as a piece of Jewish history – the heroic rescue of an ‘endangered’ Jewish group by a grassroots Jewish organization, the American Association for Ethiopian Jews (AAEJ). Since that Jewish group lived in Ethiopia and their ‘rescue’ took place in that part of Africa, the book is as much a fragment of African history as it is a piece of the Jewish experience.

Founded in 1974, the AAEJ was responsible for getting thousands of Ethiopian Jews airlifted to Israel in the famous Operations Sheba and Moses, in the 1980s and 1990s. Until the publication of Lenhoff's book, these operations lingered in public memory as newspaper stories that revealed little about their actors, purpose and politics. This book fills that lacuna. It describes how a group of dedicated and well-meaning people eager to 'save the Jews of Ethiopia' (p. ix) succeeded in bringing contending groups, governments and even enemy states – Sudan and Israel – together to facilitate a series of successful humanitarian missions between 1977 and 1991. To that extent, this memoir is a worthy addition to the transnational history of Africa because it documents the making of the Ethiopian Jews' rescue policy. In that process, one observes a complex web of conflict and concessions between transnational entities such as the state of Israel, various American administrations, the governments of Sudan and Ethiopia, insurgent groups in Ethiopia, various American Jewish organizations and the AAEJ.

The author, one of the leaders of the AAEJ, describes the desire to 'rescue' the Ethiopian Jews as an 'obsession' of his grassroots movement (p. 2). It was an obsession suffused with dilemmas. Not only did many Jews and rabbis in the United States question the identity of the Ethiopian Jews as Jews, many Israeli officials were, initially, not interested in the emigration of the Ethiopian Jews to Israel (pp. 27, 39, 50). As Lenhoff admits, the AAEJ was perplexed by Israel's lack of enthusiasm in applying its 'open door policy for Jews of the world, The Law of Return' to the Black Jews of Ethiopia (pp. 19, 41). That the AAEJ eventually secured the support of previously dissenting groups is one of the compelling moral stories in this frank and impressive memoir.

Yet, one wonders whether what the author presents as a mission to rescue an endangered group is what actually happened or whether what occurred was a negotiated exodus or ransomed operation that had moral and ideological motives: the desire to create a multi-ethnic Israel as a global model of successful racial integration (p. 40). The necessity of adding Black Jews to a multi-racial Israeli society, for the added value of undercutting critics who accuse Israel of racism (p. 143), also led to some bewildering bargains. These included using university letterheads to offer 'concocted' admissions to American colleges as a strategy for getting Ethiopian Jews out of Ethiopia (p. 77); provision of arms to Ethiopia by Israel as a reward for Addis Ababa's allowing 120 Ethiopian Jews to immigrate to Israel in 1977 (p. 31); payment of \$26 million to Ethiopia's President Mengistu Haile Mariam to 'release 20,000 Ethiopian Jews' (p. 29) for the airlift; and other sums of money paid to Sudanese officials to secure their silence and support for the exodus. The author explains these as traditional practices 'in Jewish history' in which Jews were allowed to 'buy their way out of a country' (p. 29).

The author misses an opportunity to provide persuasive analyses of the specific conditions of life that threatened the biological survival of the Ethiopian Jews in Ethiopia, warranting a rescue of that extent. Readers are left with vague references to the 'fate of the Ethiopian Jews' (p. 32); their lives 'in extreme poverty' (p. 62); 'pogroms' they suffered 'because they were Jews' (p. 19); their 'plight' as refugees in the Sudan, among other persecutions. The author draws his main sources of information about the plight of the Ethiopian Jews from 'Ethiopian Jews living in Israel' (pp. 6–7), those who had recently arrived in Israel and communications from Ethiopian Jews waiting to join the exodus.

While historians, such as this reviewer, might treat such sources with care, the author is unapologetic about their usefulness for establishing the doomed fate of the Ethiopian Jews meriting a 'rescue'. One of the major weaknesses in the book

is the little effort the author makes to demonstrate the uniqueness of the social conditions of the Ethiopian Jews in comparison to other Ethiopians in that impoverished African country. As the author admits, the AAEJ and its cooperating institutions sought 'information' that proved 'useful in stimulating the rescue of more Ethiopian Jews' (p. 35). Thus, alternative narratives about the situation of the Ethiopian Jews, as one reads from Dawit Wolde Giorgis's *Red Tears: War, Famine and Revolution in Ethiopia* (1989, pp. 244–5), are lacking in Lenhoff's account. It is fair to argue that, under the circumstances of war, famine and poverty in Ethiopia, at that time, Jewishness acquired strategic value. It offered an opportunity for the impoverished to leave Ethiopia for a better life abroad. The many efforts the AAEJ and Israeli officials made to ensure that Ethiopian economic refugees did not join the airlift indicate their awareness of this conundrum. Since determining the Jewishness of an Ethiopian Jew became a matter of speculation, the rescue exercise inadvertently became a bonanza as many non-Jewish Ethiopians found ways of establishing the required Jewish identity in order to join the exodus.

Regardless of how one sees this book, there is a redemptive quality to it: the thrill of people helping people. To the extent that this memoir details events outside of the African continent that shaped events that took place on the continent, it is relevant to African history as a primary source-material. It fails to educate readers about the history and life of the Ethiopian Jews in Ethiopia, but it has enough material for researchers who might explore a sequel to its contents: the history and life of the Ethiopian Jews in their new homeland. As a memoir of social activism, the book is an excellent lobbyist handbook and a good encyclopaedia of public diplomacy. One finds in its pages the quiet diplomacy that made it possible for Sudan and Israel, countries technically at war, to work together to get the Ethiopian Jews to Israel through Sudan. In that vein, the book charts many pathways that grassroots activists can use to deal with the government of Sudan on Darfur.

University of South Florida

EDWARD KISSI

THE HISTORY OF DARFUR

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The Darfur Sultanate: A History. By R. S. O'FAHEY. London: Hurst, 2008.

Pp. xx + 336. £35 (ISBN 978-1-85065-853-5).

Darfur's Sorrow: A History of Destruction and Genocide. By MARTIN W. DALY.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pp. xix + 368. £45 (ISBN 978-0-52187-618-6); £14.95, paperback (ISBN 978-0-521-69962-4).

KEY WORDS: Sudan, colonial administration, Islam, kingdoms and states, precolonial.

R. S. O'Fahey's *The Darfur Sultanate* is the indispensable history of Darfur, from the date of the foundation of the kingdom in the early seventeenth century to its demise in 1916 and incorporation into the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. During those three centuries, Darfur was a 'Sudanic' state, one of a string of comparable kingdoms along the southern edge of the Sahara desert, which combined absolute and sacral kingship with Islamic faith and law. From its beginnings as an ethnic kingdom in the mountains of Jebel Marra, Darfur subsequently developed into a complex multi-ethnic empire. By 1800 it had surpassed its better-known rival on