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**Review of doctoral thesis by Tsegu Melaku, M.A. prepared under the supervision of
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***The Contribution of Radio Broadcasts in the Absorption Process of Illiterate Ethiopian
Jews in Israel***

The doctoral thesis by Tsegu Melaku, M.A. numbers 187 pages. It consists of three parts: an introduction detailing the author's educational path and life experiences, an abstract, introduction and conclusions. It also contains references regarding Israeli and media issues and an appendix containing a survey questionnaire.

The first part is the most comprehensive. It consists of four chapters devoted to a detailed analysis of the situation of Ethiopian Jews in Ethiopia and Israel.

Part two is much shorter. It contains just one chapter and is devoted to the history of Israeli media and to the present media setup.

The third, and the shortest part, includes the results of a survey carried out by the Author among Ethiopian Jews in Israel whose aim, as I understand it, was to gather information on the perception of the community's absorption into Israeli society assisted by radio programming.

The Author focuses on the way Ethiopian immigrants have been adjusting to life in Israel, the different forms this process takes, in particular the circumstances in which it occurs and the mechanisms that guide it. What the Author aims to achieve is to show the process of cultural adaptation of mostly illiterate immigrants, coming from underdeveloped rural regions in Ethiopia, to life in the urban environment of one of the world's fastest developing high tech societies. This process is meant to be assisted by Amharic-language broadcasts, one of fourteen language broadcasts by Israel Radio International and addressed to immigrants and overseas audiences. (The data provided was valid at the time of writing. Currently, there are fewer and some of them - skeletal).

On the basis of a modest survey, the Author has analysed communications practices connected with the reception of these broadcasts, in particular listening time, the popularity of various genres and broadcasts which are meant to assist the integration process to the highest degree.

As I started reading T. Melaku's dissertation, I assumed that that it would be organised around the analysis of data obtained from the survey conducted by him. I was reassured in this by the Author herself in his competent characterisation of the quantitative and qualitative approach (pp. 23-26) which was to be applied in the study and in the formulation of its goal and hypotheses. Moreover, on p. 25 she described her approach as an 'emic' perspective, in which 'understanding and description of the behaviour of the object of the study' is stressed (p. 25.) In my view, the problem is that the 'emic' perspective is strongly linked with the 'etic' perspective, which means that the 'from within' perspective cannot be grasped other than 'from the outside.' Incidentally, a large number of recent studies has questioned this distinction. Taking the post-modernist approach, it describes the results of such studies as yet another narrative regarding the culture under investigation (cf. Jensen 2013.)

It is regrettable that, compared to the length of the entire dissertation, one notices not so much the lack of proportion between its individual parts but the very brief analysis of the empirical body of evidence. In the opinion of the Author herself, this part is crucial for what is essentially an empirical study. Moreover, I failed to find in this chapter what the Author wrote about in the introduction where she defined the aim of the study, formulated his hypotheses and discussed the aforementioned quantitative and qualitative approach.

In part three, the Author describes the size and socio-demographic makeup of the sample: Ethiopian immigrants to Israel. However, she fails to mention in what way the sample was selected and what type it represents. Is it a probability or non-probability sample (random or purposive sample) ? May be, it is a convenience sample or volunteer one ? Another words, is it thus representative for Ethiopian Jews in Israel or was it selected in a incidental manner?

The Author also fails to mention what seems the most crucial: how she reached the respondents, in what way the interview was conducted, taking into account that most of the respondents are illiterate, and thus could be expected to possess a limited understanding of the subject matter of the questionnaire normally addressed to educated respondents. For instance, question 12 refers to 'integration' and 'absorption.' It is not clear whether the Author asked the question in this way or in a manner that enabled the respondents to understand these two notions.

Generally speaking, I think that Author didn't provide the operational definition of variables, even for the main notion of the study: "contribution of radio to the absorption process of immigrants". Meanwhile, operational definitions are indispensable in scientific research, because they enable investigators to measure relevant variables. In any study, it is necessary to provide operational definitions for both independent variables and dependent variables.

The key question from the point of view of the Author's stated aims is how to treat broadcasts addressed to Ethiopian immigrants. These broadcasts are aired by Israel's state-owned public radio network. In this case the very philosophy behind the network assumes that relations between the institution and the audience are defined in cultural, ideological and often political terms with no regard for commercial considerations. Free from commercial pressure, unlike its commercial counterparts, the broadcaster is not expected to 'offer what audiences expect.' In cultural terms, such broadcasts, what are meant to provide 'what audiences need'. It is vital to explain why then need it. Unfortunately, very little, if anything, is said about that in the study. The Author appears satisfied with his superficial, laconic answers to the closed-ended questions of the questionnaire regarding the type of Amharic-language broadcasts the respondents listen to and prefer.

The audience of any medium is characterised by duality. Next to the audience which constitutes a *discursive construct* which is verifiable in market surveys, according to I. Ang (1991) who we owe the distinction to, there is also an actual audience. It is a real audience which is part of society with its practices, daily life experiences which are commonly referred to as 'watching,' 'listening,' 'using,' 'reception,' 'consumption' etc. All these types of activities are linked with media reception which are derived from

public life in all its complexity and cultural, political and historical dynamics. Whereas the former audience, namely the discursive construct, remains in the sphere of the media, research centres and those who commission media studies, the latter is within the realm of actual audiences and media users.

The social environment of the actual audience encompasses a multitude of wide-ranging elements which do not easily yield to change and exposure, and which are far from complete. In other words, as I. Ang puts it, "*the fixing of meanings of the (...) audience is always by definition unfinished, because the world of actual audience is too polysemic and polymorphic to be completely articulated in a closed discursive structure (...) Indeed, it (...) audience exists nowhere, actual audiences are everywhere.* (1991:14.)

The actual audience, unique though it is in the case of the Ethiopian Beta Israel community, is the subject of study by Tsegu Melaku, M.A. The problem is, the Author explores the subject very superficially. She appears content with replies to closed-ended questions alone as the questionnaire only contains this type of questions.

Incidentally, I wish to point out questions which are incorrectly constructed from the point of view of standard requirements, e.g. question 11 regarding the type of broadcasts the respondent enjoys and dislikes. The ambiguity contained in the question is the reason why the replies seem confusing.

I wish to make it clear that in the study undertaken by Tsegu Melaku, M.A., it is hard to find a theoretical paradigm thanks to which the analysis of the empirical material could achieve the aim of the dissertation stated in the introduction. It also seems hard to find qualitative data which, as stated by the Author in the introduction, could serve to complement or offer an insight into quantitative data obtained in the, admittedly, small-scale survey.

It seems worthwhile, at this point, to quote Marshall McLuhan's twin concepts: the often questioned one contained in the aphorism 'the medium is the message' and the quasi-theoretical one whereby a distinction is made between 'hot' and 'cold' media. As an electronic medium, radio as a medium has the longest experience of contact with the audience. In the early 1960s McLuhan described radio as a *hot medium*. This term now seems slightly outdated.

A number of authors correctly point to the shift in the social significance of radio broadcasting from being a hot medium toward a medium that accompanies the listener's daily activities, while remaining the most universal and accessible means of communication. It seems regrettable that the Author of the dissertation fails to explore this concept by referring to the features of the new status of radio broadcasts as a means of enhancing the absorption of Israel's immigrant communities and not just of Ethiopian Jews.

While analysing and interpreting survey data, the author frequently seems to misinterpret obvious facts. For instance at the point when he quotes the gender makeup of the respondents, he states that male respondents prevail, which leads him to the unjustified conclusion that men are dominant in Ethiopian culture. These two observations seem unrelated, unless female respondents tended to refuse to take part in the survey, which would indeed testify to a cultural trait. However, there is no mention of that in the study.

It seems regrettable that the Author fails to refer to the knowledge offered, on the one hand, by the 'communication and development' paradigm and the role of the media – and especially of radio broadcasting - within it. On the other, he fails to refer to the concept of 'cultural pluralism', which remains within the orbit of studies on cross-cultural communication and the functioning of a multicultural society, which Israeli society essentially is, and the role of the media in the integration process. For in essence, absorption is synonymous with the process of cultural integration.

The dissertation by Tsegu Melaku, M.A., also features several other shortcomings. The author seems to have included too brief a description of the Israeli media market, notably of the Amharic-language broadcasts meant for Ethiopian immigrants. In the analysis of the subject-matter and discourse, she fails to provide a more detailed characteristics of the structure of the broadcasts in terms of radio genres. Instead, she focuses on their broadcast time.

His description of the activities of IBA (soon: the Israeli Broadcasting Corporation) and of the Second Authority of Television and Radio seems too sketchy, on the one hand, in terms of their role as 'umbrella' organisations affiliating respectively public and commercial radio and TV networks, and on the other as the two sectors' regulatory

bodies. As a result, the issue of media regulation, including radio broadcasting, is neglected in the study, especially when it comes to broadcasts for new arrivals meant to help them adapt in Israeli society.

Overall, in spite of the aforementioned shortcomings and errors, according to this reviewer the study by Tsegu Melaku, M.A., offers an interesting analysis of the functioning of Ethiopian Beta Israel immigrants to Israel who arrived there during three logistically complex rescue operations. Against this backdrop, it describes the potential of radio broadcasting as a useful medium which helps in the process of absorption into Israeli society.

It also seems worthwhile to underscore the considerable effort the Author has made to consult an impressive body of interdisciplinary literature. Of note is also his analysis of the absorption process of other immigrant Jewish communities besides the Beta Israel, for instance of Jews from the former USSR, whose number far exceeds the size of other communities that make up Israeli society.

Taking into account the Author's erudition and the responsible way in which her observations are made, according to this reviewer the doctoral dissertation by Tsegu Melaku, M.A., meets the necessary criteria to be admitted to the final stage of the procedure leading up to the awarding of the degree of doctor of social science in the scope of political sciences.

Reference works:

Ang I. (1991) *Desperately Seeking the Audience* London/New York, Routledge

Jensen K. (2013) *A Handbook of Media and Communication Research*

Qualitative and Quantitative Methodologies London/New York, Routledge

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