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SELF-SEGREGATION AND INCORPORATION AS A MEANS OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF THE ETHIOPIAN BETÄ ĀSRA'EL

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Abstract: Ethiopia is one of the most ethnically heterogeneous countries of the African continent. The overwhelming majority of its peoples have no literary tradition of their own. As a result, their lifestyle, manners and customs can be examined through field researches with only few exceptions. In this connection the Amhara and the Təgräy ethnic groups, who traditionally constitute the ruling class of the Christian state of Ethiopia, and at least one more people, viz. the Betä Āsra'el (the so-called 'Ethiopian Jews', or Falasha), are of particular interest, since all of them are more or less well represented in traditional Ethiopian historiography and have more or less well conserved their proper generational memory. The self-consciousness of the Betä Āsra'el revealed through the lens of written and oral tradition exerts its influence on patterns of their behavior in the changing world. Archaic backgrounds of their existence, especially their origin myths, were often left on the surface throughout different recorded periods of their existence and they remained aliens in Ethiopian society. The process of the alternate self-segregation and incorporation of the Betä Āsra'el within the Ethiopian state and the resulting social changes in the life of the people (both positive and negative) that occurred are demonstrated in the frame of the present research. The struggle for self-identity and recognition of the Betä Āsra'el as the descendants of King Solomon's noblemen is still in progress, even in Israel where they managed to move almost entirely in the last quarter of the 20th century.

Keywords: Ethiopia, Israel, culture, socio-cultural anthropology, the Falasha, the Betä Āsra'el, traditions, self-segregation, Incorporation

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In traditional societies, the ethnic consciousness and the feeling of the proper cultural, religious and national identity constitute the core of social links for every person. This phenomenon is clearly observed through different peoples of the African continent. Archaic social structure of some African ethnic groups is connected in this context with relevant origin myths and legends about their past. During almost three thousand years of its written history, Ethiopia has been a state with ethnic and linguistic variability which has very few parallels in the world from this viewpoint. From the mid-1st millennium AD to the present day, the Christian monarchy is predominating in the Horn of Africa. After the *coup d'État* of 1270 that had brought to power the so-called Solomonic dynasty, the ruling class of Ethiopia was recruited from the Amhara and, to a

certain extent, from the Təgräy peoples, who for a long time were in focus of relevant researches. However, the reconstruction of a detailed and balanced history of that country cannot be realized without recourse to data on other ethnic groups subjugated by the Ethiopian Christian kingdom. The Betä Əsra'el (or Falasha¹) [Kaplan, 2003] are of special interest, since they are rather well attested in traditional historiography compiled in Gə'əz, the only written language of Christian culture in medieval Ethiopia [Mamher Asras Yayeh, 1989]. Moreover, a rather good preservation of the generational memory of their past (at least of its legendary version) in their cultural milieu (in comparison with other peoples of the Horn of Africa) makes their history a very promising material for researchers.

The overwhelming majority of the peoples inhabiting the territories of the Horn of Africa have no literary tradition of their own. With that in mind, the Betä Əsra'el (the so-called 'Ethiopian Jews') are of particular interest, since they are quite well represented in traditional Ethiopian historiography and have conserved their proper generational memory. The materials of the Ethiopian Royal historiography and a series of relevant historical texts constitute the main source base of the present research.

The Betä Əsra'el self-consciousness revealed through the lens of written and oral tradition exerts its influence on patterns of their behavior in the changing world. One of the most contradictory positions in the Ethiopian state was occupied by the Betä Əsra'el, who claim to be of Israeli origin, completely ignoring their local African roots². Most of them believe to be descendants of the famous first-born sons of the Israelite nobles sent to Ethiopia by King Solomon. That genealogical tradition goes back to the legendary tale of the Queen of Sheba, the King Solomon and their only child Menelik (Mənilək) I, from whom the uninterrupted succession of the monarchs of Ethiopia can be traced [*Kebra Nagast*, 1905]. The Betä Əsra'el claim to practice the most genuine Judaism, that in reality seems to derive from a group of extreme Christian sectarians, who completely rejected the New Testament in favor of the Old one, or, less likely, of non-Talmudic Jews.

The present research focuses on the Betä Əsra'el people that used to inhabit Ethiopian territories on the Horn of Africa³, and the aspect of correlation of their past and present in the everyday life inside the Ethiopian multiethnic society. Being also of a different religious affiliation in relation to the majority of the population of Ethiopia (commonly Christian and Muslim), for a number of reasons hostile to the Jews, the Betä Əsra'el in different historical periods and circumstances chose (when it was possible) voluntary or obligatory to self-segregate (morally, physically and geographically) or to incorporate in the developing society of Ethiopia. This led to different results in their conditions of everyday life, standards of living in general, and economic development or recession.

It is worth to say a few words about the origin of this ethnic group. The problem of the ethnogenesis of the Betä Əsra'el is controversial. There are several versions of their appearance in Northeastern Africa. The diffusionist version explains their presence on the Horn of Africa in different ways and considers the Betä Əsra'el descendants of the "Ten Lost Tribes", immigrants from South Arabia or Egyptian Jews. Regardless of exact origin, for the first time they have been attested in Ethiopic written sources in the Chronicle of the Wars by 'Amdä Šiyon I (1314–1344), the first known work of the Ethiopian Royal historiography [Turaev, 1936, p. 20]. It seems that the Betä Əsra'el used to live in the Ethiopian territories (first of all, in the remote mountain region

¹ The ethnonym is considered a derogatory name by its bearers. As a matter of fact, the "Falasha" is a proper noun derived from the Gə'əz verb *falasa*, emigrate, go into exile, be removed, and is still in use not only among indigenes of Ethiopia, but also in some scholarly works.

² Anthropologically and linguistically the Betä Əsra'el belong to the Cushitic people of Agau, represented by different ethnic groups in Ethiopia.

³ We say "used to", since most of them immigrated to Israel at the last quarter of the 20th century (the question of their immigration will be discussed below).

of Səman⁴) from the ancient times (probably even before the Christianization of the country in the 4th century AD)⁵. As a matter of fact, no reliable information about their migration to the Horn of Africa can be found in written sources.

The Betä ʾƏsra'el themselves do not elaborate any coherent version of their origin. However, a representative of the Betä ʾƏsra'el in his book written in Amharic, the language spoken by the majority of that people [Teferra, 2017], and published in Addis Ababa in 1989, not only describes their cultural characteristics, habits, traditions, but also gives a detailed tale of their origin [Mamhar Asras Yayeh, 1989]. This is one of the diffusionist versions dealing with the arrival of the Jews exiled from Palestine in the times of the Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar II, through Egypt and Nubia to Ethiopia.

It does not seem that the Betä ʾƏsra'el had ever had even a tiny knowledge of the Hebrew language before they started studying it in Israel in the last quarter of the 20th century. The texts they use for religious needs and services were compiled in Gə'əz, or Classical Ethiopic, the liturgical language of the Ethiopian Christian Church. It seems more probable that they borrowed their literature from Ethiopian Christians. Moreover, it is well known that Betä ʾƏsra'el adopted Ethiopian manuscripts of Christian origin with addition of some corrections in their texts and decoration⁶.

Some of the Betä ʾƏsra'el say that one of the languages of the Cushitic group, Kwarinya⁷, used to be the native one for their fathers. Others declare, although without any foundation, that their mother language was Hebrew, but they have lost its knowledge during their very long stay in Ethiopia and only recently, for social and economic purposes, began to speak the Cushitic language Agau⁸. Before their emigration to Israel, in spite of their habit to live separately from the representatives of other religions, they were obliged to master Amharic and Tigrinya (the languages of official use in Ethiopia) to be incorporated into the social structure of modern Ethiopia and were gradually forgetting their native Cushitic language⁹. Some of them even think that they have never had another language except Amharic and wonder, if any Agau ethnic group could be connected in any way with the 'Ethiopian Jews' [Herman, 2012, p. 25–26]. In all likelihood, the ancestors of the Betä ʾƏsra'el belong to an ethnic group of Agau who converted into Christianity and then, as a result of long periods of isolation and presumable sporadic contacts with some Jews, created their own doctrine of faith based on the Old Testament.

The Ethiopian ruling class and the majority of the people indeed were not favored from the point of view of their customs and traditions. The Betä ʾƏsra'el, who proclaimed themselves to be the 'genuine Jews' [Kaplan, 2003], were treated by the medieval Ethiopians as the 'people of blood' in full accordance with Matthew 27:25 ('His blood be on us, and on our children')¹⁰. Prejudices against the Betä ʾƏsra'el on the part of the Amhara-Təgräy society, which constituted

⁴ Səman mountain ranges, consisting of several plateaus separated by deep gorges with rivers flowing below, go north of Gondar. The highest point is Mount Ras Dashen, which reaches a height of 4533 m (the highest mountain in Ethiopia and the fourth highest on the African continent) [Quairin, 2010]. In 1959 it became Mountains National Park and in 1978 it was included in the UNESCO World Heritage List.

⁵ The Betä ʾƏsra'el themselves created only one chronicle of their history [Leslau, 1946–1947; Kaplan, 1999; Gusarova, 2014].

⁶ See for instance the manuscript Octateuch (Eth. 100) from the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences collection [Gusarova, 2020].

⁷ A dialect of Agau.

⁸ See about the languages the corresponding article in the Encyclopaedia Aethiopica [Appleyard, 2003].

⁹ Nowadays completely extinct.

¹⁰ That is one of the main reasons of their almost total emigration to Israel. In sum, about 55 000 people from the Betä ʾƏsra'el had moved to Israel from 1977 until May of 1991, when during the so-called 'Operation Solomon' the rest of them, about 15 000, were brought by air from Ethiopia.

one of the main pillars of the Ethiopian traditional ideology¹¹, used to be widespread in all historical periods.

As a result, a large amount of fantastic stories about the Betä ʾƏsraʾel was created in Ethiopia: for example, common people often believe that they can turn into hyenas at night and attack people. Such magic practices proved to be ascribed to the Betä ʾƏsraʾel, since they were largely involved in blacksmith craft and pottery production [Shvarts, 2023], which from time immemorial were considered by African peoples as occupations specific to sorcerers. Unexpectedly, such heightened superstition of the majority of the Ethiopians had a significant impact on the position of the Ethiopian Jews in the country. As Christian and Muslim majority were prejudiced against some crafts and professions, the Betä ʾƏsraʾel began to engage in them and soon monopolized them. This, on the one hand, gave rise to even greater antagonism (and fear) towards them, and on the other hand, brought them considerable economic benefits. Moreover, this contributed to their recognition in the country as talented craftsmen, which more than once worked to their advantage.

As far as historical facts are concerned, beginning from the famous military campaigns of ʾAmdä Šiyon I (1314–1344) (and probably even before them), parallel processes went on. The kings of Ethiopia were pursuing the policy of Christianization of the population of their country. They tried to incorporate the non-Christian population of surrounding areas, including the Betä ʾƏsraʾel, into the Ethiopian traditional society and to submit them to the central authority. On the other hand, during that era, the majority of trade routes were under the control of Muslims. Many Ethiopian feudal lords and wealthy traders professed Islam and spread their religion (consciously and unconsciously) over vast territories of the Horn of Africa¹². As an alternative to the official religion of the Ethiopian kingdom, the Islamic faith seemed to be attractive for many local peoples. Meanwhile, the Betä ʾƏsraʾel did not practice commerce and used to live in isolation, thus belonging neither to Christianity nor to Islam, the two “official” religions of medieval Ethiopia. Over the years some of them were forced to change their faith, being converted into Christianity by the will of the kings expressed during their military campaigns. Usually, people were not free in the choice of their religion. One of the most cruel examples traces back to the reign of King Susənyos (1607–1632) who ordered to kill a lot of the Betä ʾƏsraʾel “to cancel the memory of Judaism in all the lands of his Kingdom” [Chernetsov, 1984, p. 231] and shortly after started a campaign to spread Christian faith among the survivors¹³. Many of them adopted the official faith of the Christian state of Ethiopia under constraint (and some rejected it after some time).

The Betä ʾƏsraʾel indeed have never really attempted (and probably never desired) to get involved into the Ethiopian kingdom and for that reason preferred remaining in isolation. Disobedience normally caused physical and economic repressions. It was the main reason of the self-segregation of the Betä ʾƏsraʾel. The struggle of the Betä ʾƏsraʾel for their cultural and religious identity left a lot of traces in the Ethiopian Royal historiography. The enthronement of the King Susənyos illustrates that situation very well [Cohen, 2010]. He was not the direct descendant of a king but a great-grandson of the King Ləbnä Dəngəl (1508–1540) and did not have a right to the throne. Moreover, his mother was a daughter of an influential Oromo chief. At the same time, the mother of the legitimate heir to the throne Yaʾəqob (Jacob) was of Falasha (Betä ʾƏsraʾel)

¹¹ It was formed gradually under the Solomonic dynasty, that ruled from 1270 until the revolution of 1974, when the Emperor Haylä Səllase I was deposed. The ruling dynasty and the majority of courtiers ethnically belonged, for the most part, to the Amhara and the Təgräy. After the revolution, that promulgated the liberty and equality of all the peoples of Ethiopia, the new government of the Därg (Coordinating Committee of the Armed Forces, Police, and Territorial Army) also consisted predominately of representatives of the same two peoples. Attempts of other ethnic components to enter the state apparatus were in vain and even provoked ethnic persecutions of the Oromo and some other peoples.

¹² Nowadays, according to official statistics, the number of the Muslims and the Christians in the Horn of Africa is equal.

¹³ It is worth mentioning that the King himself adopted the Catholic faith (and paid dearly for this).

origin¹⁴. She entered the struggle for power with the help of the Falasha ruler Gedewon. The outcome of the confrontation of the two strong parties depended on the attitude of the people and the army. Here again the Oromo and the common people of Ethiopia supported King Susānyos [Chernetsov, 1990, p. 90–94]. Probably the fact that some Oromo adopted Christianity played the main role in the triumph of their party, while the Falasha were considered the ‘damned Jews, crucifiers of Jesus Christ’.

It is obvious that it is unreasonable for a people to start a “struggle for identity” in a “historical vacuum” [Mekuria Bulcha, 1996, p. 49] and in presence of another stronger and often hostile population in its vicinity¹⁵. In case of the Betä ʿƏsra’el the “struggle” took shape of marginalization and voluntary segregation instead of open confrontation. In that context it should be concluded that complex processes of their common history reflected in specific variants proved to be kept in the consciousness of the Betä ʿƏsra’el and their collective memory. Self-identity constitutes a concept common for most individuals of the ethnic group which can be justified by the unity of their religion and customs, but not by the language. The majority of the Betä ʿƏsra’el used to live compactly and separately from the other population of Ethiopia in isolated areas, mostly located in elevated rugged terrains. Such segregation was partly a consequence of the aforementioned Royal policy towards them, since separately and compactly living peoples are easier to be controlled by the central authorities and local chiefs.

At the same time, physical and geographic self-segregation in a hard-to-reach region, such as the Səman mountain ranges, contributed to the conservation of religious purity and protected the people from excessively frequent visits of the representatives of the Royal administration. From time to time the Betä ʿƏsra’el decided to live separately in order to avoid the Royal control, offensive discrimination against them, and last but not least, because of their habits and religious traditions (special restrictions in food consumption [Shvarts, 2024], ritual purity, etc.).

In the case of the Betä ʿƏsra’el, there were special territories allocated for them by the Ethiopian kings. Proof of this are numerous examples of descriptions in the Royal chronicles of the Ethiopian king’s military campaigns in the mountains of Səman. As far as 1332, king ʿAmdä Šiyon I sent troops to suppress the uprising of the Jews [Turaev, 1936, p. 20–21]. King Isaac (1414–1424) was the first to attempt to include Səman and its population in the administrative system of the Ethiopian kingdom [Quirin, 2010, p. 612]. In the first half of the 15th century, Samen became an administrative unit of the state and its inhabitants began to be subject to the rights and duties, in particular the obligation to feed the royal army during military transitions and pay taxes. During the reign of King Sarsa Dengel (1563–1597), the royal army has devastated Səman several times due to rebellions of the Betä ʿƏsra’el and their refusal to pay tribute [Chernetsov, 1984, p. 81–82], despite the inaccessibility of their habitats and climatic conditions, characterized by a predominance of low temperatures, unusual for the bulk of the Ethiopian population.

Under similar circumstances, the Royal troops invaded the habitat of Betä ʿƏsra’el during the reign of Adyam Sagad (1682–1706) [Chernetsov, 1991, p. 37–43] and even in the times of political disintegration of Ethiopia in the end of 18th century [Chernetsov, 1991, p. 175] etc. Səman is regularly mentioned in the Royal chronicles in connection with appointments of the administrative head there [Chernetsov, 1989, p. 11; Chernetsov, 1991, p. 81, 97, 151], that shows the economic importance of this area for the treasury.

As a result, at least since the 17th century, the Betä ʿƏsra’el has been residing separately, with the exception of some short periods when they managed to enter the “Ethiopian life” as carpenters or craftsmen at the Royal court. The breach of their isolation was connected with the foundation of

¹⁴ The details of her appearance in the Royal family are not covered in the chronicles.

¹⁵ In the case of Ethiopia such population is represented by the Amhara and the Təgräy, from whom the ruling class of the country was recruited for centuries.

Gondar, the new capital of Ethiopia, in 1636 by the King Fasilidas (1632–1667). Good craftsmen were in high demand. The construction started under the previous King Susenyos, who was the first to introduce wages for builders and craftsmen of the Royal residence [Chernetsov, 1984, p. 308, 310].

The Betä ʾƏsraʾel, that used to be potters, carpenters and smiths, in spite of discrimination and prejudices against them, were en masse involved in the construction of Royal residences¹⁶. They were exclusively employed as smiths, since this craft is considered impure by the Christian population of Ethiopia. The attitude towards pottery was almost the same. In modern terms, those occupations continued to be practically monopolized in Ethiopia by the Betä ʾƏsraʾel and that situation allowed them to improve their economic conditions. This is the most obvious example of a positive side of their discrimination.

In 1668, King John I (1667–1682) issued a decree on the separate residence of the Franks (i.e. foreigners, Europeans), Muslims, Turks and Falasha [Chernetsov, 1989, p. 12], whose representatives by this time had begun to receive honorary titles of the state. According to the Royal chronicles, the Betä ʾƏsraʾel have never had such respect in Ethiopia.

As a matter of fact, the isolation of the Betä ʾƏsraʾel was not total. Many of them became assimilated, kept in secret their origins and, as a result, lost their cultural identity, especially in larger cities. In any case, the attitude of the superstitious Christian population of Ethiopia towards them was aggressive and derogatory. Periods of peace for them were alternating with periods of conflicts with the central authorities and wars. During the reign of Tewodros (Theodore) II (1855–1868) several religious disputes between the Betä ʾƏsraʾel and Christian clerics took place [Flad, 1920]. The details of what had happened are not known, but soon after many of the Betä ʾƏsraʾel were converted into the Christian faith. The others began to consider, for the first time in the history of that community, moving to the land of their legendary ancestors.

These hopes took shape only in the last quarter of the 20th century when (in 1975) the Chief Rabbinate of Israel recognized the Ethiopian Jews as a part of the general Jewish community, and in 1977 it was decided to allow their repatriation. In total, by 1999 more than 55 000 of the Betä ʾƏsraʾel emigrated to Israel. Nowadays, the great majority of the Betä ʾƏsraʾel lives in that country. As previously in Ethiopia, they mostly speak Amharic¹⁷. In Israel the Betä ʾƏsraʾel faced a different reality. First of all, they got acquainted with a modern standard of life, which they were not ready to face. They had to study Hebrew, to go to school and to work. The problem is that a considerable percentage of the Betä ʾƏsraʾel, like the majority of the population of Ethiopia, was illiterate or had no regular education. As a result, in the beginning they did not succeed in studying at school and mastering a new language. There was also a problem of employment. The local ‘paleface’ population did not hospitably accept the black ‘Ethiopian Jews’. Encounters with them provoked the creation of new stories of legendary character as a result of prejudices towards the Betä ʾƏsraʾel.

All those circumstances led them to a new isolation and social vacuum. Here again the Betä ʾƏsraʾel chose the familiar self-segregation. This is a common desire for immigrants all over the world (for example, for Muslims of different origin and others living compactly in European countries, the Chechens in Cairo, etc.). Due to the disinclination of dealing with the “black” Jews, the Betä ʾƏsraʾel face employment difficulties (especially finding a “good” job) in Israel, so many of them are living on the dole.

¹⁶ The story of the construction of Gondar palaces and other monumental buildings provided by A. Pollera [Pollera, 1936] is worth mentioning here.

¹⁷ The Betä ʾƏsraʾel’s life in the state of Israel was well described by M. Herman, who was contacting with them during her stay in that country in the early 1990s [Herman, 2012].

Some of them (especially young people) earned their living by playing and singing in musical bands and the songs they performed were mostly in Amharic [Kaufman Shelemay, 1986; Herman, 2012]. At the same time they were improving their Hebrew in special schools. Although the phenomenon of such bands had no parallels in their past, it was probably a way of their self-realization in the new living conditions and making a living. The participation of women in those musical bands also broke the traditions, since Ethiopian women never appeared in public in such a way, maintaining their reclusive lifestyle. However, in the modern society of Israel, the Betä ʾƏsraʾel are commonly considered quite old-fashioned. Moreover, many young Betä ʾƏsraʾel, both male and female, often born already in Israel and thus speaking Hebrew more or less as a mother language, entered the armed forces or police¹⁸.

On special occasions and for performances, they wear traditional Ethiopian white dresses and cook Ethiopian dishes. Thus, they try to maintain their traditions, without which they view the risk of losing their identity as very high. In contrast to other discriminated peoples of Ethiopia, first of all the Oromo, the Betä ʾƏsraʾel succeeded in fulfilling their dream providing security for future generations. The legendary story of their past found its materialization in the present. Nevertheless, the so-called neo-traditionalism in their behavior demonstrates that the traditions they carry on are connected with their previous existence in Ethiopia rather than with their mythical past. Every person of the Betä ʾƏsraʾel affirms that he or she is a Jew, whose ancestors moved to Ethiopia in the reign of the Biblical King Solomon, and belongs to the Jewish culture, but in everyday life proves to be an Ethiopian with all the specific manners and customs.

Historically the interrelation between the local Christian and Muslim population of Ethiopia, on the one hand, and the Betä ʾƏsraʾel, on the other, was reciprocal. The Betä ʾƏsraʾel considered them corrupt, impure, followers of wrong religious traditions and communication with them was a sort of “taboo”. That is why, in contrast to other peoples of Ethiopia, they normally did not assimilate. Rare cases of their ethnic and linguistic assimilation were attested, but in any case individuals kept their ‘Jewish’ religious identity intact.

The Betä ʾƏsraʾel have conserved the generational memory and the legends of their past not as folklore, but as their genuine national history. Their belief in the origin from common ancestors, firstborn children of Israeli nobility, was uniting them as a people, superior to the local African population. As a result, their everlasting struggle for self-identity and recognition as the descendants of King Solomon’s noblemen is still in progress, even in Israel.

Profession of Judaism, considered by the Betä ʾƏsraʾel as the original and right religion, became a symbol of the nationalist movement for freedom and independence, against the persecutions from the predominant Amhara-Təgrāy society of Ethiopia that were taking place during all the Middle Ages. Moreover, the Betä ʾƏsraʾel consider themselves superior to the other peoples inhabiting the Horn of Africa. Thus, the central point in the self-identity of the Betä ʾƏsraʾel is their claim for being the genuine Jews. For a long time they were looking towards their official recognition at the Royal court as the Jewish religious community, not as a nation (as in the case of the Oromo). When they failed to reach that goal as a result of the policy of Christianization of the peoples of Ethiopia, the only possible escape for them proved to be self-segregation. Such a way out proved to be a good idea both for the king and for the Betä ʾƏsraʾel themselves. Thus, the traditionalism acquired a new form, so that some of its manifestations are aimed at implementing the objectives set by new circumstances. Traditional patterns (mostly forgotten and out of use) were placed in the base of a future Betä ʾƏsraʾel freedom and recognition in accordance with their nationalist aspirations. They have always had a desire to come back to the land of their ancestors. However, this dream was materialized for the first time as a real possibility during the Emperor Menelik II’s reign (1889–1913).

¹⁸ See numerous publications in the media [Muse Tegegne, 2014; Cohen, Shpigel, 2015 etc.].

Incorporation on the levels of the state and of the society does not mean assimilation and *vice versa*. It constitutes the main factor for a people living in multiethnic country, since isolation leads to cultural and economic regress. Archaic social structure as a base of strong organization and unity of the people in obtaining their goals facilitates the common struggle for recognition. In this regard we can conclude that in any case self-segregation excludes integration in any modern or archaic society. Awareness of being indigenous in the area facilitates the integration. Access to the central power is secondary and can be considered an intermediate result but it provides the subsequent integration.

In the State of Ethiopia, its multiethnic and multicultural society, self-identity and religion from time to time play the central negative role in the process of integration. Religion used to be the primary initial symbol and tool for centralization of the country. Then, when it was territorially formatted, religion started to play a disintegrating role. Currently, Ethiopia can be considered one of the most tolerant multi-religious countries in the world. Religion in such conditions has become the prerogative of the private life.

Thus, discrimination in Ethiopia, as elsewhere, depends on how to treat it and to benefit from it. As a result, this phenomenon can have different effects on the history of the peoples who fell under it, and of the country as a whole.

It seems that the idea of obtaining independence and freedom for the Betä ʾƏsraʾel consisted of their expectation to come back to the land of their fathers and to worship God according to their rites. The central component of the Betä ʾƏsraʾel's ideology proved to be their traditional mythology, which is based on the Old Testament and is in complete contradiction with objective linguistic, cultural and religious facts.

The Betä ʾƏsraʾel people, contrary to the other ethnicities of the Horn of Africa, left their native country and are now gradually losing their "Ethiopian" cultural identity. For almost all the periods of their existence in Ethiopia they used to remain in isolation, being discriminated by the local population. Nowadays they live in Israel marginalized, isolated and alien to its Jewish population, as their adherence to Judaism (even non-Talmudic) is put in doubt for lack of the language, rites and customs common for the other Jews. Despite this, the standard of living in a much more economically developed country, even if frequently lower than of other Israeli citizens, is undoubtedly significantly higher than the average income of an average resident of Ethiopia. Once again incorporation is the only way for the Betä ʾƏsraʾel to improve the standard of living, economic and family wealth.

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