Ethiopian Jewish Migrants into Israel

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CONTEXTUAL OVERVIEW

With the influx of Jewish migrants into Israel from all over the world, Israel has become a settler society for persons of Jewish origin. According to the PEW Research Center, as of 2010, 3 million Jewish migrants have ended up in Israel. Additionally, in 2021, The Jewish Agency for Israel helped 28,601 Jewish immigrants enter Israel, marking a 31% increase compared to 2020. Through a sociological perspective on religious migration and identity, this paper intends to discuss the Ethiopian Jewish migration processes into Israel. According to the Migration Data Portal, Israel is a top country for Ethiopian migrant destinations, with 78,000 Ethiopian immigrants in 2020. By analyzing how religion and identity can motivate migration, this paper intends to discuss the structures that facilitate Ethiopian Jewish migration into Israel. Previous research has shown that heterogeneity within the country of origin has influenced Ethiopian migration. Also, with limited microdata analysis involving individual Ethiopian demographic characteristics, large-scale data shows migration trends for Ethiopian migrants. More so, research has shown there is growing religious intolerance that Ethiopian Jewish migrants have endured in their country of origin and how cultural differences have created challenges for Ethiopian Jewish migrants in Israel. Lastly, the population in the movement defines themselves both in the sending and receiving country as Ethiopian Jewish migrants. The Ethiopian Jewish identity is shaped by religious and racial intolerance both in the sending and receiving countries. Finally, this paper aims to explore the motivations and challenges of Ethiopian Jewish migration to Israel as it is essential to understand historical and contemporary issues surrounding departure, transit, and arrival conditions for Ethiopian Jewish migration into Israel. Recommendations to improve conditions and human rights can be inferred.

DEMOGRAPHIC PORTRAIT

As the country of origin, Ethiopia is in the Horn of Africa, which is a large peninsula in the East Africa region between Sudan, Somalia, and Kenya. The demographic population of Ethiopia has been shaped by Western influence, both critical political as well as rural upheaval, and natural disasters like drought and famine. The historical complexities of Ethiopia have shaped the population to be highly heterogeneous regarding ethnicity, education, and religious beliefs. For instance, Ethiopia's society is ethnically stratified, whereas "one group dominates the others" (Tuso 1982:270). Ethiopia is ethnically heterogeneous, whereas ethnicity plays a crucial feature in "governance, power and resources, development, and management of public affairs (Mberu 2006:512).

Similarly, Ethiopia's educational system is disproportionate to that of pre-revolutionary Ethiopia, as those who were more socially and economically advantageous could benefit from the opportunity of modern education. Tuso (1982:280) states, "Government schools were built to educate the children of these groups and not the rural masses, who are usually non-Amhara." More importantly, Ethiopia's religious beliefs have a long cultural and historical relationship to the practice of Christianity and Islam. For instance, Ethiopian Jewish migrants faced religious persecution for practicing Jewish and Zionist activities (Terrazas 2007), such as when "The Derg made emigration illegal, closed Ethiopia's borders, and banned religious practices." Moreover, a brief description of migration processes based on large-scale data will give insight into the overall demographic characteristics of Ethiopian migrants.

Macro-level data analysis has provided insight into the dynamics of Ethiopian migration. There are limited microdata involving individual Ethiopian migrant characteristics. The majority of Ethiopian migration data is based on large-scale processes. An example of macro-level research regarding migration trends amongst Ethiopians is conducted by authors Kuschminder, Anderson, and Siegel (2012:31). In contrast, the study examines the primary motivation for Ethiopian migrants emigrating to the Middle East, including work, and the primary reason for choosing the destination country is due to network

effects like "having family or friends in the country of destination (26 percent)." Authors Kuschminder, Anderson, and Siegel (2012) also state that the feminization of migration is a growing trend for Ethiopian migrants, as 68 percent of Ethiopian migration to the Middle East is comprised of females. In the East and Horn of Africa, which includes Ethiopia (World Migration Report 2022:264), "females account for the largest share of refugees and asylum seekers." Ethiopian women tend to use the Eastern Route through the Horn of Africa for migration. Most female Ethiopian migrants use irregular channels through the Eastern Route to reach Middle Eastern countries for domestic work. Ethiopian migrants in 2021 were the largest nationality in the East and Horn of Africa to move into and out of the region with the predominant Eastern and Northern routes. The International Organization for Migration in relation to the East and Horn of Africa (2021:73) states that Ethiopian migrants who used the Northern Route consisted of "over half of the population on the move (54%) were between 18 and 29 years old." Another large-scale analysis of migration trends shows that Ethiopia is a top host country for internally displaced persons, with 9.6 million persons as well as 3.6 million refugees and asylum seekers. The influx of 5.4 million internally displaced persons in Ethiopia is due to "political tensions, terrorist attacks as well as prolonged droughts" (International Organization for Migration 2021:17). Moreover, a brief description of the demographic characteristics of the population in movement is relevant to religious challenges Jewish Ethiopians have endured in Ethiopia.

Historical and contemporary complexities in the practice of Judaism in Ethiopia determine a key feature of Ethiopian Jewish identity. In Ethiopia, Jewish Ethiopians refer to themselves as Beta Israel, whereas their neighbors usually referred to them as Falasha (Kaplan 1988:1), "landless, wanderers, exiles." In essence, Ethiopian Jewish migrants have historically remained outcasts in their own country. For the Jewish community in Ethiopia, Ethiopians have historically lived in peace with their Muslim and Christian neighbors (Terrazas 2007). However, historical events such as the push for Christian conversion in Ethiopia, as well as The Derg political repression of the late 19th century, have inflicted religious persecution amongst Jewish

Ethiopians. Again, Judaic Ethiopians have primarily concentrated in the northern and northwestern parts of Ethiopia, where the Jewish community became increasingly isolated from the Jewish World until the historical events of World War II. However, the Ethiopian Jewish community did observe traditional practices of Judaism (Britannica 2022) like "the Sabbath, practice [of] circumcision, synagogue services led by priests…dietary laws of Judaism, observance [of] many laws of ritual uncleanness." The practice of Judaism in Ethiopia has made Judaic Ethiopians a distinct minority in Ethiopia. The practice of Judaism has consistently been a predominant factor in how Judaic Ethiopians identify themselves. As Salamon (2003) illustrates, "The Beta Israel saw themselves as a distinct group, keepers of a faith…their belief was rooted in the Old Testament, whose commandments they meticulously observed." Ethiopian Jewish identity whilst in Ethiopia has been shaped by Ethiopia's historical and contemporary complexities.

CHALLENGES FOR SAFE AND SUSTAINABLE LIVELIHOODS

Challenges for safe and sustainable Ethiopian Jewish livelihoods are evident across migration processes and how Judaic Ethiopians are racially and religiously perceived while living in Israel. Again, Ethiopia's location is a strategic transit region (Adugna 2021) for migrants who aim for Europe and other northern destinations. According to the Migration Policy Institute, Adugna (2021) references migration patterns throughout Ethiopia, stating, "Migration occurs eastward to the Persian Gulf states and the Middle East, crossing the Red Sea or the Gulf of Aden; southward to South Africa; and northward across the Sahara, into Sudan and often Europe." Jewish Ethiopians are mainly concentrated in Beta Israel in northern Gondar, Ethiopia. During the Derg governance of 1974, when Ethiopian Jewish migrants faced religious persecution, Ethiopian Jewish migrants who migrated used two routes: one was out of Sudan and the other Kenya. Author Terrazas (2007) states, "An estimated 4,000 perished during the journey due to the severe conditions" because of illegal emigration. In 1989, Ethiopian Jewish migrants were able to migrate to Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, because of the "reestablishment of diplomatic relations between Israel and

Ethiopia" (Terrazas 2007). Ethiopian migrants have traveled to the Middle East at high rates since the 1990s through irregular channels. The International Organization for Migration (2021:6) illustrates the severity of irregular channels that many Ethiopian migrants use, noting, "The irregular journeys remain fraught with peril as migrants use multiple smuggler networks, cross dangerous seas, pass through war-torn countries and continuously face the risk of detention and deportation along the way or at destination." The usage of irregular channels is an extreme reality Ethiopian migrants face regularly. Meanwhile, Ethiopian Jewish migrants faced significant migration challenges upon arriving in Israel.

According to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics (2021:1), the population of Ethiopians living in Israel at the end of 2020 consisted of 159,500 residents, of which "88,500 were born in Ethiopia, and 71,000 were Israeli born with fathers born in Ethiopia." The Ethiopian Jewish population in Israel is defined as those of Ethiopian origin by one or more parents. Moreover, the Ethiopian-origin population in Israel is concentrated in specific communities within Israel. Such as, in Qiryat Moshe, 3,000 Ethiopian-origin residents comprise over 56% of the total number of residents, and in Rishon LeZiyyon, where 2,700 Ethiopian-origin residents comprise 53% of the total number of residents, according to Israel's Central Bureau of Statistics (2021:3). The concentration of Ethiopian Jewish migrants has led to the ghettoization of specific neighborhoods which are based on racial and socioeconomic prejudices. The evident increase in the Ethiopian-origin population in Israel has culminated in racial and religious intolerance, which has reflected the perceived identity of the Ethiopian Jewish-origin population.

For instance, Ethiopian Jewish migrants did not identify as Black. However, in the transition from Ethiopia to Israel, Ethiopians were racially categorized as Black under Israel's racial construct. Researcher Salamon (2003:9) illustrates the effect of the white-black binary within Israel's racial system: "Race hierarchies persist to this day within the Ethiopian community in Israel and continue to have deleterious and far-reaching effects on Ethiopian racial identity." To dig deeper, the categorization of Judaic Ethiopians as Black under Israel's racial hierarchy fundamentally altered preconceived racial identities within the

Ethiopian community. In other words, researcher Salamon (2003:7) describes Ethiopia's racial categories, which consisted of red (qey), black (t'equr), light brown, and brown skin color (t'eyem). In contrast, Ethiopian Jewish migrants referred to themselves as qey or t'eyem but never black (t'equr). This racial categorization in Beta Israel is based on the historical racial oppression of black (t'equr) enslaved people, where Ethiopian Jewish migrants have historically owned enslaved Black Ethiopians. The transition from Ethiopia to Israel fundamentally changed the preconception of how Ethiopian Jewish migrants viewed themselves.

Equally important, Judaic Ethiopians living in Israel faced religious intolerance by Israeli society. The disparities in religious and cultural practices created difficulties for integration. Integration challenges into Israeli society are because Jewish Ethiopians were isolated from other Jewish communities for many years. As a result, their practice of Judaism differed in many ways from the rest of the world's Jewish population. As author Ben-Eliezer (2008:936) exemplifies the practice of Judaism by Ethiopians, "It is a Judaism that is fraught with elements dating from biblical times, intermixed with elements of Ethiopian Christianity – the milieu in which they lived." In other words, the Ethiopian population in Israel identifies as Jewish, but their Jewishness was questioned because of years of isolation from the rest of the world's Jewish community.

Additionally, the question of Jewishness is relative to Israel's non-Jewish Muslims (Jewish immigrants). Ethiopians who migrated to Israel in 1993 under the Law of Return were converted to Falas Mura. As a result, Falas Muras are not recognized as Jewish under Israel's halakhic law. According to researcher Raijman (2020), Falas Mura are "the descendants of Beta Israel communities in Ethiopia and Eritrea that converted to Christianity." Israel's halakhic law does not recognize Falas Mura as Jewish because of this ancestral conversion out of Judaism. Again, Falas Muras identifies (Raijman 2020) as "ethnically belonging to the Beta Israel community, with many practicing Jewish faith rituals." They are considered non-Jewish migrants under Israel's halakhic law. Finally, challenges for sustainable livelihood amongst the Ethiopian Jewish population living in

Israel are shaped by religious and racial intolerance. By understanding the challenges to the sustainable livelihoods of Ethiopian Jewish migrants, recommendations to protect their human rights can be inferred.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVED CONDITIONS

Recommendations to protect the human rights of Ethiopian Jewish migrants may be inferred throughout the migration process, as well as Ethiopian Jewish livelihood in both Ethiopia and Israel. The unfortunate reality concerning the migration processes worldwide has led to increased migration governance. The Migration Data Portal discusses the Internal Organization for Migration's (IOM) usage of the Migration Governance Indicators (MGI) tool. The MGI is a way to help countries understand and develop migration policies and practices. The MGI uses 90 indicators to help facilitate migration governance with three main objectives (2022:2), "Generate a dialogue on well-managed migration policies. Identify gaps to be addressed to inform the formulation of comprehensive migration strategies. Help establish baselines to track progress on national and international commitments." The MGI (2019) for Ethiopia indicates numerous well-developed areas and the potential need for further development related to six different dimensions of migration governance. For instance, a possible need for further development within MGI's safe, orderly, and regular migration indicator includes Ethiopia's Proclamation No. 909/2015. Ethiopia's Proclamation to Provide for the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants is limited. According to MGI (2019:19), "There are no formal cooperation agreements with other countries on the identification and tracking of missing migrants…revision to include…a national referral mechanism meant to assist victims of trafficking and other vulnerable migrants and returnees." Ethiopia's Proclamation for the Prevention and Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and Smuggling of Migrants needs to be thoroughly addressed to protect the human rights of trafficked persons in and out of Ethiopia.

In addition to the IOM's MGI for further development in Ethiopia's policies and procedures, immigration services in

Ethiopia have helped service Ethiopian Jewish candidates for Israeli approval. The Jewish Agency for Israel has provided services for Aliyah, another term for the immigration of Jewish descent to Israel, in Ethiopia's Addis Ababa and Gondar. In contrast, The Jewish Agency for Israel (2021) has helped with departure, transit, and arrival in Israel; for instance, they have helped Ethiopian immigrants integrate into Israeli society by providing transitional housing that is dedicated to the "unique cultural needs of Ethiopian olim [immigrants on Aliyah to Israel]." Additionally, Israel's 1950s Law of Return has encouraged Jewish migration to Israel, as stated by Palmer and Kraus (2017:3). This policy has significantly influenced Ethiopian Jewish migration, as it policy allows immigration into Israel for anyone who can prove their Jewish ethnicity. For instance, Operation Moses and Operation Solomon were two pivotal movements under Israel's Law of Return for Ethiopian Jewish immigration. Under Operation Moses (Kruger 2005), 8,000 Judaic Ethiopians came to Israel under a "covert removal of Ethiopian Jews who had fled to Sudan," and 14,000 Ethiopian Jews arrived in Israel under Operation Solomon when "Eritrean and Tigrean rebels challenged the Ethiopian Government in 1991." Again, these are only a few policies and procedures that help protect human rights throughout the Ethiopian migration process; innumerable policies and procedures on the macro and micro spectrum can help protect the human rights of Ethiopian migrants during the migration process.

Meanwhile, there are considerable recommendations that protect the human rights of Ethiopian Jewish migrants living in Israel. Growing research shows the everyday cultural racism Ethiopian Jewish migrants experience while living in Israel. The Association for Civil Rights in Israel (ACRI) has helped protect the human rights of Ethiopians living in Israel as there is an emergence of Ethiopians experiencing painful discrimination in many sectors of Israeli society. For instance, the ACRI recently filed a claim against the Israeli Police for racial profiling of a 16-year-old Ethiopian boy. As reported by ACRI (2021), "We argued that the behavior of the officers violated the boy's right to equality and dignity, unjustifiably revoked his freedom, and invaded his privacy." Racial discrimination against Ethiopians persists amongst many different sectors of the Israeli community, and the

ACRI is just one example that helps protect the civil and human rights of Israeli society.

Lastly, recommendations for improved Ethiopian Jewish livelihood can be made based on the religious intolerances Ethiopian Jewish migrants encounter while living in Israel. As previously mentioned, Ethiopian Jewish migrants face integration challenges because of the differences in the practice of Judaism in comparison to their Israeli neighbors. Again, Judaic Ethiopians have been the victims of discrimination while living in Israel. However, specific advocacy groups like the Israel Association for Ethiopian Jews have helped the absorption of Ethiopian Jews into Israeli society. The Israel Association for Ethiopian Jews offers programs in the forms of community empowerment, employment, technical training, and law. For example, in an article by World Israel News written by Paul Shindman (2020), "President Reuven Rivlin and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu joined [Ethiopian] community leaders to remember the estimated 4,000 Jews from the African Country who perished…trying to reach Israel." Services to commemorate Ethiopian Jewish migrants have helped bring attention to Ethiopian Jewish integration into Israeli society.

CONCLUSION

To effectively protect the human rights of Ethiopian Jewish migrants, recommendations for migration processes through migration tools like the Migration Governance Indicator and immigration services like The Jewish Agency for Israel may be utilized to ensure the safety of Ethiopian Jewish migration into Israel. The irregular migration channels and the severity of natural circumstances surrounding the realities of migration processes are inevitable. However, these harsh realities can be significantly decreased by implementing migration governance. Additionally, to effectively provide a sustainable livelihood for Ethiopian Jewish migrants' advocacies like The Association for Civil Rights in Israel and Israel Association for Ethiopian Jewish migrants are prominent instruments that promote Ethiopian Jewish integration into Israeli society. Recommendations for sustainable livelihood for Ethiopian Jewish migrants living in Israel are comprehensible

if the information is publicized through written text and various media sources.

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