

**‘IT IS WE WHO WILL NEED TO PRESERVE OUR TRADITION’:
IDENTITY CONSOLIDATION OF ETHIOPIAN YOUTH VIA AN ETHNIC
CELEBRATION**

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ABSTRACT

This article focuses on the manner in which the ethnic identity of Ethiopian youth consolidates via an ethnic celebration. The article attempts to explain the ethnic phenomenon of thousands of Ethiopian youth who arrive en masse to the site of a traditional religious celebration called the Seged, from their perspective. This holiday is, in essence, not entertaining. Rather, it is a day of fasting and prayer. The findings show that their participation in the celebrations, with a selective return to their traditional roots, strengthens their sense of confidence and pride in their ethnic identity, the connection to their community of origin, and their belonging to the absorbing society. With the celebrations, they mark their ethnic boundaries and conduct negotiation over their place in the social and cultural space. Political-social leaders who headed organisations of Ethiopian immigrants in Israel played a major role as socialisation agents in the youth’s identity consolidation.

Keywords: youth; identity; ethnicity; celebration; immigration; boundaries

1. INTRODUCTION

In the scientific literature, immigration is perceived as a crisis event, where immigrants experience loss of many resources.¹ They also experience problems of adjustment to the absorbing society, coping with negative attitudes and a discriminatory policy.² Immigrants therefore undergo a process of mourning, which involves loss of control, psychological distress and questions of identity.³

The family is a resource of strength and a focus of support for the immigrant, and plays a crucial role in shaping his ethnic identity and social inclusion.⁴ Family relations of immigrants also influence intergenerational relations.⁵ Due to circumstances of immigration, the family undergoes an upheaval and many changes take place in the family structure, in the role division between parents and children and in the parenting style.⁶

Adolescence is one of the critical periods in psychosocial development, and consolidation of the self-identity is one of the main challenges during this period.⁷ Processes of cultural change that occur during the passage from one country to another can influence the identity consolidation process and the inclusion ability of adolescents.

Studies show that the process of consolidating the self-identity during situations of

immigration is accompanied by difficulties among most children and in particular among adolescents.^{8,9} During the immigration process, a collision may take place between the norms and values of the immigrants and those of the absorbing culture. The cultural difference is expressed in divides within the nuclear family cell, between parents and their children, and in different perceptions of the hierarchy.¹⁰

The complexity of the immigration problems increases as the gap between the absorbing society and the immigrants increases.¹¹ Members of the second generation, who are trapped between different value systems, may experience conflicts in values. They may also feel alienation both from their parents whom they regard as not progressive, and from the peer group in the absorbing society. They may sense a general situation of anomie, which may lead to an increase in crime rates.^{8,12}

Studies indicate the importance of maintaining a strong ethnic identity among young immigrants.^{13,14} Preserving values and strong ethnic relations (concomitantly to integration in society) are valuable and comprise a social and personal resource that may help youth succeed. They feel confidence in the ethnic and national identity and their sense of ethnic pride and self-esteem strengthens.

These feelings, as well as positive approaches among young immigrants toward the country of origin and the absorbing country, were found to be related to measures of psychological adjustment among minority groups.^{15,16} Young immigrants who are committed to traditional values and are involved in the ethnic community are more successful in school.¹⁷ Other studies found that a strong and positive ethnic identity with reference to the absorbing society is also related to social-cultural adjustment, including adjustment to school, academic achievements and work.^{17,18}

The above-presented theoretical perceptions, that indicate a positive relation between preservation of values and ethnic connections and a strengthening of feelings of confidence and pride in the ethnic and national identity, will be tested in this article among youth whose families emigrated from Ethiopia to Israel.

Adjustment difficulties of children of immigrants from Ethiopia

Israeli society is a society of immigrants who immigrated from different countries and communities around the world, including Ethiopia.¹⁹ In the 1970s, the political conditions in Israel and in Ethiopia enabled the Jews to leave to Sudan on their way to Israel, on an arduous journey on foot. The Ethiopian Jews then came to Israel in two mass immigration waves: "Operation Moses" in 1984 and "Operation Solomon" in 1991.²⁰

According to data of the Central Bureau of Statistics, the Ethiopian population in Israel at the end of 2018 included 151,800 people (17% of Israel's population). Approximately 43% of them were born in Israel.²¹ The data show that even today, this is a weakened population for whom opportunities in the fields of education and employment are still limited. Immigrants from Ethiopia cope with absorption difficulties that originate in their skin colour and cultural difference, and experience discrimination and marginalisation. The doubting of their Judaism was another factor that led to their exclusion and to harm to the status of their religious leaders.^{22,23}

The family of the immigrants from Ethiopia is still undergoing changes following the transition from a developing traditional society to a postmodern Western society. Similarly to

other immigrant societies,^{24,25} the women and children adapted to life in Israel faster than the men. Undermining of the family cell and removing the children to boarding schools harmed the parents' authority, in particular the father's, and thus also cultural continuity.²⁶

Members of the younger generation of the Ethiopian immigrants were trapped between different value systems and experienced ethical dilemmas. They experienced dual alienation, both from their parents and from their peers in the absorbing society.¹⁷ According to the cultural codes of the patriarchal family in Ethiopia, a strict hierarchy existed, and the children were educated to respect the adult and obey the parents' authority. Only a minority were sent to school.²⁷

In contradistinction, Israeli society stresses children's rights and more egalitarian relations between children and their parents. The intercultural differences created different intergenerational perceptions and conflicts that redefined the relationships between the children and their parents.^{10,28} The undermining of the family framework and external factors led the adolescents to a sense of loneliness and forced them to cope with problems without having suitable coping tools.⁹

The youth also coped with a large cultural gap between them and their Israeli peers, and with stereotypes due to their stigmatisation as 'black'. As a result of the exclusion, they tended to be secluded, and developed feelings of alienation toward Israeli society.²⁹ Many adolescents were exposed to risk behaviours, which are characterised by breaking norms and low self-esteem.¹²

In the last decade, many of the second and third generation (whose parents immigrated at a young age) demonstrate their desire to become included in Israeli society. However, they have difficulties with this due to a low socioeconomic status, gaps and discrimination.^{30,31}

The complex problematic positioning led to several identity patterns/self-representation strategies with which they negotiate over their invisibility in the Israeli public space.^{32,33} One pattern is adoption of cultural elements that are considered 'Israeli', with a blurring of Ethiopian elements. Another pattern is trans-national and is expressed in connections to the country of origin: tourism, entertainment and business. A third pattern is global – identification with Afro-American culture. Through Black music in general, and Hip Hop music in particular, the youth try to connect to sources of the success and resistance of the Transatlantic Black Diaspora.³⁴

The latter identity patterns do not replace their Israeli identity. Rather, they are integrated in it and reflect the complexity of their identity and their integration in the absorbing society.³²

2. METHODS

On a background of the weakening of major authority foci among the immigrants from Ethiopia (the spiritual leaders and the family cell), as well as the secularization processes, I will test the attitude of the Ethiopian youth toward their ethnic tradition in the last two decades, via an ethnic celebration called Seged.

The Seged is a unique pilgrimage holiday of the Jews of Ethiopia, which was celebrated on 29 November. It is a day of fasting, purification and prayer on a high mountain, where the religious priests read portions of the Torah in the ancient Ge'ez language which only they preserved, and prayed for redemption in the Land of Israel. The Seged reconstructed and symbolized the renewal of the covenant between the People of Israel and God in Jerusalem during the 'Return to Zion' period, as well as during the Revelation at Sinai. This, with the aim

of strengthening the religious faith of the Ethiopian Jews, their yearning to immigrate to the Holy Land, and to strengthen community solidarity.³⁵

Studies show that cultural characteristics, such as rituals and celebrations that were preserved from the past with some change, mark the boundaries between groups, help in their preservation and turn into a symbol of belonging and identity.^{36,37} These rituals may play a role in negotiation by matching between multiple identities or by overlapping with ethnic boundaries for creating renewed cultural ethnic practices.^{38,39,40}

I claim that exposure of youth to stereotypic perceptions, racism and discrimination that originate from the cultural difference, the doubting of their Judaism and their skin colour, strengthened the ethnic boundaries among the Ethiopian youth, which can be seen during the Seged holiday. In this article, I will examine the explanation to the ethnic phenomenon of thousands of Ethiopian youth, many of whom are not religious and are not familiar with the significance of the Seged or with the language of the prayer, who come en masse to the site of the religious celebration in Jerusalem, from the youth's perspective. What is their renewed interpretation for the Seged celebration, which contrary to other ethnic celebrations (the Mimouna of immigrants from North Africa and the Seharane of immigrants from Kurdistan) is not entertaining in essence, but rather a day of fasting and prayer? I will investigate who are the socialisation agents that acted to connect the Ethiopian youth to the Seged and used it for strengthening their ethnic identity.

The issue of the identity of the young generation of immigrants from Ethiopia is important for understanding their coping processes as members of an excluded minority group in Israel. The discussion will also focus on the manner in which youth from immigrant families from Africa construct their identity and their social-cultural position in the postmodern reality.

I combined different qualitative research methods in order to achieve the research goals. I performed content analysis of articles that appeared in the newspaper *Yedioth Negat* (in Hebrew and in Amharic), which has been published in Israel since 1999 by the Steering Centre for Ethiopian Immigrants in the Education System. The newspaper includes interviews with members of the community, including youth. The newspaper actually fulfils a dual role: (1) It is a source of information on the history and culture of the immigrants from Ethiopia; (2) It plays an active role in strengthening their ethnic identity.

To a lesser extent, I also used *Pana Lapid – Journal of the Israel Association of Ethiopian Jews*. This journal is not published regularly and has a smaller distribution, but important information on the Seged is published in it, including activities of youth movements, etc.

The written sources were complemented by several participant observations in the Seged ritual in Jerusalem, and especially by semi-structured interviews with youth of the community. The research included 25 semi-structured in-depth interviews held between 2013 and 2017. The interviewees were aged 15-23, members of the second and third generation to families who immigrated to Israel from Ethiopia in 'Operation Moses' in 1984, and the majority in 'Operation Solomon' in 1991. The interviewee group was heterogeneous: school and boarding school pupils, soldiers, members of youth movements and higher education students. They live in settlements in which there is a high concentration of immigrants from Ethiopia, mainly in the periphery. I reached the first interviewees through my students, and they referred me, via the snowball method, to additional youth.

The phenomenological-hermeneutical method that I used in this research attributes importance to the understanding, description and analysis of social phenomena via the participants' subjective experience and their perceptions regarding the meaning of the studied phenomenon.^{41,42,43} The semi-structured interview may supply information and references that focus on the issue chosen by the researcher. The researcher also gives the interviewee an opportunity to express himself and develop issues in directions which the researcher did not foresee.⁴⁴

I will begin with a description of the Seged in Jerusalem. This will be followed by a discussion on the youth's connection to the celebration.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Religious experience on the mountain

Since the 1980s, the Steering Centre for Ethiopian Immigrants has been acting to advance the issues of the community, including organising the Seged. The head of the organisation, Adiso, who emigrated from Ethiopia at a young age and served as the first Ethiopian Knesset (Israeli Parliament) member, acted in collaboration with heads of other organisations of the immigrants from Ethiopia, in order to impart renewed content to the holiday. The motive of members of these in-between generation members in leading the community was ethnic-political. They viewed the Seged as a mean for demonstrating ethnic identity, exposing their tradition to the Israeli public and obtaining the establishment's recognition of their unique culture.⁴⁵

The observations and written sources indicate that the Seged celebration managed by the Steering Centre for Ethiopian Immigrants had a fixed pattern. Thousands of celebrators came from the early hours of the morning (in the 1990s about 15,000 and in recent decades approximately 20,000-30,000) to the Government House promenade in Jerusalem to celebrate. The celebrators also included people not from the Ethiopian community, whose numbers increase every year.^{46,47}

Many celebrators came by organized transportation of hundreds of busses. This expressed a deep change in the essence of the pilgrimage as a mean of self-denial for forgiveness of the person's sins. The adults fasted and wore traditional white clothes. A large stage was positioned overlooking a view of the Temple Mount. The religious priests (kessoch) arrived from nine in the morning. They wore white hoods and richly-embroidered robes and were accompanied by men carrying splendid parasols, which indicated their high status, as well as people who carried the Torah scrolls for them.

At ten o'clock, the kessoch began praying in the Ge'ez language, accompanied by a melody. The prayer was translated by one of the kessoch into Amharic, which the audience understands. It included praise to God for redeeming them from exile, asking for forgiveness, and hope that the Temple will be rebuilt. The audience, especially the adults, crowded around the kessoch and the excitement of the religious experience was reflected in their eyes. They raised their arms upwards in supplication (mainly the women), bowed and answered Amen.

From noon until one o'clock there was a break in the kessoch's prayer for speeches by public figures, who complimented the Ethiopian immigrants on their culture, stressed the actions they took for this community and promised to support turning the Seged into a national holiday. The politicians' participation also served the political needs of the Ethiopian community's social activists, who wanted to use the Seged for obtaining national recognition of the holiday, their

culture, and for demanding their rights as equal citizens.

After the speeches, the kessoch continued with their prayers, and this continued until two o'clock. Because it was not possible to hold a great feast for a large number of people, this tradition was not preserved, and each family celebrated at home.

The Seged celebration as a social encounter

Many youth, pupils, soldiers, members of youth movements and higher education students came to the Seged celebrations. The religious among them wore white clothes, stood close to the stage, and prayed with the adults. Joseph said:

I love the Seged holiday. I always travel to Jerusalem with my friends. Sometimes we organise transportation together. I take a day's leave from the army, I fast on this day and am strict about wearing white clothes as was customary in Ethiopia. When I arrive at the place, it is very important to me to be as close to the kessoch as possible, so that I can hear them and feel the sanctity in their prayers.

Tehila explained:

For me, the Seged is a holiday that passed from generation to generation. It is an important and significant holiday that expresses unity, and symbolises the belief that they will live to immigrate to Israel.

Rachel added:

At first, I went to the Seged out of curiosity. Today I go to be a part of the celebration, like my family. The kessoch pray and give thanks for being able to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem every year. What I learn from the Seged is the perseverance, courage, persistence, desire and belief in God that if you want something you can achieve it.

However, many youth, especially secular ones, referred to the Seged as a social event. They stressed that it is important for them to participate in the Seged every year in order to strengthen their fraternity with their brothers from the community, and regarded this as connecting to the roots of their culture. However, the majority did not connect to the religious ritual itself. They stood or wandered about far from the stage, and did not pray.^{48,49,50} The soldier Nathaniel shared his experiences:

The Seged holiday is one of the most fun days, because on this day I can obtain leave from the army. Another thing, on this day I can meet all my friends from the time of boarding school and my cousins from all over the country. There are beautiful girls whose phone number one can get on that day, to ask to be friends on Facebook. The truth is, some of the kessoch and old people are a little boring and cumbersome, because it is long and I don't understand what they say.

Shiran explained the significance of the social encounter for her:

I am always happy and excited before the holiday, expecting to meet all my friends. This is also an opportunity to see a lot of relatives that I don't always have time to meet. On the day of the holiday, I and a group of my girlfriends from high school travel together to the Seged. The holiday is important to the youth who were born in Israel both for social and for religious reasons. I don't think that these contradict each other. It is true that many go there for the social meetings, but we also care about the holiday itself. My father always told us about the Seged, and how it was celebrated in

Ethiopia. I do not understand Amharic, so it is a little difficult for me to understand the meaning of the prayers. Also the sermons are long. But the general atmosphere is very good for the youth, even if they do not always understand the meaning.

Other youth voiced criticism of the improper behaviour of youth during the holiday. They also implicitly or explicitly accused those responsible for organising the gathering, and called on them and on the religious leadership to include the youth in the celebrations. It is apparent that they consider the continuation of tradition as important, but want to give it their own interpretation in order to make it relevant. As youth who were educated in Israel, most of them demand turning it into an integral part of Israeli culture. Mazal indicated:

All the girls from the boarding schools come to the Seged, and the boys come to meet the girls. A few years ago the dress was more modest, but today the place has turned into a fashion show of youth, and a place for girls and boys to meet. That is why I stopped going to the Seged in Jerusalem.

Einlam, a soldier, said:

I have a personal problem in going to Jerusalem on the Seged, because what one sees there on this dignified day is the kessoch praying with the adults. But the youth have turned the place into a pub. The youth smoke and drink, and a holiday should not look like that.

Meital supported this demand:

We should continue to celebrate the Seged, because this is our holiday. But it lacks content. Every year I come to Jerusalem with the expectation that this year it will be different. I have girlfriends who stopped coming. I am among the youth who try to be near the area of the kessoch and the adults. I stand near them, but unfortunately I do not have much in common with them. They pray in the Ge'ez language and I don't understand the prayer. The promenade has turned into a meeting place. I am shocked by how some of the girls dress, as if they came to a dancing party in a discotheque. This is a holiday of prayer. Where is the respect for tradition? Many of the youth don't even know the significance of the holiday. I want the organisers to act to include us young people, to find the way so that we will also return home at the end of the day with the feeling that we participated in something holy. I also ask that the adults and the kessoch have us participate in the praying. In a few years it will be we who have to preserve the tradition.⁴⁹

Preparations for the Seged in the education system

In order to draw the youth to the hidden meanings of the Seged and the community's heritage, the Israel Association of Ethiopian Jews initiated preparation activities for the Seged in the education system. Already in 1994, the Ministry of Education established a Steering Centre for Ethiopian Immigrants in the Education System with the aim of promoting the absorption of Ethiopian pupils. All workers of this centre are of Ethiopian origin.⁴⁵

Establishment of the Steering Centre expressed a change in Israel's absorption policy. Since the 1970s, and especially since the 1990s, a pluralistic approach evolved that replaced the assimilation policy in immigrant absorption. The new approach expresses a declared policy of consideration of the cultural difference and recognition of the immigrants' cultural values.⁵¹ The

pluralistic approach is expressed in the education institutions, and in preparation activities for the Seged held in the 1990 in institutions in with numerous Ethiopian pupils.⁵²

From the written sources it appears that the preparation activity of the Steering Centre for Ethiopian Immigrants in the Education System has become more intense in recent decades. The centre's manager, David Marat, who emigrated from Ethiopia in the 1980s at the age of 18, declared:

We aspire to draw the youth to the spiritual and Jewish significance of the Seged holiday, and to connect members of the community to the culture from which they came. The Seged has meanings with which every Jew can identify. If we succeed in adapting the Seged to the new circumstances of life in Israel, we hope it will be recognised as a holiday for all Jews in Israel and around the world.⁵³

The Steering Centre implemented its program using Ethiopian educational mediators who are employed in education institutions that include Ethiopian pupils. The program was uniform, with small variations. Each mediator prepared special activities on the Seged holiday, culture in Ethiopia and immigration to Israel in his educational institution. The activities were intended for all pupils, with cooperation of the school principals, educational team, pupils, parents, and the community's kessoch.^{54,55}

The activities in the school were held for a week prior to the Seged. The peak occurred on the last day, which was devoted to the culture of the local community of immigrants from Ethiopia, with participation of the parents. It included shows, plays, traditional dances, Ethiopian foods, works of art, an exhibition, a quiz and a performance. On the day of the Seged, some of the education institutions did not hold lessons, and the pupils travelled to the celebration in Jerusalem.

The testimonies indicate that by pointing to the Seged as an integral part of the education system, the education system achieved two goals in implementing the pluralistic approach: (1) An educational goal of reducing the sense of alienation and breaking down the social barriers between the Ethiopian pupils and the others. The Seged celebration afforded the Ethiopian students a sense of pride and equality in their relations with their peers and educators. (2) A public goal of taking a clear stance that gave public expression to the full acceptance of the immigrants from Ethiopia as Jews. The Seged celebration communicated the message that the holiday is not only the holiday of the Ethiopian immigrants, but rather of the entire educational establishment, which adopts the holiday as part of the Jewish calendar. Michal, a pupil, shared her feelings:

In the school celebration, strong emotions of happiness overtake me. I feel that the Israelis accept us with love and happiness when they celebrate the Seged with us, and devote an entire day of ceremonies and activities to this. I am excited that there is agreement among the pupils and the teachers to accept another custom, which originates in the Ethiopian community.

Edna, an educational mediator, told:

Many pupils who do not belong to the community of immigrants from Ethiopia came to the culture evening with their parents. For them, this was an opportunity to become acquainted with the community's culture. There was good cooperation between the entire staff and the pupils. It influenced everyone, including the

educational team and the parents. The members of the community had a feeling of pride and happiness over the attitude toward their culture.⁵³

Neta, a non-Ethiopian pupil, said:

I learned to respect the community, the difficulties and the impossible journey that these dear people made in order to reach Israel. We learned things that Israeli society does not really know. The celebrations at the school dispersed social stresses, led to a change in the feelings of the Ethiopian girls. They came out proud and empowered, began to take a more active part in the school activities, and felt greater belonging. My Ethiopian girlfriends said that they feel that the school loves them, and from that day it is also their home.⁴⁹

Irit, a school principal said:

Together with the mediators, we prepared activities for a day devoted to the Seged. There were activity stations where the children learned about the customs, dances, language, dress, utensils, food. There were games, competitions and quizzes. After that the entire school and the pupils put on a show on the significance of the holiday and danced Ethiopian dances. All pupils had an opportunity to be acquainted with the Ethiopian community, and the children were proud of their culture and their parents. The Seged connected the Ethiopian mothers to the school, and after the Seged they felt free to come there. Later, the mediator established a parents group. The Seged opened a gate to communication between the parents and the school.⁵⁶

The Seged in the youth movements

Organisations of Ethiopian immigrants also 'recruited' youth movements for promoting the Seged among the youth of the community. They regarded these as important socialisation agents for connecting the youth to their ethnic tradition and to communicating the spiritual and social messages of the Seged. They also endeavoured to promote multicultural openness among members of these movements.

The Bnei Akiva movement, as a religious-national movement, was prominently active in the Seged celebrations, out of identification with the social-religious messages of the holiday. The observations and interviews show that after preparations for the Seged, hundreds of adult Bnei Akiva alumni, instructors and coordinators arrived for the celebration at the Government House promenade in organised transportation. The instructor Rachel told:

For one week we learned about the significance of the Seged holiday and why it is celebrated. We had all kinds of activities related to the holiday, and ate Ethiopian foods. I love this holiday because it is special, and it is fun to see many people from different places that come to celebrate together.

Tehila, the branch coordinator, added: 'We want to be with Ethiopian friends. We came to participate with them, on their holiday, without ethnic group differences'.

Bnei Akiva youth sang and danced to the sounds of Amharic music, and shared with the celebrators, with emphasis on the youth. They set up a table on the promenade, on which they placed prayer books, and passed out information brochures to the participants. In a tent which they put up, they gave explanations on the essence of the holiday and read Psalms in Hebrew, contrary to the traditional content. The experiences of Ethiopian youth who are members of the Bnei Akiva movement shows awareness of the importance of the holiday and its values, and their

connection to the tradition and ethnic community through the holiday. They expressed their aspiration to a merging of the Seged in Israeli culture.⁵⁷ Abrash, a coordinator of a Bnei Akiva branch, told:

In my opinion, it is necessary to connect via the holiday. On the day of the Seged we first allow time to hear the prayer of the kessoch. But after that we hold our own activities for the members. We read Psalms, we sing Bnei Akiva songs, translate some of the Seged prayers into Hebrew. The youth need something to which they can connect.

Rina explained:

Until not long ago my attitude toward the Seged was superficial. But when I understood that this tradition is a spiritual value that should not be lost, I began to research my roots, which were almost lost to me over time. When reading the theoretical material about the Seged, there was one word that made a deep impression on me, and this word is yearning.

Tali said:

The Seged holiday is an excellent opportunity for our closed community to open its gates to the rest of society and contribute to Israeli multiculturalism. This is an opportunity for Israeli society to become acquainted with our culture and customs. The Seged is an expression for the yearnings to Jerusalem. This is a time of personal and national soul-searching, where I stop to think and understand where I am positioned with reference to society and to the Creator. I suggest that society adopt this beautiful holiday as a national holiday, and will celebrate it together with our community.

The Scouts youth movement also participated in the Seged celebrations, with the aim of drawing them to the movement and its values and to encourage a multicultural perception among its members. In the activities in preparation for the Seged, the movement stressed traditional values of the Ethiopian Jews, as well as the connection between the Seged and Zionism. A Scouts band held shows in the movement's branches around the country. Hundreds of youth and instructors from the older members of the Scouts, about half of them Ethiopian, came to the Seged celebration. They gave flowers to the adults and in the tent they put up, gave out information pamphlets and organised activities focusing on the holiday.^{49,58}

Art and music events

With the aim of connecting the youth to the Seged, and to encourage them to participate in the celebrations, it was decided, in the first decade of the 21st century, that organisations of Ethiopian Jews in Israel will hold additional educational and social activities for the youth at the celebration site in Jerusalem: lectures and discussions on the Seged holiday and its significance, workshops for studying texts from the kessoch's prayers translated into Hebrew, an exhibition, a show of a dance group and more.^{53,59}

After the Seged holiday was given national recognition in 2008, the community's organisations made many attempts to give the holiday a broader national character.^{60,61,62} Before and after the religious ritual, events not essentially religious were held with government and municipal funding: movies; plays; culture evenings; seminar evenings for youth on the significance of the Seged; musical events; a festival of Ethiopian-Israeli art.

It is apparent that the organisers made an effort to disseminate and assimilate the holiday with emphasis on culture, which is a broad denominator that may draw the youth of the Ethiopian community and the Israeli public. A large part of these events themselves became a tradition in the celebration of the Seged in Israel. In this, the Seged reflected the goals of the organisers: to connect between generations, communities and different cultures in order to promote the holiday and the community.

Young Ethiopian participants expressed support for such events. Their testimonies indicate that tradition is important to them, and they feel pride from the fact that their ethnic holiday is taking root in Israel. For example, Golan said:

It is important that there is such an opportunity to expose our culture. Society knows us only in negative contexts, and such an event can counterbalance this. The visitors have an opportunity to understand that this is an entire culture that represents years of tradition. The event exposes the Israelis to our mother culture.

Sigal indicated:

For years, our heritage was getting lost, and now I think that it is finally returning to itself. My generation hardly knows the language. I don't know Amharic, and this sometimes creates communication problems. I even thought of taking a course for learning the language. Today we already understand that it is very important to preserve the past. The young generation should be told the story of our immigration to Israel. However, contrary to what we thought, the youth today have greater pride and are not ashamed of who they are.

Idit admitted:

For years I lived in confusion. This began with denial of my past. You want to be more Israeli, you forget the language, relinquish and leave behind what you brought from home. But as years went by, I underwent a process. You consolidate your personal identity, accumulate more confidence and recognise and appreciate who you are, not only in talk, but also in feeling. For example, I decided to strengthen the Amharic language that was almost forgotten. I began talking to my parents, who at first did not understand me, because in the past I insisted on speaking only Hebrew. But I came from a respectful place, and they understand that something else is happening, that it is important to us not to forget and disappear. I ask questions about the Seged holiday, ask to hear the story of the immigration, and want to help preserve our tradition.

Miriam said:

The contribution of the Seged holiday law is great, in that Israeli society recognises another new culture and will have knowledge about the holiday. The law's importance for the community is that we preserve our culture and customs. The law strengthens and helps each member of our community to connect to his own self, to know where he came from, and how much our ancestors sacrificed in order to immigrate to Israel. Also the youth. Before they had no awareness, and now they will know about the holiday.

4. CONCLUSIONS

This article focuses on the manner in which the ethnic identity of youth from families of immigrants from Ethiopia is consolidated via traditional Seged celebrations. This is a pilgrimage holiday that the Ethiopian Jews celebrated on 29 November. It is a day of fasting, purification and prayer that took place on high places, during which the religious priests read portions of the Torah and prayed for redemption in the Land of Israel. The Seged strengthened the religious belief of the Ethiopian Jews and helped consolidate their identity as a minority ethnic group within a multi-ethnic society.

The findings show that on the day of the Seged, the youth of the Ethiopian community come to the site of the religious ritual in Jerusalem en masse. Contrary to the adults, most of them do not fast, and for them the celebration comprises an opportunity for a social encounter. They also participate in Seged celebrations in the schools and in holiday events that local urban councils hold around the country, where the Ethiopian immigrants' culture is expressed: religious customs, history, art, music, dance, foods, exhibitions, movies.

From the talks with the Ethiopian youth I gain the impression that their participation in these events strengthens their sense of confidence and pride in their ethnic identity, their connection to the community of origin and their belonging to the absorbing society.^{38,40} In these events, in which they 'host' young Israeli youth, they feel confident enough to selectively return to their traditional roots. In a society that encourages pluralism, it is easier for descendants of the immigrants from Ethiopia to conduct themselves in both cultures.⁶³

In a research on Ethiopian youth's perceptions of their socio-cultural adjustment in Israel, Korem and Horenczyk⁶⁴ reported on the youth's ambivalence regarding the values of their culture of origin, which is characterised by esteem on the one hand, and by a feeling that the culture of origin is not effective for social coping in Israel on the other hand. This study shows that in the events of the Seged holiday, the youth use their culture of origin as a resource for coping with difficulties in Israel. In spite of private and collective experiences of rejection and negative stereotypes, which originate in their skin colour and in the doubting of their Judaism, the youth proudly exhibit the symbols of their ethnic identity in public, and the marking of their ethnic boundaries.⁶⁵

Through these symbols, the Ethiopian youth can present themselves as having a social message that is relevant to the entire society, and negotiate over their position in the social space.⁶⁶ The national recognition of the Seged in 2008 strengthened the youth's expectations for the taking root of the holiday and the community's culture in Israeli society. It seems to me that this expectation is meaningful for them, because it actually involves a solution to the intercultural conflict in their self-identity.

Social-political activists who headed the organisations of the Ethiopian immigrants fulfilled a major socialisation role during the identity consolidation process. These leaders, members of the intermediate generation, who were familiar with both cultures, are those who imparted the Seged renewed relevant content to which the youth could connect, since they saw it as an intergenerational bridge, absorbing and absorbed, past and present, tradition and modernity as well as between nationalism and ethnic particularism.

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Conflict of interest statement

The author declares that she has no competing interests.

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