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Our Ink Serves as Voice for Those Who Cannot Speak

In my novel *Shell* [ሃሻል] (2006), I tried to portray a character named Mesfin, an Ethiopian Jew. This group is known as "falasha", meaning immigrants, by the most significant part of Ethiopian society. However, the Jews believe that this name is being used against them, even believing that others refer to them as "buda", a colloquialism for those with the ability to cast an evil eye. And in fact, many people do suspect that the falasha have the ability to cause harm to those who see them or are seen by them, making an effort to avoid their perceived evil, damage – their likeness even. People marginalize and isolate the falasha for a variety of reasons. Their way of life was simpler, and they typically relied on making pottery to survive. Additionally, the novel's protagonist Mesifin said:

I am like a Gypsy; a Gypsy has neither a home nor a place to return to. The entire world disdains the Gypsy. People only enjoy their art and their music. The gypsies are constantly on the move, they are despised, and are notorious for their constant alms-begging to survive.

This character justifying himself in this way and the society I come from are the same. Although our carrier and hand-made products are helpful, some Ethiopian communities do not consider us part of it. To them, we are outsiders.

These are not the only groups experiencing exclusion and constant labeling as homeless and rootless. Many people have been cut off from society; in every corner of the world. Today, the most important thing is to go beyond simply welcoming them and making them feel at home. They constantly experience stress on some level, always concerned that they won't be able to lead the everyday lives they aim for. There is hatred, harm, and even needless killing.

Let me tell you about the Fuga clan. They are found in Ethiopia and are part of the Gurage society. However, their way of eating, clothing, thinking, and life are quite different from the others. Fugas are relatively isolated; the rest of society doesn't interact much with them. Like slaves, people don't want the Fugas to multiply in number. Yet they are good medicine men. If accidents happen to members of families, it's the Fugas who are sought to treat such people.

I have seen several such kinds of things in our country. In Ethiopia, there is a place called Keffa region, home of the Manja tribe. Manjas are treated poorly and seen as part of the lower social class. The upper-class claim that these Manja's are not trustworthy, that they are backward, and eat foods that religions prohibit. Mainstream society trashes them and throws them away as far as possible. Like outcasts everywhere, they face difficulties with social interaction and financial assistance. Did you know that in southern Ethiopia, around the Omo River, in the twenty-first century, having a twin is often seen as a taboo and a curse, with problems following them as they grow up?

These socially excluded groups hate both those who pushed them out and those who remained silent while they were pushed out. They despise those who choose to stay silent and complain about it.

What does marginalization mean? I tried to make the point earlier that isolating means violating a person's

human rights. Marginalizing and claiming that “I am wheat and they are chaff” undermines a person's position. It takes extreme greed to isolate others so that one’s jewelry shines brightly even while disregarding other people's nakedness in the cold. Marginalizing others means that I don't mind if there is chaos as long as it doesn't get me into trouble.

As Ernest Hemingway once said, “As a writer, you should not judge, you should understand,” an author’s primary task is to alleviate this indifference.

It’s not true that marginalized people have suffered losses and need our assistance; instead, both the isolated and the isolators have suffered losses. They were detained in the name of progress, religion, culture, and established social norms. The world undoubtedly loses a great deal of glory, greatness, and depth by isolating them.

What will free these prisoners? Will it be ink? This is nothing new. The great author John Steinbeck frequently wrote about those marginalized and outcasts from society. In *Of Mice and Men*, we see a character struggling because he had lost a leg in an accident, a woman struggling because she is a woman, and another character because of his mental illness.

More than anything else, creative works do a great job of assisting in the healing process of societies. We must listen to the voice of the tortured people. We have to stay awake; otherwise, our silence will eventually scream back at us.