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DOUBLE ENGAGEMENTS:
THE TRANSNATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF ETHIOPIAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE
WASHINGTON, D.C., METROPOLITAN AREA

ABSTRACT

This dissertation explores the transnational experiences of Ethiopian immigrants in the Washington metropolitan area across generational units. Much of the recent research on transnationalism has focused on the ties immigrants maintain in the sending country. This dissertation adds to this analysis by looking at how the actions of Ethiopian immigrants contribute to nation building in the United States as well as in Ethiopia. The double engagements of Ethiopians challenge either/or views of immigrants and demonstrates how transnationality works in both directions.

My research, based on 12 months of fieldwork in the metropolitan area of Washington, D.C., used participant observation, interviews, life histories and extended conversations to provide the first comprehensive study of first- and second-generation Ethiopian migrants using the transnational perspective. I explore the factors that motivate migrants to maintain transnational connections. I argue that for first-generation immigrants, the conditions of exit greatly shape the types and nature of transnational engagements as much as the receiving-country contexts. In addition, Ethiopian immigrants arrived in three distinct generational units, each of which had starkly differing experiences in Ethiopia and in the United States. These experiences have influenced their priorities regarding adaptation and transnational connections. Largely as the consequence of incongruent pre-immigration experiences, some Ethiopians are heavily involved in political transnationalism while others favor philanthropic giving.

I also analyze the transnational activities of second-generation Ethiopians, which include visiting the ancestral land, sponsoring children in the homeland, working for philanthropic NGOs in Ethiopia, shaping definitions of Ethiopian Americans, defending the

homeland in the United States, and taking part in political action, especially the hard work of building a voting bloc. Both the diverse generational units of the first- and second-generation Ethiopian immigrants grapple with politics, family loyalty, nationalism, obligations to those left behind, differing views of success, racial views, and many more transnational ties, all the while gauging how far to integrate into U.S. society.

**DOUBLE ENGAGEMENTS:
THE TRANSNATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF ETHIOPIAN
IMMIGRANTS IN THE WASHINGTON, D.C., METROPOLITAN AREA**

By:
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A Dissertation
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in Anthropology in the Graduate School of Syracuse University

Syracuse University
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Dedications

To my late father Kebede Haile
& a renowned anthropologist Professor Judith-Maria Buechler

**Double Engagements:
The Transnational Experiences of Ethiopian Immigrants in the Washington, D.C.,
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PREFACE

It was the 4th of July 2008 weekend, America's Independence Day. Tens of thousands of Ethiopians converged on Washington, D.C.—the city most Ethiopians living in other parts of the United States call a new homeland, a home away from home. Some visitors came from Canada and some from as far away as Europe, increasing the already-high number of Ethiopians in the metro area. The main reason for the gathering was the annual Ethiopian Sports Federation in North America (ESFNA) soccer league tournament. About twenty-eight Ethiopian American teams participated in the week-long playoffs, which took place at the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium. There were so many Ethiopian and Ethiopian-descended spectators in the stadium that it looked as if a soccer game in Addis Ababa had been transported to Washington, D.C. Hotels and restaurants, particularly Ethiopian-owned businesses, were busy catering to the large turnout. It was the most spectacular and colorful event I had ever witnessed.

Indeed, soccer has a huge fan base in Ethiopia, and Ethiopians in the United States have brought this enthusiasm and energy with them. In North America, however, the sport has become a medium for bringing together the diaspora community. “I have never seen any other country out of Africa, or elsewhere for that matter, that brings thousands of their people in the diaspora together the way Ethiopians have done during this week of the Ethiopian Sports Federation's soccer games. . . . It makes me feel very happy to be part of it,” community activist Obang Metho remarked. For the past twenty-five years, the tournament has become the Ethiopian community's version of an annual carnival and a venue where identities are affirmed, negotiated, and transformed. In this respect, it is comparable to the colorful DC Caribbean Carnival that takes place every summer.

The ESFNA was established in 1984 following the arrival of thousands of political refugees fleeing the military junta in Ethiopia that snatched power from the hands of a civilian administration (Getahun 2009). ESFNA's vibrant and annual tournaments seek to strengthen and promote "goodwill between the Ethiopian communities in North America and [create] a bridge where people from Ethiopia and North America can interact in a mutually beneficial manner" (ESFNA 2009). The federation has clearly lived up to this objective. The annual ESFNA tournament, which is organized in a different city each year, is more than a sporting event. It has become the moment to articulate and display Ethiopian/Habashaⁱ transnational identities. Thus, the event is a venue for all sorts of interest groups and activities, ranging from cultural performances to fund-raising events for philanthropic projects. Some showcase traditional and popular Ethiopian culture through music performances and other forms of the arts. In 2008, posters advertising parties, concerts, and even fashion shows appeared throughout the Little Ethiopia neighborhood of Washington, the city blocks centered on the intersection of 9th and U streets.

More important, the week of the ESFNA tournament is best known for a major passion of some Ethiopian diaspora community members—transnational politics. Several political parties purposely arrange their annual meetings around this time to take advantage of the large gatherings. At numerous meetings, people hear fresh political news from home and take part in extended discussions and gossip in restaurants and cafés. The political identities of attendees are refreshed and their patriotic fervor is recharged. The event also presents a rare occasion for Ethiopian political organizations to raise money and recruit new members by appealing to the mantra that undergirds patriotism in Ethiopia—the only uncolonized country in Africa. In addition to those who were engaged in homeland politics, many organizations and individuals in 2008 were busy raising funds for food crisis relief, HIV/AIDS prevention

projects, assistance for street children, and so forth. For instance, the charitable organization Hiwot HIV/AIDS Prevention and Care and Support Organization (HAPCSO) rented a booth from the federation to display their humanitarian activities. They were also selling handmade cultural artifacts produced by project beneficiaries. Beyond the many beneficiaries' pictures they had posted on the front door of the kiosk, what attracted my attention was a large framed photo of President Clinton. The picture was taken during Clinton's visit to the organization's headquarters in Addis Ababa in 2008. His image on the poster lent credibility and international recognition to the organization, and HAPCSO uses that poster to funds.

Interestingly, members of the second generation of Ethiopian Americans were also drawn into this immigrant transnational social networkⁱⁱ. The federation hopes to inculcate a sense of pride in Ethiopian heritage among this group. ESFNA's projects are designed to impress upon the second generation the need to do well in school and be part of the future of Ethiopia. One such project is the financial assistance ESFNA offers to all soccer players who have a grade point average of 3.2 and higher and who are pursuing or intending to pursue higher education. But the federation has gone even further by including students who do not play soccer. In order to be eligible non-soccer player applicants must have a GPA of 3.0 or above and be accepted into an accredited four-year college. Applicants must write an essay on the theme of how they intend to be part of the future of Ethiopia's development efforts and become the future leaders of the country. At the same time, the second generation of Ethiopian Americans used the 2008 tournament as an opportunity to register as many Ethiopian immigrant voters as possible and encouraged them to vote in the upcoming presidential election.

The activities I saw at the ESFNA event in 2008 are prime examples of the kinds of dual engagement I describe in this dissertation. The event contributed to strengthening the

receiving-country context by injecting millions of dollars into the local economy. It celebrated core American values: Ethiopian Americans were enjoying the freedom and liberty associated with July 4th and demonstrating their yearning for similar socioeconomic and political progress in their old home. The Ethiopian flag that flies alongside the Stars and Stripes in areas where Ethiopian groceries, restaurants, and other businesses have concentrated testifies to this claim.

^aMost Ethiopian immigrants in the Washington metropolitan area refer to themselves as Habasha. For the present purpose Habasha is an ethno-racial construct among Ethiopian immigrants that often emphasizes Semitic origin and highlights historical glory of Ethiopia. Yet, Habasha identity is not identical with Ethiopian identity. Several ethnic groups in Ethiopia reject being called Habasha because the construct does not include Ethiopians of the South and South West (Habecker 2011: 5-6). However, Habasha identity received wider popularity in the Washington metro area partly because of many of the migrants in the metro are dominantly Amhara and Tigriyan ethnic groups who claim Semitic roots.

^bFor the present purpose immigrant transnationalism may be defined as the process by which *immigrants and their children* build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement as part of their daily lives (Glick Schiller et al. 1992: 1).

Chapter I

Introduction

In the Fall of 2009 I spent almost half a day with Ayu, 62, an owner of a thriving business establishment in the Washington metro area. We picked up his kids from a suburban private school, shopped for Christmas gifts, and ended the day with a late lunch at a high-end restaurant. Although he had initially agreed to give me only half an hour because of his busy schedule and his distrust of me, we quickly established a rapport. He was interested to hear about my background, particularly my rural upbringing, because I was in his royal family creed. Ayu told me that he came to the United States during early 1970s as a graduate student. His father, who worked as a high-ranking bureaucrat for the imperial government, had secured a government scholarship for him and partly covered his expenses. “I had a privileged life in Ethiopia,” he says unabashedly. Like some of his friends, Ayu talked about how easy it was for him to come to the United States, how he was welcomed into the United States with open arms. Although he had no intention of staying after he graduated, the 1974/75 revolution and the radical makeover in Ethiopia that ended the imperial system kept him here. Return to Ethiopia would have been fatal.

“A day begets another,” he says, and he put the sojourn mentality to rest. He unpacked his suitcase and got on with his life. He started a business not even remotely related to his field of study, which was chemistry. Despite the challenges he faced during the early years of the business, he was able to succeed. Perhaps because almost all of his parents’ rental homes and estates in Ethiopia were confiscated, he started from a scratch. Ayu used the terms

“military,” “junta,” and “*Derg*¹” interchangeably to express his perpetual disdain for the government that nationalized private properties and deprived him of his privileged status. He has adopted the narrative of a hardworking immigrant, as someone who pulled himself up by his bootstraps. Ayu lives the American dream. He resides in one of the richest neighborhoods of the metro area. He put it well: “Life cannot get better than this!” He is very appreciative of the opportunities America has afforded him.

At the same time, Ayu talks endlessly and fondly about Ethiopia, particularly how he misses the social life of his native country. As he talks of his “infinite” love for both Ethiopia and the United States, it is as if he has two lovers. His narratives are filled with how Ethiopia is the birthplace of humanity, as evidenced by the location of the 3-million-year-old skeletal remains of Lucy in the Afar Depression; how the country’s culture is ancient; and how Ethiopia was never colonized, unlike other African nations. He also feels that more than all the other African nations, Ethiopia has successfully melded multiple ethnic groups into a national identity: “I have always said that if there was any country in Africa that has reached the state of the nation-state where various ethnic groups have coalesced to become a nation the nearest one was Ethiopia,” he told me. The Ethiopia he described to me reminded me of the Ethiopia Selam, another study participant, had heard about from her grandmother. Her grandmother used to tell her, “In Ethiopia the oranges are sweeter. The water heals your skin. The food tastes great and [you will hear] all the good stories you can possibly imagine.”

Ayu has been home only once, in 1991, following a regime change. He saw then that the grandiose image he had in his mind of Ethiopia no longer exists, if it ever did. He could not reconcile and come to terms with the current situation of the country. Like many of his

¹ *Derg* or *Dergue* is literally an Amharic word for committee—the socialist ruling body that ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991.

generational units, Ayu blamed the Russians and the *generation unit*² who succumbed to communism for the current grim condition of the country and for the fact that the *Oxford English Dictionary* cites Ethiopia as the example that defines the word “famine.” As we spent more time together, Ayu began to sound somehow bitter and vindictive, and very conscious of generational boundaries. In his view, the generational units that embraced communism and thus brought about the demise of the imperial regime were “kids” who did not know what exactly they were doing. But he was even more harshly critical of the Ethiopians who had come to the United States after the 1990s, a group that includes me.

The generation immediately after the Italian occupation, which is my generation, from 1941 when the emperor returned from exile to 1974, when he was overthrown, that generation had a very peaceful life. We did not have so much ups and down in our political and social life. All our attention was to see what we can do for our country. You can imagine. . . . These Ethiopians who are coming now are slicks. They are acting like the world owes them something. They come here telling all kind of lies and they want easy money. I was so embarrassed the other day when the airport security officials caught an Ethiopian stowaway. I just cannot bring myself to believe that things are this desperate in Ethiopia. I am sure some of them think the US streets are paved with gold. Very bad for them; they do not know how hard it is to live in the US.

Fifty-three-year-old Daniel, another study participant, has a quite different narrative about Ethiopia from the one Ayu presented. He came to the United States during the 1980s. Like Ayu, Daniel talks about the 3,000-year history of Ethiopia. They agree about its natural beauty and the “pristine” nature of the country. Ayu and Daniel also agree that the young

²People often lumped together as the first generation immigrants mostly belong to different historical periods, facing different historical circumstances at their arrival and coming from a society that itself was different from the one earlier migrants had left. Following Karl Mannheim (1952) and a number of researchers who used generation and generational analysis to make sense of contemporary international migration (see, Eckstein 2009; Berg 2011; Erdmans 1998) I use generational analysis to highlight profound internal differences, tensions and conflicts among Ethiopian immigrants. Thus, generational units may be defined as individuals experiencing the same concrete historical problems just like other members of a society but who “work up the material of the common experiences in different specific ways” (Mannheim 1952: 305-306). In other words, generational units embody an identity of responses and views about events. First generation immigrants, therefore, may constitute a number of different and conflicting generational units (Kertzner 1983:141-142; See chapter-2).

generation are “political voids” and that Ethiopian Americans are thus not nationalistic enough. But they would not see eye to eye on the economic and political accomplishments of the monarchy. To Daniel, Ayu and his generational units are feudalistic exploiters and “spoiled school drop outs” who came to the United States at the expense of poor people. Daniel categorized himself as a member of a generation units that was ahead of its time, avid nationalists and visionaries who worked hard to reverse entrenched inequalities. He feels that his generation “shed blood, sweat and tears” to make things better for the masses and have the scars to show for their efforts. They embraced communism and started a populist revolution on the basis of “land to the tiller.” They did not reach all of their goals. A military that was initially supportive later turned against civilians and almost exterminated the younger generation. Thousands of political activists died for the betterment of the country. Many of them, including Daniel, fled the country to escape inevitable murder, languished for years in refugee camps, and finally ended up in the United States.

Since they came to the United States, Daniel and his colleagues have been working tirelessly to change the political direction of Ethiopia. The closest they have come to doing that was during the 2005 parliamentary election, when opposition parties supported and financed by the diaspora won a number of parliamentary seats. Yet the outcome was a complete fiasco. Many who had won seats in parliament decided not to take their seats under a government that they claimed “refused to acknowledge defeat in a democratic election.” The ruling Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party (EPRDF) cracked down and squashed the uprisings that followed with an unexpectedly heavy hand. Politically active members of the Ethiopian diaspora, including Daniel, were partially to blame for the outcome because they pressured opposition party members to boycott the parliament in the hope of forcing the

government to yield. This strategy did not produce the results they hoped. Any flickers of political opening in Ethiopia that existed before 2005 have since been extinguished.

Daniel has since shifted his focus to working for his homeland through the U.S. political process. During our second-round interview an extremely disappointed but hopeful Daniel went through a pile of paper and handed me a document titled “How to Lobby the U.S. House and Senate.” This pamphlet was generated during the campaign for the Ethiopia Democracy and Accountability Act of 2007 (hereafter H.R. 2003 or the bill). The bill was intended to reprimand the Ethiopian government for its crackdown after the 2005 parliamentary election and the resulting narrowing of political opportunities in Ethiopia. The bill also sought to make the construction of democratic institutions in Ethiopia a condition of the aid it receives from the United States. Although the bill is an important statement of the views of politically active Ethiopian Americans, it died in the Senate.

Daniel participates enthusiastically in the events surrounding the occasion of the annual ESFNA soccer tournament. The most fascinating aspect of the political meetings was the passion and intensity of the discussions. The yearning of the attendees for a political change in Ethiopia demonstrated the extent to which transnationalism runs through the veins of many Ethiopians. One of these meetings was the highlight of my entire year of fieldwork. As always, the gathering started more than two hours later than the time announced on community radio stations and web sites. Slowly but surely the conference room at the Marriott Hotel in downtown D.C filled with people. The meeting was also broadcast over the Internet. The discussions about the political future of Ethiopia heated up when a much-anticipated speaker, Professor Mesfin Woldemariam, an academician turned human rights activist turned opposition political leader, took the podium. His prayer for divine intervention

struck a deep chord: “Ethiopia is in a deep serious problem. Ethiopia is stressed. The Ethiopian people are in a deep serious problem. We, the people, are unable to agree. We are unable to cooperate.” Before he finished, many in the audience were in tears. Some of them were struggling hard with raw emotions. It took some time for people to stop sobbing.

Exactly what was going through their minds was hard to understand. I turned to Daniel to ask what was making the people cry. Even though I had asked a question with an obvious answer, he kindly explained to me that “the country and the people are suffering under a dictatorial government. How about those young and adult innocent Ethiopians who were cowardly gunned down in the streets and alleys of Addis Ababa in 2005 election? Ethiopians are being terrorized, killed, violated, and tortured every day. Our people are languishing under an American-supported government. We cry for the people, we cry for the country.”

Afterward, I listened to my recording of Daniel and the sounds of people crying several times. The wailing was as if the state casket of the Ethiopian nation was in the room for a final farewell. It was as if Ethiopia as a person was right there, wrapped in *shema* (a traditional handmade cotton cloth), imploring the room to rescue it. Often Ethiopian long-distance nationalists, particularly national artists, represent Ethiopia as a fair-skinned Habasha woman dressed in a traditional highland costume, lying on the ground as separatists and ethnonationalists beat her with sticks. Some, like Daniel, feel it is incumbent upon them to “protect the mother from ungrateful children who have grown into violent thugs” (Matsuoka and Sorenson 2001, 159). However Ethiopians in the diaspora conceive of their homeland, the nation-making project of Daniel and his colleagues has been one of numerous setbacks, heartbreaks and missed opportunities.

As I went through the narratives of Ayu and Danile, I realized that we had little in common. Of course we are from one country. We all wish good things for the people back home. I, however, have no royal family line to talk about or family estate that has been unlawfully taken away. Nor did I participate in the 1970s revolution and “shed blood,” for the remaking of the nation-state. I was born to a farming family just when the revolution was starting. I and many of the post-1990s immigrants inherited the economic brutalities wrought by endless civil wars that Daniel and his group ignited. I grew up hearing the clatter of Russian made military vehicles and armored tanks crisscrossing villages as the government worked hard to drive out rebels it was convinced were bent on dividing and dismembering the country.

My feelings and my experiences mesh better with those of Messi, who coordinated local NGO programs in Ethiopia before coming to the United States. Messi and I spoke in a similar way about home, experienced similar pain and perhaps held the same image of Ethiopia. For us, Ethiopia is not a nation with a grand past or a Habasha woman mistreated and disgraced by her ungrateful children. It is rather a country that is unable to take care of its children. When she speaks about home, her immigration experiences, and her family’s inability to provide for itself, Messi gets emotional, but for different reasons than Daniel and his colleagues do. One afternoon, as Messi and I were heading to the Borders bookstore café off Fenton Street in Silver Spring, Maryland, for an interview, Messi pointed her finger at the Red Lobster restaurant on Georgia Avenue and said, “Every time I pass by this street and see this restaurant I feel very bad. I hate this restaurant.” She spat out the word “hate.” “When I came to the U.S. ten years ago my first job was waitressing at Red Lobster. I never thought I would be a waitress, but I had to. As if my being a waitress was not enough, I had a rough

experience with customers, particularly African Americans. For some reason, African American customers did not like me. They did not. They complained a lot about me. Sometimes they [would] say that I brought them wrong orders and wanted to talk to the manager. Lots of complaints, you know. Sometimes they [would] say they could not understand my English. I decided to quit after six months of working there, although the manager wanted me to stay.”

Even though for Messi working at the Red Lobster was the most depressing experience of her life and she “cried until her eyes were sore” almost every day after work—mainly because of customers’ complaints about her but also because of homesickness—there was a silver lining to her hard work and perseverance. Messi explained: “I send money home regularly, every month. When I send money I forget all my troubles. Even to this day, every time I go to a Western Union kiosk to send some money home I feel good. It makes my day. For the most part my family depends on me.” Messi avoids politics. She has never been to a political gathering. She refuses to make contributions to political parties, although “they” have approached her to make donations. For her, family survival comes first. The fact that many people are unable to feed themselves keeps her up at night. Over the past ten years she has managed to turn around the lives of her family members. Sending remittances, not participation in transnational politics, is her way of exorcising what is bad about her homeland—poverty. Over the past decade, she has built her mom a house and is now in the middle of helping her start her own small business. As she looks at what she has achieved, Messi is very appreciative of the United States. She marries the two countries or as she frankly put it, “Ethiopia is like my mom while the United States is my dad. My heart is in

Ethiopia.” Her story is not unique. She is like thousands of Ethiopians who support families at home through their regular migradollars, or migrant remittances.

I met with Bersa, 27, a second generation Ethiopian, the afternoon of the Memorial Day. The temperature was hovering near 90 degrees. She braved the sizzling sun to come to Sankofa Café off of Georgia Avenue for the interview. Surprisingly, she started our conversation with whether I would like to interview her in Amharic or English. Bersa was born in the United States but she speaks Amharic language fluently. She credited the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, her parents particularly her grandmother for her language proficiency. “My grandmother came to the US for treatment and she lived with us for some time. When we lived with my grandmother, I had no choice except to speak Amharic. I learnt some Amharic at the local Ethiopian Orthodox Church, that I think helped. I really, really want my children to speak Amharic, yes. I feel sad when I think about the fact that there is a possibility that everything could stop with me. The only thing you could do is take them to Ethiopia and give them no choice. When they have no choice they are in.”

Beyond her language skills, Bersa talked about issues of race and racial identification, combining American and Ethiopian identities, transnationalism and transnational involvements, and a whole host of other things. She pointed out how she grew up with the idea of being a Habasha. “As a child I had a lot of black friends but I knew I am different from them. Because for a lot of Ethiopians including my parents black means descendants of slaves in this country. I knew that was not me and I did not identify with that category of people. But when I consider the outside world, when they look at me and when they see me they see a black person. Nowadays if I am filling out a survey or an application I will fill out “black.” As a child I use to fill out “other” because I did not know that I am black. I only

knew that I was Habasha. After I learnt what black meant I said, oh, I am black too.” As she continues to figure out her sense of belonging she did not like to talk much about race and racism. She explained how her parents dismissed out of hand any talk of racism.

My mom says, ‘stick to your studies.’ You know my parents came to this country for educational opportunity, you know. I think they have the mentality that if you do well in your studies nothing matters. I agree with them. I can honestly say that I do not feel like I personally suffered from discrimination. It is more so knowing what happened in the past and a lot is still going on of course. I grew up in Washington, DC area and things are a lot different over here compared to the South. DC is a lot better; it is diverse, pretty more liberal and multicultural. Discriminated or not there are always a set of people who are not privileged. It forces you to be hard worker than looking for excuses.

Bersa also stated how she is well integrated into America but “definitely” identifies herself with her Ethiopian heritage. She particularly stressed her love for Ethiopia. “I was born and raised in America. It is the greatest privilege of all. We all consider ourselves American. I am born and raised here, I cannot get any more American. But I jokingly say to my friends, ‘I am not American and I do not know what you are talking about. What is an American?’ To me everyone that comprises it comes from somewhere else. You see, by that standard, it makes sense that I am an Ethiopian and an American. I cannot live without both.” Bersa used her body as a metaphor to make me understand the twofold identities that are ingrained in her. “Which do you choose between your left hand and right hand?” asks Bersa. “So I am both. Right hand is probably my Ethiopian side because I write with my right hand. It is where my parents are from? Ethiopia runs through my veins. I mean as simple as they are the people that I love, you know what I mean? But I grew up in a location where everything in that location has effect on me. It is the duality that exists in one person.”

To translate her love for her ancestral land into action, Bersa is involved in transnational activities. She eschews and disregards transnational politics in favor of

philanthropic endeavors in Ethiopia. For her Ethiopian transnational politics is “complicated” and partisan. Instead, she joined her mom and a few other women in the neighborhood who contribute money and help needy families in Ethiopia. “They pulled me in and many of us,” she says. “I send money indirectly, indirectly, not specifically to one person. There is an orphanage in Ethiopia that I am excited about. To that orphanage, I send money. It is located in Mojo—a small town outside Addis Ababa. I contribute twice a year. I mostly do it like—I do it once and it lasts six months, you know what I mean.” In the future Bersa plans to spend long period of time Ethiopia and help the country. “I like the idea of going there every once in a while for couple of months. Being permanent there I do not think so. I am here.” She resists her parents who encourage her to start some investments like building a home in Ethiopia.

This dissertation is built around these and many other narratives about the experiences of Ethiopian immigrants who have come to the United States in large numbers since the 1960s. The participants in my study settled in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area—an emergent “global city,” to use Saskia Sassen’s powerful concept—and remained connected to their homeland. The dissertation is about the everyday lives of immigrants who engage with both Ethiopia and the United States as they adapt and became “agents actively engaged in rehabilitating both spatial and economic sectors of the city” (Sassen 2001:321). Throughout the dissertation, I look at three groups of Ethiopian migrants and their descendants. The first group came to the United States prior to and following the 1974/75 communist takeover; this group views living in the United States as something imposed on them. The second group is comprised of Ethiopians who have come to the United States since the mid-1980s and early 1990s, after their hopes and dreams of constructing a socialist Ethiopia was dashed by the

military takeover of the government they had created and the indiscriminate killings that followed. The third group, of which I am a member, came to the United States in the wake of the impact of the neoliberal agenda; this group is distraught by the increasing economic hardships the country faced and continues to face. The fourth group consists of second-generation Ethiopians, many of whom are the children of pre-1990s immigrants.

Since the 1990s the way we look at migrants has changed. Many migrants today make substantial commitments that link them with significant others in their sending countries. The transnational perspective in migration studies has challenged the simplistic idea that immigrants sever ties with their place of origin in order to assimilate in their new homes (Basch et al. 1994, 7; Faist 2000; Vertovec 2009; Arthur 2010). In hindsight, it is clear that transnational linkages of immigrants with their homelands are not entirely new, although the process has intensified in recent years. As Steven Vertovec (2009) has pointed out, “social patterns and practices of migrants to the Americas in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth centuries” also demonstrated transnational connections (p. 14). Recently, however, scholars have begun to produce empirical evidence that amply documents the significance and transformative impact of transnational connections for several contemporary immigrant groups, particularly those that originated in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia. Even though a large number of Africans have come to the United States since the 1960s, especially since 1980s, the existence, pervasiveness, and depth of various forms of transnationalism among the new migrants from sub-Saharan Africa have not yet been studied empirically (Arthur 2010). This dissertation addresses that gap in the literature by exploring the transnational experiences of Ethiopians in the Washington metropolitan area across several generational units.

Ethiopians were among the first new Africans to come to the United States in large numbers since the end of forced migration of Africans to the New World (Woldemikael 1996: 147). They began to arrive in small numbers in the 1960s, and in subsequent decades a variety of groups of Ethiopians arrived in ever-increasing numbers. For the past forty years, the majority of Ethiopian Americans have made the Washington metro area their home. Of the 460,000 Ethiopians in the United States, roughly 350,000 (76 percent) live in the metropolitan area (Terrazas 2007). The presence of the Ethiopian embassy, the availability of entry-level jobs, the cosmopolitan nature of the metro area, and the denseness of Ethiopian networks that have been woven in the DC area have attracted and continue to attract many Ethiopians to the area and have made it a hub for the Ethiopian diaspora community (Selassie 1996; Ungar 1998: 263). Even though they have not been able to re-create their pre-immigration lives in terms of concentrated settlement patterns or ethnic enclaves, Ethiopians in the United States have been able to carve out something that signifies their presence and makes visible their imprints on U.S. culture. What Chacko (2003a) has called ethnic-sociocommescapes have emerged in the DC metro area. These serve dual purposes—they are commercial areas as well as nodes of social interaction.

The empirical study of Ethiopian immigrants is relatively recent. Although many of these studies concentrate on the period of initial adjustment to relocation (McSpadden 1987; Ungar 1998; Moussa 1994; Koehn 1991), some more recent studies have looked at racial and ethnic identities (Matsuoka and Sorenson 2001; Mohammed 2006), transnational political involvement (Lyons 2007, 2011), gender relations (Bhave 2001), processes of place making (Heldman 2011; Chacko 2003a), historical trajectories of ‘survival, adjustment and adaptation’ (Getahun 2007a), and transnational music (Shelemay 2011). While I build on and

benefit from these extremely useful studies, I argue that the complex process of how Ethiopians have shaped and are shaped by both the receiving and sending countries has yet to be fully addressed.

Therefore, the dissertation explores the following important questions. What are the main transnational activities of Ethiopian immigrants to the United States? What types of transnational social networks do they create? What factors prompt first generation and second generation migrants to establish linkages with the sending country? Why do those who engage in transnational practices often restrict their activities to one area of action (Levitt 2001b, 198)? Few researchers have asked why people such as Messi, Ayu, Daniel and Bersa experience connections with home in such different ways (see Eckstein 2009; Berg 2011; Pasura 2011). Messi, Ayu, Daniel and of course Bersa each express a deep sense of belonging, and each works hard to bring about change in the sending country. Messi and Daniel even shed tears about the plight of their homeland. Yet their opinions about what issues need immediate attention and their solutions for the problems they see are very different. In what ways does the past of individual immigrants shape the kinds of transnational activities they take up or ignore? It is important to understand why immigrants make different choices about transnational action vis-à-vis the same homeland.

Importantly, most studies of transnational migration have focused on what immigrants do in the sending country. Not enough attention has been given to how immigrants are part of nation-building exercises simultaneously in both the sending and receiving countries. My work explores how Ethiopian immigrants participate in transnational activities in both Ethiopia and the United States. Finally, I analyze how well transnationalism persists across generations. Is transnationalism the business of the first generation only? Is there any

evidence that transnationalism endures among children of immigrants? If it does, how does the second generation construct identity? How is the transnationalism of the second generation similar to and different from that of the first generation?

Literature Review

Clearly, the field of the anthropology of migration has flourished in the past three decades (Vertovec 2007: 962; Lewellen 2002; Brettell 2000). Anthropological interest in contemporary migrants and migration grew exponentially during this time frame in response to the impacts migrants have on both sending and receiving countries. Immigrants from some places have not only established new settlements in the receiving countries but have also maintained such strong links with sending countries that they have produced de-territorialized nation-states (Foner 2003: 14). This process is often called transnational migration (Basch et al 1994). Anthropologists were the first to draw researchers' attention to how migrants influence and are influenced by host societies and how they simultaneously transform their sending countries (Vertovec 2009: 11). They have elaborated the phenomena so lucidly that the anthropology of migration is currently considered a prime disciplinary setting for such discussions (Pajo 2008; Lewellen 2002: 137).

As the transnational migration research agenda migrated across the social sciences, anthropologists sought to uncover to what extent early anthropological work could shed light on the current understanding of transnational migration. Did anthropology formerly give as much attention to migration as it does now? Much of the analysis of this question (Brettell 2000&2003; Foner 2003; see also Eades 1987; Kearney 1986; Vertovec 2007) argues either that the issues of migration—why people migrate, who migrates, and what happens to them

after they migrate—were central to anthropological ethnography or that these issues were ignored in that field.

For many years, some have argued that migration studies were marginal in the field of anthropology. Such researchers feel that the predominant interest of the field was the “timeless” and “bounded” cultures located in the far off places (Kasdan 1971: 1; Eades 1987: 1; Kearney 1986: 331), although it is doubtful that such cultures existed in the first place (Mangin 1970: xv). Those who searched for “exotics” tended to view migrants as stochastic factors. In other words, the sedentary bias of some researchers led them to see people who moved between cultures and belonged to multiple societies as anomalies who therefore fell outside of the “modes of imagining homes and homelands, identities and nationalities” (Malkki 1995: 15). Caroline Brettell (2000: 97) is among those who persistently argue that migration has not received proper attention from anthropologists; as an example, she points out that the *bracero* program that brought thousands of Mexicans to the United States has not been adequately studied (Brettell 2003: ix).

Some scholars do not agree with the argument that “the ethnographic study of migration, complex societies, and transborder processes is something new to the discipline” (Glick Schiller 2003: 101). Perhaps part of the reason U.S. anthropologists did not pay as much attention to migration as some sister disciplines such as sociologists of the Chicago School did is that by the time anthropology began to flourish as a field of study in the United States, international immigration to the United States had slowed to a trickle (Foner 2003: 10). The discipline developed at a different pace in Great Britain, and as early as the 1940s, the Manchester School had produced remarkable ethnographic works that looked at colonialism and urbanization and the resultant rural-urban migration in Central and Eastern

Africa (Werbner 1987; Mintz 1998). It clearly shows that anthropology did not shun migration altogether. A careful analysis of this body of literature reveals three important insights from this period of anthropological research, each of which informs much of today's anthropology of migration.

First, ethnographers influenced by the Manchester School described fluid social relations in African cities, thus breaking away from the stasis of structural functionalism. Second, they introduced and enriched social network analysis in their efforts to understand “the conditioning nature of, and inter-linkages between, encompassing spheres of political economy and modes of social relations implicated in migration processes” (Vertovec 2007, 962; Mintz 1998: 120). Third, in addition to looking at the causes of migration, they explained what motivated people to sustain or construct rural-urban ties and how they maintain dual identities “as they leap from village to town and back, and selecting behavior to fit each situation of work and play in either place” (Werbner 1984:161). Several contemporary scholars direct our attention to and build on the long and rich history of migration studies (Glick Schiller 2003: 101).

Contemporary research on migration generally and international migration in particular began to appear in the 1970s and gained momentum in the 1980s (Buechler 1973: 285; Lewellen 2002: 131; Kearney 1986: 332). Several political, economic, and social changes across the world spurred interest in migration, not least the unprecedented population movements that began in the 1960s internally and across international borders. Remarkable interest in migration and migrants came out of the movement of peasants to the nearest cities, including cities of the developed world (Werbner 1987; Mangin 1970; Buechler 1970; Brettell 2000). The phenomenon created increasing dissatisfaction with the bipolar model of

migration. Some researchers, influenced by the bipolar approach, argued that “immigrants remained oriented to the place from which they had come, and thus stayed only briefly before returning home” (Rouse 1995: 354; Gmelch 1980), while others maintained that immigrants typically cut ties with their sending countries and settled permanently in the new place. Many researchers of the 1970s and 1980s tried to squeeze and shoehorn their data into this either/or framework. For example, in his impressive review of literatures dealing with return migration, when George Gmelch (1980: 146) observed what he called “‘shuttle migrants’—cultural commuters who move back and forth between home and host societies,” he glossed over the phenomenon as an outcome of dissatisfaction with both sending and receiving countries. Efforts to always keep an eye on where migrants originated and visualize migrants who were managing lives sandwiched “between two cultures” were quite rare (see Watson 1977).

Since then, scholars have revisited the network theory espoused by the Manchester School. The Manchester school anthropologists discussed how migrants construct and extend enormously complex linkages that were “like a spider’s web” that linked the sending and receiving places (Eades 1987: 8-9; Buechler and Buechler 1987; Boyd 1989). Cross-border linkages produce impacts. While little empirical research has been done on the effects of international migration on the social structure of homeland communities, even less research has focused on how immigrants adapt to their place of immigration while at the same time continuing to maintain connections to their place of origin (Judith-Maria Buechler 1976). Jeremy Eades (1987: 9) has pointed out that most migrants probably retain some links with home, “though this is not necessarily the case.” The 1980s research strategy of foregrounding transnational migration provided us with clear patterns of how immigrants stayed connected with the countries they came from. Buechler and Buechler (1987) argue that a focus on such

connectedness “translates itself into a view of migration as an integral part of adaptive strategies affecting not just the migrants themselves, but also those who are left behind” (p.2).

Nonetheless, the research strategy of paying attention to the multiple identities and multi-local and transnational attachments of people who circulate internationally did not take hold firmly until the early 1990s (Basch et al. 1994: 29). In that decade, many anthropologists and researchers from other fields became receptive to the notion of the importance of the connections migrants construct with their home societies. I might add that there is also something seductive about contemporary migrants. Many of the people on the move today are the very people whose cultures anthropologists once brought to the Western audience as a “scholarly artifice,” to use Clifford Geertz’s phrase. The “tribal” people, including the iconic Nuer of Sudan, have moved to the United States in large numbers and are now just a train ride away (Shandy 2007; Mintz 1998). It is no surprise that anthropologists who have fieldwork experience in immigrant-sending countries began to pay attention to the impact of migration on those who moved, the links with the homeland they constructed, and the consequences of those links for those left behind (Foner 2000: 50).

In reality the spiderweb-like linkages between home and host land have become so thick, so enduring, and thus so important that they should no longer be viewed as a marker of transition or an ephemeral phenomenon. In a pioneering re-conceptualization of transnational migration, Linda Basch, Nina Glick Schiller, and Cristina Szanton Blanc formally define such linkages as

the process by which immigrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement. We call these processes transnationalism to emphasize that many immigrants today build social fields that cross geographic, cultural, and political borders. Immigrants who develop and maintain multiple relationships—familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political—that span borders we

call “transmigrants.” An essential element of transnationalism is the multiplicity of involvements that transmigrants sustain in both home and host societies. (1994: 7)

As is clear in this definition, the networks and relations international migrants maintain with societies of origin and destinations have been diverse and “now exist paradoxically in a planet-spanning, yet common—however virtual—arena of activity” (Vertovec 1999: 1; see also, *inter alia*, Glick Schiller et al. 1992; Guarnizo and Smith 1998; Kearney 1995; Portes 1999; Morawska 2001; Faist 2000). The transnational social fields that migrants build and sustain and the small-scale and everyday practices of individuals and groups transform the economies, values, and practices of sending and receiving countries, both incrementally and cumulatively (Vertovec 2004). Transnational migration contests and challenges the previously accepted boundaries of studies of political participation, identity construction, worship, and even social rituals such as funerals (Mazzucato et al 2006). For transnational migrants these processes take place across national boundaries rather than within them (Levitt 2001a; Al-Ali and Koser 2002).

There have been glitches and hiccups as the transnational migration research agenda established itself (Guarnizo and Smith 1998: 3). In the early 1990s, Glick Schiller and her colleagues signaled that “a new kind of migrant population is emerging, composed of those whose networks, activities and patterns of life encompass both their host and home societies” (1992: 1). As one might expect, as soon as the analytical framework of transnational migration was proposed, critiques of the approach emerged. Some of the critiques and appraisals were extremely constructive and beneficial. Others were very critical, to the point of almost rejecting the notion as an analytical tool. It is possible to identify at least three groups of scholarly responses to the new thesis of transnationalism.

First are the researchers in the social sciences who fall into what sociologist Robert Merton once called “the fallacy of adumbration,” a tendency for looking at the past for evidence that a practice is not new in an attempt to “negate the novelty of a scientific discovery” (Portes 2001: 184). A few researchers rejected the phenomenon of transnationalism on the basis that it has “actually [already] been observed among the Bongo-Bongo” (Vertovec 2007: 968; see also Waldinger 2008: 3; Kivisto 2001; Waldinger and Fitzgerald 2004: 16, for an extended critique of immigrant transnationalism as an intellectual fad). The second group appreciates the newness of the theoretical approach in making evident the increasing intensity and significance of transnational connections, even though the phenomenon has always been with us. In order to maintain its theoretical novelty and to help researchers systematically collect survey data from which to develop hypotheses and test it empirically, Portes and colleagues argue that the transnational migrant category should be reserved for a special group of immigrants. In order to be transnational, they argue, migrants must engage in “regular and sustained social contacts over time across national borders” (Portes 1999: 219; see also Guarnizo et al. 2003; R. Smith 2006). This approach disqualifies transnational migrants who engage in cross-border activities only intermittently.

The third scholarly group makes several important corrections to the initial claims of the transnational studies framework and challenges those who would dismiss or restrict the parameters of the research agenda. First and foremost, they argue, even if cross-border connections and activities have existed in the past, the phenomenon has not been explained adequately (Al-Ali and Koser 2002:4). The fresh framework of immigrant transnational networks allows us to highlight, document, and understand in a systematic fashion “how ordinary individuals live their everyday lives across borders and the consequences of their

activities for sending—and receiving—country life” (Levitt and Waters 2002: 8). The new transnational framework has enabled scholars to revise and analyze social history literature on the immigrants from Europe who came to the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (ca. 1880-1920s). The reexamination revealed activities that clearly qualify as transnational connections, be it in terms of sending remittances, political participation, constructing a nation-state, or maintaining social contacts with immediate family members back home. Even the official interest of migrant-sending European and other countries in the well-being of their nationals abroad could be an example of transnational activity (Morawska 2001; Glick Schiller 1999a; Guarnizo 2001; Foner 2005; Cano and Delano 2007).

At the same time, there are many new things about today’s transnational linkages. In the past, ideas that “challenged . . . loyalty to a single sovereign state, were treated either as a marker of transitional status or, if they persisted, as both peculiar and pathological” (Rouse 1995: 354-353; see also Glick Schiller 1999b; Levitt 2001a: 26). Today, the possibility of embracing multiple identities, multiple localities, and dual citizenship was almost unthinkable before the end of the twentieth century (Glick Schiller 1999a: 95). Moreover, the patterns, scope, and volume of immigrants’ interactions with people and organizations in the countries they left have intensified because of new technologies that compress time and space, as has the impact of such contact on sending countries. Nancy Foner found that “The New York Post offices sent 12.3 million individual money orders to foreign lands in 1900-1906—with half of the dollar amount going to Italy, Hungary and Slavic countries” (Foner 2005: 64). This is a drop in the bucket compared to the volume of money transfers today.

The changing policies of receiving and sending countries have also evolved in the direction of “outright tolerance in favor of dual loyalty”; in countries where this is not the case, issues of loyalty have been handled with a “don’t ask and don’t tell” policy (Jones Correa quoted in Foner 2005: 75). Historian Elliott R. Barkan (2007: 9) and many others remind us that unlike in the past and despite the persistence of nativist sentiments, most receiving countries celebrate multiculturalism. And sending countries and receiving countries alike now regard immigrant remittances, once seen as perpetuating the “status quo and underdevelopment” (Kearney 1986: 347), as a highly valued resource. In fact, the value of immigrant remittances is poised to exceed or has already exceeded foreign direct investment and net official development assistance. There is also a growing recognition of how immigrants contribute to their host societies (Mazzucato 2008).

Finally, although limiting the definition of immigrant transnationalists to the “cadre of regular . . . activists,” as Portes (2003: 877) has suggested, may sound plausible for the purposes of statistical analysis, this definition precludes analysis of the less regular contributions immigrants make to their home and host societies. Immigrant practices such as watching news about the homeland, attending political rallies, and making occasional contributions to charitable activities add up to a considerable economic and social impact for the communities and nations involved. In order to bridge this gap researchers have established two types of transnationalism for analytical purposes. Broad transnationalism refers to a situation in which a large group of people engage in a particular practice irregularly, and narrow transnationalism refers to a pattern by which a small portion of people are involved in habitual, recurrent, and intense transnational activities (Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002: 770). Such configurations do have heuristic value. Yet the messiness of immigrant lives may not

lend itself to such neat classifications. The activities of most migrants would fall somewhere between these two definitions (Barkan 2007: 8).

As the dust that swirled around the newness of immigrant transnationalism gradually settles (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007), several important questions have been proposed that require further empirical research: What motivates or compels immigrants to be transnational? What kinds of transnational activities are immigrants engaged in? When researchers use the transnational theoretical framework, do they analyze transnational identities and activities concurrently with the transnational contributions of the immigrant group(s) they are studying (Basch et al. 1994: 23)? When they do, what does the dual embeddedness of immigrants in home and receiving countries look like? What role do nation-states, particularly sending nation-states, play in shaping transnational engagements? Finally yet importantly, how long does transnationalist behavior endure, particularly within the second generation? Does it last beyond the “nostalgic” behavior of first-generation immigrants?

The question of what motivates immigrants to be part of often-demanding transnational activities has long engaged researchers (Guarnizo and Smith 1998). It has been argued that immigrants are denied integration, are discriminated against, and experience “social demotion” because they are forced to accept low-paying jobs (Pajo 2008). The theory is that these factors are what propel immigrants to engage in transnational activities: sending remittances, helping their families, and traveling home enhances their social standing. At the same time, some immigrants see transnational involvement as an economic survival strategy both for themselves and the people they have left behind. In most cases immigrants are seen as the product of the operation of the capitalist economy, which causes economic and social disruptions in sending places. These disruptions have generated unequal economic standing

between sending and receiving countries. Immigrants are mostly committed to their old homes because they are helping families in economic dire straits. At the same time, by buying houses, starting businesses, and investing in social networks they ensure their own economic and social security (Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2002&2005).

However valuable and useful these explanations are for understanding and appreciating why people are transnationally engaged, existing analysis is very inadequate in terms of understanding why immigrants make different choices about transnational action vis-à-vis the same homeland. Three limitations in the current state of our knowledge can easily be identified (Al-Ali and Koser 2002; Levitt 2001a). First, researchers who have looked into factors that motivate, force, or compel immigrants to participate in transnationalism have privileged the receiving-country context as *the* factor that shapes transnationality (Basch et al. 1994; Itzigsohn and Giorguli-Saucedo 2005; Itzigsohn 2009). The receiving-country context does not fully explain how and why immigrants pursue different strategies for adapting to the new country and how they maintain ties to their homelands. Second, contexts have not been historicized enough to show how immigrants who come from the same country at different times experience different political and economic situations in the host country (Kasinitz 1992). Third, and importantly, migrants from the same country are a diverse rather than a cohesive group of people. Much of the research on transnational migration “overstates the internal homogeneity and boundedness of transnational communities,” and “overlooks” pre-immigration experiences despite pleas for researchers to question whether national identifiers are in fact homogenizing factors (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003, 596; McAuliffe 2008, 63; see also Mahler 1998; Portes 1999; Erdmans 1998).

It is important to understand why first-generation immigrants from the same country partake in different kinds of transnational activities (Al-Ali and Koser 2002 5-6). Some immigrants do make improving their own economic status and that of their families a primary mission. Others work passionately to improve the political situation of the sending country. There are many variations in the “frequency, depth and range of transitional ties *within* the national origin groups” (Foner 2005: 86; see also Eckstein 2009). It is important to examine the internal variations, contradictions, tensions and differences within people categorized as the first generation to emigrate from a sending country. As Castel and Miller have argued, “No single cause is ever sufficient to explain why people decide to leave one country and settle in another” (Castel and Miller 2003: 28). Such interrelated yet various causes of migration complicate monolithic understandings of the so called first generation migrants.

Members of a first generation often differ in terms of what triggered their immigration, how they view and are connected to the sending country, how they relate to one another in the host country, how they lead their lives, and what aspect of their home country they would like to change (Ghorashi and Boersma 2009; Arnone 2008). The diverse experiences of members of an initial migrant group before leaving the sending country play important role in determining the transnational activities they take up. It is important to look at differences within an immigrant community, since most immigrants originating from the same country have different political, economic, and sociocultural backgrounds from each other. As Eckstein (2009: 2) has pointed out, “First generation immigrants who uproot at different points in time . . . may come to the US with different experiences, and with different values and views so formed, that influence their lives in the new land.” These differences also

shape transnational involvements. I discuss the impacts of such differences in transnational participations in chapter two.

Nevertheless, the historical and sociocultural baggage that immigrants bring does not predetermine their destiny, nor do immigrants accept unquestioningly the customs and mores of the areas where they resettle (Smith 2008; Eckstein and Barberia 2002; Marcelin 2005).

Another factor that shapes transnational involvement within an immigrant group is the experiences of its members in the United States. The United States has changed remarkably in the past fifty years in terms of tolerance regarding racial and ethnic identities (Kasinitz 1992).

A deeper understanding of the historical trajectories of immigrant reception and pre-immigration experiences may help us understand why immigrants are transnational, what kinds of transnational activities they are engaged in, and how they relate to their new home. Perhaps “migration can thus be analysed through the experiences lived ‘from there to here’ which mark the way migrants dwell ‘here and there’” (Arnone 2008: 326).

The concepts of generations and generational differences are useful ways to understand society. However, to date, the tools of postcolonial anthropological research have not been used to explore these variables in great depth (see Whyte et al. 2008). I approach the concept of a generation as a social construct rather than as a cohort based on age (see Pilcher 1998 3-7). In the case of Ethiopian immigrants to the Washington area, the generations I discuss were constructed through historical experience rather than as a function of age. Here I rely on Karl Mannheim’s (1952) classic essay “The Problem of Generations,” Mette Louise Berg’s understanding of generations as social groups (Berg 2007), and the work of pioneer researchers who have turned to a generational approach to understand the lived experiences of

members of diasporas (Eckstein 2009; Eckstein and Barberia 2002; see also, McAuliffe 2008; Gibau 2005).

Typically, migrants engage in a diverse range of transnational activities and linkages. Steven Vertovec (1999: 2) notes that transnationalism includes a variety of sites of political engagement, different ways of constructing and reconstructing place and locality, a variety of modes of cultural reproduction, and different avenues of capital accumulation. Other researchers look at general domains of transnationalism such as religious, cultural, social, political, and economic modes of transformation (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007). Johnson and others direct attention to transnational giving, or “diaspora philanthropy,” through which immigrants allocate a portion of remittances for the public good, such as building schools and community centers or renovating churches (Johnson 2007: 6; Cohen 2001; Levitt 2001a, Arthur 2010). These areas and modes of transformation may overlap.

One of the most important research questions related to transnationalism is how immigrants balance their simultaneous activities in two countries. Immigrants are “confronted with and engaged in the nation building processes of two or more nation-states” (Basch et al. 1994: 22). Most buy properties and build houses, start businesses, and become part of political developments in the new home at the same time that they are involved in building or rebuilding lives in the sending country. These processes are intertwined, inseparable, and at times complementary. However, much of the literature on transnational migration has been dominated by a celebratory account of how immigrants impact and transform sending countries (Al-Ali and Koser 2002: 1-10). While previous researchers have been accused of emphasizing the experiences of immigrants in their receiving countries, the current scholarly gaze seems to overlay sending-country connections (Foner 2005: 85; Mazzucato 2008).

The fact that “transnational migration scholars did not document migrant incorporation with the same fervor as transnational connections” has had unintended consequences (Glick Schiller and Levitt 2006: 14). Often contemporary immigrants are unfairly characterized as resistant to assimilation and as not loyal to receiving countries, in contrast to past generations of immigrants. They are seen as not integrating into the host society. Mexican immigrants were particularly singled out as a group that eroded the American ethos (see Huntington 2004). Such characterizations have sparked enormous debates about the nature of transnational migrants (see Glick Schiller and Levitt 2006; Smith and Bakker 2007).

Hence, emerging empirical research about transnationalism has made some concessions. Initially transnational migration was wrongly seen as an alternative to and even as the antithesis of integration or assimilation (Vertovec 2007: 77; Miller 2011: 43). Substantive research has since documented how integration in a new land and enduring transnational attachments are not binary opposites. In most cases transnationals are well integrated into the host society. Of course, the absence of integration would not prevent them from being part of transnational involvements. How we view integration in transnational contexts needs to become more complex. Integration into a host society is not a linear process. Rather, it is a creative undertaking. Instead of thinking of new arrivals as simply accepting or rejecting whatever the new society throws at them, it is more useful to think of them as adopting some of the values and norms of the new home and choosing to retain some of the values of their own culture and reject others. Levitt and Glick Schiller find the choices immigrant groups make to be “a kind of gauge, which while anchored, pivots between the new land and a transnational incorporation” (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004: 12).

One of the important issues many researchers who operate within the transnational theoretical framework have overlooked is how immigrants shape, contribute to, and transform their new homes. Paul Stoller (2002) discusses how African merchants in New York have expanded the informal sector of that city's economy, creating employment opportunities for themselves and providing services for the wider community. They have accomplished these things despite their own uncertain immigrant status. Stoller calls this importation of African ways of doing business "the Africanization of New York City." Because immigrants are doubly rooted in both sending and receiving countries, their contributions can be seen as creative importations of solutions to U.S. problems such as decaying urban neighborhoods (Swyngedouw and Swyngedouw 2009; Chacko 2008; Wolf 1997; Sassen 2001), a process I call transnational place making. Immigrants also question, enrich, and internationalize existing ethnic and racial categories (Zephir 1996; Sutton 1992; Arthur 2010); participate in political activities and influence elections, even at the presidential level (Eckstein 2009); remit the values, norms, work ethics and political culture of the host societies to sending countries (Mohamoud and Monica 2006; Levit 2001; Miller 2011); and transnationalize cuisine (Wood 1997: 53), among many other things.

Finally, in the case of the continuities of transnationalism, all eyes have been on the second generation—the children of the post-1965 immigrants—to see how they will shape the future of transnationalism. At present, there are many more questions about them than there are answers based on empirical research (Foner 2009: 1; Lee 2008; Levitt and Waters 2002). The most general questions are: How well are they doing in terms of economic success, that is, attaining the coveted status of middle-class Americans? What do the racial and ethnic identities of the second generation look like? Will they participate in transnational activities?

These and many more questions are very “ripe for empirical” investigation and have yet to be answered (Levitt and Waters 2002: 18). I extensively discuss the existing literatures and debates surrounding the first and second generation in chapter six and seven.

Methods and Materials

In this section I explain the methodological approach of the study, including site selection, construction of field sites, methods used in data collection, and reflections on the challenges and opportunities of doing fieldwork amongst one’s own people.

Research Site(s) Selection

The research site is located in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. Here my use of a single research site instead of several sites may sound awkward and even wrong in relation to contemporary anthropological research methods. In most cases today, anthropological fieldwork uses multiple research sites, and the researcher shuttles between locations (and even continents) in the quest for a holistic understanding of the subject under study. The use of multiple sites is almost always required when one studies transnational migration and migrants—people whose lives are pivoted between the sending and receiving societies (Fitzgerald 2006; Smith 2005; Hage 2005; Hannerz 1998& 2003; Stoller 1997). This practice began as an “experimental moment” in anthropology. Marcus (1995) was the first to systematize a number of strategies for multi-sited ethnography that include following the people, following the thing, following the metaphor, following the conflict, and so on.

In my research I recognize that a multi-country approach—one in which I would follow consultants as they moved between the United States and Ethiopia—could have enriched the data. However, I decided on a single site—a single metropolitan area—for a number of reasons. First, traveling around the world at will is not possible for most

researchers from Third World countries, even though there were many moments when I felt like traveling with my consultants. But in today's world, the activities of traveling and following are textured with power relationships. It would have been difficult for a person from a Third World country to hop on a plane and follow migrants around the world; obtaining a visa for such travel would have been almost impossible. Second, multi-sited ethnography has its down side. The practice of multi-sited fieldwork has been marred by tension and has raised a number of questions (Fitzgerald 2006: 4-7; Falzon 2009, 12). In a cuttingly funny essay, Ghassan Hage (2005: 465) notes that "jet-lag" is a major problem when following migrants throughout the world. He further quips that such travel is more like "floating above the cultures" and substitutes vignettes for serious fieldwork (Hage 2005: 465).

Hage's criticism is somehow harsh. One of the merits of the multi-sited ethnographic approach is the sensitization of researchers to the fact that there appears to be no such thing as localized, integrated, self-contained social and cultural units (Olwig 1997: 35). Once we overcome what Wimmer and Glick Schiller (2003) called methodological nationalism—the entrenched assumption that the nation/state/society is the *only* structuring principle of the cultural, social, and political lives of people in today's world, we can capture the lives and "the impact of transnational relations . . . by asking individuals about the transnational aspects of their lives, and those they are connected to, in a single setting" (see, Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004: 14). After all, as Karen Olwig (1997) has underscored, mobile people often develop an attachment to a specific place that then comes to play a role as a common source of identity in their global networks of relations. In most cases, such places may serve as "cultural sites in the sense that they are created through interplay between dwelling and traveling, presence and absence, localizing and globalizing" (p.35).

I chose the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area because it is the U.S. city with the greatest imprint of the culture and presence of Ethiopians. Even though Ethiopian immigrant settlements and social institutions have emerged in other U.S. cities such as Atlanta, Boston, New York, Houston, Dallas, Los Angeles, Seattle, Columbus (Ohio), and Minneapolis/St. Paul, the Ethiopian presence in these cities is small compared to the numbers of Ethiopians in Washington and its environs. Washington has been the hub of Ethiopian immigrant culture for the past forty years if not more (Chacko 2003a). Dr. Tsehaye Teferra observes, “When you ask an Ethiopian where he is actually living he would say to you, I am living in Washington, DC. May be he is living in Arlington, VA and even may be another state. You have to ask, ‘Where exactly?’... Washington, DC has become a generic name.”

Washington’s multiculturalism and multiracial population, the availability of entry-level jobs in the city, the fact that it is a national capital, and (above all) network-propelled migration explain why the place emerged as a magnet for not just Ethiopians but most African immigrants (Selassie 1996). Over the past several decades, thousands of Ethiopians have relocated from other U.S. states and cities to the D.C. area, and thousands continue to arrive from Ethiopia every year. Many built on established networks of compatriots. Immigrant networks produce transnational social spaces. Thus, it is often said that Ethiopians who move to Washington, D.C., get two for the price of one—Ethiopia and the United States. Many who used to live in other U.S. cities explain that they came for a short visit, felt “at home,” and decided to stay; not to mention those who packed and left for another US state and had to return “homesick.”

The concentration of Ethiopians in the D.C. metro area, however, presented some methodological difficulties. First, it is virtually impossible to know how many Ethiopians live

in the metro area. Nobody seems to have hard empirical data about the size of the Ethiopian immigrant community in Washington. Community centers, the Ethiopian embassy, and several researchers have made estimates, but none of them agree with the others. Even the U.S. government agencies do not agree among themselves about how many Ethiopians live in the United States, let alone in the metro area. While the 2000 census reported only 69,530 Ethiopian immigrants in the United States, the U.S. Bureau of Immigration and Naturalization reports that 47,528 Ethiopians immigrated to the Washington, D.C., area, in one five-year period alone (1994–1998). That number is more than twice as many as the census bureau's 2000 figure of 19,353 Ethiopians in the Washington, D.C., metro area.

This great disparity in numbers illustrates an important fact about migration that Castel and Miller have noted: “Much of contemporary international migration is simply unrecorded and not reflected in official statistics” (2003: 5). Perhaps the most systematic data was produced by Terrazas (2007). Using the Global Migrant Origin Database, he found that there were 73,066 foreign-born Ethiopians in the United States ca. 2000. If the descendants of Ethiopian-born migrants (the second generation and later generations) are included, the estimates approach upwards of 460,000 in the United States (of which approximately 350,000 are in Washington, D.C.; 96,000 are in Los Angeles; and 10,000 are in New York). The disparity between the numbers U.S. government agencies report and individual estimates makes it difficult for researchers to build an accurate sampling frame.

My second concern was how to identify where Ethiopians live in the metro area. I had envisioned a sort of concentrated settlement area. But this was a construction of my imagination. Ethiopians live in many places in and around the city. Fortunately, two important studies helped me “place” ethnographic subjects around the cityscape. Price et al. (2005) have

introduced the concept of “the world in a zip code” and have skillfully mapped the settlement patterns of contemporary immigrants to the greater D.C. area, including Ethiopians. They found out that Ethiopian settlement patterns were “dispersed with some areas of concentration” (62). Elizabeth Chacko (2003a) used census data to develop a map, which I adopted below. It shows the settlement patterns of Ethiopians across the metro area. She found that “despite relatively weak residential clustering, robust ethnic places have emerged in the area, fulfilling many of the functions of the traditional inner-city ethnic neighborhood” (p. 22).

In order to locate the most apposite place for my research I focused on ten zip codes in the D.C. area where more than 49 percent of the total number of immigrants from Ethiopia to the United States have concentrated. I then narrowed my search to four zip codes: 22204 (South Arlington), 20011 (the Petworth neighborhood in the District of Columbia), 22304 (Alexandria, Virginia), and 20009 (the Adams Morgan/Mount Pleasant area of the District of Columbia). These four areas showed the highest concentration of Ethiopians, what Price et al. call residential enclaves in formation (Price et al 2005: 76). During my year long stay in the metro area I focused on these areas while I kept an eye on two zip codes in Maryland: 20910 (Silver Spring) and 20912 (Takoma Park).

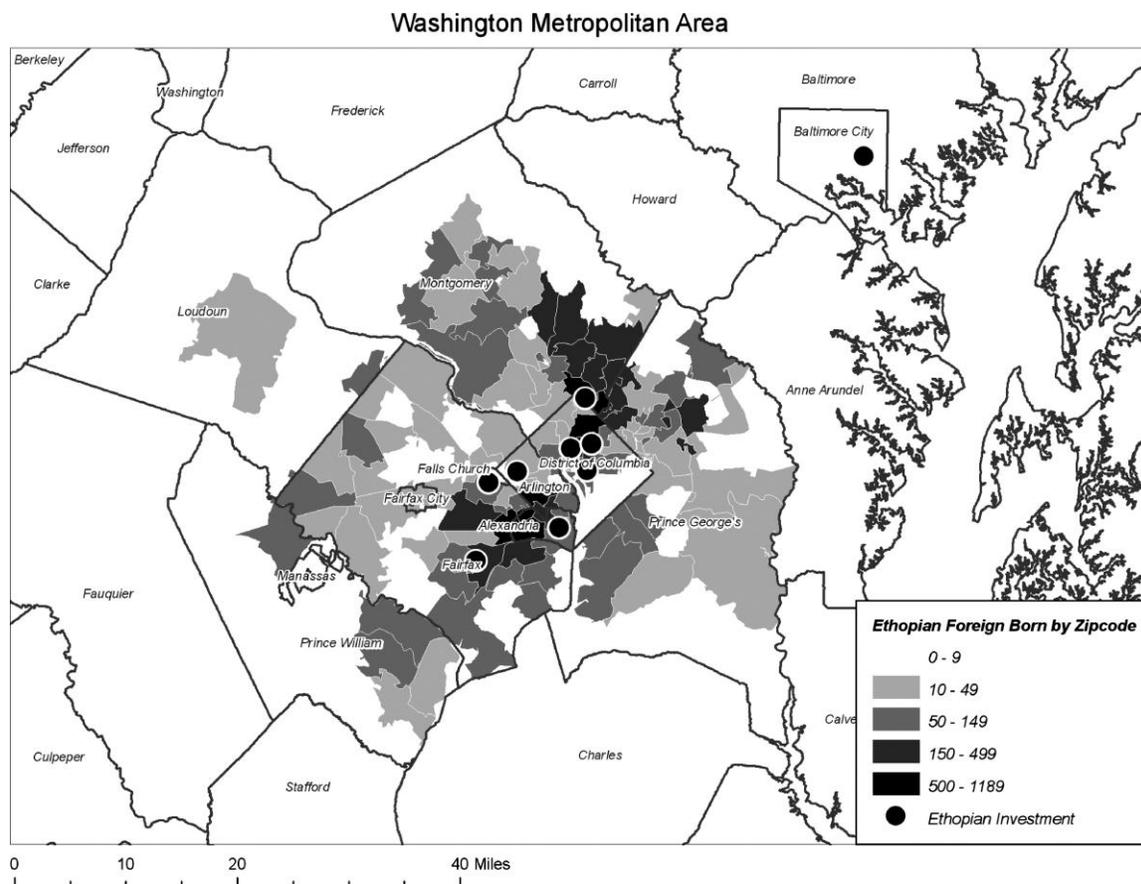


Figure -1 Distribution of Ethiopian Foreign Born by Zip code
Adapted from Price and Chacko (2009: 335).

Entering the Field Site

Once I had identified the zip codes I would focus on, the next task was constructing a field site. This was not easy. It soon became apparent despite the structured zip codes the field site was not clearly territorialized and it was not a matter of getting off the verandah as Bronislaw Malinowski once stated, or in my case getting into the zip codes. Amit's observation about the difficulties of constructing a field proved to be very true: "In a world of infinite interconnections and overlapping contexts, the ethnographic field cannot simply exist, awaiting *discovery*. It has to be laboriously constructed, prised apart from all possibilities for contextualization to which its constituent relationships and connections could also be referred" (Amit 2000: 6; see also Gupta and Fergusson 1997).

Two of the most laborious and stressful tasks, at least at first, were getting around the city and putting a roof over my head, as it were. I planned to rent an apartment in an area where Ethiopians live. I targeted South Arlington, Virginia, Petworth in the District of Columbia, and the Landmark neighborhood of Alexandria, Virginia. I relied mostly on newspapers. Many Ethiopians that I encountered suggested a couple of Ethiopian news papers that frequently advertise apartments. I found *Atref* (lit. “save”), the Ethiopian version of a local Pennysaver newspaper, to be extremely useful. Established in 2002, *Atref* runs ads for businesses, rooms for rent, babysitters, and a host of things. It is distributed in markets, restaurants, and other Ethiopian-owned businesses in northern Virginia, Washington, D.C., and Maryland. Many of the apartments for rent were located in the zip codes I was focusing on. Most of the landlords were Ethiopians.

The search for an apartment revealed much about the values of the Ethiopian community in the D.C. area. Some of them were in basements that were barely finished. A maze of utility pipes and wires were just above my head. Landlords often advised me that I should keep my head down, both literally and metaphorically. I was often advised not to spend my money on a fancy apartment. The process of finding a place to stay took almost a month. In some ways, I was responsible for the length of the search; it provided me with a perfect opportunity to talk with people. However, when I would tell someone that I was a student doing research, they would almost always become extremely suspicious and reduce their conversation with me to the bare minimum.

Finally, I decided to take an apartment in the Petworth neighborhood. It was located at the intersection of 14th Street and Arkansas, NW. The neighborhood seemed an ideal location for an anthropological field site. Reportedly, Ethiopians rank third among newcomers to the

area (Price et al. 2005: 76). An Ethiopian Orthodox Church—the Debre Selam Kidist Mariam (Saint Mary Church) is located just a block away from where I lived, as were a few Ethiopian-owned businesses. The red brick buildings, the tree-lined streets, and the seeming calmness of the neighborhood gave me the vibe of a middle-class neighborhood in the suburbs of Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. I thought I had finally mapped out the site where I could easily mingle with Ethiopians on a daily basis and find interviewees.

Almost nothing went as expected. Most of the churchgoers commuted from the suburbs. Many of the Ethiopians living in the area, fewer than had been reported, were new arrivals and they had settled in the area because rents were low and the neighborhood was a central location for public transportation. Because these new arrivals worked two or three jobs to make ends meet or make it to their own version of American or Ethiopian dream, they were almost invisible and very hard to pin down for an interview. My roommate is a typical example; he worked more than eighty hours a week and I almost never saw him. We spent time together only on Sundays and for a few minutes in the evening. He took a half-day off each Sunday to go to church.

In addition, I found that the apartment complex was not secure. Despite massive gentrification in the area (or maybe because of it), the place turned out to be very uncomfortable. On a couple of occasions the police raided the building, although I was not sure what they were after. I decided to move out of the apartment the day the police vigorously knocked on the windows of my room, which faced 14th Street. I was told to open the front gate to let them in. When my roommate Petros returned home that evening, I told him what had happened. He seemed to be less concerned than I was but warned me that I should keep the window blinds down at all times. “You could have been shot,” he almost

shouted. “Do not open the door,” he warned me. He interacted with me as if I was a spoiled brat sitting idle and calling for trouble—not working hard like him.

After two months, I was once again on the move. Ending a lease agreement and moving out of an apartment is an easy affair among Ethiopian landlords. In most cases, the landlords I talked to did not require any paperwork. They did not ask about credit history, about current and previous landlords, or about paychecks. Everything was done verbally, as it is done in Ethiopia. I was advised that I could vacate the apartment at any time as long as I paid the rent I owed. Such transactions are an example of an Ethiopianization of an American setting. Of course, these transactions are to the advantage of new arrivals, who can hardly produce all the documents needed or cannot find a co-signer to rent an apartment in the American way.

My second search for an apartment led me to people who opened up networks of contacts for me. The fieldwork started to take shape thanks in large measure to a contact I had established in Syracuse, New York. Before going into the field I had contacted Teferra (Teff), an undergraduate Ethiopian American student at Syracuse University, who had kindly given me his mother’s phone number. My attempts to contact her when I first arrived in Washington were not successful, but with Teff’s help I made the connection with her. Genet, Teff’s mother, is well educated and a journalist by profession; she knows a lot about social research methods. She was very kind to me and found me a nice apartment in the suburbs of Silver Spring, Maryland, where Ethiopians were ubiquitous. The very apartment building where I lived smelled like an Ethiopian kitchen because of a remnant of cooking that does not go away easily. However, the cockroaches that infested the building were not so welcome. Genet also helped me find interviewees, took me to meetings, and told me that I should go to cafés

in the neighborhood to meet Ethiopians. As I explain below, oftentimes Ethiopians and Somalis congregate in a coffee shop near where I was living after work and on weekends. Her suggestions and advice made my life much easier and helped me get my fieldwork off the ground. Because of our close friendship, however, I did not include Genet in my research.

My trouble was not yet over. Navigating around the metropolitan area was something I initially dreaded. I had never lived in a big city the size of the Washington metropolitan area. The cities I was familiar with, Syracuse and Addis Ababa, were very small in comparison to the size of the metro area. I am indebted to Petros, my first roommate, who understood my worries and tried to calm my nerves. He told me that it had not taken him long to find his way around the city. When I first met him, he was off work for two weeks because he had been in a minor car accident. This was a blessing in disguise; he kindly used the time to educate me about the layout of Washington's streets. Once I knew that almost all streets oriented east/west use a single letter of the alphabet and that the streets oriented north/south are designated by numbers, I found getting around Washington a lot easier. It is a very navigable city. Public transportation such as buses and trains always run on time. Of course there were times when I missed interview appointments because I could not find the exact location, but as time progressed I became almost an expert and started helping new Ethiopian arrivals.

Methods of Data Collection

In this study, I used qualitative methods to understand the transnational experiences of Ethiopian immigrants. Although I appreciate the use and value of the large-scale survey because it enables researchers to interpret ethnographic data and place it in a large context, I am convinced by researchers who argue that a qualitative approach provides a springboard and a good starting point for a phenomenon and a group that is not yet well researched

(Creswell 1998: 18). While there have been numerous studies on “new” migrants from the global south to the United States, few of these studies have focused on Africans and even fewer on Ethiopians. Therefore, qualitative studies can provide better in-depth knowledge of the day-to-day lives of people than a large-scale survey. In addition, ethnographic research not only brings people—“their perspectives, social relations, and problems—to life but also reveal(s) subtleties in meaning and behaviors that large scale surveys often miss or in some cases, get wrong” (Foner 2003: 27).

In her extensive study of Haitian transnational migrants, Nina Glick Schiller (2003, 118) contends that in the study of transnational migration, surveys that rely on self-reported responses can underestimate the number of people involved in transnational activities. Nancy Foner cautions that those involved in transnational political or religious activities that are politically suspect, for example, may be reluctant to reveal their activities to survey researchers (Foner 2003, 117). This is also an issue in qualitative research. In my own case, it was only after second interviews and after trust had been built that consultants would reveal that they were involved in political transnationalism. Because of this, I used a collection of mixed qualitative methods such as participant observation, a variety of interview techniques, life histories, and the study of documents to understand the transnational behavior of study participants.

Participant Observation

Participant observation was an essential part of my research to understand the everyday life of Ethiopian immigrants. Because Ethiopians, like most other immigrants, do not have a core geographic center from which one can observe and be part of their day-to-day activities, I found Dianna Shandy’s (2007) research on the Nuer and Paul Stoller’s

(1997&2002) long-term study of West African immigrants in New York City to be extremely useful. Following their suggestions I hung out at convenience stores, neighborhood ethnic businesses, restaurants, and cafés and attended churches and community organizations so I could casually meet and interact with people. These locations attract and bring Ethiopians together hence they can socialize, share news, share their triumphs and disappointments, and alleviate loneliness (Selassie 1996: 266).

I found coffee places, particularly Caribou and Starbucks stores—what my consultants call “a de facto embassy of Ethiopians and Somalis”—crucial for engaging in verbal exchanges, conversing about life in the United States, and recruiting individuals for interviews. Every day, but especially on Sundays and Saturday afternoons, Ethiopians literally crowd the nearest coffee place in their neighborhood. In fact, sitting in a coffee shop for hours is a form of continuity. In Ethiopia, people (almost exclusively men) chat for hours on end over a cup of coffee. Perhaps what made the coffee places in the metro area more attractive was the free wireless internet, which computer-savvy Ethiopians use to learn about happenings in Ethiopia and beyond. In most cases I had a chance to meet and talk with individuals informally before asking them to participate in my research. We would talk about many issues over coffee, although immigration and life in the United States were usually our topics.

These “ethnic sociocommerscapes” as Chacko (2003a) rightly referred to them serve as community billboards. Ethiopian cafés and restaurants often posted notices of communitywide events and calls for meetings that allowed me to closely follow what was going on in the community. I was able to attend formal events such as political meetings, demonstrations, fund-raisers for philanthropic activities in Ethiopia, and so forth by just

following café notices. I also learned about such events through local radio stations. Going to such formal meetings enabled me to learn not only what the meeting was about but also who attends them. There were so many communitywide activities that at times I had to be selective.

Some of the activities of second-generation Ethiopians overlapped and clashed with those of the first generation. I found being with and interviewing second-generation Ethiopians very exciting. They were very open about their experiences. Moreover, many of them were involved in the 2008 presidential election campaign. Together with them I attended several meetings, registered voters, canvassed, and met at an Ethiopian restaurant in Little Ethiopia, where we monitored primary election results, rooted for Obama, and watched all of the presidential debates while listening to their expert opinions. I also participated in several fund-raisers for philanthropic activities that had been organized mainly by second-generation Ethiopians.

Because I was living in an apartment complex where many Ethiopians have settled, I was able to establish myself as a researcher interested in “how Ethiopian immigrants live in the US.” The Ethiopians in my neighborhood were always worried about my economic well-being, since I was not working for wages. Nevertheless, I was gradually but surely invited to events such as the daily extended early morning coffee ceremony, dinners, graduations, weddings, a family welcome party, and so forth. Consultants who have become friends helped me join a fitness club. Being invited to a coffee ceremony was a sign of trust, neighborliness, and good rapport. Gradually people allowed me into their lives, and shared their secrets with me. I was asked to help with online applications for unemployment benefits and for the U.S. citizenship exam. By using the methodology of participant observation, I was able to learn

and understand the kinds of transnational activities local Ethiopians were involved in, how they construct and negotiate their ethno-racial identities, and much more.

Interviews

I obtained much of my research data using structured interviews, unstructured/ethnographic interviews, and informal interviews. I first used participant observation to recruit interviewees. Some of the people I met at cafés and other social events and institutions offered to take part in the research. Other times I used the Ethiopian Yellow Pages and invited business owners, churches, and other social institutions to participate in my research. Although many declined, several others were willing to share their experiences with me. I relied on snowball sampling—using an informant’s networks of friends, neighbors, and relatives. In total, I interviewed sixty-four people, of which twenty-one were second-generation Ethiopian Americans³. Some of the interviewees are community leaders, pastors, and members of different political parties, and of course many of them are regular people. All of my informants were legal residents or documented immigrants. I have not included “illegal” or “undocumented” migrants partly because I did not have access to them and arguably, the number of undocumented Ethiopian immigrants is not significant compared to those from Latin American countries, for example.

In selecting my consultants, I initially tried to sample different age, religious, ethnic, and occupation groups. However, the issue that repeatedly came up during the early interviews was the time of arrival in the United States. In other words, consultants emphasized acute generational differences. For the population that comprised my consultants,

³ The term ‘second generation’ is used here to refer to individuals who were born in the United States and outside Ethiopia and migrated before age of 12. The second generation also includes those who have one non-Ethiopian parent although researchers use the term “2.5 generation” (See Lee 2008:7). In fact, the second generation may also include the entire age cohort in both homeland and hostland because many grow up in transnational social fields (Fouron and Glick Schiller 2002: 193).

generational differences, as defined in terms of time of arrival to the United States and pre-immigration experiences, were more important than even rivalries among ethnic groups or regional differences.

Three generational units emerged among the seemingly homogeneous first generation. The first were the royalists. They fled the country when the imperial Ethiopian government was removed from power, starting in 1960s. Many of them were not very political. The second group are the revolutionaries—the people who embraced communism, cooperated with the military, and upended the reign of Haile Selassie I (r. 1930-1974). It was the actions of this group in Ethiopia that led to the exodus of the royalists. The revolutionaries were themselves purged by the military government, which refused to hand over power to a civilian administration. They too came to the United States, beginning in 1980s. The third group is the DV generation units—those who started to arrive in the United States in the 1990s for economic reasons. There are some similarities and commonalities among these three groups by virtue of the fact that they are all Ethiopians. Yet the different experiences of these three groups before immigration and in the US has produced three distinct subgroups or what I call following Eckstein (2009) immigrant divide. Members of each generational units have different views, interpretations, and understandings of life from members of the other two groups. As I selected consultants I paid attention to these three categories of individuals. I made sure that the voice of each category was heard.

I began the first round of interviews with a structured questionnaire. In developing interview questions, I found Ewa Morawska's (2004) interview questions to be very useful. I updated her questions and added new questions using data obtained from participant observation and initial interviews. I included questions about Habasha identity, the changing

culture of work, Ethiopian cuisine, stories about Little Ethiopia, and issues of transnationalism among children of the immigrants.

Initially the interview questions covered the demographic and socioeconomic backgrounds of consultants. However, in most cases I avoided compiling explicit individual profiles that included information about education, ethnic background, religion, and age. Even though I promised to use pseudonyms, many respondents were fearful that information about their background could be used to identify them. Instead, I focused on context related to the issues they were willing to talk about without personalizing the data (see Moussa 1994: 41, for a similar experience).

Many of the interview questions focused on the following core areas: whether the respondent was involved in transnational activities (e.g., sending remittances), the reasons why the respondent was part of transnational social activities, whether the respondent felt that their transnational involvement facilitated or hindered their incorporation into American mainstream society, and to what extent their representations of their ethno-racial identity was affected by U.S.-based racial categories. At the end of each interview, I asked consultants to report broadly not only on their own personal experiences but also on the general conditions of Ethiopians in the metro area and to make comparisons across generations. Most interviewees were very comfortable talking about the community as a whole.

Many of the interviews were carried out in the favorite place of my respondents, mostly in their preferred Starbucks café. Time was a major constraint for those who work long hours. I often went to workplace locations, such as parking lots, gas stations, and taxi stands. I interviewed respondents individually so that they could become comfortable. Most

of the interviews were recorded with permission, although some of my respondents refused to be tape recorded.

I also used unstructured interviews for follow-up sessions. I found the technique useful and very fruitful. Many of the unstructured interviews were done in the apartments of my consultants or in my own apartment, in parks, at Ethiopian community centers, or over a cup of coffee. Most of these interviews lasted anywhere from one hour to almost half a day. The core of my conversations revolved around the same issues as the structured interview yet in a very relaxed manner. I also asked my respondents to tell me about their migration history, about their children, and about their interactions with non-Ethiopians. In addition, I asked them the open-ended question of what they would like to tell me. Some consultants were animated when talking about Ethiopian history and political issues. There were times when I felt like a captive listening to their stories and lectures. Others liked to talk about the successes of their children. In these discussions, my interviewees educated me about their versions of Ethiopian socioeconomic and political contexts, particularly the Ethiopian student movements of the 1960s and 1970s.

Informal interviews—what I call gathering data on the move—was a third technique I used. Somewhat interestingly, this was the most important source of information about the general situation of Ethiopians. There were many days when I did not have a scheduled interview and no communitywide special event was scheduled. On those days I rode on Metrobus Route 70/71, which connects Washington, D.C., to the downtown area of Silver Spring, Maryland, to meet and converse with Ethiopians. I always found Ethiopians on the bus who were going to or returning from work. I had conversations with dozens of Ethiopians on the bus. It was a good opportunity to talk about any topic, mostly about employment

experiences, racial relations in the United States, and how Ethiopians identify other Ethiopians in public places. Since I was perceived as just an ordinary passenger, not a researcher, people talked freely and honestly about their perceptions of America, the sense of being different in the new land, what meanings they give to their racial and ethnic identities, and their overall concerns and dreams. The most challenging aspect of this kind of data gathering was remembering all the conversations. After such conversations, I would invite the person to participate in a formal interview. A few agreed to meet at a later time, but many of the bus riders rejected the invitation.

Life Histories

I constructed life histories for some of the people I interviewed. I focused on eight individuals whose lives would help me generalize about the experiences of a group. Length of stay in the United States and generational identity were important considerations in selecting consultants. In all honesty, the life history consultants were almost self-selected; these were the individuals who were willing to meet with me on several occasions and share their immigration experiences. The main question I specifically used for the life history interviews was: “If you were to write your migration history, where would you start?” In most cases the question made sense and consultants talked very freely. George Gmelch has noted that “migration, like war, creates vivid memories, and vivid memories are more likely to be reliable than dim ones” (1992: 312), and this was clearly the case with my life-history consultants. Through frequent meetings and extended informal interactions I was able to explore personal stories that visualize in retrospect the period before migration, the context in which they made the decision to migrate, what their lives have been like in the United States, and how they participate in transnational activities. These interviews enabled me to create a

coherent portrait of the overall transnational landscape, and I quote from their narratives throughout the dissertation (see Olwig 2003; Buechler and Buechler 1996: xx).

Positionalities and the Politics of Fieldwork

Despite that fact that I was an “insider,” as it were, my identity as an Ethiopian did not give me automatic access to the people who participated in this study. Sometimes it was not easy to create rapport and build trust right away. Of course, I expected some of these challenges because I know that Ethiopians are very suspicious and secretive, even though they are perceived to be very sociable. Many of the second-generation consultants talked about how difficult it is to penetrate the community. They found this issue to be a challenge for their political organizing. But they appreciate the fact that “just a random person does not have access to our community,” as Selam put it.

Beyond collective secrecy, however, some of my respondents were genuinely concerned about their safety and the safety of their families in Ethiopia should they speak their mind. I understood their fears and valued the explanation they gave me about why they could not be part of my research. Those who were willing to be interviewed insisted that I keep their names secret, even though I repeatedly told them that their names would not be revealed. Some of them did not like to talk about politics at all, sometimes because of fear and sometimes because of disinterest. The fear I encountered in one way or another showed me a lot about the power the nation-state has beyond territorial boundaries to limit even silence immigrant transnational voices.

Consultants were just as interested in me as I was in them. They asked me about my ethnic background, political orientation, and what I think about Ethiopian history. As a matter of reciprocity, I took time to share my own personal background. Yet, sometimes, some of

their demands went over the top. Some individuals wanted to know what I think of the Ethiopian government and the opposition political parties. I made an effort to explain to them that as a researcher I was neither supporting nor opposing the Ethiopian government. But, neutrality, it did not make sense to them. For them, there is no way to be neutral about the Ethiopian government and its opponents. Perhaps speaking ill about the Ethiopian government would have won me more interviewees, since most people seemed to be opposed to the government in Ethiopia. Yet I wanted to interview as many people as possible and to represent a range of views and opinions.

Interestingly, one of my interviewees showed me his business in downtown Washington and told me how he had worked hard to make it into the American middle class—or “upper middle class,” as he put it. We were getting along so well that he promised me a free apartment during my fieldwork. However, during our second interview he stubbornly sought my opinion about a new Ethiopian law—The Proclamation for the Registration and Regulation of Charities and Societies (2008). This law was fiercely and widely discussed among Ethiopians in the metro area. I honestly told him that since the law denies external funds for anything that could be considered political in anyway, I believed it was a path to complete autocracy. He was apparently displeased with my opinion; he was pro-government because he believes that the current administration is “better than” the one before. After this conversation, he refused to answer his phone when I tried to contact him.

As the fieldwork progressed, I tried to be attentive to the political messages of the remarks I made. Yet I found such self-censorship challenging. Once I had a meeting with the ex-chairman of the main opposition political party. He could have been the prime minister or a prominent government official if the opposition had won the election. Suddenly, the

interview went sour. I had made an off-the-cuff remark that although I have not been to Ethiopia since 2004, from what I had heard and read, the recent parliamentary election was the closest thing we had to a democratic system, despite what had happened in the vote-counting process in the election. He remarked that my thinking was pro-government, and I immediately became a foe. He abruptly ended the meeting. This was just one example of how my political self-positioning had implications for the data I collected. The fact that I presented myself as politically neutral might have had a negative impact on who would talk to me and what they would tell me; I was definitely not given a free pass to access to the Ethiopian community of the D.C. area. At the same time, my neutral political stance enabled me to talk to diverse groups of people.

Ethnicity and ethnic belonging was another issue that affected my research. Ethiopians in the United States are sharply divided along ethnic lines—sometimes more divided than the people at home. Again at my own peril, I was not so interested in the acrimonious and murky issues of ethnicity, although I did not entirely ignore how those issues affected the transnationality of my respondents. Just as they had been curious about my political orientation, consultants wanted to know which ethnic group I belong to before an interview began. I suspect they wanted this information so they could tailor their narratives according to the ethnic group I belong to. My late father was Amhara and my mother was half-Oromo and half-Amhara. I was born and grew up in a dominantly Oromo-speaking region. I speak both languages and practiced both cultures. Unlike most of my consultants, ethnic belonging and ethnic ideology was not drilled into my consciousness in childhood. I did not encounter these overplayed and sometimes toxic issues until I attended college although I understand that Ethiopia like most other countries has never been an ethnic heaven. My rural family had

many other things to worry about, not the least of which was earning an extremely precarious livelihood. In any case, I always felt I could get myself around ethnic issues or go for a hyphenated identity—Amhara-Oromo. My use of hyphenation won me a nod but they always wanted me to belong to one ethnic group.

Perhaps my indefinite ethnic identity made the issue more interesting in terms of data collection. Although I believe that not belonging to one ethnic group may have shaped how people responded to my questions, I found the dual identity to be beneficial since it gave me the chance to talk to people of different ethnic groups. When they look at my names people assume I am an Amhara. However, when we meet in person, people tell me that I speak Amharic with an Oromo accent or whatever. Some of those who claim Amhara identity or that of other ethnic groups would naively ask me “why the Oromos do not call themselves Ethiopian” as if I was the last person to answer the question. In contrast, although my Oromo consultants were very comfortable with my Oromo language and understanding of Oromo culture and history, they were concerned that my Amhara names made me less of an Oromo. As one of my undergraduate college friends that I met in DC put it, I am not an Oromo *qulqullu* (lit. pure Oromo)—expressing a clear ethnic primordialist way of thinking that bedeviled the country.

What mattered most, more than my politics or my ethnic origin, was how I defined myself in relation to the three groups of immigrants I identified for this study: the royalists, the revolutionaries, and the DV group. In many ways I see myself as a member of the DV group. Members of this group and I tended to agree about the nature of Ethiopia and about the situation we grew up under regardless of our ethnic and political orientations. Yet my interviews with the royalists and the revolutionaries were very interesting precisely because of

our points of disagreement. We discussed, debated, argued, and negotiated about the condition of Ethiopia. Sometimes it was very hard to relate to them and even show interest in the kinds of stories they liked to tell me about the glorious Ethiopia of the past. Some of them became emotional when they talked about the Ethiopian state which I felt disconnected from. In any case, my stance as a researcher is that my political, ethnic, and generational positions are very much part of the processes of collecting interviews and writing about my findings. I bring my own generational thinking and voice to the research, in addition to my academic training.

Significance of the Study

The dissertation is of significance to the study of transnational migration in multiple ways. For the past three decades, scholars have been documenting how immigrants retain their ties with the countries they came from. Much of this analysis has challenged the conventional representation of migrants as people who either assimilate fully into the culture of the receiving country or who ultimately return to their home countries. While transnational studies have created a richer and more nuanced understanding of immigrants, much of the research on transnational migration has focused on the ties immigrants maintain in the sending country. This dissertation adds to this analysis by looking at how the actions of Ethiopian immigrants contribute to nation building in the United States as well as in Ethiopia. The dual focus of this group challenges either/or views of immigrants and demonstrates how transnationality works in both directions.

This study also contributes to our understanding of why immigrants make certain choices as they adapt to their new home and what motivates and shapes their transnational activities. For Ethiopian immigrants, generational units is a clear factor. Ethiopian immigrants

arrived in three distinct units, each of which had differing experiences in Ethiopia and in the United States. These experiences shaped their priorities and views. My examination of the choices and priorities of the royalists, the revolutionaries/political generation, and the DV generation units adds nuances to our understanding of an immigrant community over five decades in a way that goes beyond simplistic analysis based on parentage or length of stay in the receiving country. This exploration of Ethiopian immigrants describes how these three generational units grappled with politics, family loyalty, nationalism, obligations to those left behind, differing views of success, racial views, and attitudes about education, all the while gauging how far to integrate into U.S. society. The story is complex and reminds us that simplified analysis will not provide depth of understanding.

Most studies of transnational migration have focused on the political, economic, and cultural dimensions of cross-border engagements. There is a consensus in the literature that philanthropic activity is an understudied but important theme in the identities of most migrants. Philanthropy embodies the connection and commitment of transnational migrants to the economic and social improvement of both the sending and receiving countries. In this dissertation I discuss how they participate in activities that bring a socioeconomic benefit to their fellow nationals in both locations. I argue that immigrant philanthropy is a new topic in the list of what most studies focus on. Its impact is more significant and profound with far reaching consequence on nation state.

Oftentimes, transnationalism is described as the business of the first generation. However, my study shows that transnationalism is part of the world of each of the generational groups I identified including the second generation. Moreover, transnational involvements and interests differ for a member of the DV group than it does for a long-settled

member of the royalists, but each generational unit contributes hard-earned resources to transnational action, be it through engagement with homeland politics, contributions to an international NGO, or direct contributions to families. My exploration of the differences in transnational activity among the generational units reveals differences in focus over time in a well-established yet ever-growing immigrant community.

Finally, as Sara J. Mahler and Patricia R. Pessar (2001) and many others (Arthur 2010) have pointed out, studies of transnational practices have focused on immigrant groups from Latin American and Caribbean countries. The generalizations these studies have made about the potential of transnationalism to change the social and political landscapes of sending and receiving countries have not yet been tested for immigrant groups from other parts of the world. This dissertation examines those generalizations using the experiences of a large number of Africans who have come to the United States since the 1960s, especially since the 1980s. It demonstrates the existence, pervasiveness, and depth of various forms of transnationalism. I discuss how the community studied fare in terms of the generalizations about transnationalism that have been made in the existing literature. While I underscore how Ethiopian immigrants support those generalizations they also add new layers to our understanding.

Chapter 2

Immigrant Generations: Contexts of Identity and Transnationalism

Introduction

In this chapter I argue that the continued involvement of immigrants in their place of origin as well as what they do in the place of destination are shaped by the circumstances of emigration and reception. Since research on immigrant transnationalism began in the 1990s, the most important and engaging question has been “Why do immigrants participate in transnational social activities?” Because transnational activities are such extremely demanding undertakings particularly financially and of course it can be extremely time consuming, it is important to understand what factors or constellations of factors motivate, force, or compel immigrants to participate in them. How and why do immigrants pursue different strategies for adapting to the new country and in what ways do they continue ties to their homelands? Why are some members of particular immigrant groups more involved in particular transnational activities while others in that group shun them altogether? In order to answer such questions, several researchers have focused on the context of reception—the factors that relate to the host country. To date, researchers have privileged the study of the experiences of migrants in the receiving country as factors that shape transnationality (Al-Ali and Koser 2002; Eckstein 2009; Vertovec 2009).

Identities, adaptation strategies, and transnational participation are, however, partly formed by the pre-immigration experiences of migrants, or, as Eckstein (2009, 10) put it, “the weight of their (immigrants’) past,” as it is carried to the country of destination. The political and economic situation in the home country influences the type of people that emigrate. Of course, the historical and sociocultural baggage that immigrants bring does not determine

their fate, nor do immigrants accept unquestioningly the customs and mores of the areas where they resettle (Smith 2008; Eckstein and Barberia 2002; Marcelin 2005). Therefore, not all first-generation immigrants adapt to the host country in the same way or engage in activities related to the homeland in ways that are similar. These differences are often shaped by the economic and political conditions that prevailed and the events that occurred in the home country at the time when they left (Erdmans 1998; Pasura 2011; Berg 2009a&2007; McAuliffe 2008a).

At the same time, the continually evolving political and economic situation in the host country also has a bearing on how immigrants adapt. In order to understand how pre-immigration lived experiences *contribute* to the adaptation strategies and transnationalism of immigrants, I pay attention to differences among immigrants, particularly intra and inter-generational differences.

The chapter is divided into four parts. The first part provides theoretical reflections on determinants of transnational participation with a focus on a generational approach. The second part briefly explains the relationships between the United States and Ethiopia and how the former emerged as the major destination for Ethiopian immigrants. The third and most important section examines three generational groups of Ethiopian immigrants. I have identified three generation units of Ethiopian immigrants based on the issues that triggered the first generational unit to emigrate and the sociohistorical context for their reception in the United States.

Determinants of Transnational Involvement: A Generational Approach.

In one of the trendsetting texts on immigrant transnationalism, *Transnationalism from Below* (1998), Guarnizo and Smith stated, “A main concern guiding transnational research

should be the study of the causes of transnationalism and the effect that transnational practices and discourses have on pre-existing power structures, identities and social organizations. Put differently, the causes and consequences of transnationalism, from above and below, ought to form the center of the transnational *research agenda*” (p. 29, italics added). Granted, several researchers have since then pursued this research agenda, asking “Why do migrants maintain and construct transnational social fields?” Itzigsohn and Saucedo (2002, 2005) have systematically compiled and reviewed the literature on determinants of transnationalism and grouped the analysis into three categories: resource-dependent transnationalism, linear transnationalism, and reactive transnationalism.

Several researchers argue that transnational involvement is very much resource dependent. They suggest that transnational activities begin once the economic situations of immigrants improve (Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2005; Portes et al. 1999; Itzigsohn 2009). Economic incorporation in the host society as a factor for transnationalism has been touted. Yet economic success may not guarantee or be motive enough for transnational involvement. Hoffman-Guzman (2004) looked at the lives of the middle- and upper-class Dominican immigrants in Miami and found very limited transnational connections. According to Hoffman-Guzman, immigrants’ improved standard of living became a disincentive for economic transnational activities when the immigrants anticipated little or no economic return. For Eritrean immigrants, for instance, sending remittances is a matter of national obligation, rather than improved economic standing. Eritreans must contribute to the state through the regular payment of 2 percent of their annual incomes. This payment applies across all social categories, including even the unemployed (Al-Ali and Koser 2002:587).

Another major motivation researchers have identified for transnational engagement after migration is linear—a “simple” continuation of the ties that connect immigrants to their family, friends, and place of origin (Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2005; Glick Schiller 1999b). Migration is often conceived as a network-building process that builds upon itself, facilitating the departure and settlement of newcomers (Bashi 2007). Regardless of motivations, the onset and continuation of transnational activities follows the same logic of network construction (Guarnizo et al. 2003).

In addition many researchers emphasize reactive transnationalism as an explanation for why migrants maintain ties to the homeland (Glick Schiller et al. 1994&1995; Foner 2005; Itzigsohn and Saucedo 2005, Vertovec 2009). The perspective emphasizes that many (if not most) immigrants are discriminated against, exploited economically, and have no political voice in their host countries. Their educational credentials are rarely accepted. They often fail to secure jobs that would give them a shot at the American dream. A popular joke among Ethiopian and other African taxi drivers in the Washington, D.C., metro area is that the best place to have a heart attack is in a taxi. It is likely that the driver will be a doctor. Therefore immigrants who are disempowered and disenchanting in their host country often turn to transnational activities in reaction to their disappointment with their new situation (Glick Schiller 1994, 50-51).

What is more, unlike previous historical waves of immigration, which were peopled largely by members of white ethnic groups, the new wave of immigrants to the United States is racially diverse. They may encounter negative experiences and hostilities in the host country attributable to racism. Generally, racialization, marginalization, and the overall negative experiences of integration that immigrants encounter in the host country are seen as

“potent forces” propelling immigrants to be transmigrant (Foner 2005; Glick Schiller, Basch and Blanc 1995). These individuals may see transnational engagement as a means to an end. Even if they are living in government-subsidized housing and earning no more than minimum wage in their new surroundings, when they can send money back to the home country, even if the remittance is small by U.S. standards, they become persons of high status at home. They become people of substance. Goldring (1998) argues that the desire for status in the home country is an important and expedient motivation for transnational activity among immigrants regardless of their economic status in the receiving country; even those who experience low levels of “marginality” want to have their status valorized back home.

Certainly, the variables identified above are useful explanations for the motivations for transnational practices. However, many of these analyses have focused on and given primacy to what happens in the post-immigration environment. The privileging of host-country factors and the sidelining of immigrants’ past emerge from the conventional assumption that immigrants arriving from a particular country are all the same. As McAuliffe (2008a: 63) has correctly observed, “Many studies continue unproblematically to deploy national migrant communities as objects of analysis, treating migrant groups as internally coherent and homogeneous.” However, as Pina Webner (2004: 896) perceptively stated, “Diasporas are full of division and dissent. At the same time they recognize collective responsibilities, not only to the home country but to co-ethnics in far-flung places.” Researchers have just begun to look closely at internal diversities among first-generation immigrants in terms of pre-migration factors, such as how religion (McAuliffe 2008a& b), ethnicity (Matsuoka and Sorenson 2001; Bozorgmehr 1997; Østergaard- Nielsen 2003), political ideologies (Hepner

2009), and generational differences (Erdmans 1998; Berg 2007, 2009a and b; Eckstein 2009; Eckstein and Barberia 2002) shape how immigrants adapt to their new surroundings.

Here I wish to show how generational differences among first-generation Ethiopian immigrants contribute to their transnational commitments. The concepts of generations and generational differences are extremely useful ways to understand society. However, to date, the tools of postcolonial anthropological research have not been used to explore these variables in great enough depth (see Whyte et al. 2008). In this chapter and subsequent chapters I approach the concept of a generation as a social construct. In doing so my intention is not to dismiss the importance of age differences. Rather a historically grounded generation analysis helps us recognize generation as a *social* group rather than one given a priori by virtue of date of birth (Berg 2007: 17). Here my theoretical understanding of generation is informed and enriched by Karl Mannheim's (1952) classic essay "The Problem of Generations" and the work of several researchers who have now turned to a generational approach to understand the lived experiences of members of diasporas (Eckstein 2009; Berg 2007&2009a; Eckstein and Barberia 2002; McAuliffe 2008a; Gibau 2005).

In his influential writing about the concept of generations, Mannheim suggested that generations are sociocultural and political experiences. He proposed the concept of "generation as an actuality" to help us better understand times of rapid sociocultural change in a particular society. Mannheim argues that location in time (as in an age cohort) or within society (as in social class) are not enough to explain what constitutes a distinct generation (see also Pilcher 1994). Even national location is not sufficient; he points out that urban and rural young people of the same nationality have very different experiences during their formative years. What he calls "generation as an actuality" is created when bonds are created between

people based on their shared exposure to the social and intellectual changes that emerge during a “process of dynamic de-stabilization” (Mannheim 1952: 303). The postcolonial world and the drive for modernization in Africa have produced such a moment of rapid social transformation, in the process creating fertile ground for the coalescence of a generation as an actuality (Kebede 2008; Whyte et al. 2008).

However, the concept of a generation as an actuality, whose members share the experience of “being sucked into the vortex of social change,” as Mannheim (1952: 303) put it, does not provide a sharp enough analytical tool. Oftentimes different or opposing forms of responses to particular historical situations emerge, a liberal and a conservative group, for example. Ethiopians within the same generation did not interpret events during the Ethiopian revolution of 1970s in the same manner, as was the case for Iranians, Cubans, and Vietnamese during their respective revolutions (McAuliffe 2008a; Berg 2007; Bozorgmehr 1997). The divergent views of these groups were largely shaped by class, education, ethnic and/or national membership, gender, and many other intervening variables (Kebede 2008; Pilcher 1998; Kertzer 1983). The most important analytical level would be a generational unit, or “generational habitus,” in Pierre Bourdieu’s conceptualization. Members of a generational unit share a much more nuanced and concrete bond, “an *identity of responses*, a certain affinity and common views about events” (Mannheim 1952: 306). During the Ethiopian revolution of the mid-1970s, some individuals rallied under the banner “land to the tiller,” and they eventually unsettled the ancient empire. Others saw little or no fault with the feudal tenure system. Rene Lefort describes the disparity:

Ethiopia, land of contrast . . . what country in the third world would not fit this cliché? On a country road a horse man passes, protected by a swarm of armed guards who drag behind them, chained by the neck, peasants to be thrown into prison for not having paid him his due, a

due which is perhaps being used *to pay for his son's studies in one of the best American universities.*" (1983:12-13, my italics)

For Mannheim, both the peasants being dragged by the neck and the son of the wealthy horseman would be members of the same generation. He explains: "Within any generation there can exist a number of differentiated, antagonistic generation units. Together they constitute an 'actual' generation precisely because they are oriented toward each other, even though only in the sense of fighting one another" (Mannheim 1952: 306-07; see also Bourdieu 1977:78). Different generation units in Ethiopia—those who rallied against the ancient regime and those who benefited from it—immigrated to the United States under different historic moments and circumstances. These contending generation units concentrated in Washington, D.C.⁴.

Karl Mannheim never applied his theoretical analysis to an attempt to understand immigrants. However, several researchers have since systematically used the historical generational approach to appreciate immigrant generations. First, the sociohistorical context—that is, the generative forces that precipitate migration—greatly influence how and why émigrés from particular time periods and from a specific country adapt differently, imagine home differently, and have different relationships to the home country (Erdmans 1998). Second, just like the societies of the home, host countries undergo changes. In the United States for instance, immigrants who arrived prior to or even during the Civil Rights Movement may have different adaptation experiences than those who arrived decades later or during the Obama era. Hence the historically grounded generational units analysis promises to

⁴Of course generational units are not homogeneous. As Pilcher (1998:7) argues that social generational differences may vary as a function of particular issues. Perhaps generational social cluster is more appropriate than generational units, as cluster may recognize impermanence, agency and intra-generational differences although once formed generational identities are more resilient.

explicate how the historical moment of departure and the reason for departure (pre-migration background) and moment of arrival in the host society (post-migration experiences) influence how immigrants adapt, form new identities, and relate to their home country (Eckstein 2009; Eckstein and Barberia 2002; Berg 2009a).

The United States as a Destination for Ethiopian Immigrants

I would like to begin this section with a fascinating conversation I had with, Esther, 40, a Zimbabwean immigrant. I met Esther at a law office in downtown Silver Spring, Maryland. She works as a paralegal. A friend of mine was a client at the law office; he was appealing a deportation proceeding after his asylum application had been denied. On a couple of occasions while my friend was weighing his legal options with his lawyer, Esther and I had interesting discussions in the waiting area. She was staggered by the number of Ethiopian asylum seekers. “Many of our clients are Ethiopians,” she told me. She railed about that “African political mess” that she felt was responsible for “our exile.” She talked with desperation about how Robert Mugabe—Zimbabwe’s president since independence in 1980s—was the reason she had emigrated. A comment she made about her own experiences struck a chord with me. “There are few Zimbabweans in the States. I feel very lonely. I call home at least every two weeks. . . . It is funny,” she continues, “Every time I call home I talk to my grandfather. He asks me, ‘Hey, Esther how is London?’ I have told him several times that I am in the States. For grandpa if a Zimbabwean is in the West it has to be England.”

Esther’s story testifies to how a country’s historical, social and (perhaps) colonial relationships shape immigrants’ destinations. This is probably why we find many populations of South Asians and the Caribbean in the UK, North Africans in France, Filipinos in America, and Ethiopians in the United States. Even though Ethiopia and the United States had no

colonial relationship, the United States emerged as the preferred and primary destination for Ethiopians. The pattern is the result of the complex relationships that have existed between the two nations, particularly since the Second World War (Metaferia 2009; Getahun 2007a). As Ruben G. Rumbaut (1994:588) has correctly stated, after the war, “the United States became more deeply involved in the world, [and] the world has become more deeply involved in America—indeed, in diverse ways, it has come to America.”

The United States has certainly been deeply involved in internal affairs in Ethiopia, sometimes without the knowledge of the U.S. congress (Diamond and Fouquet 1972). As Halliday and Molyneux (1981: 214) have noted, “The linchpin of US policy in the Horn was, until 1977, its relationship with Ethiopia, for many years America’s chief ally in black Africa.” Before the 1960s, when there were few independent countries in Africa, Ethiopia became “the most preferred nation in Africa” (Diamond and Fouquet 1972: 37; Zewde 2002). Such status was conferred upon Ethiopia after much diplomatic lobbying on the part of Ethiopian leaders. John Spencer wrote how the Ethiopian emperor Haile Selassie I and other elites were obsessed with the United States in the 1920s and 1930s: “Throughout his reign as automatically as a compass needle drawn towards the magnetic pole Haile Selassie I turned towards the United States” (2006:103). The Ethiopian ruling class realized that American pragmatism could work in its favor. American foreign policy contrasted with the patronizing nature of the British and the Soviet Union’s anti–status quo approach (Westad 2005; Patman 1990). Faced with the possibility that Britain would add Ethiopia to its sphere of influence after World War II, Selassie turned to the United States as his powerful new ally.

The United States was primarily interested in the strategic position of the country in the restive Arabian Peninsula and needed to create a partner in the Cold War era (Lefebvre

1991). After years of foot dragging, partly because of the limited concern of the United States for the world outside its own horizon, especially for Africa, the United States yielded to Ethiopian interests since 1950s (Agyeman-Duah 1994). Before the advent of satellites in space, Ethiopia's value to the United States was the fact that a strategic spot called Kagnew lay within its borders; it was the best place in the world from which to receive and transmit radio signals (Wrong 2005a:198). Beginning with a May 1953 treaty and proceeding through subsequent agreements, the United States obtained unfettered access to the listening station that lasted until 1977. In return, Ethiopia received more than 60 percent of U.S. military aid to Africa and modest socioeconomic support. Interestingly, Ethiopia used the strategic location as a bargaining chip. In order to receive more military support from the U.S. the Ethiopian government pandered to the Soviets. The Soviets were extremely interested in the vital communication base. The action of the Ethiopian government almost blackmailed the United States to continue delivering aids. For three decades after the 1953 treaty the maneuver worked and there was literally virtually no area of Ethiopian society where the United States involvement was not visible. The United States became Ethiopia's patron, a substitute for the colonial master Ethiopia never had because it was never colonized.

Some of the sectors where U.S. influence was remarkable were education, health, and agricultural development (Wrong 2005a). The premier university, Addis Ababa University, was modeled after and indistinguishable from an American University. It was largely funded by the U.S. government. Many American professors arrived to teach and do research. Hundreds of Peace Corps volunteers roamed the country; it was the largest presence of that organization in Africa. At the same time, scores of Ethiopian students were sent off to the United States for graduate studies. Ethiopian Airlines, now the biggest airline in Africa, is

another legacy from this time of America's involvement with Ethiopia (McVety 2008). Despite Ethiopia's continued demand for economic assistance, however, "neither [the] US government nor American capitalism eagerly poured millions into bastion Ethiopia, . . . to transform its economy" (Marcus 1995:90). Nonetheless, much of the country's façade and veneer of modernization are directly attributable to American support. One might add among the general public the United States remained the most popular country in the world.

However, the most enduring, and perhaps controversial contribution of the United States is the millions of dollars it poured into Ethiopia's army (Metaferia 2009). Decades of arms transfers and the training of Ethiopians in the most prestigious military academies, including West Point, led to the formation of one of the most powerful armies in the region—"a big fish in a little pond," as Lefebvre (1991: 107) put it. Ethiopia became the first country south of the desert to possess supersonic jets. In fact, it is fair to say that Ethiopians experienced modernity through its instruments of mass control rather than harvesters and combiners. The consequences of such misdirected modernity continue to be far reaching. Strengthening the military increased state control and centralization; Levine has called it "a degree of autocratic control previously unknown in Ethiopian history" (1968: 17). Repression and the use of naked force became ubiquitous. Control of political dissent only produced growing armed resistances and national liberation movements (Hess 1970). In fact there were instances when the United States helped the Ethiopian government foil coups d'état. The United States also helped the government fight insurgents. But it did virtually nothing to reform an archaic political system (Edmunds 1975: 182; McVety 2008). The result of this was a stream of refugees and exiles that began as early as the 1960s (Kibreab 1987; Hess 1970; Tadesse 1991). The behavior of the United States in Ethiopia complicated its modernist

agenda for that nation. It was willing to provide a helping hand to maintain the political status quo and remained less concerned about Ethiopia's democratic future.

Years of repression and political control resulted in a popular revolution in 1974/75. Ethiopians often refer to “the explosion of a revolution.⁵” Unfortunately, a military dictatorship emerged from the upheaval of a populist revolution. It was not unexpected. Scholars had been debating the fate of Ethiopia given the modernization of its military “the only institution that is simultaneously traditional, modern and national” (Levine 1968: 22) in a country where political parties were not allowed. While some felt that the military was not politicized and saw no threat to the civilian administration, others foresaw an eventual military takeover (Scholler and Brietzke 1976). The second group was correct; riding the tide of popular revolution, the military government assumed power in June of 1974. The military leaders saw the United States as complicit in the social, economic and political injustices the regime unleashed on its people, and the junta broke diplomatic ties with the United States and welcomed the USSR as a replacement (Korn 1986). Individuals who supported the United States were either executed or sent into exile. Many Ethiopians who were brutalized under the military dictatorship came to the United States—the country they knew so well.

For the next seventeen years (1975-1991), despite its ideological rhetoric, the Soviet Union continued the same agenda as the United States had—the militarization of the country. The difference was that the Soviets did it on a massive scale (Kapuściński 2002:307). The Soviets made a symbolic attempt to persuade the Ethiopian government to improve its political situation and make peace with ethnic insurgents, but in practice they provided

⁵The Ethiopian experience was not isolated. Iran provides another example where U.S. involvement produced a similar result; the military aid the United States supplied to the Shah of Iran partly contributed to that country's revolution in 1979 (Koehn 1991).

ammunitions in Ethiopia's efforts to extinguish insurgencies, unrest, and liberation movements. At the cost of economic violence Ethiopia accumulated well over \$10 billion of debt to the USSR. Military expenditures reached more than 40 percent of the national GDP (Omitoogun 2003: 36). The "making of the most militarized state in the world" was actualized, a process that had started under the United States, reached its climax under the Soviets (Cervenka 1987: 74). Millions of refugees fled the brutal government. Today material culture objects mobilized for modern warfare are stuck and folded in the landscape—bombs, shells, tanks. These souvenirs so to speak are "intimately connected with decisions taken in Washington and Moscow" (González-Ruibal 2006: 180, 188).

In 1991 the military junta was forcefully removed from power. A new government, the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Front (EPRDF), assumed power, directly assisted by the United States. This event signaled the second coming of the United States with its neoliberal program and a road to democratic governance. Yet what began as a democratic movement quickly became a mockery of it (Pausewang et al 2002). The EPRDF rapidly became a totalitarian power. The government has survived criticism from abroad and even receives substantial economic and military training for "battling terrorism," a new goal that has effectively replaced the Cold War-era justification for military might (Shinn 2005).

Lawlessness and statelessness in Somalia has made the Ethiopian government an indispensable partner for the United States. The United States calls the Ethiopian government a democracy in progress because it is better than "centuries of aristocracy" (McVety 2008:403). Sustained "investment" in war and growing insurgencies coupled with neoliberal policy, however, continue to drag the economy down. Political and economic crises have made immigration a survival strategy, and many immigrants have come to the United States.

Diasporic Generations: “They stoop to anything to come to the US”

Literally, the generations of Ethiopians who have come to the United States in the past half-century are the product of Ethiopia’s ideological seesaw and major developments in the US. The transformations in Ethiopia from a semi-feudal state to semi-capitalist economy through the mid-1970s to the Soviet takeover to reincorporation into global capitalism and the neoliberal agenda since 1991 mean that Ethiopians have left from very different contexts and for various reasons. Such situations defined why people immigrated and shaped the frames through which each group interpreted the behavior of other groups.

Generational differences were brought up repeatedly in almost every interview. As Shelley’s (2001) study of Vietnamese immigrants in the United States suggested, the circumstances of immigration and resettlement in proximate localities often exacerbate and sharpen generational gaps that existed before immigration. I was able to identify at least three generational groups of Ethiopian immigrants. Of course I agree with Berg’s (2009b:297) idea that the diasporic generations were not “out there” to be had but analytic approximations. The first émigré generational units included the pre-revolution upper classes, who had been part of the imperial system. They were the privileged few; most of them educated in the West and groomed to be modernizers. In this chapter I refer to them, as royalists. The second group I refer to as children of the revolution/revolutionaries, following award-winning Ethiopian writer Dinaw Mengistu (2007). Most members of this group attempted to take the Ethiopia modernization effort one step further than their predecessors had, through what Donald Donham (1999) called “a Marxist modern” socialist revolution. But when the revolution backfired, most members of this group fled the period of Red and White terrors in the mid- to late 1970s. The third group started to arrive from the mid-1990s and continues to arrive today. They share the experience of living in Ethiopia while the national economy took a nosedive.

Most of them are in their prime working years and sought to leave the country as an economic survival strategy. They have been assisted mainly by the 1990s U.S. immigration reform called the Diversity Visa (DV) Lottery Program (Mains 2007). I refer to them as the DV generation.

The Royalist: “Immigrants are not us!”

Ayu, a business man that I described in the introduction, talked about the group of Ethiopians who left the country about the same time, ca. 1970s. It was as if he kept a roster of them. Many of these Ethiopians came from a fairly homogeneous group. They went to the same schools not only in Ethiopia but also in the United States and their families worked for the government. Most of them, by their own accounts, had a privileged life. Nonetheless, they were already dissatisfied with the imperial administration’s lackluster to change and unwillingness to introduce political reform in spite of the fact that the Ethiopian society was changing rapidly during the 1970s. They found the status quo that afforded them a privileged life unsustainable and “no one listened to us,” as Ayu stated. By the time their life style came under attack, by those promoting socialist principles, even before the revolution broke out in 1974/75, many left the country hoping that things would calm down. They had anticipated that the imperial system would weather public discontents and they could return in no time.

As we talked about conditions of exit and the causes of migration my conversations with Ayu got even more interesting. Ayu rejected being called an immigrant altogether. “You could call me a person of Ethiopian origin. Immigrants are not us,” he protested. “Look, I have employees who had never been to Addis Ababa before coming to Washington, D.C. Some of them are illiterate. . . . I was able to buy my plane ticket. I was able to go to the American embassy for a visa. I was welcomed with a handshake and allowed to stay in the

US as long as I wanted. When I came here there was a welcome party in honor of me,” he said. For a while I thought that Ayu’s refusal to be called an immigrant was simply an idiosyncrasy. Yet few of the Ethiopians who participated in the study and who came to the United States prior to and immediately following the Ethiopian revolution felt comfortable with the label of immigrant. In fact, it was not the words immigrants, exiles, and refugee themselves that bothered them. What offended them was my disregard for status and royalty when I characterized them merely as Ethiopian immigrants. I commonly hear people say, “America is like a bench chair. America equalizes people.” When they refer to a “bench seat,” they are not talking about an ornate seat reserved for royalty. They are using the bench as a metaphor for the fact that, although they are blue bloods and aristocrats, they were treated like common people when they arrived in the United States.

Like Ayu, many members of the first cohort of the Ethiopian diaspora in the United States were students from privileged families. In the 1920s, few Ethiopian students were sent to the United States for higher education. Most students who were sent abroad for study went to Europe, mainly France and England. The United States replaced France as a major destination of Ethiopian students after the 1950s because of the strong diplomatic ties between the two countries (Zewde 2002). Most of the students of this generation belonged to elite families and were the children of those who “*surrounded themselves around the emperor*,” Haile Selassie I (Ungar 1998: 259, emphasis mine). Selassie saw the possibility that students who had been educated abroad could become agents of modernization, and he expressed an interest in overseeing and financing their education. Balsvik (1985) called students of this era “Haile Selassie’s Students.” Melaku Beyan, a relative of the emperor, is a notable member of this early generation who studied in the United States. He is often noted as the first of such

students to have returned to the United States after the Italian occupation of Ethiopia (Zewde 1993). Most of the students of this generation returned to Ethiopia.

Although immigration to the United States was restricted to Europeans before the 1960s, the government gave Ethiopia a quota of 100 people each year (Getahun 2007a:19). Ethiopians did not take advantage of the quota during this period because people were averse to emigration. Department of Homeland Security (2011) data shows that only 1,180 Ethiopians were granted permanent residency during the four decades from 1930 to 1969. It would be difficult to say why those people preferred to settle in the United States, except for possible political discontent. In the 1970s, the number of immigrants to the United States more than doubled that population; in the period 1970-1979, 2,588 Ethiopians were granted legal permanent residency. These were the people who were driven out of Ethiopia during the 1974/75 revolution. Among others, the new regime targeted the imperial family, those who had worked for the imperial government, and anyone suspected of having a Western orientation. These individuals were indiscriminately rounded up, stripped of their assets, and vilified as *adhari*, an Amharic word for a reactionary. After sixty top government officials were summarily executed without a fair trial in the name of neutralizing the pro-imperial government and intimidating those plotting to reverse the revolution, the flood of emigration began. As Tessema a substitute teacher in Virginia put it, “In effect we were escaping incarceration from the bloody government” and it is understandable why many were bitter.

Dr. Mulugeta: “The soldiers were trying to arrest and cage anyone”

Ayalew, a former minister in Ethiopia calls himself a commoner. He eschews the label royal. In any case he blamed the Soviets for advising the government to pursue and target pro-U.S. individuals. For a long time, Ayalew was Ethiopia’s ambassador to Somalia and a

defense minister under the military government. As he was preparing to leave for Washington as Ethiopia's ambassador to the United States, he luckily escaped an assassination attempt. "The Soviets knew that I was moderate and pro-America. They tried to get rid of us before they took over the government," he told me. Even academic institutions were targeted as harboring supporters of the imperial government and the West, and several university professors were exiled (see, Metaferia and Shifferaw 1991). Dr. Mulugeta Wedajo, a top university official, described the moment as "insanity."

In 1974 when the soldiers took over, the emperor was overthrown, the university was closed. The soldiers said "Let's go to the rural areas and do quote unquote 'national service.'" There were no students and they made skeptical look at us. It made no sense to stay. It was very difficult to leave the country at that time because the soldiers were trying to arrest and cage anyone who was remotely associated with [the] previous regime. They considered anyone of any responsibility [to be] part and parcel of the emperor's administration. We at the university were very jealous of our academic freedom. We did not think we were part of the government, but the soldiers decided otherwise.

Many who came to the United States during this time were of higher socioeconomic status. Most were well educated men; few of these immigrants were women. Prior to emigration almost all of them had lived in the capital city of Addis Ababa. In a survey conducted in Washington, D.C., Koehn (1991: 103-110) reported that over half of the Ethiopian sample had a high level of policy-making, professional, or managerial positions in their homeland. Moreover, more than 15 percent had been engaged in large-scale farming or other commercial activity. Markedly unrepresentative of average Ethiopians, approximately 80 percent of them rated their personal and family income as "high" or "medium" (Woldemikael 1996: 149). The majority of them belonged to the dominant groups in Ethiopia, Amharas and Tigreans.

For many of the royalists, coming to the United States was almost like a homecoming. Even those who had never been to the United States had been influenced by the three decades of the U.S. presence in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian educational system was indistinguishable from that of American colleges. Mina recalled how she knew a great deal about America from the books she had read and movies she had watched and from her own teachers. Prior knowledge of the United States, academic credentials from elite U.S. schools, and a better economy in the United States all worked in the favor of this group (Ungar 1998). In contrast to the classic narratives of labor migration in which the immigrant starts at the bottom echelon of socioeconomic hierarchies, most members of this group secured jobs in the top levels of their fields; one even got a position at NASA. Ethiopians were not the only nationality to have this experience during the 1970s. Many immigrants from Iran and India who came to the United States during this period were professionals (Bhatia 2007; Bozorgmehr 1997). The U.S. labor market warmly welcomed these highly skilled, fluent English speakers and American-oriented people.

Nonetheless, all was not well as they adapted in the United States. In this post–Civil Rights Movement era, many study participants had trouble getting housing. Tessema told me about these experiences: “We go to an apartment for rent and the room is no longer available. Some of us were naughty. We go to the nearest telephone center and call them. The owner says, ‘Yes it is available and come on.’ It was obvious that they did not want to let that place to us. That happened several times.” It was a fall from grace for many of them. It was partly because of such scenarios that some members of this group established a better relationship with African Americans and embraced a pan-Africanist identity, unlike most Ethiopians who arrived later. (I explore this topic further in Chapter 3.) Many members of this first group of

immigrants spoke of how the United States had changed during their lifetimes. Dr. Abiyi explained, “You would not recognize the America I first experienced during the late 1950s. Now we are about to elect a black president. Many people of your age think that America has always been like this. No.”

It is important to examine how this generation relates to, perceives, and is perceived by later groups of Ethiopians who followed it to America. In most cases, conversations were filled with discourses of generational differences, boundaries, and resentments. The royalists see their exit as something that was forced upon them, whereas for Ethiopians who embraced socialism, emigration is a self-inflicted wound. In the eyes of the royalists most recent arrivals are simply deserters and are barely Ethiopian. “They are traitors that stoop to anything to come to the US,” as Ayu put it. In every interview members of the royalist generation spoke of their intuitive connection with home and told about how they had turned down lucrative job offers and tenure track positions after they graduated so they could return home to Ethiopia. Dr. Mulugeta stated,

Many of us left the country (the United States) after we finished our study without even participating in the graduation ceremony. We were so eager to go back. We were passionate. I did not take my diploma with me for instance. It was mailed to me, it was shipped to me. That was more or less the standard, not an exception. Everybody was enthusiastic to help the country. All our attention was to see what we can do for our country. Service for the country was the paramount and guiding principle of our life. You could compare that with the current generation. They want to leave the country. I understand it is the rotten written politics that force some people to leave. I understand there are so many factors. However, some of them look for an excuse to leave. They are comfort seekers.

The Ethiopia they imagine is often much grander than the actual present-day Ethiopia; it is almost like a foreign land to today’s young Ethiopians. The royalists remember and

sometimes consume the past like a pain reliever. I have been told on many occasions how Ethiopia was one of the most respected countries in the world. “To be Ethiopian was no[t] a shame. Just like any other powerful countries, Haile Selassie I and the United States presidents used to give press conference[s] at the Whitehouse. [Now] Ethiopian leaders are rarely seen in public with a US president and they are disrespected,” a participant who had been a major general under imperial rule told me. As a proof of that glorious past, he directed me to an online video. The video shows the emperor and President John F. Kennedy together in a parade on the streets of Washington, D.C. This participant is a self-published author who chose a photograph of Haile Selassie I and President Kennedy for the cover of his forthcoming book.⁶

The most glorified figure for older members of the diaspora is the emperor. They speak over and over about how benevolent he was and how he modernized Ethiopia. They filled their conversations with me with stories about the leadership role the emperor played in Africa and the speech he delivered at the League of Nations protesting colonialism, sidestepping the issue of the human rights violations that took place under his rule. Dawit surprised me with the idea of the “poorest king.” “Haile Selassie was the poorest king that ever lived,” he said. “He never had an asset. Actually his only asset, so-called asset, was a gift from the king of Persia, the Shah of Iran. He gave him five millions supposedly at that time.” Such a narrative directly contradicts much of the literature, which often discusses how the emperor was an embezzler, someone who built statues to dead dogs and fed live ones with choice meat while thousands of people were starving (Kapuściński 1984). Susan Eckstein

⁶ Susan Eckstein (2009) observations about pre-revolutionary Cuban immigrants apply equally well to Ethiopian immigrants. She writes about how older-generation Cubans often glorified and romanticized the past and vilified the post-revolutionary period.

(2009: 22) wrote in her detailed ethnography about pre-revolution Cuban immigrants how Cuban exiles imagined the homeland “through rose-colored pre-revolution lenses that blinded them to injustices which had prevailed in their midst.” One could say the same for many of the pre-revolution Ethiopian immigrants I spoke with.

The royalists follow current Ethiopian politics although they are not passionate. Most of them opposed Marxism in favor of political reform in the 1970s. “Some of the kids who embraced communism steered the country in the wrong direction. They blindly pushed the country into abyss and an uncharted territory,” stated Tessema, who often lectured me on his version of Ethiopian history, politics and much more. He and others in his generational cluster would enumerate the reforms their group had achieved, including the country’s first constitution. A coup d’état in the 1960s was commonly mentioned as a landmark in their efforts to remake the country while keeping the imperial family as a figurehead. Most of them characterize the leaders of the current government as “unrepentant communists” and point out that they saw communism as a panacea but are now advocates of free-market economics. Although a few of the royalists went back and served the current regime, others voiced their opposition regularly. While all Ethiopian immigrants see the Ethiopian flag as a symbol of identity and a visceral attachment to home, the royalists express their political identity by using the old Ethiopian flag overlaid with the image of the crown—the Lion of Judah symbol (Chacko 2003a: 35). In this way they distinguish themselves from later groups of immigrants and express their opposition to both regimes that followed the revolution.

Immediately after the military government was overthrown in Ethiopia in 1991, several royalists went home, only to realize that the home they imagined existed only in their minds. They changed their minds about staying. “I wanted to return and end this soldiering in

the diaspora. [But] I felt I did not belong there [in Ethiopia]. I felt like I was a stranger there. Everything [had] changed. Even the language [had] changed. I said, ‘What am I doing here?’” Dawit said of the first and the last time he returned to Ethiopia. He found few people he knew and to who he could relate. The streets, the neighborhoods, and family homes seemed strange to him. Ayalew stated that he feared political reprisals. “You know we work to bring down that government. Even if I go back and leave peacefully they know my heart. They look at me with askance.” Dr. Mulugeta agreed that it was impossible for others like him to return home: “The hope of going back I had evaporated. It is funny; one day we think about going, the other day we decide against it. It is [better] to think and imagine about home from here than going there.” Although they have given up the thought of returning to Ethiopia, many of them are engaged in recovering, restoring, and rehabilitating the past, including suing the government for their confiscated properties and at least their own homes.

The Revolutionaries: “Revolution is like a cat; it devours its kittens.”

More than four decades have passed since Astu came to the United States as a student. “The day I came here is like my birthday. I remember the year, the date, and everything about that day,” she remarked while we were having a late snack at a Panera Bread café in Arlington, Virginia. As usual, she dipped into the wealth of her experiences as an immigrant. This time she was reminiscing about her younger brother.

For a long time my brother was mad at me. When he arrived from Sudan, after years of separation, I thought it was going to be a happy reunion. [But] we were barely on speaking terms...My brother and many students rushed home immediately following the removal of the imperial government from power. The hope and passion was to build a socialist Ethiopia. They prodded us to go home with them. Some of us said no. Unfortunately, things did not go as planned. They demanded that the soldiers pack and go back to [their] barracks and hand over [the] government to a civilian administration. The soldiers refused and hunted them [down] one by one. Thousands of them were

murdered. My brother vividly recalls the October 1976 killings. And they fled to Sudan on foot. Now, they look down upon us as if we are less Ethiopian because we did not suffer for a national cause as much as they did.

The rift between Astu and her only brother has healed since both of them live in the metro area and they were able to bridge their differences. Time heal all wounds, it is said. Yet something that happened during a group dinner made her realize and understand the rage and pain of her brother and why he continues to be a “fanatic” about Ethiopia.

Once we had this dinner party. It was more like a reunion of old buddies. We still do it once in a while. We had our dinner and Ethiopian artists were performing. A few people danced; you know, it was a low-key type [of event]. Apparently one of the guests requested a Sudanese song. I forgot the name of that artist. I think my brother’s folks love him. Just when the music started playing, my brother and his friends crowded the dance floor. The mood in the room totally changed. Some of them were extremely emotional. It was weird. I thought the music opened up the old wounds. I sensed their ache. My brother still gravitates towards those people he spent time with in the refugee camps. They are comrades; that is what they call each other.

During the 1980s, the United States airlifted thousands of Ethiopian refugees suffering in Sudan and Kenya (Getahun 2007b). Even though the number of African refugees brought to the United States was paltry compared to the number of immigrants from Eastern Europe and Asia until 1993/94, Ethiopians constituted 93 percent of all African refugees admitted to the United States during the 1980s (Woldemikael 1996; Hepner 2009). About 33,195 individual Ethiopians were resettled. In subsequent years, up until the mid-1990s, thousands of Ethiopians were admitted to the United States as refugees. Some were students who had been sent to socialist countries but had defected to Western Europe when the Soviet Union crumbled.

The arrival of Ethiopian refugees from around the world was made possible by the passage of the Refugee Act of 1980. The act allowed the president, in consultation with Congress, to review the worldwide refugee population and admit those with “special humanitarian concern” to the United States. Refugees from communist countries were the most favored. They became symbols of the virtues of capitalism and the menace of communism (Rumbaut 1994; Eckstein 2009; Gordon 1995; Getahun 2007b). No other group in the refugee world fit this profile more clearly than Ethiopians. Because Ethiopia was a former ally who had turned into a bitter enemy of the United States, Ethiopians who wanted to leave represented the fatalities of communism yearning for freedom. Ironically, many Ethiopians who were admitted to the United States as victims of communism were communists themselves. In fact, they were more communist than the military government that had dislodged them.

The revolutionaries have a unique history. Unlike the royalists, the generation that came of age in the 1960s to the end of 1970s was radicalized. It was an obvious generational split. Members of this group, who are often associated with the Ethiopian student movement, were strongly organized and very vocal. They embraced Marxism as a self-evident truth (Wolde-Giorgis 1989), idolizing Ho Chi Minh and Che Guevara. They condemned Western imperialism for entrenched despotism and for almost every ailment in Ethiopia and beyond. In an unprecedented move, they demanded the overthrow of the monarchy and demanded that land be redistributed to the peasants. Tadesse (1993) wrote that it would be an understatement to argue that the younger generation was revolting against its own culture and tradition in advocating a revolutionary transformation of society. Bahiru Zewde (2002: 99), a well-known

Ethiopian historian, stated, “It was as if they [the students] woke up to a disturbing awareness of the country’s backwardness.”

Scholars still debate about why the students embraced radicalism (Kebede 2008; Westad 2005; Zewde 2002 &2010). The question is relevant because the educational system was dominated by the United States. Many of the teachers were Americans. In addition, scores of students received their graduate training in the United States. Westad (2005) argues that while they were in the West, particularly in the United States, the students had a great deal of freedom. They could discuss sensitive political issues, explore alternative ideologies, and, above all, learn about radical student movements. Some of the students who returned to Ethiopia in the early 1970s had been profoundly impressed by the radical student movement in the West. They brought that vision home with them and began rebelling against authority in Ethiopia, triggering a “generational conflict” (Abbink 1995: 139). These young people were able to generate revolution in a society commonly seen as regimented.

However, the revolution went awry. The military, consisting of noncommissioned officers often called the Derg, an Amharic word for committee, assumed power temporarily. The Derg promised to relinquish power to a civilian government. The revolutionaries did not agree about how to build a communist Ethiopia, despite their shared Marxist ideology. New political parties formed, including the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Front (EPRP) and the All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement (AESM). These inexperienced parties disagreed about what to do with the military. AESM members were prepared to cooperate with the military government to achieve communism, whereas the EPRP saw virtually no role for the military in a civilian administration (Ottaway and Ottaway 1987). Instead of solving their problem through negotiation, the opposing sides resorted to violence. The urban guerilla warfare of the

EPRP, often referred to as the White Terror, sought to bring down the military and its AESM collaborators. In reprisal, the AESM and the military formed an alliance and purged the EPRP, calling their killing spree the Red Terror (December 1977–February 1978).

When it was close to assuming power, the military regime created a rival party and turned its guns against the AESM—its own ideological protégé (Tareke 2008; Donham 1999). The the revolutionaries had politicized and inoculated the military with an ideology of “scientific socialism” that it parroted for the following seventeen years. Ethiopians who lived through the popular revolution that turned out to be so cataclysmic often say that “revolution is like a cat; it devours its kittens.” During the Red Terror, at least 30,000 to 40,000 Ethiopians were killed; the the revolutionaries were devoured (Abbink 1995: 135). The daily killings and each person’s suspicion that he/she would be the next victim resulted in “a perpetual siege which has created a flight psychosis even among those who are not politically conscious and motivated” (Bulcha 1988: 104). Hundreds of thousands fled to neighboring countries, mainly Sudan (Getahun 2007b).

Akin to Astu’s brother many of the Ethiopians who were brought to the United States were simply survivors. Some men escaped the country dressed in women’s clothing to camouflage themselves. Many suffered torture in prison. Unlike the royalists, it would be hard to pin down their socioeconomic status. Some came from humble families (Lefort 1983: 28). Kebede disputes the generalization that the the revolutionaries came from modest backgrounds. According to him, most of them were educated. The fact that they were able to go to school during 1960s and 1970s in Ethiopia means that they came from middle-income families at the very least; education was reserved for members of the privileged class (Kebede 2008). Regardless of their economic background, the revolutionaries were highly nationalist

and were disconnected from the average people. In their efforts to create a modern socialist country, they “felt entitled to drag, so to speak, their traditional countrymen into the twentieth century” (Donham 1999:126; Levine 1965).

As they resettled in the United States, most of the the revolutionaries faced major adaptation problems. They had troubled beginnings in their new host country, although their situations had improved remarkably. Compared to most refugees who arrived at about the same time, Ethiopians experienced a higher than normal level of depression, unemployment, and suicide. McSpadden (1987: 800) found that most of them were “single and alone” because they had been drawn into the currents of revolution at an early age. Lack of family support in the United States, traumatic experiences in the refugee camps, and survivor guilt took a heavy toll. Zewde and Getu, revolutionaries, spoke with me about their traumatic experiences in graphic language. They explained a massacre, torture, or an assassination as if it had happened yesterday. Getu, who is still haunted, used the word “vanguard” many times during our conversation; he talked about how he and his friends were vanguards of the revolution. He wanted to know if I had heard the slogan “Revolutionary motherland or death.” He told me the phrase was used during “the time when the military government ordered free killing. Corpses were thrown in the streets. Families were prohibited to take dead bodies of their loved ones until they paid for the bullets used to kill them.” Zewde, a political activist, did not speak much about that period, although he did mention that he has the “wounds of torture.”

Tesfu, who is now in his late 60s, recollected how he pretended to be unconcerned and avoided death. He has a vivid memory of the time. “I walked Churchill Street where I saw [the] dead bodies of people I knew strewn on the street,” he mentioned tearfully. Pastor Fasil,

another participant, joined the Seventh Day Adventist Church when “the whole thing turned bloody.” Many of the survivors left for Sudan. They told me the abuse they experienced in the hands of Sudanese police although the public were welcoming. Such horrific experiences continue to haunt many of them. Gabi, a second-generation Ethiopian, talked about his immediate families unspoken yet painful memories:

My family experienced war and great terror. I ask other Ethiopians what their families are like. It is a similar story... Our parents do not talk about the trauma they went through. It is always a secret. You know what I am saying? Straight up, it is just like black people are still haunted, after so many years, by slavery. Our parents still suffer from traumatic experiences. There is what is called post traumatic disorder. They still are all dealing with post traumatic disorder. Honest conversations are not happening to seek a help.

In addition, the the revolutionaries had the misfortune to arrive when the U.S. economy was contracting. This well-educated generation (although perhaps not as well educated as the royalist generation) had high hopes of living the American dream. Had they been able to remain in a peaceful Ethiopia, many would likely have become politically and economically important. The fact that they could find only low-paying jobs in the United States further complicated the adjustment process for them (Matsuoka and Sorenson 2001:69). However, in a short period of time, they showed remarkable resilience. They found niches of self-employment; many became cab drivers and parking-lot attendants, and some operated small businesses. It was after this group arrived that many people came to recognize Ethiopian immigrants. Restaurants, businesses, churches, and community organizations flourished. In many ways, this generation almost overshadowed the royalists as an immigrant presence, and it was this generation that defined the social and cultural ethos of Ethiopians in the metro area (Ungar 1998; Chacko 2003a).

In the diaspora the revolutionaries sharpened their generational identity. Their proximity to members of the royalist generation in the D.C. metro area highlighted the differences between the two groups. Kiflu Tadesse (1991), a freelance journalist in the United States, described the younger generation, in which group he includes himself, as “visionaries, idealists and activists who came together because of *altruistic* aims and goals to transform the society” (1993: 1, my italics). The the revolutionaries dismiss the royalists as opportunists who were complacent about the imperial government’s human rights abuses. Zewde (2002: 211) said the royalists embraced “loyal and dedicated service rather than engagement in social and political critique.” As far as the younger generation was concerned, the royalists lived lives of privilege and accepted the status quo, always ready to be recruited into the imperial state machinery.

Tibebu: “Protest is in our blood”

Many of the revolutionaries speak favorably about their generation. “We were the generation that changed Ethiopia beyond recognition,” Getu told me. He and Abdul, like many others, narrate how they organized the youth to protest against the status quo in Ethiopia. According to them, their protest continued abroad. Tibebu, an activist in the United States, mentioned how in Kenya they organized Kenyans to resist “colonial hangover” and how he and his colleagues resisted cultural assimilation in Holland.

We were in Kenya only 16 years after they became independent. It is a highly developed country infrastructure wise. You know, there were restaurants and hotels that the Kenyans do not go to. Not officially, but the waitresses do not serve them and mistreat them. We started going there in [a] group and saying no. . . .

And after a few years we were tired of waiting for a chance to be resettled in the US. Together with my friends we landed in Holland. We were granted asylum but you have to be Dutch to have your conditional residency removed. You have to learn the language and change yourself. You have to adapt to their monolithic political and

ethical system. We resented that too. We thought it is another form of colonization. We used to go to a party. People were trying to talk to us in Dutch. We used to answer back in Amharic. I say to them, “What makes you think that I speak Dutch? Do I look like I am from your Surinam?” You know Surinam used to be a Dutch colony.

We were professional protestors. Protest is in our blood. You know our generation was street smart, we were bold, we were anxious, we were chance takers, we were risk takers, and [we] wanted to experiment and wanted to know. You do not believe the anxieties that were in us. We were a force to reckon with. It is not by chance that I am living in Takoma Park, Maryland. I made a conscious decision. It is the most progressive county in the US. I was awarded activist of the year in 2007.

The revolutionaries are not an entirely homogeneous group. Several factors shape how they relate to one another and how they perceive home. They are members of the Amhara, Oromo, Tigre ethnic groups, among others, and these differences continue to bedevil them (Sorenson and Matsuoka 2001). The other source of division is the precise time they left Ethiopia. Some left the country when the military declared “free killing.” Others stayed behind and worked for the government and even benefited from it. In the United States, other members of the revolutionaries generation sometimes treat those who worked for the military government as traitors and collaborators. “Some of the people who call themselves revolutionaries served the bloodthirsty government. They were freelancers and mercenaries. They have blood on their hand[s] and they will be brought to justice,” stated Biruk. Those who waited to leave Ethiopia until they were disillusioned by the military government emphasize the major achievements of the revolution. They cite land redistribution and a massive literacy program that brought the regime an award from UNESCO. Adugna, an apartment security guard, spoke at length about how he organized farmers to take stock of their lives. “Never did the peasants dream of owning a piece of land. We did it,” Adugna proudly declared. Some of them are proud of their own personal advancement. “As a Muslim

I got a chance to study abroad,” Abdul stated. Abdul, Adugna, and others like them did not defect until they saw continued executions for alleged crimes against the revolution and “wrong socialism that neither Lenin nor Marx would endorse.” Some of the disillusioned defectors had been ambassadors, cabinet ministers, and graduate students in Ethiopia (Wolde Giorgis 1989: 357).

Despite the differences among members of this generation, one factor unites them. Political participation is a defining commonality among the revolutionaries. They seem to be more organized, more politicized, and more vocal than other generations of Ethiopian immigrants. Many of this generation still hope to return to Ethiopia and be part of the political process there. Some cling to their Ethiopian citizenship and criticize members of their community who chose to become U.S. citizens. Getu’s feelings about the issue of citizenship are representative of this segment of the revolutionaries generation: “Some of the people who are coming now are quick to give up their citizenship. I heard that they even throw a party the day they become a citizen. The US does not force you to be a citizen. Why do they do that?”

Some members of the revolutionaries generation have come to the United States very recently. They are living through a second exile. These are people who left Ethiopia in the 1970s and resettled in other countries. Samson, a computer animationist, for example, went to Saudi Arabia and lived there until 1991, when he returned to Ethiopia. He started a business there with money he had saved. But in 2005, he became involved in the parliamentary election as a member of the main opposition group. “The opposition parties were robbed of victory,” he says. The government made doing business impossible for people like him. Things became so bad for Samson that he was able to produce “credible evidence” about government abuse in Ethiopia that enabled him to get asylum without even hiring a lawyer.

Samson's experience was not unique. From 2005 to 2009, a total of 23,716 Ethiopians arrived in the United States as political refugees. This was more than 5 percent of the total number of persons granted asylum in the United States. This new wave of refugees continues to replenish the already existing generation of the revolutionaries.

Diversity Visa (DV) Immigrants: "An exit generation?"

On a cold Sunday morning in February, Petros, my roommate, suggested that I visit the International Ethiopian Evangelical Church (IEEC) and meet more people for my research. He casually introduced me to his cousin Eyoel, who just arrived as a Diversity Visa (DV) winner—fresh off the plane (FOP). On our way, Petros poked fun at his cousin's eagerness to get started with life in the United States. "He asks me thousand questions like a nine year old. He became so impatient," chuckled Petros. Petros listed Eyoel's questions in a manner of mimicking him. "When do I get [a] green card? Who is going to drive me to the Social Security Administration (SSA) for my appointment? When do I petition for my fiancée? What does it take to get a driver's license?" It is just a week since he came. He wants everything done in a snap." Eyoel interrupted with an additional question, "Why is uncle Beke not helping me? Why is he so rude to me?" "I have told you several times," Petros responded, defending uncle Beke. "He has a family. He has a job. This is not Ethiopia. He could not be with you all the time. Did he not pick you up from the airport? All your concerns will be answered. Just relax."

At the IEEC I was fascinated to see the number of churchgoers. The hall was packed, and the room was so warm from all the attendees that the church was running the air conditioning in February. Other than every Sunday the only other time I had seen such a large crowd of Ethiopians outside Ethiopia was at the annual soccer match. The vibe was as if

we were in Ethiopia. The entire service was in Amharic except when the worshippers got rapturous and people shouted “Jesus is Lord!” and “Halleluiah!” The choir, whose members were second generation, sang in English. It seems that the audience did not connect well with the choir’s singing in English. Prayers were said for Ethiopia and for America, including the economy. As part of the weekly service, the pastor asked new arrivals to stand up and introduce themselves. Eyoel and half a dozen arrivals from Ethiopia identified themselves. The members of this new group were welcomed warmly and handed registration slips and pledge forms so they could start tithing.

In the following weeks I hung out with Eyoel around Columbia Heights, a part of Washington, D.C., undergoing massive gentrification. A sign at the mall reads “Open during construction” in Amharic, English, and Spanish. On April 21, 2004, Amharic became one of the official languages of the government of the District of Columbia. Both Eyoel and I were amazed at this implementation of the district’s Language Access Act. However, we talked more often about how pleased Eyoel was when he learned that he had won a visa in the U.S. Diversity Visa Lottery Program. It was a turning point in his life; Eyoel had planned to pursue a degree in pharmacy. When he learned that he had won a visa, he did not even share “the good news” with his close friends for fear that they would sabotage it. Now, in the United States, all such worries were behind him and he was enthusiastic about starting a new life. An ongoing negotiation with his elder sister was the one thing holding him back. His sister had paid all his travel expenses and had welcomed him into her home. She wanted him to go to school to refresh his pharmacy associate degree so he could apply for a better-paying job. But going back to school was not a priority for Eyoel. “You know I’ve heard that you may not get a job in your profession in America. My sister worked hard to help me and my family. I

would like to take that responsibility. I told her to stop talking about school and find me a job,” Eyoel told me. He repeatedly remarked upon how indebted he was to his sister.

The last time I saw Eyoel, he had quite a lot of good news for me. His immigration papers, including a green card, a Social Security number, and many other documents, had all arrived. Most of Eyoel’s questions had been answered except how and when to petition for a visa for his fiancée, who then lived in Walayta, a small town in southern Ethiopia. In fact, through his sister’s network, Eyoel had obtained a job at an airport café. He will soon be ready to assume “taking over the responsibilities of helping families,” as he put it. Of course an eight-hour job would not be enough. He was also looking for another job, possibly a parking-lot job once he learns the ropes. His role model was Petros, who works more than eleven hours a day seven days a week. The only time he has off is Sunday morning, when he attends his church service.

Eyoel is typical of a DV generation of Ethiopians that began to arrive in the mid-1990s. He clearly epitomizes the main reasons for migration among this generation—economic factors and pragmatism. By the 1990s the Ethiopian economy simply hit rock bottom. For the past decade, the government had spent billions of dollars to flush out ethnic insurgents. In addition, the economic support the country had obtained from the Soviet Union dried up in 1989 when the Union collapsed. In 1991, a coalition of rebels, the Ethiopian Peoples’ Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) ousted the socialist military regime and adopted neoliberal economic policies. The new government hoped that liberalization would pull millions out of the rut. Under the structural adjustment program of the World Bank, Ethiopia, like many other developing nations who adopted the bank’s neoliberal regime, privatized some if not all of government owned properties and laid off thousands of

employees. The plan was to funnel resources toward producing goods for export. This strategy did not work, and the economy has not shown any sign of meaningful recovery. In fact, neoliberal policies have plunged Ethiopians in both rural and urban areas into even deeper poverty. For many Ethiopians, migration to the Middle East, Europe, South Africa, and the United States became the only hope. Leaving the country has become a family survival strategy (Mains 2007).

But the dire economic situation of Ethiopians was not enough in itself to create the new wave of migrants. Exit was made possible by several other factors. The new government lifted a ban on outmigration, and exit passports became obtainable. In addition, members of previous generations of emigrants were allowed to visit the country. These visitors whetted the appetite of prospective migrants, and they also sponsored families. But it was a U.S. policy that finally made migration possible. Where refugee resettlement tapered off, the Diversity Visa (DV) Lottery Program began. The DV was intended to bring more Europeans to America and was aimed at mitigating the effect of the immigration laws of 1965, which favored Asians, Latin Americans, and (to a degree) Africans. In 1995, Congress decided that the DV program should be expanded. Although the program excludes countries such as India and Mexico that already have a sizable immigrant presence and nations that are hostile to the United States, under the new law, over 176 countries became eligible. In Africa, Ethiopia, Ghana, and Nigeria especially benefited from the DV program. From 2005 to 2009, a total of 14,958 Ethiopians settled in the United States as DV immigrants (DHS 2011). The DV group constitutes about a quarter of Ethiopians who arrive each year. Although the term “DV generation” has been used in a demeaning way by some, I use the term to refer to this group with no condescension.

The socioeconomic status of the DV generation is distinct. Most of them come from modest or poor backgrounds. Most of the Ethiopians who arrived after the mid-1990s were not executives, aristocrats and political activists. The only requirement for winning the DV lottery, other than good fortune, is a high-school diploma or two years' work experience. Prospective immigrants send in applications, and lottery winners get the chance to come to the United States. This does not mean that all who win a DV visa are of lower economic status and that all who win the lottery make it to the United States. In fact, some of the DV lottery requirements gave families who are better off than most a chance to come to the United States. Before a visa can be granted DV winners have to have an affidavit of support or a job waiting for them in America. In addition, a DV winner has to pay a nonrefundable visa processing fee of US\$755. The average Ethiopian cannot afford this fee. As a result, richer families search for lucky winners to arrange sham marriages for members of their family that would make them eligible for immigration. In return, they cover all the expenses for both their own family member and the lottery winner. A 2007 report from U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) showed an increase in "fraudulent DV marriages" from many parts of the world, including Addis Ababa. The report stated that in Addis Ababa, "fraudulent DV couples go to great lengths to try to prove their relationship is legitimate, including backdated marriage certificates and staged wedding photographs, and some even incur pregnancies for the sake of the visa" (p.4).

Once they arrive in the United States the members of the DV generation are off to a good start. "We are psychologically prepared to take any available job," Eyoel remarked and even if it means downward mobility. If there are any similarities between the DV generation and the revolutionaries, it is the employment patterns both pursue and the Habasha identity of

members of both generations (see Chapter 3). Unlike the previous generations of Ethiopian immigrants, the DV generation has benefited from networks and information about jobs, housing, etc. They have followed in the footsteps of the revolutionaries by starting their own businesses, most of which serve co-ethnics.

Unlike the revolutionaries, however, they mostly shun politics. “They do not care so much about the country. They do not care if the country is on fire,” argued Joshua. Joshua is a member of the DV generation who tries to politicize and enlist younger people to participate in homeland politics and he calls himself “born to be a politician.” The DV generation does seem apathetic about politics. Perhaps this is because they grew up under the socialist regime. During interviews they refused to answer questions related to Ethiopian politics out of disinterest. Mesfin, Ayele, and Frew told me that unlike the previous generation they do not see everything from a political angle. Ayele summed up this attitude with a vivid statement: “Politics and electricity at a distance” (*poletik ena korenti beruku*). Tronvoll (2001: 170) observed such indifference. “The legacy of politics in Ethiopia is draped in memories of violence and suffering. Political participation is often stigmatized and shunned by ordinary people.” Getu, a member of the revolutionaries generation, speaks with sympathy and understanding about the DV generation. “These people who recently came here, I understand, had more economic needs. They are supporting ten thousand people and they have to work three jobs. You talk about political activism, they are going to say, ‘Politics, what? I have people to help.’ For me it is a bit too much, they do not even contribute money for national cause let alone coming to a meeting.” The situation is similar to Berg’s (2009a) analysis of Cuban Americans in Spain, where recent Cubans were not interested in politics and were focused more on improving their own economic situation. John Arthur (2008) found a similar

trend in his study of Ghanaian immigrants in the United States and Europe; most recent Ghanaian immigrants were focused on economic achievements.

The main difference of the DV generation from the previous cluster is that some of them hail from different regions of Ethiopia. This is because the lottery is random, of course. Most of the Royalists and the revolutionaries came from Addis Ababa. Some of these people wonder if the DV generation are really Ethiopians. “The only thing we share with the DV generation is that we are supposedly from the same country,” said Astu. A second generation Ethiopian whose father served in the imperial administration as a chief attorney said how the DV generation changed the composition of Ethiopian immigrants. “I run into these DV people quite often. Funny! Every time I run into them, I ask them where they are from. Some of them came from villages that I have never heard of. Many of them are people who were the first in their home region to travel outside of the region, let alone come to the US. I think the DV generation changed what it is to be Ethiopian. They democratized the whole immigration.”

Sometimes the ways that members of other generations characterize members of the DV generation seem unfair. Previous generations of Ethiopian immigrants tend to demonize and scapegoat them. Haile, a royalist, mentioned how the DV people have lowered the educational profile of not just Ethiopian immigrants but the entire metro area as well. “When we came here we wanted to go to school. I ate a burger a day to go to school full time. Ask the one arriving now. Once they land a daily job they are all set. Because of them there are more people who could not read and write in DC,” stated Haile. Whenever terrible things happen in the community, such as family-related violence, street crime, and so forth, the DV people are often blamed. When an Ethiopian immigrant murdered his wife, some of the

people I know commented on how the DV people had defiled the community. The post-1990 immigrants were even blamed for contributing to tensions between Ethiopians and African Americans surrounding the issue of racial identity. A second generation Ethiopian American stated, “Some of these country bumpkins with fourth grade education come here and deny who they are. They think they are not Africans. Others do not call themselves black, you know what I mean. They do not think they are African. Wow! Who are these people? My mom had no such identity problem.”

In contrast, most members of the DV generation call themselves the “true face” of Ethiopia, unlike those who doubt their Ethiopianness. They feel that they represent and reflect the existing situation in Ethiopia. Sisay feels that the generations that came before him have no moral right to comment. “They messed up. They did not manage the country seriously. We are in a foreign land because of them. There [was] no *ersho* [starter] for us.” *Erscho* is a starter used to ferment Ethiopian flatbread—injera. In this case *ersho* was used as a metaphor for startup capital or other resources to build a decent living in Ethiopia. When he won a DV lottery, a delighted Negash left his job as a bank manager without giving notice. However, he soon realized that good jobs in the United States were hard to find. “When I came here the 1990s recession welcomed me. I went to California, no job. I moved to Chicago and worked in a pizza parlor. I moved to Washington, DC, after I heard that there are jobs over here. I got a job as an accounting clerk [making] just better than the minimum wage.” Despite these struggles, after a recent trip to Ethiopia, Negash realized that he had made the right decision. Before that trip, he had been “full of regrets” regarding his decision to leave a professional job. But he found that in Ethiopia, “many of my friends were still there,” implying that their

economic status had not improved as much as his even when they worked as managers or business owners.

Despite taunting from earlier generations of Ethiopian immigrants, many of the DV generation take pride in their economic successes. At his successful travel agency, Birra, 41, told me how he and his generation are very realistic. “I was [in] the early batch of DV immigrants. I started working at a gas station. . . . Coming here I was fascinated by escalators, doors opening automatically and wowed by [the] microwave.” He laughed heartily. His wife, who was listening to our conversation, reprimanded him, saying that he should only answer my question and stop talking about “embarrassing things.” Indifferent and cheerful, Birra continued, “I saved up my money and obtained a loan through the District of Columbia. I started the business.” In fact, Kia also has an investment in Ethiopia, not to mention a mansion he built for himself in Ethiopia. Tadde is another member of the DV generation who is happy with his accomplishments. He has worked at a parking lot for the past nine years. He told me about a home equity loan that he intends to take for his son’s education. He contrasted himself with the family that received him. “When I came here my aunt sponsored me. They lived in the United States for more than twenty years. They always dream about going home. Going where? She could not find me a job. . . . I worked hard, really hard. When I told them that I was planning to buy a house they thought I was joking.”

Andrew: “The older people are screwed up big time.”

Members of previous generations reluctantly admit that members of the DV generation are hardworking and have turned their lives and the lives of their families around. Andrew was born in the United States. His mother was an Irish American and his father an Ethiopian student who came to the United States during the early 1950s. Andrew grew up in

an orphanage since his maternal relatives rejected a colored child. The concentration of Ethiopians in the metro area increased his curiosity about his roots. He finally traveled to Ethiopia to find his ancestral home. Although Andrew is relatively new to the community of the DC metro area, he is aware of the way members of the three generations of Ethiopian immigrants perceive other generations:

The older generation are screwed up big time. They are obsessed about Ethiopian politics. They could not lobby the mayor to save their taxi livelihood. The mayor changed the taxi-cab zone fare system to the time and distance without their will. He knows the taxi people do not vote. . . . Then, talk about this DV people. Boy! For the DV people America is a badland. This is an evil, decadence and battle land. They say, 'I am going to use it and make all the money and get the hell out of here.' Some of them have that extreme cynicism. They say, 'Look what kind of people are these (Americans), throwing money around? I catch it though, bring it home and take it back to Ethiopia.'"

Although Andrew is right in his characterizations of the generational divide; none of the DV Generation I interviewed sees the U.S. as a temporary place. Asamnew continually talked about a disagreement he had with his father over an "important matter": "I told my father to buy a house so that we will help him pay the mortgage. He refused. My father always dreams about going home." Although recent studies indicate that young people from African countries immigrate to the West for material resources and intend to return to Africa (Ricco 2008; Mazzucato 2008), Ethiopian immigrants seem to depart from this trend. Most show attachments to the United States. They are very appreciative of the opportunities they have found in America. Sisay explained, "None of my families died fighting for the sovereignty of this country. I have the opportunities. For me America is like my father while Ethiopia is my mother. I thank America for all the opportunities."

Marit: "They do not go to Italian restaurants"

Most DV generation play by the rule and they are succeeding within the American parameters. Sometimes members of the former generation see them as less integrated and not participating in the American way of life. Marit, a member of the royalist group stated,

I rented my basement for the DV people for just \$400. They were couples. I get to see them once a month. That is when they pay the rent. They work, work, and work. I asked one of them how many hours she works. She said eighty something hours a week. I do not want to hear that, no. They do not have a life. They cook Ethiopian food once a week and they never eat out like I do. They do not go to Italian restaurants, they do know where the movie theater is, and they just live like Ethiopians. Besides, I cannot tell you how many people live in that small room to save money. In less than five years they moved out. Guess what? They bought their own house. They paid \$30,000 down payment, believe it or not. You do not know how long it took us to own a home. I said, "Wait a minute, these are completely different Ethiopians."

Hermela: "A generation in a coma"

However the DV generation has its own view of their predecessors. Hermela Kebede has served as the head of the Ethiopian Community Center for the past three decades. The center has helped new arrivals adjust to their new surroundings. Hermela spoke with enormous experience and genuine understanding of the generational differences. She seems to agree that many of the recent immigrants are less educated and less nationalistic. "We teach them English as a Second Language (ESL) here. Reportedly some of them are high school graduates. They do not speak English properly. . . . For them the goal of coming to America is financial." She is impressed with the "enormous agenda" that members of the DV generation have. Their objective is to turn around, as she put it, "the lives of the entire village in Ethiopia. If I tell you what the DV people call us you will be surprised. They call us 'a generation in a coma.' They have a point. We [have] lived in the US for the most part of our lives. We still could not afford a plane ticket to go to Ethiopia. Things in Ethiopia did not

improve as we like [them] to be. . . . They are right, we are in a coma.” Generally members of the DV generation are much more realistic than previous generations and are guided by the moral values of helping family members at home and changing the economic face of Ethiopia.

In this chapter I discussed how the coming of Ethiopians to the United States was made possible by centuries-old political and economic partnerships between the two countries. Such networks and connections brought thousands of Ethiopian students to America. The web of connections students built set off migration to the U.S. regardless of an unforgiving distance between the two countries. Ethiopians came to the United States for economical, social, and political reasons. I identified three generational units that in many ways reflect the causes of migration. Members of the three groups have contrasting and even conflicting images of the country they left behind and how they view the United States. It is important to note that when, how, and why emigrants left their homeland shapes how they view the world, how they relate to other emigrants, and what priority they set for themselves in participating in transnational connections. In the following chapter I discuss how their pre-immigration experiences play out in relation to adaptation, identity construction, and transnational engagements.

Chapter-3

Immigrant Imprints: Nation Building in the New Home

Introduction

In this chapter I explain how Ethiopian Americans participate in nation-building practices in the United States as part of transnational identity construction. Transnational immigrants participate simultaneously in nation-making and nation-building projects in both their old and new homes (Basch et al. 1994: 46). As I discussed in the Introduction, transnational nation building in host societies and the ways that immigrants make their mark in their new location has received much less attention (Park 2007; Ghorashi 2004; Swyngedouw and Swyngedouw 2009). The research focus is somewhat understandable. The primary objective of the research on transnational migration has been to address and rectify the flawed argument that immigrants are drawn into the lifestyle and values of the host society and sever their ties with the past. We now know that immigrants do not sever ties, and we know a great deal about their continued interactions with their home societies (Arthur 2010). The downside of this research agenda is that the push to examine the transnational lives of immigrants almost ignores how immigrants function within receiving societies in response to circumstances in both sending and receiving countries (Foner 2005:85; Eckstein 2009).

The chapter is organized around three broad themes. In the first part I discuss how Ethiopian Americans join Caribbean Americans and African Americans to “challenge any implied homogeneity based on the generalized ‘black label’” in the racial structure of the United States (Shaw-Taylor 2007: 3; Waters 1990). I often hear consultants say, “Do they assume all black people are the same?” Through their transnational engagement, immigrants complicate and tweak “monolithic conceptions of blackness” (Kasinitz 2001: 204). In the second part of the chapter I describe the socioeconomic and cultural manifestations of

transnational identities. Ethiopian immigrants have absorbed many American norms and values in their quest for inclusion. I specifically focus on their work ethic, which departs from attitudes toward work in Ethiopia. I also explain the construction of a national cuisine and the proliferation of Ethiopian restaurants as part of the transnationalization of American culture. Finally, in the last part of the chapter, I look at how immigrants make their presence felt and seek acknowledgement for their contributions and examine identity construction through place-making projects (cf. Korac 2009: 25). When I talk about place, I am specifically referring to the physical realities of geographical location. My arguments are grounded in my analysis of intergenerational differences in the Ethiopian community in the United States and the social and historical contexts that shape transnationality.

Complicating and Tweaking the Terrain of Race

The most important and perhaps most pressing identity questions immigrants encounter in the United States are related to race. To which U.S. racial group do Ethiopian immigrants “belong”? Forms that all immigrants must complete routinely ask them to choose a racial group. Eyoel and Frew, two of the DV generation, mentioned repeatedly how anxious having to make this choice made them. The choices they were given didn’t make sense to them, and they wondered what the rationale was for asking the question. “I [had] just arrived. . . . How could I be an African American? Black would be OK. I chose ‘Other’ and wrote in Ethiopian,” Eyoel stated. Like Eyoel, many immigrants challenge the racial homogenization that seems to be forced upon them. In their studies of African immigrants in Canada, Matsuoka and Sorenson (2001) note that few of their Ethiopian consultants openly “expressed solidarity with other African and black people, [and] others reject the very notion of a single identity based on either categorization. They were ambivalent about being classified as

African or black, and often resented it.” In his study of Ethiopians in Washington, D.C., Mohammed seems to have arrived at the same conclusion, although he noted that some of the earlier Ethiopians who came to the United States “socialized with and had a better understanding of African-Americans than the Ethiopians who came later” (Mohammed 2006: 42).

Matsuoka and Sorenson (2001) and Mohammed (2006) provided their own theories about why the first generation of Ethiopian arrivals reacted differently to the U.S. racial regime than later arrivals. Matsuoka and Sorenson note that accepting a totalizing racial identity would be an anomaly for Ethiopians. Their refusal to do so “afforded amusement for some Western observers who take such classification as common sense realities” (Sorenson 1991: 28). Mohammed went so far as to (2006) pathologize Ethiopians’ rejection of racial regimes. He saw it as evidence of a lack of racial consciousness, as an effort to be recognized as a model minority, and as (at least partly) a rejection of pan-Africanism. Such arguments have created an analytical quagmire for African Diaspora studies, as Zeleza (2005) has pointed out. The issue in this case is not the false identification, based on the hegemonic worldview of members of external cultures, of all Africans as representatives of an undifferentiated group called “African blacks.” Rather, the problem has been created by intellectuals, particularly Africanists, who ignore the great diversity of the African diaspora and “wish to impose an emancipatory Pan-African solidarity” (Zeleza 2005: 40).

Many of the authors I mention have not sufficiently analyzed the evidence that demonstrates that numerous contemporary immigrant groups, particularly Caribbean black Americans and African black Americans, are challenging the racial categories to which they are assigned. Several ethnographic researchers who work within the framework of

transnationalism have explored the ways that African and Caribbean immigrants are rejecting a one-size-fits-all system of racial categorization that puts all descendants of Africans in the same group. These writers note the great diversity on multiple levels among blacks in the United States (Arthur 2010, 2008; Vickerman 2001; Rogers 2001; Zephir 1996; Shaw-Taylor and Tuch 2007). Because most immigrants arrive with a strong sense of their own racial and ethnic identity, it is important to understand and appreciate how people define their identities in the United States in relation to the dominant racial ideology that operates in their respective countries and in turn influences the U.S.

Researchers who study internal differences within black immigrant communities in the United States suggest we give attention to the historical dynamics that have produced those differences. For example, although their presences were small, most Caribbean immigrants and Cape Verdeans have been in the United States since the middle of the twentieth century. Some arrived before 1965, but most members of these two groups arrived during the 1980s. The time when they arrived in the United States has played a crucial role in shaping how members of these two groups present their identities. In other words, the historical conditions under which groups are introduced into a host society influence how they create and re-create transnational identity (Kasinitz 1992: 5; Gibau 2005). Thus, the notion that all Caribbeans and Cape Verdeans can be categorized as African American will probably not match how members of these two groups understand their racial identities. Rogers's (2001) research bears this theory out: in his study of the transnational identity of Caribbean immigrants in New York, only one of his consultants strongly identified himself as African American. Similarly, in her richly documented study of Haitians in New York City, Zephir (1996: 70) has shown how Haitian arrivals avoided "any concrete association with African Americans" in order not

to become “black twice.” Because Haitian immigrants have generally been described in the literature as a homogenous group, we do not know if all or only some of them fit the identity model Zephir documented.

Keenly, as Kasinitz (1992) reminded us decades ago, researchers need to look closely at intergenerational differences. Before 1980, many Afro Caribbeans immersed themselves in African American ways of life, played down their ethnoracial distinctiveness, and were active participants in black social movements. Early Cape Verdean immigrants followed a similar pattern of adjustment (Gibau 2005). Unlike those who arrived after the 1980s, the earlier arrivals found themselves in a race-segregated society that was about to explode, and the power of that issue may have dwarfed their individuality as a diverse group of immigrants from Cape Verde. The racial tensions of U.S. society rendered their particular racial or ethnic identities invisible. They were simply “black” to most of the whites they encountered. This is one example among many of how history has shaped different generations of immigrant groups differently. And it illustrates how one generation (usually the first) may have less latitude than others in the project of creating and re-creating a transnational life.

Learning to be African American: “We struggled for racial equality”

When early Ethiopian students, diplomats, and other immigrants first set foot on U.S. soil, they were deeply shocked when they were denied entry into restaurants, stores, and even restrooms (see Getahun 2007a). In a very performative manner, Ayu told me about his first encounter with the American racial system. “When I first came to the U.S.,” Ayu recalled, “I wanted to get a cup of coffee. I was in a wrong place in those days. Yes, a wrong place. Security personnel came and told me, you know, ‘What are you doing boy?’ I said, ‘Hey, to get some coffee.’ He said, ‘This is not the place boy, get out of here. . . . They chased me out

of there and told me to go to the place where black people should go. That was the most kicking, ticking, and clicking moment. I felt really bad. I felt embarrassed. It was like a foot in my mouth.” Like Ayu, none of the members of the first group of Ethiopian immigrants were prepared for such experiences. Tsehai remembered, “When I saw racism I could not believe white people were talking to me the way they did. It was very hard for me to understand and process why they look that far down on people of color. I said to myself, ‘I am not who you think I am.’”

Neb: “He thought they were cheering him on”

Akin to Ayu and Tsehai a number of the early generation immigrants, the Royalists, recalled how unprepared they were for the unprecedented racism they encountered. Smiling broadly, Mimi explained, “For real I did not know how racism works. I lived in Latham, N.Y. My sponsors were whites. Their daughter was my best friend *at home*. When we were at school she did not talk to me. She did not want to be seen with me. When we were at school she acted as if she did not know me. I thought she was crazy. I later realized that she did not want to be seen with me. Very interesting!”

Just like Mimi, most of my informants’ narratives are filled with what could be labeled as racism and racist remarks. However, almost all of them underscore that racist remarks have little impact on their lives, their self-worth, and how they think about themselves. “The fact that all my life I have heard Ethiopia is the only African country that has never been colonized gave me pride. You know humorously like I have other African friends and truthfully as well they would say why their country is better off than my country, you know what I mean. I feel that pride comes with anyone but ours is huge. I did not grow up eating McDonald. Sometimes our pride borders on arrogance. Do you think any stupid remark hurts

me?” asked Mimi. A second-generation Ethiopian American, Neb, recalled his father’s story to drive home the point and indicated that he too inherited that pride which served him as a firewall against hurtful remarks. The anecdote has become something of a family legend. The incident took place in a swimming pool.

A family living in Wisconsin sponsored my dad to come to the U.S. The host families were very very kind to him. There was a pool party the second day after he arrived in Wisconsin. They took him to the party. When he got there, there were so many people swimming in the pool and everything. And, you know, he got in the pool. They all went to one corner. Crazy, it was in the early 70s. My dad found it somehow awkward. He swam to their end where they were all gathered. As he got there they all started getting out of the pool. By the time my dad got up, nobody was in the water except him. They all got out. My dad started swimming faster and faster. He said he thought that they got out of the pool to see how great a swimmer he was. It never occurred to him that he was [being] discriminated against.

Although he laughed long and hard as he told me this story, Neb, takes the incident very seriously. He interprets the story as an illustration of “the sense of pride that most Ethiopians arrive with. That is the pride I grew up with.” Most members of this first generation of immigrants had not expected the racial problem of the United States during the 1960s and 1970s. Some had heard stories about the U.S. racial situation from students who had studied there and returned to Ethiopia. Nevertheless, even these stories had not prepared them for the harsh realities or the depth of racial prejudice.

Just like most other immigrants Ethiopians arrived with their own racial ideologies and categories that were very different from those in operation in the United States. In Ethiopia the racial categories are based on a combination of color, hair type, facial features, and (sometimes) socioeconomic status (Kaplan 1998). Because Ethiopians emphasize phenotypic features, there are at least two racial categories—black (*Shankilla* or *tiquur*) and

reddish-brown (*qey*). Black is a term reserved for low-status groups, especially people who live in peripheral areas. Donham (1986: 12) has analyzed how the ruling groups—the Amhara and Tigre, which most Ethiopian immigrants belong to—consider themselves to be racially different and “superior” to the *Shankilla*. But in certain contexts, for example among family members and friends, variations of the term *Shankilla* indicate appreciation and care.

As I have mentioned in chapter -2 almost all of the first generation of Ethiopians who came to the United States were members of the ruling elite; they were blue-blooded aristocrats. This group found it hard to assimilate/become African Americans. A comparable difficulty can be found among Dominicans, who reserve the racial label “black” for their Haitian neighbors. Peggy Levitt (2001a: 108) notes that when Dominicans immigrate to the United States, they experience mental anguish when they realize that in the new context, “they belong to the very racial group they reject so adamantly at home.” The royalist generation Ethiopians told me that they distanced themselves from African Americans as long as they could when they first arrived. “I tried to detach myself from the stereotypical things. Anything associated with Negro I did not want to be involved and associate with. I rejected my own people,” recalled Dr. Abiyi. But this detachment from African Americans did not last. Being people of color defined where they lived. Contact with home was very limited. “When I started working at The World Bank,” Dr. Mulugeta recalled, “There was no email. There was no CNN some thirty years ago. I remember sending the very first fax to Nigeria. It was a miracle to us . . . It used to take a good three to four weeks for mail to get to Lagos and another same [number of] weeks to hear from them.”

This generation had to “learn to be black,” to use Stuart Hall’s phrase (1991: 55). Some Ethiopians have “expressed an almost total identification with that community,” as

Zewde (2002: 91) has noted. Early Ethiopian immigrants responded to the new racial environment in ways that were similar to how early Cape Verdean immigrants handled the situation. Before they migrated, most Cape Verdeans had ethnoracial identities based in the racial structure within Cape Verde. When they came to the United States they tried to maintain and nurture their home-based identities. But after experiencing the “acute racism” of the city of Boston, where many settled, many embraced the “transformative effects of the Black Power Movement” (Gibau 2005: 409, 42). In fact, most black immigrants, many of whom were Caribbean at that time, were at the forefront of civil rights struggles. Ethiopians told me that during the 1960s they also participated in the fight against racial segregation in the United States. Dr. Mulugeta remembered that Washington, D.C., was a segregated city at that time, and movement participants struggled against the system with some success.

You could only go to some restaurants, not all. You could not go to all hotels, only a few hotels. The first group who really faced the issue was Ethiopians, who managed to integrate in restaurants in downtown Washington, D.C., around DuPont Circle. By sheer force of resistance they managed to integrate. I know that for sure. I was president of the Ethiopian Student Union at one stage and president of the African Student Union. We struggled for racial equality.

Many of these early immigrants criticize and ridicule newly arriving immigrants for keeping a distance from African Americans as we see below, and thinking that they are different. Andrew repeatedly talked about how Ethiopians would soon understand America has no room for racial ambiguity. An Ethiopian intellectual who refused to participate in the research because he did not want to be “my guinea pig” talked bitterly about Ethiopians. He explained how frustrated he had become because he invited Ethiopians to come to Pan-African meetings, Kwanza, etc., but only a few of them showed up.

However members of this same group of early arrivals express ambivalence when I ask them how they identify themselves. Dr. Mulugeta laughed loudly when I asked him if he chose to identify as black or African American. “What do you think I am? I am black. I call myself both African American and Ethiopian American” as if I asked a multiple choice question. Dawit and Ayalew were unhappy about the fact that Ethiopians are not mixing well in general, yet they were ambivalent about embracing “black” as their only identity. Ayalew stated, “You see, I call myself black. It is only until recently that people are willing to say they are black. Always they say we are Ethiopians/Habasha. In fact such self-misidentification has hurt us and helped us. It helped us because we are able to keep the candle of identity alive. It hurt us because Ethiopians have a hard time and, by the way, they still have a hard time to be part of and among the mainstream Americans.” Dawit even wrote a letter to an editor of a newspaper critiquing the characterization of Ethiopians as, as he put it, “white-looking blacks.” When I asked him how he identifies himself, his answer was long and complex.

I went to the west and learnt that I am black. I personally think I am black. On the form actually I have no hesitation. I identify myself as a black. The blackness that I identify with would be different from the blackness that someone [else] may identify with. Purely when I say black that is purely the skin pigmentation, you know, you see. Nothing more, it holds no value and no water than as it would probably be with others. . . . Look, Africa is purely put as the continent for a black person or a black pigmentation. Really, blackness is an identity that is given to people with that type of skin pigmentation. I take it as being black.

Habasha as an Ethnoracial Construct

Most Ethiopians see themselves as part of the African diaspora, an identity that has many diversities, as Paul Tiyambe Zeleza (2005) explains. Most of the revolutionaries and members of the DV generation think of themselves as Habasha—an ethnoracial construct

whose stock has increased in the United States, both in terms of the number of people who embrace it and in terms of cultural significance. When I was growing up in Ethiopia, I did not come across people referring to themselves as Habasha in such palpable and ideological ways. Indeed, back home people use the word Habasha to describe themselves only in rare circumstances and “mostly to differentiate themselves from foreigners” (Habecker 2011: 7). For that matter, in certain contexts the word Habasha even has pejorative connotations. For instance, the term *ye-Habesha ketero* (lit., an appointment made by Ethiopians) implies that likely the person who is assigned this identity will probably not keep it. Yet people frequently call themselves Habasha in the United States. They often talk about what a typical Habasha looks like. Merchandise imported from Ethiopia is marked as Habasha goods. Grocery stores and restaurants use the word Habasha in their names.

I have even heard something akin to a racial creation myth. In the story God is depicted as a potter. He (God) wanted to create human. “He put somebody in the oven to bake them. He turned out too soon. They were white. He put some others and they came out too burned and the Ethiopians were just right.” (Quoted in Mohammed 2006: 66). But I never remember hearing such a myth while I was living in Ethiopia; it could be a story that was born in the diaspora. It is not clear how many Ethiopians duly subscribe to such likening of God to a potter because several of them are Orthodox Christians. Perhaps it is an outcome of the diffusion of race paradigm in peoples thinking and may serve as group boundaries and identities. Importantly, such constructions “signify color or cosmetic features and not necessarily meant to imply contempt, although understandably in a racially sensitive context any interpretation is possible.” (Mohammed 2006: 67).

I have been asked a number of times if I am Habasha; this often happens when I am using public transportation. Some people are asked much more often than I am. These are people who were strangers. When I would answer in the affirmative, the conversation with the unfamiliar person sitting next to me would immediately become very animated, and I was always surprised about how easy it was to connect with that person after the question had been asked and answered. I have been told when Ethiopians meet each other in the DC metro area and elsewhere it has become a customary practice to inquire if s/he is Habasha and exchange greetings, even if the parties involved are strangers to each other (Chacko 2003b: 501). This phenomenon fits a model of behavior among members of immigrant communities that Itzigsohn (2009: 119, 13) has identified; he points out that immigrants often construct new ways of talking about themselves and build new ethnoracial identities. Often the basis for the new identity is a subtle rejection of U.S. racial categories, and this process is mediated by living transnationally.

Chacko notes that such groups construct “distinct features” (Chacko 2003b: 501) that members look for before they approach a person with the all-important question that will determine if he or she is a member of the immigrant group. In my case, that question is *Habasha neh* (Are you Habasha?). What makes it possible for immigrant groups to build new ways of talking about themselves? Here pre-immigration experiences matter a great deal. Today’s immigrants arrive with complete national and ethnic identities (Humphries 2009; Arthur 2008), even though in many cases, such identities were complicated by the postcolonial nation-making process⁷. Every country has a different racial system, and the racial label an African immigrant arrives with may not match well with the one they

⁷ Except the five year “Italian occupation” (1936-1941) Ethiopia has never been colonized. I, however, found the postcolonial literature useful for my analysis of the data.

encounter in the United States. The monolithic identity of “black” that is available to Africans and African-descended people in the United States conflicts with the notion that race is relevant to each country in a very specific way (Rahwa 2007: 31).

In Ethiopia the notions of raciality and of Ethiopians as racially distinct from other African groups is as old as the nation. The writers of most history books about Ethiopia seemed to be bewildered about where to locate Ethiopia in ethnic and racial classifications (Hess 1970: 8). Nevertheless many of these early writers were at ease discussing how Ethiopians were not only racially but culturally different from the rest of Africa. They locate the genesis of such differences in population movements between northeastern Africa and Arabia. The thesis is that people from the southern part of Arabia emigrated to Africa. They then intermarried and intermingled with indigenous people. Ethiopians are thus the outcome of the mix of South Arabians and Africans (see, Greenfield 1965; Trimmingham 1965; Minda 2004: 122). The word *Habasha* often refers to miscegenation. Piolet (1999), for example, likened the term to the idea of “a crowd” or a “heap of sweepings,” because Abyssinians descend from many ethnic groups. Many narratives tend to place Ethiopia in an intermediate ethnoracial position—with one foot in Arabia and one foot in Africa (cf. Sorenson 1991: 13, 31). Newly emerging Ethiopian historians, influenced by the Afrocentrist paradigm and “baptized by the radical holy water of [the] Ethiopian student movement” (Tibebu 1995: xiv), challenge the South Arabian origin of Ethiopians because they interpret it as Orientalism at its worst (see Bekerie 1997). In Ethiopia, much deleting and rewriting of history has been taking place in this postmodern era. But the revisionist approach has done little to undermine the long-standing view.

At any rate, historical writing is not what determines ethnoracial consciousness in Ethiopia. The knowledge of being of different stock has been drilled into the consciousness of the people for centuries. Prominent Ethiopians, members of the nobility and painters made sure that people understood that line of history (Putnam 2007: 423). Well-known Ethiopian historians were trained by scholars who advanced the South Arabian origin of Ethiopia. Students trained by these mentors are now critiqued as being “miseducated” (Bekerie 1997: 35.) Nevertheless, the textbooks these historians wrote, which have been widely used at almost every school level, etched into the consciousness of the people the notion that Habashas are ethnoracially different. An early test of this ethno-racial distinctiveness was during the early twentieth century. Because Ethiopians once held the banner of freedom as an independent black nation, African Americans and Africans looked to Ethiopia for whatever inspiration they could garner in their quest for freedom. Yet African American self-identification with Ethiopia encountered contradiction and conflict partly because, it was reported, Ethiopians do not consider themselves to be black. W. E. B. Du Bois (1935: 82) reacted sullenly to the notion of Ethiopians distancing themselves from the black race. All Ethiopians, he wrote, were “as Negroid as American Negroes” although he acknowledged racial intermingling.

While state sanctioned powerful historical discourses have contributed to the identity construction of Ethiopian immigrants to the United States, another factor is shaping how recent immigrants understand themselves. Their experiences around the issue of race could not be more different than those of the early generation who arrived in the mid-1960s and 1970s. However, the more recent group of immigrants has not experienced officially sanctioned racism. Most of them do not have a “collective memory of racial segregation and

subordination; hence they do not see themselves through a racial prism” (Humphries 2009: 276). I am not implying that racism no longer exists in the United States; prejudice and discrimination might have even increased, and consultants have spoken numerous times about how they have been discriminated against. The important issue is that members of the more recently arrived generation use a number of strategies to cope with racism. Many of them respond in ways that demonstrate that they reject the notion that they are somehow less worthy than either whites or black Americans. These responses often include rejecting the idea that racist ideas are valid; trying to minimize or avoid racist encounters; and keeping the “exit strategy” alive as an option (see Bashi Bobb 2001: 216-223 on how West Indians have devised multiple responses to racism in New York City). O’Brien’s (2008) comparative studies of Latinos and Asians showed that most of her interviewees “ignore” prejudice. She reports that “respondents largely characterized their experiences in U.S. society as those of inclusion, acceptance and unfettered access to the American dream,” although O’Brien herself found their encounters with prejudice “disturbing” (O’Brien 2008: 124).

Importantly, many of my informants see racism or discrimination as something directed to an individual per se than to Ethiopians in particular or black people in general. Such a stand and perspective are quite dissimilar from the way African Americans may interpret racism—the latter perceive it as something directed at their collective self. Moreover, Ethiopians and, for that matter, contemporary black immigrants, in general, refuse and resist to view racism as one of the major problems they face even though they express it in their narratives (Bashi Bobb 2001; Arthur 2010). In fact, the most commonly reported perhaps anticipated strategy when discrimination becomes unbearable seems to be the exit option (cf. Rogers 2001). They turn to transnational connections as a protective shield and

revive the possibility of going back. Hanna, a member of revolutionary generation, explained the point I am trying to make.

My cousin brings up this issue of racism more often. He grew up here. I always say, for God's sake stop talking about this nonsense and focus on your MD. On my birthday an incident happened. After an outing we were heading home with my husband and his friend. The police stopped and searched our car. We fit a certain image they have. My husband was driving a beat-up 1996 Grand Marquis. We were coming from the Adams Moran neighborhood on top of that. I said to the police, "You stopped us because this is a typical car that fitted your typical whatever, whatever. I am a person of color, not a person of interest." I was so upset I was crying, and my husband did not see any reason why I was infuriated. If you shipped me to Ethiopia that day, I was ready to go. If this thing gets worse I would go home.

Hume (2008: 497) argues that "the strength of immigrants' ethnic identities varies depending on the host society's support for ethnic maintenance and pressure to assimilate." The United States encourages immigrants to exercise their cultural identities. People do not have to go to court to be categorized as whites as in the past. The historical experiences of Punjabi Indians (Bhatia 2007) and Syrian Americans (Gualtieri 2009) provide a perfect example of immigrants petitioning the government to be categorized as white in pre-1960s America. In a turn of events these immigrants now cultivate Syrian American and Indian American identities, a form of "de-assimilation" from imposed Anglo conformity (Gualtieri 2009).

The construction and perpetuation of identity could well be the outcome of strong transnational networks. Many immigrants enter a strong transnational community, where they come into contact with co-nationals. The networks and institutions they encounter cultivate and perpetuate a sense of group racial consciousness and cultural identity. "I used to go to the Greek Orthodox Church before. Not anymore. I have the luxury to choose which Habasha

church I should go to,” Astu noted. Several Ethiopian community centers and social institutions have become centers of cultural interactions. They introduce and make it easier for immigrants to gradually adjust to the American society. Besides, the Ethiopian Airline flies from Washington DC to Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia six days a week. It has become a conduit for the flow of ideas, people and goods that help replenish Ethiopian identities.

Identifying Habasha: “It is a visual truth, dude . . .”

In the metro area, whenever I was asked “Are you a Habasha?” I was curious to know what people really look for before they approach a stranger with such a bold question. Many of them responded to my questions with a great ease and seemed unconcerned about political correctness as they listed what stands out as Habasha features. As Matsuoka and Sorenson (2001: 202) have noted, race is a system of power that uses physical differences where they exist and invents them where they do not. Thus, the most commonly mentioned physical features were bigger eyes, a straight nose, no high cheekbones, long necks, slender yet curvy bodies, thin lips, and (most frequently) an olive complexion. In most cases the responses of my consultants were consistent. In fact, when I compared their responses to historical narratives about Ethiopian ethnoraciality, it quickly became apparent that most of them were influenced by historical accounts. The following two quotes from the early writings about Ethiopia may indicate where such self-imagining comes from.

Beautiful the Ethiopians are—distinct on the continent of Africa for their straight noses, thin lips, attenuated body structure and olive skin (Rosenfeld 1986: xii).

The olive complexion of Abyssinians, their hair, shape, and features, distinctly mark them as the colony of the Arabs; and the descent is confirmed by the resemblance of language and manners. (Edward Gibbon quoted in Tibebe 1995: xx).

Given the above narratives, one afternoon I was having coffee with Messi, a member of the DV generation, in downtown Silver Spring, Maryland. Issues related to immigration often arise before I ask any questions. Messi, a senior at the University of Maryland College Park, studies accounting management because her master's degree in English from Ethiopia did not land her a decent job in the United States. She noted that almost all of her friends were Ethiopians, although most of her classmates were whites. Our conversation became even more interesting when I asked Messi if she has a non-Ethiopian as a friend. After a pause she responded,

As I said, I have mostly Ethiopian friends. My best friend and her family, they are like my second family, obviously they are Habasha. I have a Habasha roommate. The person we rented from is an African American, she is black. Yes, another friend of mine, not friend, friend from college is half Rumanian and half Nigerian. She lives in Washington, D.C. She looks like a Habasha. [Me: What does a Habasha look like?] Why are you asking? Is that a question? Dude, at the very core of it we look alike. It is the visual truth, dude, that you cannot escape. No matter what you do to your hair, what kind of cloth you wear, etc., dude, we look alike. Mostly slim, straight nose, and an olive skin complexion, you know Habasha when you see them.

It is interesting to imagine a Habasha person as the product of an intermarriage between a Nigerian and a Rumanian, as my informant unquestioningly stated. It is obvious that consultants take a cue from the view that Habasha are a people of mixed blood and the fact that identifying Habasha is that easy—a visual truth. But sometimes recognizing another person as Habasha can be haunting. Getahun, member of the revolutionary generation unit, told me an anecdote that happened long ago.

I went to this coffee shop in downtown D.C. It was some time ago but I could not make myself forget about it. At the coffee shop the barista was a Habasha, okay. Just like some Habashas do he smiled and started talking to me in Amharic. He then refused the pay for the cup of coffee and a donut. When he did that I told him that he better

should because the store manger was around. He said, “It is on me, it is on me,” and started helping other people. Before I left, the manger saw what he did and ordered him to hand over his uniform and go home. He was fired just like that; lost his job. Maybe that was not his first time, maybe I should not have insisted and attract[ed] the attention.

He narrated this particular story so many times that I finally asked him what was bothering him about it. It was not that he was immediately recognizable as Habasha to the barista that bothered him. His recognizability was beside the point. He seems to be preoccupied by what happened and feels guilty that the person lost his job although according to him what happened was no fault of his. Certainly the incident could be an extreme and rare example. Yet sometimes Ethiopian immigrants feel out of place and even discriminated against when they are singled out because of their appearance, even by members of other immigrant groups. They are often asked, “Where are you from? When do you want to go back?” Some of my consultants seem to take the question as recognition of their being different. One informant told me this story: “I sat next to this Spanish woman in the metro bus. I said, *!hola! como estas?* I just picked some Spanish, you know. She asked, ‘Where are you from?’ I said, ‘I am from Ethiopia, Africa.’ When I told her that I am from Ethiopia she was, you know, surprised. She said, ‘You do not look African.’ I know it is racist but I told her that all [Africans] may not look alike, just like Spanish people.”

Predicaments of Recognizing Habasha: “You do not look Habasha”

The idea of recognizing Habasha and the “visual truth” that Messi and most other respondents talked about can be complicated, embarrassing and in some cases alienating. Sometimes individuals who are not Ethiopian are followed and asked if they are Habasha. Fascinating social encounters take place when Ethiopians follow people of other nationalities

and talk to them in Amharic. Sisay remembered how he approached a woman at Borders bookstore and of course asked the magic question. She inquired, “What made you think I am an Ethiopian?” “I innocently said, ‘Because you are beautiful.’ She was like, ‘Thanks. Are Ethiopians the only beautiful people?’ Since then I stopped [asking] unless I am so sure.”

Mina recalled a similar incident that took place while she was working at a movie theater:

There was this Nigerian woman that so many Ethiopians used to go and say, “Hello, how are you?” They say that to her in Amharic. She would look at them and walk away. She knows how biased we are. One day this Ethiopian guy came over, talked to her and started acting up. At that point she stopped and cursed this Ethiopian guy in public. “You think you are the only pretty people in the world. I am not an Ethiopian. I do not want to be an Ethiopian. I am a Nigerian and I am proud of it.” She had enough of it and she was tired of people bothering her. I was so happy.

In fact the practice of chasing strangers to check whether s/he is a Habasha has declined now that there are so many Ethiopian people in the metro area. Dr. Tsehaye remembers when the practice was much more common than it is now. Perhaps the most hurtful and controversial aspect of identifying people as Habasha happens when people are categorized out of the group even when they identify themselves as such. Those who consider themselves Habasha are sometimes the victims of insensitive and hurtful remarks, such as “I did not know you were Habasha. You do not look Habasha.” Mina, Dr. Abiyi, Seyoum, and Mimi argue that Ethiopians in the metro embraced the American racial ideology and became even more conscious of race than they were at home. Dr. Abiyi remembered how he was “less Ethiopian in Ethiopia” because of his looks. For him this sense and obsession became even stronger in the metro area. He remarked,

When they hear me speak Amharic, they automatically turn around and say, “Are you Habasha? We did not know.” I ask them, “What do I look like?” They do not seem to recognize how much their question

is very wrong. Look, if you meet an Ethiopian girl anywhere in Washington, D.C. and say, “Hello, my dear you remind me of my sister in Nigeria,” she will go crazy. You are telling an Ethiopian girl she looks like a Nigerian. It is an insult. For me nobody thinks that I am an Ethiopian. Ethiopians are trapped by the notion that the phenotype that most resembles the European is deemed desirable.

Mina, Seyoum, and Mimi have experienced similar exclusions based on phenotype and were very interested in discussing the topic of who meets or does not meet the stereotypical criteria. All of them seemed to think the imagined phenotype of Habasha was simply a “stunt.” “The whole thing is a stunt,” Seyoum underlined. Surprisingly, however, they themselves reproduce and reinforce the stereotype they seem to contest. Mimi recalled a recent incident when she went to an Ethiopian store to get quarters for a parking meter. She resentfully stated, “I spoke to the shopkeeper in Amharic. ‘Do you have quarters?’ He said, ‘I did not know you were Habasaha.’ Stupid. It is really stupid. . . . You know why he was not sure. You know what it was? It was because of my hair. It is unusual for Habasha women to dread their hair. I am *shanko* [black] too.” Mina described a Nigerian woman who once insulted an Ethiopian man, as “pretty, light skin and everybody would think she is Habasha. . . .Of course I do not care what feature qualifies for Habasha. It is like your ears are one tenth of a degree to the left. It can be one of those.”

Seyoum seemed to be very hurt by the comments people make. Ethiopians hardly ever ask him if he is a Habasha. “I can get in and get out without being noticed and without being pointed at. You know, I can get away with a lot of things. I do not have to say hello to every Ethiopian that passes my way. I do not have to nod my head up and down.” When I asked him *why* people do not acknowledge him, Seyoum described the stereotype he rejects:

I thought about it for a while why I am not asked. As you can see I am on the overweight side. Most Habashas bill themselves as slim. I have

very dark features. I have full lips, wide nose, red eyes, etc. I do not look like an Ethiopian. I am not a Habasha for many people. A lot of people tell me that I do not look like a Habasha. You know what, . . . it used to hurt me big time. Now it does not. I am actually at ease with it. The good thing is we are in America and we choose what we want to be. I am very comfortable the way I look.

In the end, regardless of whether the construction of Habasha identity is a stunt or a visual truth, Ethiopian immigrants have made repeated efforts to re-imagine themselves as a significant collective group. In addition, intense debate has been swirling around black identity, which once was monolithic and taken for granted. With regard to this issue, immigrants are engaging the host society on their own terms. Abdul led me to a *New York Times* article entitled “‘African-American’ Becomes a Term for Debate” (Swarns 2004). At the core of the debate are new African immigrants, particularly Ethiopians who deconstruct and contest external categorization even at the risk of being perceived of as unruly and as people who betray their race. At several neighborhood-based discussions organized by Impact Silver Spring that I attended, African American participants repeatedly discussed the need to rethink and narrow down the category “African American” to include only descendants of slaves. These are examples of “marginal changes” in racial identity among immigrants “that could in the future, have larger societal effects” (Vickerman 2001: 242).

Transnational Identities and Cultures

Like racial identities, cultural identities are also on the line when people immigrate. Several researchers have explained how immigrants construct social fields and practice bicultural identities that connect the sending and receiving countries. This involves integrating with the culture of the receiving country to a certain degree while at the same time maintaining ties to the culture of the sending country (Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004). The cultural constructions of transnational identity remain complex where cultural identities are

being de-territorialized from the physical bodies and go through the process of hybridization (Hall 1992: 297). The dynamics at work are accommodation to American mainstream society combined with and the continuation of traditional Ethiopian cultural practices producing not a split identity but a transnational bricolage (Arthur 2010). In the following subtopics I explore the work ethics and the making of national/transnational cuisine as marks of transnational identities under construction. Both areas provide great instances where immigrants drop old habits, learn new ones, open up, influence and also influence the host society.

A Habasha Work Ethic: Yanking the Culture of *Yilunnta*

During conversations with Ethiopians I heard about the themes of hard work, making it economically, and “not taking no for an answer” many times. I have repeatedly been reminded that Ethiopians are hard workers and have often been told that employers prefer them because they are very reliable. “Most employers in this area know Ethiopians are hard workers. At the gas station where I worked before I started my own law office the owner likes Ethiopians. He knows that we are honest and dependable. We are on time, and no sick calls. If you hire some other people, you know, you have to have a contingency plan. They make frequent sick calls,” Samson, a former parking lot attendant turned lawyer, proudly declared. Not surprisingly, economic success remains the top priority of most Ethiopian immigrants, even those who are political exiles. This is the case for other immigrant groups from Africa. For example, Stoller reports that many West Africans “hold two jobs, work seven days a week, and sleep only three to four hours a day” (2002: 9). The value many immigrants put upon hard work and reliability reminds me of Weber’s (1958) Protestant work ethic, although in this case the driving force is transnationalism rather than religion.

If most immigrants are economically driven, is there really any need to discuss a particular Habasha work ethic? I do not want to imply that prior to migration Ethiopians were not hard workers, but I have noticed significant cultural changes among Ethiopians after they emigrate. Most Ethiopians, particularly those who have managed to come to the United States, despise nonprofessional jobs. In his interesting study of work ethics among Ethiopians who have not emigrated, especially young people in urban settings, Mains (2007) identified cultural factors that impede socioeconomic achievement. Jobs are very scarce in Ethiopia's urban areas, and unemployment remains very high. Yet a cultural barrier—*yilunnta*—complicates the issue. *Yilunnta* is when someone experiences intense shame because of what others think and say about one's family based on the kind of work family members do. *Yilunnta* robs people of the willingness to take any kind of work that is available. For example, it would be unthinkable for a college graduate to work at a local gas station in Ethiopia, as they do here in the United States. "When I asked young men about unemployment," Mains (2007) wrote, people often said that "there simply was not work to be had, but when I pushed, pointing to other youth who were working, they claimed that it was impossible to work in Ethiopia because of *yilunnta*." In addition, it is culturally acceptable for working-age adults in Ethiopia to continue to live with their parents, especially while they are attending school (McSpadden 1991).

When Ethiopians come to the United States, *yilunnta* sometimes has its day. Finding jobs for Ethiopian immigrants was one of the greatest challenges for sponsoring agencies and families during the 1980s. Most immigrants either turned down job offers or walked off jobs. The major complaints of such individuals were that the jobs they were offered were too menial and that they were not appreciated for the skills they had. Sponsors who had gone to

great lengths to find them employment were frustrated because they had little understanding of the cultural background of the people they were trying to help (McSpadden 1991). Much to the sponsors' dismay, some immigrants of this generation wanted to go to school fulltime while sponsoring families helped them. Most of my consultants who immigrated during the 1980s remembered the awkwardness they felt when they worked at a parking garage or a gas station or some other type of menial labor. They rarely reported to their friends back home about the kind of "odd jobs" they were doing. Some of them still have not told their friends and relatives in Ethiopia what kind of work they do. "Ethiopians who come back to Ethiopia, there is a total spoof. They are wearing sun glasses, driving big car and tipping too much money. I mean, you know. They want to show that they are big shot. They do not tell them that they work in a parking lot here," said Zewde.

Zewde, now a Real Estate broker, told me the difficulties he had experienced adjusting to his janitorial job. He was an engineer before coming to the U.S. Likewise, Nigus talked at length about how he quit several jobs and how he "upset" his aunt, who had used her networks to get him a job.

Nigus: "I was so afraid people might see me"

My aunt said a week after I had arrived, "You should start working." I said, "Okay. Get me a job." She found me one at a shoe store. I worked at the store for only one day, just one day. The job was as laborious as one might think. I was so exhausted. . . . My other job was even better. The same aunt got me a cook helper job at a Korean restaurant. I had to get there five or six o'clock in the morning. Can you imagine? That was where I first cleaned a bathroom, I first cleaned a window, etc. I remember feeling so self conscious when I was told to clean the windows. I was told, "Go out there and clean the windows." I was so afraid people might see me. I said to myself, "I am cleaning the windows; you know, somebody told me to clean the bathroom." It was so disturbing to me. I have no idea and I still do not know why it was embarrassing to me.

In subsequent years, however, the feeling that “people might see me” evaporated. Nigus and many others told me that the person talking to me was different from the person who came from Ethiopia. “Now I do not think that same guy exists anymore. I am not the same guy, you know. I am completely different person here. My Ethiopian background that made me despise a job has gone. I do not even know how to describe to you anymore. I could say America changed me,” Nigus told me. The narratives I heard from my consultants were not about being dependent but about being dedicated: “When I was working at two places I had to take a train home. I slept in the car and passed my stops many times.” “I once fainted while working at Starbucks coffee shops because I overworked myself.” “I drove a courier [truck] during the day and a taxi at night. My twin boys grew up without knowing me.” “I washed pots and waitressed for many, many years even when I had better job as a social worker.”

Today there are numerous Ethiopian entrepreneurs who employ not only Ethiopians but also native-born Americans. The manager of American General Supplies in Gaithersburg, Maryland, emphasized how international the company is and how many non-Ethiopians it employs. Taxi businesses and parking-lot jobs are dominated by Ethiopians in the metro area (Kelly 2006). People who have made significant economic achievements appear in community newspapers and on radio programs and are often invited to make motivational speeches. The Voice of America’s Amharic service allocates airtime for Ethiopian Americans. The program mainly focuses on those who are doing well economically. The journalist who hosts the program, Addisu Abebe, noted that most of his guests are those who have achieved the American dream. He acknowledges that the show gives a “wrong impression” to people listening in Ethiopia. However, he told me that he tempers the stories of success with a dose

of reality: “I make sure that listeners understand the road to economic successes in America would not be a piece of cake. I make sure that my guests talk about the difficulties and the kind of jobs they were doing. Some of them say they were janitors, gas station attendants even homeless.”

What is more, Ethiopians are not known for entrepreneurship back home (Price and Chacko 2009: 336), but economic and social circumstances in the United States change their work behavior. This is not unusual for an immigrant group trying to circumvent blocked mobility (see, Sassen 2001: 322). However researchers argue that the mantra of hard working immigrants seems to be an oppositional identity in relation to domestic minorities. For example, Mexican migrants from Ticuani construct an identity as “hard working indigenous Mexicans” as a discursive and practical move that positions them slightly above their fellow “Latinos” from Puerto Rico (Smith 2003: 12). West African merchants (Stoller 2002) and West Indians (Waters 1999) in New York City often contrast themselves with native-born black Americans as they adopt identities as hard workers. A few Ethiopians in the metro area often contrast themselves with the largest minority group they encounter in daily life--African Americans. Several consultants mentioned a remark Bill Cosby made as their article of faith. Cosby said that native-born black Americans should learn from Ethiopians, who may start “flipping burgers” but will eventually become the managers of the places where they work.

But most interviewees emphasized that they were influenced by American values, America’s achievement driven system. When they came to America they had little luck getting jobs in their professions, yet they did not give up. In fact they underscore that America taught them to be independent, to start somewhere. “I have an engineering degree from former Czechoslovakia, no job. A diploma in computer from here, no luck. Okay. What did I

do? I started my own organization. I stopped begging for a job. Why do we have so many Catholic universities, hospitals schools, etc. in this country? At one point Catholics experienced the same problem. They worked hard, built their own institutions and built America,” Abdul told me. In the same context, even the Ethiopian Orthodox Church seems to have been influenced by the spirit of hard work which otherwise preach asceticism in Ethiopia. During a few sermons I have attended the priest teaches hard work and he collectively referred to the diaspora as “Joseph generation” who could save Ethiopia from its present economic predicament.

Many consultants emphasized that they made a break with Ethiopian work traditions when they came to the United States. “I think America is the only place I have experienced where I can go and start from scratch and make it without having a dime. I can be a taxi driver, I can be a doorman, I can be a hotel concierge, I can be a waitress, I can be a limo driver, I can be a businessman and clean a toilet. Nobody cares what you do and it has no implication. That is the America I fall in love with. Work in any kind of environment and make money. That is it. Nobody judges you for what you do here,” Zewde told me. Seyoum contrasts Ethiopian attitudes toward work, with their focus on family status, with the “work is work” attitude he encountered in the United States.

In Ethiopia the mentality is not like that unfortunately. If, I, so-and-so’s son, go back and became a waiter my mental status is put into question. They never say, “You know it is amazing, so-and-so’s son instead of hassling on the street he works as a waiter.” Is not that something to be proud of, to be self-dependent? Nobody [in Ethiopia] would say that. That is unfortunate. That is one of the things that hold us back. It should not, but it does.

But the Ethiopians I interviewed did not accept everything they saw in U.S. work culture. While they value the American work ethic, most of them rejected the spending habits

of their native-born co-workers. “I do not think American saves money. Where I work they do not wait for the paycheck day. They quickly cash it and spend it up. The next day they ask you, ‘Do you have a dollar?’ When you give them they say, ‘Thank you anyway.’ I do not like that and I do not think older Americans are like this,” Ayele told me. Asamnew has talked about buying a house in the United States but the one he was building in Ethiopia has to be finished. He has confidence in Ekub—an Ethiopian savings institution that immigrants brought to America to which members make bi-weekly contributions. He plans to use his savings to complete his dream home in Ethiopia and put it for rent. Andrew sums it up well:

I am impressed with competitions between siblings and friends in terms of who saved more money, built a home in Ethiopia—often called Habasha 401(K) and drive a good car were very intense... Everyone talks to each other throughout the day. Are you getting your IRA (Individual Retirement Account)? Are you putting your money away? There is a stigma in the community if you do not work hard and make it. Oh, they say, this guy is not doing well. He is being frivolous. This person is taking on so many vices. You have culture on you all the time as a guide keeping you straight and focused. That is something that all culture will want to have to a certain extent.

“That is why we say immigrants built America,” adds Andrew. Of course the community is not homogeneous. Generational differences were very noticeable. In chapter two I explained how the early immigrants have an appreciable degree of human capital through their advanced education. Most did not work in the service industry. It was the members of the revolutionary group, who despite their human capital when they arrived, who started with entry level jobs. Although some of them were still employed in the service sector years later, they argue that they are better educated than the members of the DV generation who want to earn money right away and do not seem interested in education. “Right now, people come to our office and they ask us: ‘Where do I get taxi license?’ Some of them say,

‘Can you contact for me so-and-so, so that I get a job at a parking garage?’ Some of them have been here for years. I know they need to work. They need to eat and pay rent. Driving a cab is not a dream job. How about assessing financial resources to go to school? I do not think they are interested in that,” an Ethiopian Community Center ESL teacher remarked. The cultural attitudes toward education are changing among Ethiopians, even at home. Many of my consultants spoke of the embrace of the money economy as a new cultural value that is superseding education as a status marker. Zewde explained,

I do not know if you remember, [but] back home those who got educated, no matter how much money your next neighbor makes, is the most respected. Even those people who make money identify and respect the person with a better education. They know he/she deserves a respect. I think that has changed. Now people ask how rich you are not how educated you are; even in Ethiopia.

The Making of National/Transnational Cuisine

Ethiopians have made their mark in the Washington metro area not only through hard work and businesses but through inventing a national cuisine and sharing that cuisine in Ethiopian restaurants. As a result the Ethiopian cuisine is becoming part of the U.S. diet (Getahun 2007a:8). Such an ineffaceable mark and inventing a “national” cuisine in a diasporic context is an extremely difficult task. Those who invented “Ethiopian” cuisine in the United States had to make choices about regional and ethnic differences in cuisine in Ethiopia. The cuisine Americans know as “Ethiopian food” mostly represents the foodways of those who come from the north-central highlands of Ethiopia. For American consumers the entire culinary tradition has been “frozen into a simple trait such as spicy food” (Kifleyesus 2004: 28). Regardless, it is as if an “Ethiopian national cuisine” has always existed. One of my consultants mentioned, “You see, you try to stitch up these things together in the diaspora because it makes much sense here. All of a sudden that gives you a unique space and

attention.” The diaspora context has similarly had an influence on Indian “national cuisine.” After studying cookbooks in contemporary India, Appadurai (1988) concluded that the diaspora context has had a great role in constructing and reconstructing “Indian” national cuisine.

Ethiopian restaurants are not just about constructing a cuisine for diaspora residents who miss “authentic” national food. They are part of how the Ethiopian community in the United States engages in the “social processes of ‘opening up to’ the world” (Werbner 1999: 18) and a signification of Habasha ethno racial construct I discussed above. Far from being islands of insulated, inward-turning culture, these restaurants invite non-Ethiopians as customers. A number of compromises were made in order to attract a wider customer base, particularly regarding the cuisine itself. The spiciness of certain Ethiopian foods has been altered. I was told that non-Ethiopian customers would not be able to tolerate the extremely spicy food and that Ethiopian restaurateurs felt that they had to adjust their food accordingly. Other modifications include providing detailed descriptions on the menu, as opposed to the simple list one would find in Ethiopia. The visual appearance of the menus--the typography and the organization of the menu--is reminiscent of the styles one can find in Chinese and other ethnic restaurants in the DC area. Although Ethiopian food does not feature desserts and appetizers, local restaurateurs offer American customers such menu items. However, some aspects of Ethiopian culture have remained intact, most notably the practice of eating with one’s hands.

Mimi: “Habasha food is not junk”

A specific dish may become symbolic of a national cuisine. Sushi immediately brings Japan to mind. Similarly, *doro wat* (stewed chicken garnished with hard-boiled eggs) has

become symbolic of Ethiopian food. However, the “national cuisine” of Ethiopia that has developed in the United States is actually an assortment of dishes developed by Ethiopian Orthodox Churches as fasting foods, nondairy products designed to reduce the caloric intake of religious devotees during the Church’s numerous fasting seasons. Fasting foods are also the food of the poor in Ethiopia because they cannot afford meat. In America, fasting food has been renamed “vegetarian combo.” Ethiopian restaurants serve the vegetarian combo regularly, although this is not the case in Ethiopia. I have been told that U.S. diners relish vegetarian food and that this is something that brings them back. Ethiopian restaurateurs market such dishes as “healthy food,” thus appealing to an American dietary trend. Mimi explained how Ethiopian food evolved and how it meshes with current trends in U.S. culture:

Most people think that Ethiopians are very slim because we do not have enough food. That is not always true. Ethiopian food is designed to cut on fats. Through all these years our forefathers have made sure that the foods we eat are healthy. That is why Americans especially love the vegetarian food and all other dishes. Ethiopian vegetarian food is all natural and the spice itself has medicinal value. Almost all our ingredients are imported from Ethiopia. They are organic. It is not cobbled with cheese where you get loads of calories. Habasha food is not junk.

Ethiopian restaurants also contribute to changing how Americans think about Ethiopian culture. As Gebre (2004: 110) has pointed out, “Americans knew more about famine in Ethiopia than about its cuisine”. Thus, restaurants can contribute to changing the image of the Ethiopian nation abroad by addressing negative stereotypes. At the same time, the restaurants emphasize Ethiopian distinctiveness. That is, they do not represent Ethiopian food as African food. In that sense, they contribute to the sense that Ethiopia is distinctive among African nations. This strategy has been somewhat successful; most restaurant critics

and food writers compare Ethiopian food to Middle Eastern, Indian, and even Mexican food, but they don't compare it to the food of other African nations.

However, restaurants may play a role in sustaining traditional Ethiopian gender relations. In Ethiopia, men rarely cook, and the division of labor by gender is quite strict. Ethiopian restaurants in the DC area were originally launched in the 1970s to serve a population of Ethiopian immigrant men who “could not cook to save their lives,” as one informant expressed it. These were the years of the heavy influx of immigrants who were refugees from the war, the revolution generation. Most members of this group were single men. As a result, these restaurants were very successful because they met a need in the community; consultants have told me that when the first restaurant opened its doors, people had to wait in long lines to be served. When women began arriving and family life became a possibility, many men found that gender relations at home had changed from what they had been familiar with in Ethiopia; in the U.S. setting, their wives challenged them to help with household chores. In this sense, the restaurants provide what men may miss at home. Almost all the restaurant workers, including servers, are females. The presence of women in all the spaces of the restaurants perpetuates a familiar atmosphere where a man sits around the table and a woman serves.

Ethiopian immigrants have made an imprint on U.S. culture through the “national” cuisine they have constructed in the diaspora. As Shinn points out, “There is probably no large American city that does not have at least one Ethiopian restaurant” (2003: 77). In other words, Ethiopians, just like other ethnic groups, have successfully put Ethiopian food on the American national menu. This is a contribution to what Zelinsky (1985: 51) calls the “transnationalization of American culture.” Yet this contribution is a national cuisine that is

still evolving and was possible to construct only within the diaspora (see, Cusack 2000).

Beyond cuisine they have already create and recreated space that serves as an anchorage of their transnational identities as I described below.

Placing Identities: Everyday Forms of Transnational Living

When I was living in the metro area, my roommate and friend Tesfu would say every Saturday evening, “Let’s go to a Habasha *sefer*.” With these words, Tesfu invoked a place and an identity in the heart of metropolitan America. *Sefer* is an Amharic word for a neighborhood. The official Habasha *sefer* in Washington, D.C., is an area around 9th Street and U Street, NW. I sometimes hear people use Habasha *sefer* to refer to localities where Ethiopian businesses, churches, grocery stores, and business associations cluster. I rarely declined an invitation to go to a Habasha *sefer*. We would hop into his Toyota RAV4 and head for the ultimate *place*. Getting there and being there was always exciting. Many Ethiopians flock to the area during the weekend, and finding a parking space is a challenge; it sometimes takes more time to find a place to park the car than it does to drive in from a Maryland suburb. But this is a small price to pay. Being in the neighborhood is like being in Ethiopia and America at the same time.

The transnational localities immigrants create are hot spots for their communities. They provide a milieu where immigrants can enjoy being transmigrants. The literature on transnational place making amply documented the mobility of the transnational population (Appadurai 1996; Hannerz 1996). But transnational existence is not necessarily synonymous with being constantly on the move, and in most cases migrants and their networks remain strongly grounded in particular places (Mendoza 2006: 540; Conardson and Latham 2005: 228). In fact, as Smith argues, the study of transnationalism and transnational identity

formation would be “well advanced in attending to the emplacement⁸ of their everyday practices and motilities” (2005: 244). Immigrants re-create and remake home and make their presence known to host communities in the face of many challenges. Each immigrant group develops its own flavor of belonging without being disconnected from the host societies (Ehrkamp 2005; Sinatti 2008).

Over the past several decades Ethiopian immigrants have been engaged in producing an imprint on U.S. culture in cities such as Los Angeles, Dallas, Houston, and Seattle as well as Washington, D.C., (Gebre 2004; Chacko and Cheung 2006). The process of carving out a transnational place in Washington, D.C., began during the late 1970s but gathered momentum with the arrival of the revolutionaries in the 1980s. Ethiopian businesses soon appeared in the downtown area and (to a lesser degree) in residential neighborhoods. Most Ethiopian immigrants do not live in or near Little Ethiopia but rather throughout the city. Even if Ethiopians in the metro area are a community without propinquity, that is, people are in contact with each other without spatial proximity, the 18th Street area provided the gathering place and the first cultural home for the new community. This was the first Habasha *sefer*, and it was where Tesfu and many consultants would return over and over again. It is the place where homeland and host country overlap (Chacko 2003a: 33).

One of my consultants, Petros, took a walk with me one day on 18th Street and pointed out all the buildings that used to host Ethiopian businesses. In the 1990s, however, the winds of urban renewal and massive gentrification blew over the Washington metro area. The price

⁸Emplacement may be defined as anchoring. It is the process in which subjects, in this case transnational migrants are locally grounded (see, Sinatti 2008). As Edward Casey (1996:19) noted how we are “ineluctably place-bound.” He further noted that ethnographic subjects, however mobile, are situated and anchored because, “Even on the hoof, we remain in place. We are never anywhere, anywhen, but in place” (p.39).

of real estate in the Adams-Morgan neighborhood, where 18th Street is located, became too expensive for newer businesses, and many could not afford to stay. The Shaw neighborhood, where U and 9th Streets are located, provided a place where Ethiopians could resurrect their cultural home. The neighborhood had been one of the most economically depressed areas in the city since the 1960s. During the era of segregation, the neighborhood was where wealthy African Americans created an oasis in a Jim Crow America. Back in those decades, the neighborhood featured large residential homes and many businesses and social institutions, all owned by African Americans. African American churches, hotels, restaurants, banks, fraternal organizations, self-help groups, theaters, and jazz clubs all clustered in the area. Renowned jazz legend Duke Ellington lived there. The neighborhood was known as an autonomous African American area, a city within a city. It rivaled Harlem as a cultural center for African Americans (Chacko 2008: 216).

But the Supreme Court's 1953 decision in *District of Columbia v. John Thompson* began a process of desegregation in Washington. It ruled that African Americans had equal access to stores, restaurants, and other establishments that previously had served only whites. After that ruling, businesses in the Shaw neighborhood had to compete with their downtown counterparts, and without a guaranteed customer base, many African American businesses were forced to leave the area. Finally, in 1968, the unrest following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., rang the death knell for "DC's Harlem." Violence engulfed the area and raged for about two weeks. When it was over, a curator at the African American Civil War Memorial told me, the neighborhood was destroyed. Assaults, burglaries, and break-ins became part of daily life. African American residents fled the area, and its abandoned buildings and hotels soon became home to homeless people and pimps. It was the arrival of

Ethiopian and other immigrants in the 1980s that restored the grace and luster of the neighborhood (Coomarasamy 2005; Nicholls 2005; Nieves 2008; Chacko 2008).

Consultants stated that despite the advantage of inexpensive buildings, the neighborhood was very risky when they first arrived. “It was an urban wilderness. Heroin addicts could shoot you,” said Abebe, a restaurant owner. Andrew meticulously documented the history of the area and helped Ethiopians settle in the neighborhood. “This was ghetto. You know ghetto? We put security cameras around the corner to chase away drug addicts and pimps. Man, these pimps think that Ethiopians do not know the law.” When I raised the issue of crime with residents, they would tell me that this block has a long history of problems that included many reports of burglaries and even sometimes murder. They implied that the area’s new residents sometimes had to fight to take possession of their property; one new owner found twenty heroin addicts living in the basement. Gradually, Ethiopian residents reclaimed the neighborhood, replacing abandoned buildings with jazz clubs, movie theaters, and restaurants and restoring historic buildings on U Street (Nieves 2008: 22). The city government, since the 1980s, had made numerous large-scale efforts since the 1980s to reclaim the neighborhood that had limited success (Nieves 2008). As Andrew explained, it was “thanks to the hard working African immigrant community who renovated the properties that things have gotten better.”



Figure -2: Ethiopian Restaurant around U-Street, NW Washington, DC (Photo: K. Kebede)

Of course the revival and transformation of a neighborhood in a metropolitan area by an immigrant group is not an accomplishment that is particular to Ethiopians. Congolese immigrants in Brussels (Swyngedouw and Swyngedouw 2009), Senegalese immigrants in Italy (Sinatti 2008), Vietnamese immigrants in northern Virginia (Wood 1997), and Turkish immigrants in Germany (Ehrkamp 2005) are all examples of contemporary immigrant groups who have done the heavy lifting of urban renewal in Western cities. Most immigrants are engaged in “neighborhood upgrading” (Sassen 2001) and make the urban areas they reclaim a pivotal place for their transnational existence. These places provide concrete transnational localities that continue to provide a place of “communal consolation” that permits them to express the social, cultural, and other affinities associated with diasporic life (Swyngedouw and Swyngedouw 2009: 86).

This is certainly the case in the Shaw neighborhood. Every visit to the neighborhood, particularly 9th Street, provides a moment of cultural immersion. Restaurants, convenience

stores, beauty salons, travel agencies, lawyers' offices, and a community center exude a transnational flavor. Signs present business names in both Amharic and English. At all hours of the day the area is full of people and activities. Travel agencies and money-sending companies funnel people and cash to Ethiopia. Lawyers deal with documents to help new arrivals with immigration issues. Fund-raisers organize meetings for charitable activities in Ethiopia. This is where the colorful Ethiopian Orthodox Exhibition took place in the summer of 2008. The exhibition was designed to reach out to the Ethiopian community and raise money for religious activities in Ethiopia.

At the center of all the businesses in the *Habasha sefer* are restaurants—what Chacko (2003a) calls “ethnic sociocommerscapes.” Just like in Ethiopia, customers sit in a circle and chitchat in Ethiopian restaurants, sometimes for hours. Personal greetings are followed by news of the latest developments in Ethiopia. When I was doing my research, the U.S. presidential election was a frequent topic; a political suspense they enjoyed like soccer. Restaurant owners cater to their customers with decor that reminds them of Ethiopia. Walls are decorated perhaps saturated with cultural artifacts, images of unique Ethiopian landscapes, pictures that depict rustic rural life, and photos of Ethiopian kings. This decorating strategy makes Ethiopian immigrants comfortable and retains their custom, but it also appeals to a more diverse customer base. The images on the walls give customers “an exotic experience, an effortless voyage into some distant enchantments” (Zelinsky 1985: 54). In this kind of “gastronomic tourism” (ibid.), customers can visit other cultures without having to board an airplane.

The Shaw neighborhood is not just transnational; it creates transnational identities in those who visit it. It provides opportunities for Ethiopian residents to become involved in

transnational activities. Aweke and Dawit, like most other consultants, discussed how coming to that specific locality prompts people to be part of transnational action even if they may have little or no intention of becoming involved. These ideas were present in nearly all the immigrant interviewees. Aweke explained,

I can tell you this—those of us who live in the area with a larger community are always better connected with home. I could give examples. I grew up eating *injera*. I feel like eating Ethiopian food. Where do I go? I go to an Ethiopian place and I see all these magazines, I see all these calls for meetings, news that Ethiopia is falling apart, who is what, what song has been released, what is it and possibly I may run into a friend. Something you get there may put you in some sort of nostalgia and that triggers you to call home. You would say I have to call my friend X and let me call so-and-so too. There you have it, you are connected. . . . In that sense, before you know [it], you are closer to your country.

Beyond distant phone call to a faraway place, buoyed and encouraged by their modest achievements, some Ethiopians came up with a grand idea—naming the area “Little Ethiopia.” For those who promoted this transnational place-making project (Korac 2009: 25), it was a matter of getting recognition, respect, and status. The organizers skillfully recovered and documented the 100-year historical relationships between the United States and Ethiopia, collected petitions, and lobbied the city government. However, some consultants told me that African American community leaders (as well as some Ethiopians) protested against the name “Little Ethiopia.” They argued that the place is very historical to African Americans in their struggle for equality and was “already impregnated with African cultural tradition,” as Tehuti, an African American, indicated. Opponents of the idea argued that allowing Ethiopians to call it “Little Ethiopia” would overlook even delete the historic relevance of the area. This is not unlike the struggles other immigrant groups have had as they attempt to put their imprint on a geographical place through naming practices. Chacko (2008) and Wood (1997) have

described how Korean and Vietnamese immigrants faced resistance from white Americans when they attempted to rename neighborhoods. Hanley et al (2008) points out that “space has become an increasing point of tension” because “the use of space for one reason or by one group generally violates others’ claim to space” (p. 7).

Some believe that the rejection of the name “Little Ethiopia” was partly because of how Ethiopians present themselves. First, the Little Ethiopia neighborhood is mostly businesses and restaurants and as noted Ethiopians do not live in that specific neighborhood. They live in the suburbs. Second, many of the royalist generation who argue that they are closer to African Americans than the rest of Ethiopians emphasized that the main reason African Americans rejected the proposal was because Ethiopians do not mix well with African Americans. Mimi and Mina explained at length how satisfied they were when they learned that the proposal had been rejected. They told me that Ethiopians were so “insensitive” to the African Americans that they had used a white man, Jim Graham⁹, to advance their cause and “make African Americans’ neighborhood their own.” Mimi raised many issues,

Why should we have a street named after us? Do we respect black people? Do we respect these people? They struggled so much for us and they are still struggling. For us to have the rights and get education in this country is because of their struggle. Do we honor that? Do we understand their history? Do we want to understand their history? Do we? We can simply take a poll of Ethiopians in DC and you could find that most do not and do not want to identify with the greater African American community. Why would they give us a place when we look down upon them? We came to this country to survive. We cannot survive by disrespecting the people already here. A lot of what we enjoy today and the lives that we enjoy as Ethiopian

⁹ Mr. Graham is representative of Ward One in the District of Columbia. He expressed support for the “Little Ethiopia” project.

Americans is the direct result of the tears, struggles, and challenges of African Americans.

Although the litany of questions that Mimi raised may or may not reflect the views of most Ethiopian Americans, the city's rejection of a transnational place making project was disheartening. It made Ethiopians realize that there are limits to what they can do. Yet there were inadvertent consequences of the ruling. Today the location of "Little Ethiopia" is as well known in the DC area as, for instance, Chinatown. And even though many Ethiopians now find northern Virginia attractive as a place to settle and even do business the Shaw neighborhood remains vibrant. It remains a center of gravity, a home away from home and a location to relish being transnational. The Shaw neighborhood epitomizes how "becoming American means shaping America, literally and figuratively, materially and socially" (Wood 1997: 70).

By way of conclusion chapter 3 discussed how Ethiopians contribute to nation building in the United States. Among other things, their everyday activities and their construction of Habasha identity poses a challenge to the homogenization of the U.S. racial system. They are not alone. Recent African immigrants are often pressured, directly or indirectly, to merge their identities with those of African Americans. This pressure to fit an existing racial category ignores the distinctiveness of the culture and history of Ethiopian Americans. Many Ethiopians refuse to do this, particularly those who arrived after the 1980s. They challenge a binary vision of two races, black and white. In doing so they are sensitizing the nation to internal diversity within the U.S. black population. Moreover, through their construction of transnational spaces such as places of worship, ethnic restaurants, and neighborhoods, they contribute to the renewal of almost blighted urban areas. Perhaps as

much as they are trying to leave their imprint on their new home, they too are shaped by it. Among other things, the work ethic of Ethiopians has changed significantly. In the 1960s, many Ethiopians had difficulty keeping jobs that are less than professional because of an inherited cultural ethos of despising jobs. Today, although most Ethiopians work in nonprofessional and semi-professional occupations that they have never dreamed they would enter, they rarely loathe jobs. Transnational identities entail mixing and blending, negotiation and compromise as immigrants build new lives for themselves and their families.

Chapter-4

The Double Engagements: Host Country and Homeland Politics

Introduction

Ethiopians are clearly involved in transnational politics. Politics is a staple of conversation among them, and the topic pervades almost everything. Indeed, even casual encounters in Washington's Ethiopian community cannot go very far without becoming entangled in politics (Ungar 1998: 266; see also Lyons 2007, 2011). Ungar (1998: 266) notes that at the slightest of provocations Ethiopian cab drivers lecture their passengers about the latest political developments in Ethiopia and what is going on in the bowels of the U.S. State Department. Ethiopian parking-lot attendants seem to be adept at spreading the word about when a demonstration will be held and mobilizing the community in other ways. Even in Ethiopian restaurants, "politics is on the menu" (Ishola 2008); indeed, some of the restaurants serve as an "unofficial political club" (Chacko 2003a: 3). Such preoccupation, even obsession, with homeland and, to an appreciable degree, host country politics is not a recent development. Nor is it ephemeral or transient.

In this chapter I have three main objectives as I draw on and benefit from the literature (Østergaard-Nielsen 2003; Collet and Lien 2009; Eckstein 2009; Smith and Bakker 2008; Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001) that has amply documented immigrants' political transnationalism—the political activities undertaken by migrants "aimed at gaining political power or influence at the individual or collective level in the country of residence or in the state to which they consider they belong" (Martiniello and Lafleur 2008: 653). First, the chapter locates the historical trajectories of transnational politics. Although the historicization of transnational politics goes beyond the scope of this dissertation, I offer a fleeting and audacious examination of transnational politics in historical perspective to demonstrate its

existence in the past, how it has changed, and how the past may inform and even inspire the present (cf. Glick Schiller 1999a). Second, despite the pervasiveness of political engagement, not *all* Ethiopian immigrants are involved in transnational politics. Here I am looking at other variables besides the well-documented ones such as duration of stay, education level, gender, and ethnicity that clearly influence political participation (see Guarnizo et al. 2003; Lien and Wong 2009). My focus instead is on how the past of immigrants and the changing conditions of reception in the United States shape political involvement.

To this end, I look at intra-generational differences among the three groups of first-generation Ethiopian immigrants. In Chapters Two and Three I discussed at some length the relevance of intra-generational differences, specifically how pre-immigration experiences influence involvement or lack of involvement in different kinds of transnational activities. Here, focusing on transnational politics, I explain and demonstrate how among the three generational units of Ethiopians, the revolutionaries dominate transnational political discourses and influence political agendas in Ethiopia. Unlike the DV generation, who largely immigrated for economic reasons, and the royalists, who fled the country when the military assumed power, the revolutionaries had their revolution stolen from them by the military. Many are survivors of the onslaught of the military government. This conflict-embroiled generation, many members of which suffered similar kinds of trauma and still cherish the image of an idyllic nation-state, play very important roles in homeland politics—at the cost of marginalizing and sidelining other groups (Lyons 2011).

My ultimate objective is to analyze the political participation of Ethiopian immigrants in American politics as part of their nations-building work. Several researchers argue that transnational studies in general and of political transnationalism in particular have overlooked

the involvement of transnational migrants in the political spaces of the new home (Smith and Bakker 2008: 26; Baubock 2003: 720). To have an inclusive picture of the simultaneity of transnationalism it is important to observe the set of political activities immigrants are engaged in to make their lives better or to fulfill their civic duty just like any other citizen.

Historicizing Political Transnationalism

Nancy Foner (2005) and others (Smith and Bakker 2008; Morawska 2001) argue that political transnationalism has been an integral part of immigrants' lives. Azuma (2009) and Cano and Delano (2007) note that in the case of Japanese Americans and Mexican Americans, respectively, the U.S. government viewed the immigrants as outposts of their respective countries, while sending countries went out of their way to retain the allegiance of their citizens who had emigrated. Yet transnationalism, especially political transnationalism, has always been viewed with suspicion by host countries and sending countries alike. Nation-states have viewed unwavering loyalty as sacrosanct until fairly recently. In addition, until the recent past, institutional spaces rarely existed to protect immigrants from onerous demands of receiving states. Therefore it was practiced "in the closet" for many decades. Today however, diversity is celebrated (Morawska 2001; Guarnizo 2001; Azuma 2009; Østergaard-Nielsen 2009). This brief context is helpful to set up and assess just what is new about the patterns and processes involved in the transnational political ties of today.

In the case of Africa, the thesis that political transnationalism and transnational politics exist among the continent's emigrants may sound like a stretch. Indeed, theorists in a number of disciplines have raised questions about whether a formal state exists in Africa. Particularly, some anthropologists have long seen the continent as the bastion of rudimentary and even acephalous states (see Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940; Middleton and Tait 1958).

Within that context, politics beyond the boundaries of the continent may sound like wishful thinking. Moreover, Africa is frequently seen as a continent that is a late-comer to the latest installment of globalization. However, although Africa may appear to be marginal from a global perspective, from African positionalities, “the connections beyond the continent are (and have been in the past) a crucial part of the social, political and cultural transformations that are occurring within the continent” (Page et al. 2009: 138). How far must we go in space and time to locate African political transnationalism? John Arthur (2011) has recently reminded us that researchers into African political identities need to look at least as far back as the early twentieth century, when Africans studying abroad rallied against colonialism and racial inequality in Europe and America. The movements they participated in eventually “changed the course of political history in Africa” when new nation-states were created at mid-century (Arthur 2010: 102–103).

Ethiopian politics have been very much anchored in the transnational arena at least since the 1930s. Examples include anti-fascist struggles that gained momentum in the United States, where African Americans were mobilized as members of “kin diasporas” (see Shain 2007 on kinship and diaspora in international politics) by a single Ethiopian exile; the self-exiled students of the 1970s who brought socialist ideology back to Ethiopia; and the efforts of diaspora members to democratize the country after the defeat of communism there. The key actors in each of these instances were migrants and/or exiles. In fact, I hasten to add that the first serious opposition political parties in Ethiopia were formed in the United States and Europe during the late 1960s (Kebede 2008: 16).

Migrants have not always been the only players in the field of transnational political action. Sending states have also expressed interest in shaping transnational political activity.

For instance, the Ethiopian state has played an active role in mobilizing whatever diaspora group it could relate to and has done so whenever such relationships were beneficial. On the other hand, it takes a very defensive posture when its authority is challenged. For many years, the United States had a more or less restrictive policy toward transnational political action, particularly during and around the two world wars. But it encouraged such activity when it was in its own interest to do so, as Glick Schiller notes: “Political leadership in the United States up to and including U.S. presidents continued to reinforce immigrant’s transnational political ties when those ties were defined in the U.S. national interest” (Glick Schiller 1999b: 23; see also Martiniello and Lafleur 2008: 657). Whether state policies toward transnational political action are antagonistic or nurturing seems to depend on context, particularly the policies of sending states (Morawska 2004: 1383).

In Defense of the Nation-State

Long before large-scale migration from Ethiopia became an important political force, an Ethiopian exile mobilized thousands of African Americans to defend the nation-state. I begin with a brief account of an Ethiopian who brought the story of Melaku Beyan to my attention. Geta (a pseudonym, of course) was a high-ranking army general in the Imperial Government of Ethiopia (IGE). Although he had a humble beginning, Geta made a name for himself through hard work and years of military service. He came to the United States as a refugee when the imperial regime collapsed under the weight of massive protests in 1974. Noncommissioned officers “usurped” (to use his term) the roles of generals who were still bowing to the throne. For that, Geta has not and probably will not forgive President Jimmy Carter for not intervening in the affairs of a state that had been a U.S. ally for decades. As far

as Geta is concerned, President Carter's lack of action enabled the soldiers to "desecrate" Ethiopia. That happened some three decades ago.

To make ends meet, Geta worked different kinds of jobs once he arrived in the United States. Nothing suited him as well as driving a cab, however. "I am my own boss," he says as he obsessively cleans his taxi. Being a cab driver created a comfort zone for him—a job where a dishonored general could work without being "bossed around," one that provided flexibility that meshed well with his writing projects. For the past several years he has operated his taxi from 3 a.m. to 7 p.m. He takes a short nap, then usually spends some time writing. He has now written three books about Ethiopian politics. The third chronicles and is a tribute to Ethiopian war heroes. "They are forgotten despite their sacrifice in defense of our country," he told me more than once. His book will be a living memorial for all of them. In fact, I came to know Geta through a network that helped him arrange and collate the manuscript of the third book. (As a self-published author, he made a deal with a low-cost publishing company. Part of the contract was helping the publisher with binding processes.)

While he was working on the book, Geta drew my attention to a special hero. He is the only nonmilitary hero who earned space in his book about military figures who defended the nation. "For your research," he told me, "you should know about Dr. Melaku Beyan." Dr. Beyan was one of the three students who came to the United States to study during the 1920s (see chapter 2). Best known and honored for establishing close relationships and racial solidarity with African Americans, Beyan's racial militancy and pan-Africanism put him on a par with civil rights icons. The U.S. government kept a watchful eye upon him. He questioned and campaigned for racial equalities in the U.S. Because of his "guarded expression," however, Beyan did not risk being deported as Garvey did (Harris 1994:129). As a result of

their relationships with him, a number of African Americans migrated to Ethiopia in the early 1930s. He is reputed to have persuaded the emperor to employ some of them in the imperial administration (Zewde 2002: 292; Getahun 2007).

Transnational politics preoccupied him, much as they do the immigrants of today. Quite surprisingly, he was relatively successful. Before Beyan settled in what Zewde refers to as his “natural political habitat” (Zewde 1993: 292) in the United States, particularly Harlem in New York City, he returned to Ethiopia in 1936. He became the personal doctor of the emperor, but his exile to the United States was triggered by the Italian occupation of Ethiopia during World War II (1935–1941). The Ethiopian government recognized his influence and familiarity with African Americans and sent him to mobilize them in defense of the embattled Ethiopian state. Beyan used the language of strong pan-Africanist ideals and racial solidarity that he had acquired in the United States (Scott 1993: 73). His transnational mission was largely successful. Beyan created an organization called the Ethiopian World Federation as a means to raise funds and help Ethiopians displaced by the war. He began publishing the *Voice of Ethiopia* newspaper, which disseminated information about the war, and he co-founded the Ethiopian Research Council (Harris 1994: 23). Much of this was accomplished with the help of his African American colleagues. When I interviewed Tehuti, an African American, on the relationships between African Americans, Ethiopians, and other Africans, he told me how Beyan raised the bar for new African immigrants. Ending the interview on a high note, Tehuti compared Beyan to major U.S. civil rights movement figures, “For us he was like Garvey.”

One of the issues that concerned the U.S. government was Beyan’s ability to mobilize African Americans. In response to his call to defeat fascism in Ethiopia more than fifty thousand African Americans enlisted mostly as soldiers (Scott 1993). The disenfranchisement

of African Americans, the Depression of the 1930s, and Beyan's ability to define fighting fascism as a racial duty helped him enormously (Lawrence 2008). Much has been written on the involvement of African Americans in Ethiopian affairs during World War II (see Scott 1993; Harris 1994). Two points are very relevant here.

First, the U.S. government reacted strongly to the interest of African Americans in foreign affairs. It viewed the spike in African American involvement in Ethiopian affairs as troubling and took legal measures to curtail such activity. The State Department refused passports to volunteers who wanted to go to Ethiopia, and the Justice Department threatened to strip volunteers of their citizenship. A few daring souls managed to bypass such restrictions, but by and large these laws dampened the enthusiasm (Plummer 1996). The second relevant point is the tension between African Americans and Italian Americans over Ethiopia during the 1930s. Not all Italian Americans supported Italy's occupation of Ethiopia, but those who did collected a substantial amount of cash for the colonial undertaking and organized huge patriotic rallies in the United States (Scott 1993: 142). The Italian government supported this mobilization, partly to generate financial resources. At the same time, it was part of the Italian state's effort to unify Italians after the recent unification of the country. African Americans, however, saw the pro-Italy activities of Italian Americans as an attack on their race. They likened Italy's action to the "lynching of Ethiopia" (Scott 1993: 59). African Americans boycotted stores owned by Italian Americans, goods made in Italy, and even the Catholic Church. During the summer of 1935, violence flared up between Italian American and African American communities. In part, the conflict was a manifestation of long-simmering interracial grievances between the two communities (Plummer 1996: 48).

The rich history of this diasporic enthusiasm may force us to rethink what is new about political transnationalism. Despite the claim that sending states are latecomers to the arena of immigrant transnationalism (Portes 2003: 879), the evidence suggests otherwise. The relationships between the state and immigrants are very complex. Many African immigrants in the United States or Western Europe were engaged in the nation-making enterprise prior to and during the 1960s. In the era of decolonization, the world became a terrain of nation-states, especially in Africa. In that context there are two interesting dynamics at work in postcolonial Africa. Quickly already existing or newly constituted states have become big and they are frequently repressive. They have been manufacturing emigrants—ejecting individuals who happened to challenge their hegemony. Many immigrants are not so much concerned with constructing a nation-state or wresting it from the hands of colonizers, as previous generations of African immigrants were. The aim has become, as discussed below, transforming the state and even domesticating it.

Taking Socialist Ideology Back Home

Since the 1960s, the revolutionaries dominated much of the politics of transnational Ethiopia. The breeding ground for this politically conscious generation was the United States and Western Europe. The Ethiopian government sent hundreds of students to the West for graduate studies hoping that they could return and modernize the nation. Many instead gravitated towards social studies and embraced political action. Unlike Dr. Beyan, however, their objective was not protecting the nation or reforming the status quo. Much of their energies were devoted to changing and shaping the political direction of Ethiopia. Entertaining such political aspirations was unthinkable in the belly of the beast—the Ethiopian state. First, the country was ruled by an emperor. His authority was believed to be

bestowed upon Him by an almighty God and was enshrined in the constitution. Second, the United States would not have allowed or appreciated a revolution from within its client state (Westad 2005). Ironically, Ethiopian students and exiles, whose numbers increased exponentially in the West in the 1970s, found room for what was taboo in Ethiopia. In the following paragraphs I explain how the revolutionary generation, as Getu put it more sharply, were a “politically possessed generation” that exported socialism to Ethiopia and managed to make over homeland politics, although the reform was far from their liking. For the past several decades the political spirit that possessed them has refused to subside. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union this spirit demands democracy instead of socialism.

The Ethiopian Students’ Association in North America (ESANA) was a precursor to the revolutionary thought that captivated many students in the 1970s. A pro-imperial government organization and politically inactive ESANA was probably formed around the 1950s (Demmellash 1984) in the United States. The Ethiopian government showed great interest in promoting and influencing the organization, for example by providing direct financial assistance to support its activities (Tadesse 1993; Zewde 2010: 64). Several of the students who belonged to the association returned home to become part of the government, some even rising to the rank of minister. But once they had experienced the level of freedom in the United States, they grew intolerant of the archaic imperial administration. Their advanced degrees also made some of them arrogant, and they resented the fact that they had to serve under less educated “aristocrats or plebeian” individuals (Marcus 1995: 20). Marcus (2003: 22) notes that the “genuine and by no means unfounded discontent about . . . the denial to men of talent the opportunity to contribute to Ethiopia’s welfare” had serious consequences. A coup d’état orchestrated in 1961 by some U.S.-educated individuals was the

culmination of such discontent. “Many of the returned students wanted political liberty for the people,” Dr. Mulugeta emphasized in his interview with me. However, because the coup was very poorly organized and the United States intervened in favor of the imperial government, it was a failure.

Punitive measures against the organizers and supporters of the coup d'état drove Ethiopian students into exile and ultimately to the political left. Intolerant of reform efforts, the imperial government leapt from frying pan to fire, as Dr. Abiyi argues. Revolution was brewing in the West. Self-exiled students who had become politicians co-opted ESANA. Many were engaged in political debates in the late 1960s and early 1970s about how to remake Ethiopia (Hepner 2009), and the Ethiopian Student Union in North America (ESUNA) effectively replaced ESANA. The new organization, which was very political, organized 21 meetings or congresses from the 1960s to 1974, many of which were held in Western Europe and the United States (Shinn 2003: 49). ESUNA had an estimated 600 registered memberships (Tadesse 1993). Clearly, the United States provided a fertile ground for political activism for Ethiopian students and the freedom they needed.

Yet Ethiopian students' favorable attitude toward the United States declined considerably after it failed to support the 1961 coup and continued to support an emperor who was not committed to democracy (Balsvik 1979; Zewde 2010: 15; Kebede 2008: 174). To ESUNA members, communism became an attractive alternative and a rejoinder to U.S. policy. Tsehai asked,

Do you know anything about ESUNA? A very, very strong organization. It was pro-communist and socialist. Almost all of us were part of it. You needed to be part of the politics by then. It was animated by Martin Luther King. We were part of the black liberation movements as well as anti-colonial movements. We became very

conscious of the repressive political system in Ethiopia supported by the U.S.. We wanted to change it. We wanted to end it.

At least, two main factors made Marxism an attractive ideology to these students.

First was the state of Ethiopia's economy. Many students were stunned when they realized that their country was the most impoverished of African countries. Abdul, who was part of the student movements of the 1970s in Ethiopia that were radicalized, explained how students were embarrassed when they came to understand that despite political independence, Ethiopia had "no economy to speak of." Tibebe became well aware of Ethiopia's impoverishment when he visited Kenya: "I was in Kenya after the revolution. How Kenya was a fresh and highly developed country infrastructure wise was incredible. I was, you know, what the hell have we been doing? If you would like to compare Kenya to Ethiopia, oh, huhu... [But] Kenyans lacked the sense of independence. Maybe it was a trade-off."

The second issue that attracted students to Marxism was the issue of ethnic groups. In Ethiopia, the ruling group was largely comprised of Amharas, and members of other ethnic groups were not given the same rights and privileges. Ethiopian students in the United States debated incessantly with each other about how ethnic groups should be treated, in the halls of U.S. universities, in their apartments, between classes, and past midnight. Some of these students found the theories of Lenin to be the most useful. Girma recalled the different perspectives about the question of ethnicity. Some students suggested self-determination, including secession, for all ethnic groups. Others saw this as a recipe for national fragmentation and argued that secession should be ruled out. These were weighty questions, but the revolutionary generation felt responsible for the perfection of their country. Getahun generally preferred to talk about Ethiopian folk religions particularly *buda* (evil eye) than politics but he recalled,

You know the weight of the country was on our shoulders. Those of us who came to the U.S. during the late imperial period were very young. We know what was going on in the world at that time. We were the ones that were educated enough to understand the direction of the country. We were the ones that had the enthusiasm to speak up for what we believed in. People in the countryside do not understand politics. They were and still are signing their vote with their fingerprints and stuff because they cannot write.

The students were divided about how to construct an ideal society. Some suggested revolution. Others were pro reform. The various suggestions students made had class overtones. Individuals from better royalist families saw reform as preferable. “The reformists were generals’ and *balambaras*’ [lit. commander of the citadel] kids. Some of them went to the best school with foreign teachers. Some of them were even spoiled school dropouts. They came to the United States to be groomed. Their parents saw them off at the airport. So major political change would deprive them of their privileges,” Getu noted. In contrast, most of the students who advocated revolution came from lower-class backgrounds. “Commoners, even children of the peasants, came to the United States for graduate studies. I think the number of students who fall in the latter category increased by the day. Those kids naturally gravitated towards socialism,” Tsehai told me. But some of my consultants felt that socioeconomic status had little to do with their political choice. “Imbued with youthful optimism, some of us turned against the interest of our parents who were landowners and businesspersons. We joined student movements and protests. We decided to sacrifice for change, justice, and equality. We were avid nationalists. You know every society had its nationalist generation,” Girma contends.

Transnational activities were much more difficult and demanding in those days. The long-distance nationalists had to shuttle between Europe, the United States, and other African nations to plot their revolution. Algeria in particular drew the students; as Tadesse notes, “In

the late 1960s, Algeria was a haven for revolutionaries from all over the world.” Ethiopians who traveled there were given a living allowance and a two-room flat in the Casbah district (Tadesse 1993).

Years of globetrotting and political devotion resulted in the importation of socialism through publications and clandestine organizations. Elites and laymen alike coughed communism as a form of communicable diseases even when they did not understand the ailment. Biruk talked with me about how Marxism became the new best hope for him and other revolutionaries as he kindly shared his treasured pack of “authentic” *doro wot* (stew made of chicken) that he gets from Ethiopia. Cuba’s Castro became his hero. He particularly recalled how Marx and Lenin were quoted to support or refute political arguments and how Fanon’s *The Wretched of the Earth* became “the new bible.” With self-deprecating humor, Biruk told me a story that captures the political temperature of the moment.

You know, we used to debate the political future of our country. There were so many Marxist study groups. During one of our debates one of the students in order to make his point said, “According to Marx, under Socialism all will govern in turn and will soon become accustomed to no one governing.” Before the student finished his statement, a well-read and astute student raises his hand and says, “With all due respect that was not Marx’s saying. It is actually Lenin who said that.” Embarrassed but unflinching the student replied, “There was nothing that Marx did not say and write. It is just that you did not read all of his works yet.”

The difficulty of the transnationalism of the 1970s was just how the “trans” would meet the national. The socialism the students imported had an immediate impact. The revolutionaries encouraged the military to remove the imperial government from power in February 1974. Once that was accomplished, more ideologues returned home. Additional political reforms were implemented, including redistribution of land, nationalization of some

private properties, and so forth. But behind the scenes, the communists were at each other's throats. Heated disagreements broke out between the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Front (EPRP) and the All-Ethiopia Socialist Movement (AESM) over what to make of the military. EPRP members wanted no military at all. The AESM wanted the military as a provisional partner. These disagreements had bloody consequences; with the help of the military, the AESM wiped out the EPRP (Moussa 1994).

Despite the marriage of convenience, AESM members had made it clear to the military that they were needed temporarily, but with the EPRP out of the way the military went after the AESM itself. A major Achilles' heel of the AESM was the question of ethnic rights. The communist parties supported the right of ethnic groups to self-determination. However, the military rejected any negotiation about ethnic self-determination. The unity of the country became sacred. The military argued that overcoming class struggles and increasing administrative and cultural autonomy for ethnic groups was the solution. This is the issue the military used to attack the AESM; it labeled the group's support for self-determination for ethnic groups as anti-nation and eradicated the group.

The communists who were lucky enough to escape with their lives were exiled. Many formed or joined liberation fronts that typically were organized along ethnic lines. The main ones were the Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), and the Ogaden People's Liberation Front (OPLF). Armed struggles raged between the government and the liberation fronts for seventeen years. Its flames have not yet been extinguished, but in 1991 many of these liberation fronts were able to remove the military regime. Support from those in the diaspora was not insignificant in this process as we see below.

Exile, Ideological Rebirth, and the U.S. Politics

Thousands of the members of the revolutionary generation came to the United States in exile in the early 1980s. Gradually but surely their political ideas began to change. They became passionate about capitalism, the free market, and democracy. After a time, their images of a perfect home in Ethiopia could be imagined only through the prism of liberal democracy. Girma painted the ideological rebirth. “When we were students we protested against U.S. imperialism. We burned the effigy of the then visiting U.S. vice president. I remember carrying placards that says, ‘Down with Imperialism! Yankees go home!’ Same thing was going on in the United States. Students rallied in front of the White House and the State Department. America was this immoral imperialist country supporting a decadent emperor. . . . These days, rain or shine, we are [again] in front of the State Department and the White House. We implore the U.S. to help, to intervene and make us democratic. The paradox is [that] nobody listens,” he said, barely mustering a smile. In the following paragraphs I briefly explain what brought the ideological shifts and describe how members of the revolutionary generation participate in American body politics. I specifically look at how they influence and are influenced by U.S. politics. In talking about transnationalism, it is important to show such simultaneities.

Ethiopians and Eritreans were the first to be admitted into the United States after the Refugee Act of 1980 became law. Unlike refugees from countries around the world that fled communist states such as Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Lebanon, and Albania, however, only a small number of Ethiopians were admitted (Woldemikael 1996: 158). The low admission rate was despite the large number of Ethiopian refugees languishing in refugee camps.

Unprecedentedly, during the early 1980s, Ethiopians accounted for a whopping 58 percent of African refugees and displaced persons (Bariagaber 2006: 54). Refugees who fled communist

states were given asylum because of their anti-communists inclinations (Koinova 2009: 154). Some of these Ethiopians were believed to be Marxists when they were granted refugee status; many were of course leftists who had rallied against the United States. The U.S. administration was not unaware of these ideological beliefs.

Whatever the case may be many Ethiopians I spoke with argued that some of them had parted ways with socialism before they came to the United States. It was not a rapid jump off the socialist bandwagon, as Tibebe (2008) has implied. The process was gradual as Ethiopians realized that the idea of socialism and the utopian society it promised was not likely to be realized. Aduigna works as a security guard in downtown Silver Spring, Maryland. Although he is now a devoted Christian, he once worked for the military government as its foot soldier implementing rural programs. However, he found putting ideas in practice much more difficult than reading Marxism books that once flooded the country. He acknowledged that resources were wasted to implement foreign ideas. Socialist teachings, he realized, were simply “incompatible and at odds” with the Ethiopian cultural ethos. Ethiopian culture, in his view, is the “reverse” of what socialism preached. “Ethiopians like to share resources; our communal dining tradition. [But] we do not like to work together,” he generalizes. He gave up on the whole idea of communism even when he was still wearing his communist khaki uniform, raising his left fist, and screaming, “Forward with Socialism under Mengistu” as loud as he could. He now marvels at the freedom he enjoys. For example, he was quite surprised to learn that it took him only few days to form a 501 (c) organization.

Ayalew: "Something funny happened at the bar"

For others, working visits to communist countries in Eastern Europe provided the proverbial last straw. Ayalew has always been "pro-West," as he put it, but when the military government assumed power he flirted with socialism rather than going into exile. However, his experience in the former Czechoslovakia and an encounter with a Czech colonel made him rethink his position. He recalled, "I and several of my colleagues went to Czechoslovakia for an official visit. Czechoslovakia supported the communist takeover in Ethiopia and several students were sent there for graduate studies, including my cousin. In Prague University alone, there were more than a dozen Ethiopian students." (I have heard that some of the Ethiopians in Metropolitan D.C. who went to school in Prague during the military rule speak excellent Czech. They get together in D.C. each year, speak Czech, and reminisce about the "good old days" in Prague.) Ayalew told me that his cousin and his friends wanted to show him Prague. "I said, 'I am not feeling well.' I was on an official visit, you know. They persuaded me and we went out. After the visit we ended in an upscale bar. Something funny happened at the bar." He explained,

We run into this Czech colonel at the bar. He became very friendly and started asking questions. I believe we were the only black people around. I thought he was sent to spy on us. The good thing was most of the students spoke the language. I admired how fluent they had become. . . . Anyway they told him that we were just students. I wanted to get out of there as quickly as possible but the colonel did not let us go. He offered to buy us drinks. We said no, but he insisted. The students told him [that] according to our tradition we were supposed to buy him drinks. He accepted our invitation. After we paid for the first round of drinks he said, 'It is my turn' and almost forced us. When we tried to say no his face turned red. We became so anxious. We did not know what was going on.

While we were having drinks the Colonel got into his personal stories. He took a match out of his pocket. He lit it and put the burning match right in the middle of his hand like he was doing a circus act. "Look at my hands," he said. "I worked so hard for this country. My hands are very strong. I have money. With the money I have I wanted

to buy furniture. The government told me I need to wait five years. I wanted to buy a car. They told me to wait for another five years. I wanted to have my own house. They wanted me to wait indefinitely. What do you want me to do with my money? I go around and drink. Look at how communism is insidious. Communism is evil.” We had nothing to say. I only wished that we hadn’t told him we were there to be communists.

For Ayalew and perhaps many others such experiences provided enough reason to take an early exit from communism’s path. Some members of student corps who were sent to communist countries for graduate studies were unimpressed with what they saw. They either defected to Western Europe or returned to Ethiopia apathetic about communism. “Not only was the Soviet republic the poorest country in the world but there was literally no country that made it to [a] classless society,” noted Abdul, a Czech-trained engineer. Communist countries that offered scholarships were not unaware of students’ dissatisfaction. Colburn (1989: 144) quoted a Soviet official working in Ethiopia as saying, “When Ethiopian students and faculty are sent to America or Western Europe they come back committed socialists. When they are sent to the Soviet Union or Eastern Europe they come back disdaining socialism.”

The Soviet official was right. By the time Ethiopians were admitted into the United States during the 1980s and early 1990s, most of them were disillusioned with socialism. The United States accepted them with open arms and the fact that they found work that provided a living was disarming. Girma attributed the embrace of liberal democracy to maturity. “In your 20s you have the thinking that you will change the world overnight. In the 30s you start to reason a little bit, you mature. In the 40s things become very concrete for you. In the 50s and 60s where I am now you start thinking about yourself and become very realistic. When we were young socialism was infectious. We were infatuated. Who among us was not plagued by socialism then?” Of course not all Ethiopian immigrants have completely cleansed

themselves of the infatuation. “They brag about the revolution. What they have done for the country. Some of them are still enveloped in the ethos of communism,” Abdul told me.

Some of those who have retained something of the socialist ethos note that the United States they knew during their student years has since moved toward the left. “I am left of the Democratic Party. We should stand up for the rights of people,” Getu stated. “The Soviets talked about communism but the United States adopted and implemented much of the positive parts of it. In that vein it was simply a win-win situation.” Tibebe, now a committed activist, talked about how capitalism has become “compassionate” and how “profit-only hard-core capitalism” is endangered. However, after the financial crisis, the bailouts, and the credit crunch, Tibebe admitted, “I do not know what really works well. Both ideologies have failed the world.”

In contrast, the Ethiopians who came to the United States in the mid-1970s were clearly anti-communists. If anything, they were monarchists who still dreamed of restoring the monarchy (Matsuoka and Sorenson 2001: 162). Ms. Negede still calls the emperor “our father” and feels that the obsession with liberal democracy is too hasty. In fact some of them formed the Ethiopian Imperial Government in Exile. In sharp contrast, the DV generation, myself included, lived under communism. Even though it seems that the communist ideological influence bore no fruit, like the biblical seed that fell on a hard rock, they had high expectations that the U.S. government would assist them. Ironically, some of the same people who brought a socialist government to Ethiopia have the audacity to ridicule the DV generation for expecting government handouts. “Some of the DV generation hoped the U.S. government will give them a job, a decent place to live, a bag of cash with a refill slip and all that,” Abdul stated. Hermela said, “We told the DV people the government would do nothing

for them. This is not Ethiopia. You have to figure it out.” In fact, most Ethiopians believe in the good things the government can do for them, much as Haitian immigrants do (Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001: 186).

In addition to the embrace of a democratic ideology many Ethiopians also embrace U.S. citizenship, participate in civic activities and are making their voices heard. In terms of naturalization in the period 2003 to 2010, more than 49,000 Ethiopians became naturalized U.S. citizens (Department of Homeland Security 2011). Most of the reasons for naturalization that are reported are pragmatic. Inviting close relatives to come to the United States, the ease of travel, and better job opportunities top the list. Aweke, who is twenty-seven, told me, “Before coming to D.C. I was in Atlanta, Georgia. I went to a job fair at Georgia World Congress Center. I did not even make it to the hall because they check your citizenship status at the gate. They say, ‘If you are not a citizen we are not going to accommodate you.’ I said, ‘See you next time with my blue book [U.S. passport].’” Hanna, who is in her late 40s, said, “Traveling is a pain if you are not an American citizen. Period. . . . As an American the only question they ask when you go to Europe is whether you are there for business or a vacation. You say, ‘For vacation.’ They say, ‘Enjoy yourself and good bye.’ Well, I cannot tell you how you travel with that passport in the Middle East right now.” Even some of the revolutionary generation who held onto their Ethiopian citizenship in the hope that they would one day return and even have a political career have given up. I would say the fact that Ethiopian airline flies six days a week makes it easier for people go back and forth and puts nostalgia to rest.

Of course naturalization is not the final step in the process of feeling that one is a full-fledged citizen, as Jones-Correa (1998) found among Latinos in New York. Among my

consultants, Dawit is probably the only one who defines naturalization as the consummation of becoming an American. “I am an American citizen. I became an American citizen exactly five years after I came here. I guess in my case, deep inside I really believe in the values this country holds, which are many of the things that I value. I traveled quite a bit before I really ended up in America. This is the only country that you could make it home. No place that I have seen really allows you to hold your own identity and still make it home. It is dreamlike. So, yes! I do feel I am a citizen.” But Dawit is the exception. Although becoming a citizen is much like a gestational process that simply takes time and persistence, attaining the feelings and commitment to U.S. citizenship is another issue. Seyoum’s experience rings true for many people. “I am a citizen. I wanted to be. I never argued with myself not to become [one]. It was not because I felt American at the beginning. It was a selfish interest. Then it was simply to bring over my wife. . . . Now I am becoming American; I am as American as anyone is.”

Whether the motive for naturalization is “a selfish interest,” as Seyoum put it, or total immersion in American values right from the start, as Dawit experienced, most Ethiopian immigrants derive immense pride and confidence and a sense of security in becoming American. Hanna likes to talk about her American citizenship. More than once she told me an anecdote that made her U.S. citizenship dear to her. “I was in Ethiopia during the 2005 election, you know, the time when the country was messed up. The police stopped us, searched our car, and held us. He asked for our identification card before he let us go. I gave him my U.S. passport. He said, ‘Do you not have something else? This is borrowed?’ I was like, I am like ‘Sir I am sorry to say to you but you are violating my right. I am an American citizen. I did not break the law. You should treat me as a national of another country.’ He

warned me that he would jail me. I told him he could and I would cooperate. He would have to answer for it but I would be free with a simple phone call from here. He took it personally but he let us go.”

Beyond citizenship the party affiliation of my consultants varied; it was shaped by the influence of Ethiopian politics, their minority status in the United States, and their social orientation. Three of my consultants identified themselves as Republicans. Pastor Elias stated, “This year I am going to vote for Obama. Otherwise I am a Republican.” Others saw themselves as Democrats, although not “far left” of the Democratic Party, as Getu was. Zewde explained why he thought most Ethiopians, including himself, are Democrats.

My first vote was for Dukakis. He was running against George Bush senior. I remember watching every one of the debates. . . . I think as a matter of fact, if I think clearly, yes, most Ethiopians are Democrats. It is just an immigrants’ phenomenon. Most immigrants identify themselves as Democrats. Of course most of our cousins [read: African Americans] are Democrats. You know the Black in the Black community the life they live or everything that they faced become part of our problem as well. So for most of us being a Democrat is being more to the fairness side. They think that it is what fairness is synonymous with; that is, being Democrat. Otherwise we are by far the most conservative, very orthodox people.

A survey conducted in Alexandria, Virginia, by Ethiopian Americans for Change (EAFC), an organization put together by second-generation Ethiopians, found out that 56 percent of those surveyed consider themselves to be Democrats (EAFC 2009). Only 4.4 percent identified themselves as Republicans. My findings seem to contradict both Zewde’s opinion and EAFC’s results. Of course my research was based on in-depth interviews. Most of my interviewees identified themselves as independents. Teddy, a second generation Ethiopian American who administered the EAFC survey, seems to concur with my findings. “Most Ethiopians lean independent,” he noted, based on his extensive canvassing experience.

The survey was conducted in the aftermath of Obama's election. More than likely, he says, the election skewed the outcome.

Inherited distrust for politics and political parties based on the haunting political violence they experienced in Ethiopia plays a significant role for the preference of Ethiopian immigrants for an independent political stance. They interpret being independent as not going against anybody's interest. Yet they often provide other reasons for this choice. Seyoum's explanations may be similar to those of most others. "I do not want to be tied to a party. I wanted to be tied to issues. For me I vote for issues. I do not want to be labeled with any particular party. I care for issues. I do not think there is any particular thing that I like about Democrats and Republicans that I would sell my soul for."

It is also important to examine the civic participation of Ethiopians in the United States. One of the complaints that most second-generation Ethiopian Americans make about their parent generation is that, unlike them, the previous generation does not participate in American politics. Because of what they call an "almost compulsive attention to the politics of what is going on in Ethiopia," as Bersa described it, first-generation Ethiopians have "ignored" American politics. But even some members of the DV generation have a low rate of participation in U.S. politics. They are overworked as they try to make a living and seem to have less time for politics. In this regard, the DV generation may resemble the Latino immigrants in New York City that Jones-Correa (1998) described as being politically "liminal." They do not participate in political activities in the United States (mainly because they are not naturalized), and they do not participate in their home country either.

Yet the vibe I get from most members of the revolutionary generation and the royals seems to be a respectable degree of engagement with American politics, even when they are

dithering to naturalize. Dr. Teferra challenged what he called the “classic” meaning of political participation/integration, which is often defined as voting. He argues,

This last year in 2008 I decided to become a U.S. citizen—after 35 years. (Me: Is that a change of heart?) I am not going to go into that now. . . . In September 2008 of this year I cast my first vote. My being a U.S. citizen is not a sign of integration. I have always been active in the U.S. politics even though I did not vote. I campaign and make financial contributions, I volunteer. I serve on various local commissions in the country. I have had a number of assignments. Locally, I am a member of [the] equal employment commission in Arlington and I have been a member of multicultural advisory commission. I have been a member of the Arlington task force, Arlington since 2000, etc. You should not have the impression that because you are not a citizen you are not politically active. That is a classic meaning.

As part of their civic commitment consultants point to concrete legislative achievements as indicative of solid participation. Abdul stated that “among African immigrants we got the distinction of being a leading advocate for our rights.” Any achievement is well regarded and a source of enormous satisfaction for a people whose lived experiences had been such that the means of bringing change has always been through the barrel of a gun. First on the list of legislative success is the law that made Amharic a working language in the District of Columbia in 2004. “The day mayor Anthony Williams signed it into law, April 21, 2004, should have been recognized as an Ethiopian American day. . . . God Bless America,” Zewde remarked. Abdul explained the hard work involved,

It took us a year and a half to convince the city council. Latino and Asian communities helped us too. We brought to the city administration [the issue] that parents [were using] kids as interpreters. First, kids had to miss classes to be interpreters. Second, kids should not be the person telling a police officer how dad hit mom. They should not be the first to learn that mom has breast cancer [or] a communicable disease and nor should the child be the person to have to tell the story. We presented evidence to [the] city council. They realized it is very damaging to children. So many Ethiopian-

based organizations who participated in the campaign said, “It will not happen, it will not happen.” Unless you struggle for it, Congress does not grant rights. Because of the Language Access Coalition, Amharic became the first African language to be officially recognized in D.C. government.

In addition, Ethiopian Americans in partnership with other African immigrants lobbied the D.C. government to be acknowledged as a constituency with its own needs, aspirations, and interests. “Just like Latinos, we demanded to be seen as an independent group [rather] than being lumped with others,” Zewde remarked. The city government responded sympathetically. An Office on African Affairs Desk (OAA) was added to the city’s administrative structure. It focuses on the needs of the African residents in terms of health insurance and quality housing and offers grant opportunities to qualified community-based organizations. Ethiopians played a key role in campaigning for this new office, and the first head of the OAA was an Ethiopian.

Ethiopians played a role in petitioning the district for another major legislative achievement. The Emergency Non-Resident Taxicab Drivers Act of 2007 now allows more than 4,000 cab drivers living in Maryland and Virginia to work in the D.C. region. Several of them told me that they were part of a broad movement that is demanding that Congress give permanent residents the right to vote as in Takoma Park, Maryland and for a full voting representative in Congress for the District of Columbia. Abdul seemed surprised with the imperfections of U.S. democracy. “The district’s more than half a million residents are taxed without representation in the national government. That shows you that the U.S. democracy is a work in progress too.”

Motivated by what has transpired, members of the Ethiopian diaspora in the D.C. area seem to have a real interest or even a “hunger” (Calleja 2009) to organize and be organized.

Most of them now speak of their “underachievement” and the “inadequacies” that must be overcome. There have been several setbacks. One was the rejection of the proposal to designate a block of 9th and U streets as “Little Ethiopia.” Another is the fact that no Ethiopian has been elected to any level of the U.S. government despite the size of the Ethiopian diasporic population and length of time it has been in the United States. “We have been here for the past 25 years, you know. What happened is we do not have any elected Ethiopian Americans at mayor, city, council and congress levels. We do not have a single person, it is zilch. Look at Nigerian Americans. I counted they have five elected officials. They work in the city council and they already assumed prominent positions,” Biruk told me. Abdul, however, feels that the immigrant past need not be an obstacle in how Ethiopians interact with the American body politic.

Ethiopians have lingering cynicism. They say, “Nobody is going to hear me because I am an Ethiopian. I am uneducated. I have an accent. Nobody is going to vote for me.” A Vietnamese American was elected as a member of congress in Louisiana. He has an accent. A Pakistani immigrant was elected to represent the 39th District of Maryland. He is a Muslim. As far as you have what it takes, America won’t hold your accent against you. We need to overcome this inherited fear of politics. We need to be organized.

I am certain it will probably not be long before an Ethiopian is elected to office, given the spirit of second-generation Ethiopians. So far I have been discussing the political engagement of Ethiopians in the United States. In the following section I explain how immigrants use cross-border activities and networks to play a pivotal role in homeland politics as well.

A Treacherous Road to the Democratization of Home

Homeland politics have remained the top concern among Ethiopian immigrants who were ejected by virulent conflict. During the years of military rule (1974–1991), Ethiopian transnational political activities remained quiescent. Ethiopia had been in the hands of the military junta, and during that time let alone the dream of democratization, a simple trip to Ethiopia would have been suicidal. The Ethiopian government saw diaspora members, particularly those in the United States, as traitors and possibly even purveyors of American imperialism. Seyoum, who was living in Ethiopia at the time, recalled only one person among his many relatives living in the United States who dared to visit them during the military rule. “She came because she was a U.S. citizen. I would say my auntie was a risk taker.” The only way to be transnational was by supporting insurgencies and participating in activities designed to expose the obvious human rights abuses of the Ethiopian government.

Study participants recalled meeting regularly to bring political change back home as soon as they came to the United States. “We used to meet at Cornell University, in New York City, and (mostly) in D.C. to talk about how we could support armed struggles. That was the only option. The chairman was Ato Abate Kassa. Abate suggested we join the insurgencies and fight the government. Some of us disagreed. You know, I looked at him straight in the eye and said ‘Joining insurgency is not for me. I am here. I could help in any way I can.’ They started questioning my Ethiopianness,” Abdul recalled. Some of my friends joined the insurgency, but most others stayed in the United States to help build a network that connected the United States, rebel-occupied territories, and neighboring countries that provided protection during armed struggles. Leaders of armed struggle used to shuttle between the US and territories taken from the military government. The United States did not object to such activities; in fact some members of the armed insurgent groups worked closely with and were

supported by the United States, benefiting from Ronald Reagan's crusade against communism.

However, the armed struggle fighters against the military Ethiopian government did not receive wholehearted support from the US. The reasons were simple enough. First, the armed insurgents were survivors of the Communist Party(ies). Therefore in the eyes of the United States, their ideological stance was questionable. Second, the hope of the United States was that the Ethiopian military regime would make an ideological turnaround (Pateman 1995: 54). Nonetheless, the Ethiopian military government did not react in a timely manner to the US interest despite signs and signals that they were abandoning socialism in favor of a mixed economy (Matsuoka and Sorenson 2001: 163). Hence, the most the United States was willing to do was to supply some conservative groups called, *Kitet*—then based in the United States with cash and rifles, often transferring assistance from one group to another whenever U.S. power brokers were unsure of the ideological stance of the group they were helping (Pateman 1995:54). Later, the United States increased its support for a major insurgent group, the Tigrean People's Liberation Front, when it became pro-democracy and introduced moderate pragmatic policies in areas it was able to wrest from the military government (Pateman 1991: 48; Vestal 1999: 80; Krylow 1994: 233).

Events moved quickly in Ethiopia after 1991 and after the United States stepped up its global role. The military/communist government that had ruled the country almost like a sultan for seventeen years lost its grip on power. Ethno-nationalist rebel fighters defeated the once-invincible Ethiopian government. Before the capital city fell into rebel hands, however, opposition groups were brought to a round table in London, including some from the diaspora. The United States played a key role at this meeting in reconciling rebel groups.

Indeed, U.S. involvement was extremely instrumental in averting much-feared atrocities at that time. Had the United States left the country to its own devices, an all-out civil war between the different ethnic groups would have been imminent. In any case in subsequent days and months after the London conference, the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) was constituted. The TGE consisted of a number of rebel groups that had become ethno-national political parties.

However, many Ethiopians argued that the United States had misplayed its role. Some diaspora groups that were excluded from the transitional government (or perhaps excluded themselves) were critical of the TGE and the United States. They rejected ethnic-based political parties as well as the ethnic-based federalism that was taking shape (Lyons 2007). They saw the latter as a recipe for dismembering the country. Many blamed the United States for allowing the experiment of a multi-ethnic coalition government to materialize in Africa. They felt they were watching another cooptation of their dream of Ethiopia, just as they had during their student days in the 1970s. On the other hand, those who supported ethnic-based administration, pointing to inter-ethnic conflicts in the country, argued that ensuring political representation for ethnic groups would prevent such conflicts and guarantee the unity of a multi-ethnic state (Habtu 2005). There seemed to be no easy agreement between those who supported and those who opposed the strategy of multi-ethnic federalism.

Even as some diaspora members joined the new government to implement ethnic-based rule, a new kind of diaspora opposition was taking shape that draw a sharp line between itself and the transitional government. Ethiopia's former foreign minister Col. Goshu Wolde, "the favored son of the U.S. State Department (and the CIA)" (Pateman 1991: 47) and an staunch opponent of ethnic based federalism, appeared before the Committee on Foreign

Affairs Subcommittee on Africa of the House of Representatives to testify that the United States had made a mistake when it approved the transnational government organized around ethnic based parties. Organizing rallies and petitions, these opponents of the post-military government sought U.S. help in their efforts to bring about either a more inclusive government or their version of government (Ungar 1998: 266–267). Astu showed me video footage of the first major rally against the new government. In the video, now a political souvenir, Col. Wolde, the organizer, called on the United States to pressure the Ethiopian government to invite other political forces and ethnic groups into the transitional regime. His plea fell on a deaf ear. In no time, those opposed to the new government had organized themselves into several political parties. They used publications and radio stations to discredit the new government, particularly in the eyes of the U.S. administration and public (Woldemikael 1996: 166).

In Ethiopia, however, a semblance of a democratic system was under construction. With direct support from the United States, things were inching toward the first ethnic-based federal system in Africa. The first move was a power-sharing arrangement that was brokered among different ethno-national political parties. The project of creating ethnic-based territorial units took four years, concluding in 1995. It was hoped that with this structure in place, democratic governance would be ushered in, the lives of millions of people would be turned around, ethnic conflicts would be prevented, the unity of the country would be preserved, and, most important, the guns would go silent. The development and implementation of ethnic-based federalism was based on the principles of the Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the major rebel group that fought the communist regime. It favored the self-determination of ethnic groups. Because of its military might, the TPLF was

entrusted with heading the transitional government and paving the way for a democratic system. However, the TPLF showed no intention of sharing power (Pausewang et al. 2002).

The TPLF already had a grand political ambition. Its objective was to form a nationwide political party consisting of different ethnic groups. In a short time, using its military force, the TPLF created or helped create several ethno-national political parties using a simple formula: locate an ethnic group, recruit members of that group, and form a party. It would then add “People’s Democratic Organization” or “Liberation Front” to the name of the ethnic group. The goal of forming political parties for disenfranchised ethnic groups could not be faulted. But the TPLF chose members of ethnic groups that were seen as lacking independence. Its strategy was simply an attempt to bypass authentic ethnic parties. Many accuse the TPLF of being unrepentant Marxists who wanted to build a grand communist-like party (Vestal 1999). The concern of such critics did nothing to slow the political drama. In a short time, the TPFL had coalesced dozens of political parties it controlled into the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF).

Then, as part of a political ritual, an election was held in 1995; one has been held every five years since then. Initially, in the lead-up to the first multiparty election, the signs pointed toward democratic governance. Appreciable levels of participation by political parties opposed to the EPRDF, the emergence of a free press, and political campaigns were very common. Yet political issues were overshadowed by the ways that non-EPRDF political parties were discriminated against and others were denied access to their own constituencies. And as is typical of Ethiopian political culture (see Abbink 2006), opposition political parties that blamed the EPRDF for refusing them democratic rights did the same thing to those political parties seen as subservient to EPRDF (Pausewang et al. 2002: 32). As conditions

deteriorated, members of the U.S. Congress tried to bring the opposition and the EPRDF together to see if they could broker a deal so the opposition parties could participate in the 1995 election. Unfortunately, the plan fell through. A week before the election several political parties withdrew from the election. Non-EPRDF parties feared that if they participated and won only a few seats they would be pawns in an EPRDF-dominated government. Not surprisingly, many who withdrew from the election—the top brass in particular—streamed into the United States. In doing so they increased and diversified the already vocal opposition groups in Washington, DC and beyond.

But the political strategy of boycotting elections went wrong. Opposition groups hoped and expected that the boycott would force the government to compromise or face sanctions from the West. This did not happen. The EPRDF did not respond to its detractors either. In election after election, the EPRDF was the only horse in the race. To the dismay and frustration of the opposition groups, the United States viewed each election as a good start. The view of the U.S. government has always been that Ethiopia is not ready for a democratic system and that if the country moves an inch toward democracy, that is significant progress. The Clinton administration in particular broke the heart of the opposition in 1998. It was as if the opposition's attempt to discredit the Ethiopian government had the opposite effect. Clinton anointed Ethiopia's prime minister and a number of other political leaders as members of a "new breed" of African statesmen. He hoped that this new breed would end the tyranny and human sufferings that bewitched post-independence Africa.

At the same time members of the opposition, who were mostly based in Washington, D.C., which has become the hub and "head office" of Ethiopian transnational political actors, organized themselves into several political groups. At least three groups emerged. The first

consists of those who have already rejected the authority of the EPRDF. In favor of pan-Ethiopian theme they reject ethnic and regional organization of the country. Many express anger toward the late Kifle Wedajo and Dawit Yohannes (former DC cab driver turned speaker of the House of Representatives) both of whom were active members of the opposition in diaspora. Mr. Wedajo, a prominent civil servant and the first Secretary-General of the Organization of African States (1963–1964), joined the new government after spending almost two decades in exile. He is credited for his substantive contributions to the most progressive constitution in the history of the country. It is significant that Mr. Wedajo had direct ties with the U.S. government while in exile. His election to parliament gave EPRDF hegemony a stamp of legitimacy.

The second political opposition group, also largely based in D.C., accepts the agenda of ethnic-based political administration, although they express dissatisfaction because EPRDF has marginalized the “genuine” political parties. Even so they attempted to participate in elections whenever they were held, ultimately deciding against the government on the ground that the playing fields skewed toward EPRDF affiliates. The third group consists of the secessionists. These are the political parties that the first group passionately dread and oppose because they demand political independence from Ethiopia, just like Eritrea. They are on a collision course with the first group rather than the EPRDF political program. First, they reject the historic Ethiopian state as colonial (Lyons 2011: 272). They feel that the EPRDF government came up with the most progressive constitution that promised and would allow ethnic groups to enjoy constitutional rights and organize a referendum on self-determination that would include the possibility of secession. Yet they argue that the constitution is for

western consumptions and EPRDF affiliated parties made their aspirations for independence impossible.

Although the diaspora is deeply divided politically, its members are close to the heartbeat of the U.S. government and U.S. donors. Rallies and campaigns against the Ethiopian government in DC were frequent, almost rituals. And the Ethiopian government cannot afford to ignore them. In a manner that complicates transnationalism from “below” and “above” (Guarnizo and Smith 1998: 5) the government has been dragged into the transnational political arena in order to contain the political damage the diaspora can create and, if possible, to tap into its resources. As Portes (1999) and Smith and Bakker (2008) have observed, contemporary states develop transnational policies in response to both the advantages and the threat that diasporas pose. The first and most persistent strategy of the Ethiopian government has been to build its own supporters in the United States. High-ranking Ethiopian politicians regularly visit the United States and meet with members of the diaspora to brief them on socioeconomic developments and political progress the government has made. The results of this strategy have been meager and ineffective. These government officials face massive protests wherever they go in the United States. Many people in the metro area vehemently oppose the government.

The second government strategy for containing the political threats the diaspora pose was to introduce rules and regulations that were intended to chip away at their political power but at the same time maximize economic benefits to itself from this transnational resource. Through constitutional amendments the Ethiopian government granted “Yellow Cards” to Ethiopians who became citizens of other countries and to those born outside the country to Ethiopian parents. It did not departmentalize its diaspora as Haiti once did and other nations

have done in a process by which the diaspora is seen as an offshoot of the home country (see Glick Schiller and Fouron 2001). Thus, Ethiopia has become a reluctant transnational state. People who are granted the Yellow Card are allowed to work, open a bank account, and, in particular, make investments in Ethiopia. The government has seen some success with this strategy, and diaspora capitalism has become a part of the Ethiopian economy (Henshaw 2007; Wax 2004; Chacko and Gebre 2009). It is an elementary form of a neoliberal agenda by which ruling elites in the homeland turn migrants into a source of local capital—a textbook strategy that many migrant-sending countries have adopted (Smith and Bakker 2008: 191). The creation of the General Directorate in Charge of Ethiopian Expatriate Affairs in 2002, the organizing of a meeting of diaspora members in 2001, and the symbolic naming of Diaspora Square were all part of the government's scheme to maximize economic gains. Nonetheless, Ethiopians who are naturalized citizens of other countries are political outcast—not allowed to vote, run for election at any level, or work for the Ministries of Defense, Security, or Foreign Affairs or other political establishments (Getahun 2007a: 265–266).

The third strategy to disempower diaspora targets donors. The government worked hard to discredit the information that donors and Western governments regularly receive from members of an unforgiving diaspora. Until 2005 the strategy was extremely successful. They were able to persuade donors and maintain the flow of aids. Epstein (2010) estimates that Ethiopia has received \$20 billion in development aid since 1991. Top donors are the International Development Agency, the United States, the United Kingdom, and European Union aid agencies; together, these four groups contributed 74 percent of the international aid to Ethiopia in 2007–2009 (see OECD 2010). Of course the international context, particularly the 9/11 terrorist attack in the United States and the statelessness of neighboring Somalia,

gave the Ethiopian government a political goldmine. Ethiopia drew vast amounts of U.S. aid by claiming to be a bulwark against terrorism. The United States does not wish to jeopardize its influence in the region by pressing hard for democracy.

Besides, the government spoke the language the West understands—as to why a full blown democracy could not be realized easily. The government has honed itself with a readymade explanation that the country lacks the culture of democracy and has no history of democratic processes. With the use of such carefully crafted and defensible rhetoric, the government has been able to convince the West, particularly the United States, that the march toward democratic governance will take longer than expected in Ethiopia. In addition, the government emphasizes that its main focus is eradicating the poverty that seems so stubborn in the country. *The Economist* (2009; see also Epstein 2010) describes how the Ethiopian prime minister, Mr. Zenawi, hoodwinked often-gullible donors and Western government representatives into providing aid.

Meles Zenawi (the prime minister of Ethiopia), still only 54, has two faces. One belongs to a leader battling poverty. In this mode he is praised by Western governments. . . . With his polished English, full of arcane turns of phrase from his days at a private English school in Addis Ababa, the capital, he captivates foreign donors. But then there is the harsher side of Mr. Meles, the Marxist fighter turned political strongman with a dismal human-rights record who is intolerant of dissent.” (*The Economist* 2009)

Importantly as donors propitiation strategy the government portrays the most vocal members of its opposition as elites hungry for political power rather than political improvements. The last argument influenced Joseph Stiglitz, who at the time was senior vice-president of the World Bank. Stiglitz (2003: 26) dismissed those who opposed the Ethiopian government as “the long-dominant groups around the capital who had lost political power”

and discussed extensively how he battled with the IMF officials so that they would continue lending to Ethiopia. When IMF refused, Stiglitz wrote: “Happily other economists and I persuaded the World Bank management that lending more money to Ethiopia...a country with a first rate economic framework” would make sense and he reported the Bank lending to Ethiopia “tripled” (Stiglitz 2003: 32), keeping the lending flow intact. Western politicians and donors who are alarmed by stories of human rights violations often take short trips to Ethiopia, they generally return home impressed with the progress that has been made and less focused on what has gone wrong.

In 2005, the government made a move toward greater democracy, albeit temporarily. It organized a genuine multiparty election. Partly this was due to pressure from an increasing international profile for Ethiopia’s prime minister. In 2004, British Prime Minister Tony Blair appointed Prime Minister Zenawi to his Commission for Africa. Blair saw Zenawi as Africa’s most progressive leader, one who combined good governance with the agenda to end poverty. With this new international attention on Ethiopia’s “good governance,” Zenawi must have felt that a multiparty election was a wise move. At any rate, the government saw the opposition parties as fragmented and unlikely to deliver results, despite their rhetoric. It was counting on a typical election in which the opposition parties would either boycott the election or would not make many political gains. The government fully expected the usual landslide for Zenawi and his party, with the added benefit of full marks from the international community for a “free and fair” election. The free and fair election crown would keep the foreign aid flowing into the country’s coffers. But unexpectedly, the opposition parties, who were best known for boycotting elections and expecting “divine intervention,” as one of my consultants put it, decided to participate in the election. The diaspora community played an important role in this

unexpected turn of events, as Lyons (2011) reports: “A shift in strategy by key leaders in the diaspora, who decided to endorse and support participation in the elections was critical to the decision by Ethiopian opposition parties to compete.” Opposition political parties temporarily healed rifts and mounted serious challenges to the ruling party. Some of the strongest parties the Coalition for Unity and Democracy (CUD) and United Ethiopian Democratic Forces (UEDF) were financed and managed by the diaspora community. Both seriously challenged the supremacy of the EPRDF.

Eyoel, who emigrated after the election, explained what a democratic election looked like in 2005. He saw the election as a brief moment of public theatre: “I still think the election of 2005 was a drama,” he told me. He talked about the many campaigns, about people criticizing the government for what it had not done, and the yearning for political change that was in the air. “Guess what?” he said. “In the past opposition parties never criticized the government in those blistering terms and went home unpunished. We expected the government would lock them up. Nothing happened in 2005. Campaigns and rallies were held without a hindrance. In one night we became like America. It was a drama to me.” The government allowed free expression and opposition parties had access to state-controlled media. There were debates about public policy with large audiences.

Muhe, like Eyoel, came to the United States after the election. He told me,

There were debates about land rights, education and health policies, etc. We watched debates live on Ethiopian TV. The prime minister was at the debate. People who had no TV paid fifty cents to watch the debates. Remember the only TV episode that people pay for and still is the British Premier League or the World Cup. (Me: Were there any similarities with political debates you have watched here?). Yes, there were similarities. Like I said there were real talks. Just like here there were posters everywhere; people were texting each other and you could go door to door to ask for a vote. It was almost like any ordinary election in America. But there was a lot of emotions and hatred between the opposition and the government. You could see it right

there. . . . Anyway it was the first time we had people speaking up for their country. I never thought I would see such a thing in my life.

Many people I interviewed told me that they called their relatives and friends in Ethiopia to influence for whom they would vote. This is one measure of the political connection of this diaspora community. Arguably this connection could amount to influence: most people in Ethiopia's capital have at least one family member living in the United States or elsewhere. In most cases, my interviewees influenced the people they phoned to vote for the opposition because this time the election was serious. Hanna's account may well be representative. "I called my mother to go vote. She was unsure and told me 'Please do not put me in trouble.' It was out of deep desire for political change in my country that I told her to participate. She registered early and lined up for hours to vote. People never lined up to cast their votes. We used to line up to buy sugar, soap, salt and other supplies during the military government, [but never to vote]." The turnout on Election Day was extraordinarily high. Although the opposition complained that the election was rigged, international observers praised the voting process, even if they did not find the tallies credible.

As the votes were counted, the government began to realize that the situation was slipping out of its hands. Information believed to have leaked from EU election observers showed that the opposition had won 57 percent of the vote, which escalated the peoples political excitement into frenzy (Shinn 2005). The government immediately initiated a state of emergency, banned all forms of protest and all meetings, and even blocked texting. Before the preliminary results were announced, the regime declared victory based on the votes it had received from rural areas. In fact, in rural areas, according to Lefort (2007: 265), peasants interpreted the unusual strong showings of the opposition and the fact they were left "unpunished" as the government's "abdication" of power, and more than likely they voted for

the opposition. Slowly but surely, the election results were announced. Even if the government had “won,” there were real changes. The ruling EPRDF won 367 seats in Parliament, while the opposition took 172 seats—a historical first. In the city, the political bellwether in Ethiopia, the EPRDF lost all seats.

The regime could not grasp that it had pulled the rug from under itself in the name of an election. Giving up power was out of the question. The moment for Ethiopian wax and gold had arrived. There has always been an Ethiopian genre of poetry called wax and gold. This type of poetry has two meanings. Its meaning is vague to outsiders and even to uninitiated Ethiopians. One meaning is the outward wax and the other meaning, which is veiled in the wax, is the gold. Even common conversations customarily harbor double entendres and ambiguities (see Levine 1965). Abdul unlocked the political semantics as the political disaster was looming.

They [the government] knew the people voted them out. For outsiders’ consumption they said, “We just had a democratic election. We won based on rural voters.” The government’s unspoken language [the gold] to the opposition was “We made a mistake to hold a democratic election. Good job with your wins, take your seats and shut up. We are not ready to cede power.” They personally told me, “How could they expect us to hand over power at such short notice?” That was exactly what they said.

Of course the wax-and-gold meanings of the government’s word were not lost on the opposition. They knew what was going on. Yet they hoped that America would come to their rescue. Kassa who is pro-government stated, “Remember even if they run the global show the US does not have the mandate to tell you how to run your home.”

As the opposition continued to claim victory in the election, the government penchant for clever rhetoric was depleted. The usual harsh punitive actions were taken. In 2008, I had

the opportunity to speak with Mr. Hailu Shawel, the chairman of the CUD who would have been Ethiopia's prime minister if the opposition had won the election. The events of 2005 were still fresh in his mind as if time did not spin as fast as it should in that part of the world. He talked about the draconian changes the government implemented that squeezed democratic space and narrowed the chance for the opposition to participate in the government. The most upsetting change was a rule that required 50 percent of the parliamentarians to initiate an agenda before it could appear on the House's schedule. Prior to that only 20 percent was required. The outgoing parliament also approved a new regulation that would remove from parliament any MPs who used "insulting and defamatory language." In addition, as soon as the EPRDF lost the capital city to the CUD, the government introduced legislation that took autonomous power away from the city and made it completely dependent on the federal government. Under such circumstances, he told me, the opposition began considering the idea of boycotting parliament.

As the political impasse continued, key members of the opposition began to seek guidance from the diaspora. Opposition political leaders traveled to Washington, D.C., to discuss whether they should take their seats in Parliament and negotiate about the country's political future. As acrimonious ideological debates and polarization became perilous, moderate voices of the royalist generation, including Dr. Abiyi, Dr. Tsehaye, Dr. Mulugeta, and others, advised the opposition that elections come and go and that it would be better for the country if they did not boycott the parliament. However, hardliners favored boycotting the parliament. Nigus seemed unhappy about how things were handled. His eyes welling with tears at times, he stated, "Look at where we are now. How many people lost their lives? Many people said 'boycott the parliament. Participating in the parliament legitimizes the

government. Do not be a window dressing for an undemocratic process.’ What did the opposition do? They complied. . . . I do not mean to be offending but I think the opposition should make its own decisions independent of us.”

In this transnational community, the notion of “us” (in the United States) and “them” (in Ethiopia) would be a difficult distinction to make, especially in terms of Ethiopian politics. In this case, hardliners in a diaspora community put strong pressure on members of an opposition party to protest election results by refusing to take the seats they had won in the parliament. The influence of the diaspora went even further than giving advice. The opposition political leaders who chose to take their parliamentary seats were dismissed from their respective party memberships. Decisions that were made in North America damaged their political careers, perhaps irreparably.

Ironically, the opposition parties’ choice to seek diaspora-based decisions worked in the favor of the government. Just as opposition parties denigrated parties affiliated with the EPRDF as “satellites,” the government began to discredit the opposition parties as “clowns” who were “subservient” to those in D.C. Interestingly, as the role of the diaspora unfolded and the pressure the diaspora brought to bear continued to mount in African homeland politics, the government deployed externalization strategies. Pasura (2008: 18) has discussed how the Zimbabwean government externalized diaspora-supported opposition groups as “puppets” to the interests of the West and as elites who are disconnected from the real people. Of course, the diaspora and diaspora-supported opposition groups are not flawless. In most cases views and the perceptions about home within the diaspora remain static, romantic and frozen in time. It seems that the diaspora community perceives the country they left behind in

a very inflexible way. The scenario of inflexibility undermines compromise and complicates homeland politics.

Seyoum likened African politics, particularly Ethiopian politics, to the Bollywood movies he likes to watch. “Bollywood movies or the movies I watched,” he observes, “have at least three similarities with Ethiopian politics. One, you know or you would expect a lot of singing, very musical. Second you are going to see a happy ending or a sad ending with lots of crying, one or the other. Thirdly, it is predictable, way too predictable. Ethiopian politics—first there is a lot of election chatter, followed by sad endings—the murder of civilians and you know that the ruling party is going to take all.” In June 2005 and sporadically until November 2005, public protests gripped the country (Abbink 2006). The election singing quickly turned into crying. Ethiopian security forces that had been trained by the British government to fight terrorism were unleashed on the opposition. They killed more than 193 civilians, wounded 763, and imprisoned more than 50,000 (Wrong 2005b). Opposition political leaders who refused to take their seats were stripped of their parliamentary immunity and were hauled into prison for attempting to overthrow a “democratically” elected government and for orchestrating “genocide” against the ruling party’s ethnic groups. They were charged with treason. In subsequent days, the government blocked Internet websites and blogs, including the Voice of America Amharic service, to barricade the country from the radiations of transnational politics.

As the opposition had hoped, the international community did take action, albeit temporarily. The World Bank, the British government, and many other donors withheld their financial support. But in about a year many of the donors had restored funding on the grounds that the people, not the government, would pay the price. Predictably, the government “won”

the election. Alex de Waal, an expert on African politics, offered his own interpretation: “The government feels it has won this round by saying, ‘Americans need us for counterterrorism’” (quoted in Boustany 2007). Indeed the Ethiopian government makes sure that its Western allies do not forget its being a pillar of stability and anti-terrorism. Just as de Waal foresaw and before the first anniversary of the 2005 election debacle, Ethiopia made forays into Somalia. It successfully routed the Union of Islamic Courts. The invasion of Somalia had at least two crystal clear messages. First, it reinforced the government’s position in the region and why it should not compromise. Second it sent a clear signal to potential protesters that they could easily be crushed.

Rattling the Ethiopian State: “Congress is not for sale”

After 2005, one could easily run into Ethiopia’s prominent politicians almost anywhere in the metro area, particularly at Starbucks cafés and Habasha restaurants. It was as if Ethiopian politicians were on a long perhaps endless recess. Many of them, however, work tirelessly to keep the hope of democratizing home alive, even if the odds are stacked against them. The refusal of the United States to reprimand its client state remains the obstacle. Yet the brutalities of the government are an open secret. “So many people now know how brutal the Ethiopian government is. Now the government cannot dupe America or others into believing democracy is under construction. The U.S. cannot dismiss it either. Their new emperor is naked,” Getu proclaimed. Unlike the student days of the revolutionary generation, there is no other superpower to run to, no other alternative ideology to be purchased. This means that perhaps the only way of bringing the change Ethiopians seek will be through taking the bull by the horns—engaging the United States.

This new strategy will have to follow the “frustrating” course of democracy, as Marit put it to me. That course demands working closely with U.S. lawmakers, even hiring lobbyists. The United States understands the language of lobbying and of writing legislation rather than making rallies. In that regard this strategy was almost a breakthrough. When the diaspora held its feet to the fire, the Ethiopian government did feel the pressure because it felt less secure in its relationship with the U.S. administration. Of course, cordial relationships with the American executive branch may not be enough for the government. The president of the United States, unlike the prime minister in Ethiopia, does not have final say over virtually everything. As an example of the increasing complexity of transnational politics, however, the Ethiopian government has had to lobby the U.S. government in an effort to blunt the impact of the diaspora, which has now found a new way of asserting its influence. Ethiopian politics have forever been deterritorialized.

It was almost like a revelation of some kind. Daniel, who has spent the past two decades pleading with the United States to sanction the Ethiopian government, all to no avail, told me that he now realizes that little can be achieved outside the chambers of the U.S. government.

We wasted most of our energies organizing demonstrations. In the United States rallies and demonstrations come last. First you make sure that you have something to rally for, you know, a legislative piece you advocate for. You have to have a contact person who would speak for you in the halls and corridors of American government. Otherwise people say, “Look at these crazy wide-eyed third worlders. They do not know what they are doing.” Even in a democracy deals are cut in back rooms.

As evidence of his advocacy of the new strategy (and as if I was a prospective recruit), Daniel handed me a paper: “How to Lobby the U.S. House and Senate.” Of course, diaspora

community members have tried to lobby the U.S. government before. The Ethiopian-American Constituency Foundation was created during the Bush-Gore campaign; it raised more than \$175,000 dollars and donated it to Al Gore's campaign. But even with a Democrat as president, international political concerns sometimes carried more weight than the voices of diaspora members. For example, Daniel told me that "President Clinton was already sold on the Ethiopian leader with his doctrine of 'the new breed' of African leaders. We knew we had no chance with him." Even in the increasingly complex international political environment, though, the Ethiopian diaspora in the United States has pursued the strategy of using U.S. government channels relentlessly and with fierce determination since 2005.

Pursuing legislation has been the main political strategy of this new effort. Consultants often mentioned Professor Alemayehu G. Mariam, a *Huffington Post* columnist and a critic of the Ethiopian government, as the brain behind the new strategy. The legislative agenda notes that Ethiopia has used international aid to support political repression and proposes that U.S. aid to Ethiopia be attached to conditionalities related to democratic processes. This differs from previous strategies of suggesting that foreign aid be withheld in the expectation that a government would submit, as the Vietnamese and Cuban diasporas have done (see Eckstein 2009; Furuya and Collet 2009). The Ethiopian diaspora argues that if conditionalities are put in place that are similar to those the IMF and The World Bank have imposed, more than likely the government would comply. Without foreign aid, the Ethiopian government would not be able to pay its civil servants and would not have the hard currency it needs to buy arms for its police and military. The feeling within the diaspora is that the government would take steps toward democratic governance instead of risking a public uprising.

With the new goal in mind, Ethiopians in the United States together with lawmakers drafted the Ethiopia Democracy and Accountability Act of 2007 (hereafter H.R. 2003 or the bill). Although the motives behind this new strategy were sound, how could such legislation become a reality? Few U.S. lawmakers, if any, seek Ethiopian votes. The only tactic was to approach sympathetic lawmakers who would also appreciate whatever Ethiopian votes they could get. Congressman Donald Payne (D-N.J.) and co-sponsor Rep. Chris Smith (R-N.J.) introduced the bill. Both congressmen work on the Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health on the Committee for Foreign Affairs. Congressman Jim Moran of the 8th district of Virginia, was an outspoken supporter of the bill. He might appreciate Ethiopian Americans votes in Northern Virginia.

H.R. 2003 calls for the trial of persons who have committed gross human rights violations, seeks the release and/or speedy trial of all political prisoners, and seeks guaranteed financial support to strengthen human rights and civil society groups, etc. If written into law and the Ethiopian government refuses to comply, the bill imposes a travel ban to the United States on Ethiopian officials and security personnel “involved in giving orders to use lethal force against peaceful demonstrators,” as well as for those accused of gross human rights violations. Should the government comply, “The government would get \$2 billion to improve democratic institutions,” Girma summarized. In order to minimize opposition to the bill and preempt the Ethiopian government’s possible objections, the bill neither affects humanitarian aid nor U.S. interests in the region. U.S. peacekeeping and counter-terrorism assistance as well as international military education for Ethiopian government would remain unaffected.

Of course, well-crafted legislation does not guarantee success. Ethiopian supporters of the bill hired the Bracewell and Giuliani law firm, which was well connected with the George

W. Bush administration. They hoped that the firm would have what it took to bring the bill to the attention of the U.S. executive branch. Consultants rarely admitted to the fact that they had paid a lobbyist thousands of dollars, even when I showed them the *New York Times* article that quoted this figure (Lipton and Buettner 2007). But some seemed to defend the action because it was for a “just cause”—the democratization of home, although they may well recognize that the money they paid could have been used to improve the lives of many poor people in Ethiopia. Others saw it as normal. “Everybody has a lobby to get something from the United States,” Daniel argued. As was hoped, the firm delivered. “The Giuliani group,” reported Lipton and Buettner (2007) “set up a meeting at the White House at which the administration was urged to consider the viewpoint of a consortium of Ethiopian political parties and the legislation to draw attention to those disenfranchised in Ethiopia.” The lobbyists from the law firm managed to persuade the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Africa to insert language into H.R. 2003 that condemned the violence and arrests following the election of 2005 and demanded the release of jailed opposition leaders. For this service Bracewell and Giuliani was paid \$210,000 (ibid).

There is only so much that a powerful and well-connected law firm can do. For H.R. 2003 to become law, the diaspora community needed to work hard at the grassroots level as well as with members of Congress. First, transnational political activists had to organize the grassroots—something some of them had become good at during their student days. People needed to call their representatives and ask them to vote for the bill. Thus, talking points were prepared on the merits of H.R. 2003 and specifically how the bill did not conflict with U.S. national security interests in the region. Anyone could go online to the “virtual office of H.R. 2003” to download the necessary documents—a generic letter and contact information for

U.S. lawmakers. This mobilization was quite successful. A second-generation Ethiopian working in Congressman Mike Honda's office told me how the fax machines and phone lines were jammed; her officemates were not prepared to deal with the volume. "They were like, 'Who are these people?'" Selam recalled. The talking points were headed with a powerful statement that was designed to preempt the Ethiopian government's position: "No regime that terrorizes its own citizens can be a reliable ally in the war on terror." The caption had traction. During a lengthy hearing, lawmakers seem to have liked the concept that "no regime that terrorizes its own citizens can be a reliable ally" and they referred to it many times.

Another strategy supporters of H.R. 2003 used was reminding legislators that Ethiopia might become another Rwanda. Getu summarized this argument: "Ethiopia, like Rwanda, is controlled by a single ethnic group. Ninety percent of the country's generals are Tigreans. The United States has the mandate to intervene before the country descends into Rwanda. Ethiopia is a failed state. That is exactly what I tell my congressman Jim Moran." As support increased both the House Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health and the House Foreign Relations Committee passed H.R. 2003 unanimously. "It was Ethiopia's best day in the U.S. Congress," Daniel said.

The fact that the legislation got this far clearly rattled the Ethiopian government, which responded by calling the bill's advocates "diaspora extremists" and agents of colonization. The government and its supporters moved in different directions to stop the bill. They too contacted U.S. lawmakers to vote against it. In order to drive home their political message, they used Somalia rather than Rwanda as a familiar metaphor of political disaster in Africa that lawmakers could easily understand. Kassa, a pro-government took a lot of time during our interview to explain to me how H.R. 2003 would be disastrous for Ethiopia and the

region as a whole. “Sanctioning the government would destabilize the country and the region. People forget they are talking about East Africa. We are talking about a place that can easily be Somalia. We are lucky we have a government that can protect us and provide us some sort of stability. When I called my representatives to vote against H.R. 2003 I told them that their action would make Ethiopia another stateless state,” Kassa underlined.

Some in the government even claimed that the country’s sovereignty was in jeopardy. In changing times, when sovereignty is believed to be “violated” in the transnational political field and battle lines are imagined, the conventional tactic of amassing soldiers—a strategy that past Ethiopian governments often used—would not be the magic bullet. Just as the diaspora did, the Ethiopian government hired its own lobbying firm, DLA Piper, to convince senators to vote against the bill. Interestingly, the Ethiopian government and its supporters deny employing DLA Piper. They claim they have no resources to spend on such an extravagance. They have millions to feed and infrastructures to build, they claim. Of course, in America people have access to public information, and DLA Piper lobbyists worked closely with House Majority Leaders Richard Armey (D-Tex.) and Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) to block “full congressional action against the Zenawi regime” (Silverstein 2007). The Ethiopian government paid DLA Piper \$50,000 per month for its services, which the government referred to as “strategic advice and counsel” (ibid). Strategic advice and consul seems the familiar wax and gold poetry of Ethiopia that infiltrated itself into international legal documents.

A legislator who was swayed by the arguments against H.R. 2003 was Senator James Inhofe (R-Okla.), whom one supporter of the bill referred to as DLA Piper’s “quarterback” in the Senate. Senator Inhofe made a passionate plea to the Senate using the familiar language of

the Ethiopian government. He referred to democracy as a work in progress. He opined that the Ethiopian government was committed to fighting terrorism. He further noted that the U.S. democratic system should not be used as a benchmark for measuring the political heartbeats of the government of Ethiopia, Iraq, or any other country. Other opponents of the bill exploited international concerns about terrorism. Vicki Huddleston and Tibor Nagy (2007), both from the conservative Brookings Institution, wrote a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* in which they claimed that the United States would be harming its strategic interest by making H.R. 2003 law. They wrote, “By singling out Ethiopia for public embarrassment, the bill puts Congress unwittingly on the side of Islamic jihadists and insurgents.” Senator Inhofe prevented H.R. 2003 from coming to the Senate floor, and the bill died a slow death in the Senate. During the House hearing Mr. Payne who knew what was at stake noted: “The Ethiopian Government has spent tens of thousands of dollars to lobby to kill this bill. I hope that the message goes out loud and clear: ...Congress is not for sale.” Although I am not sure for how long DLAP-Piper has been in the pay of the Ethiopian government it seemed that Congress was in fact for sale, may be to the highest bidder.

Daniel: “We proved that we exist”

Despite the failure of H.R. 2003 in the Senate, many supporters of the bill saw positive gains from the legislative process. The fact that the U.S. lawmakers took their appeal seriously and that the Ethiopian government had to scramble to defend itself validated their beliefs that their political activism holds promise. Daniel made a passionate assessment with an eye to the future.

Some people could be overly ambitious. We have to be realistic. The bill was written as the consequence of our constant engagement of U.S. lawmakers. Had it been 15 years ago nobody [would have] cared. I mean nobody takes time to draft legislation. The fact that it reached

senate stage is a win for us. It is a success. We proved that we exist. We proved also that we are beginning to use the power we have as Americans and Ethiopians. The problem is we cannot change the election map, okay. If you take a look at the electoral map we live in heavily democratic states. We are not in swing state like Ohio or Florida. How much we can influence depends on those things. We can do a lot more in the future.

In fact as the bill was quickly but unexpectedly moved through the legislative process, the Ethiopian government granted full pardons to political prisoners found “guilty” of treason. Several opponents of the bill, such as Senator Inhofe, Vicki Huddleston and Tibor Nagy of the Brookings Institution, and Jendayi Frazer, the Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, referred repeatedly to the release of political prisoners as “monumental advancement in Ethiopia’s political environment” since 2005. Opposition groups in Ethiopia saw it differently. They argued that far from being a sign that the Ethiopian government was embracing democracy, the prisoner release was an outcome of H.R. 2003. “Had it not been because of H.R. 2003, political prisoners would have remained in prison. They released them because they were intimidated by the possible passage of the law,” Joshua stated repeatedly. Interestingly, as if the Ethiopian government felt it must respond to any claims and moves the diaspora makes, the prime minister issued a press release that dismissed the claim that the release of political prisoners was related to H.R. 2003.

An important gain of the transnational community’s major if not first foray into U.S. legislation is that many of my respondents stated that campaigning for the bill had taught them a lot about how the U.S. political system works. Marit spoke of how she learned about American politics while rallying for the bill.

Maybe I studied for the citizenship exam and things like that. Maybe I voted before. [But] this case alone allowed me to know how the American political system operates. The person organizing us would

tell us what we should be doing step by step. I would say the legislation took me right into the heart of and through the democratic channel. It showed me the bureaucratic ladder a single legislation has to climb. I said, "Okay, let me call congressman so and so."

Through this process, the people I spoke with learned how democracy is "frustrating, tiresome and demanding," in the words of Marit. "What people have to go through to be heard is tedious. On top of that, results are not guaranteed in democracy. I am telling you, in Ethiopia, if after all the efforts we have been through and after a lot of hard work we put in, a single senator kills the bill, people would take arms. Here the law is above everybody. The law is above the government, above the citizen and above everybody. All of them are governed by the law until they get what they want. That is the Ethiopia I dream to see one day," she concluded on an optimistic note.

The process also taught the community about its limitations—how far they could and could not go. The experience was a sort of reality check. Mimi and Daniel, for instance, raised the issue of the lack of partnerships with other ethnic groups. "Ethiopians are very much wrapped in the Habasha identity bubble," Mimi noted. She continued, "We need to build bridges with others. If Dr. Beyan was able to mobilize thousands of African Americans during the 1930s, why not us?" Daniel saw the source of the problem. "Once, quite a few people showed up for [an] H.R:2003 rally. No congressman spoke to us. No press covered it. Imagine if we had working relationships with African Americans, even other Africans. It would have been effective. Imagine how they could have helped us. If we open up and engage different segments of the community, they will come to our aid. The problem we face is this stubborn passionate idea that we alone can do it. It is the challenge we have in our community." In fact, the challenges for transnational politics seem to be deepening.

Transnational Politics in Disarray: To Go (Or Not to Go) to War

During our extensive interview, Nigus told me that I had come to D.C. at a “bad time” for my research. “I wish you were here from 2005 to 2007. There were so many meetings, vigils and demos. Politics was everywhere. People breathe politics in and out. You came at the time when everything cooled off. Actually it does not exist. The opposition groups, they do not exist anymore.” Nigus’ remarks may be correct in terms of the dampened political atmosphere in the community in the post-2005 period. However, the claim that politics does not exist anymore would be an exaggeration. The whole time I was there, activists were organizing public rallies and formal meetings that lasted for hours about issues such as the imprisonment of the musician Teddy Afro;¹⁰ the remand of Ms. Birtukan Midekesa, an opposition party leader; and a border demarcation between Sudan and Ethiopia that political leaders claimed gave a piece of Ethiopian land to Sudan. These meetings and rallies go on for hours on end.

Nonetheless, transnational politics is clearly in disarray, despite the efforts of leaders to regroup and maintain the momentum of the 2005 period. Leaders clearly disagree about strategies for shaping homeland politics. Some of them have joined armed struggle as the only viable alternative for bringing about political change. Other leaders reject the call for any kind of violence. They hope and expect that the government will once again open up. Even if this does not happen, they seem determined to pursue peaceful means of change. Grassroots supporters are left in the middle, many of them disillusioned and running out of steam. Strongly opposed to armed struggle and unconvinced by the stamina of those seeking to engage the government, they express serious doubts and even fatalism about homeland

¹⁰ Teddy Afro’s music challenges the prevailing political discourse in Ethiopia. Several of his songs have been banned by the government in Ethiopia. In D.C. his songs are alternative sites of political resistance to the Addis Ababa regime. His song “Yasteseryal” (It Heals) serves as unofficial theme music for the diaspora since it speaks out against government repression.

politics. To make matters worse, the Ethiopian government limits transnational politics through legislation and even sheer intimidation. In the following section, I discuss how internal divisions have complicated the terrain of political transnationalism for the Ethiopian diaspora community.

During the summer of 2008, thousands of Ethiopians gathered in Washington, D.C. for a soccer tournament organized by the Ethiopian Sports Federation in North America (ESFNA). Despite its being a sporting event the ESFNA annual gathering is best known for political activities and meetings. Political parties intentionally arrange their meetings to coincide with the tournament. The event creates a rare occasion for political organizations to recruit more members and raise money. Thus several political meetings were held during the week-long soccer tournament. These meetings would last for hours, during which frenzied discussions would be held. The debates would continue into the night at Habasha restaurants. Two of the political meetings I attended illustrate the divisions and fissure among Ethiopian transnational political parties. One of these meetings was organized by a new political party called GINBOT-7: Movement for Justice, Freedom and Democracy (hereafter GINBOT-7). The political strategy of this party caught many people off guard. It has made clear that its members will use “everything possible” and “every means,” including armed struggle, to overthrow the Ethiopian government. The meeting was held in a lush Marriot Hotel in downtown D.C., and attendance was high. The meeting was broadcast over the Internet. Thousands more “attended” from locations around the world, except for Ethiopia, where Internet connections remain spotty and expensive.



Figure -3: ESFNA soccer tournament at Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Stadium (Photo: K. Kebede)

Although GINBOT-7 is a newly reconstituted party in the United States, the leaders are not unfamiliar. The founder, Dr. Berhanu Nega, was a member of the faculty at Bucknell University before he returned home and became a key political actor. During the 2005 parliamentary election, Dr. Nega was one of the two prominent diaspora members who was elected as mayor of the capital city. Dr. Nega and members of his GINBOT-7 party often express deep resentment toward the United States. They cannot understand why it chooses to do business with a government that is not committed to democracy while they provide a better democratic choice. They argue that if foreign aid dries up, the Ethiopia government will

wither away. Foreign aid is a key issue for this party; since 2005, Ethiopia has received more aid than any other nation in Sub-Saharan Africa (Epstein 2010). The three-hour meeting was dominated by questions and answers about the expediency of armed struggle and debates about whether or not the party has already started the insurgency. Yet several participants expressed concerns that another round of civil war would be detrimental to a country that has yet to heal from past conflicts.

Daniel, a supporter of GINBOT-7 party, gave me the interpretation of the language of armed struggle. He told me that like most other people I was mistaken in thinking that GINBOT-7 is interested in armed struggle. According to him, armed resistance would not only be against the Ethiopian government but also a message to the United States that they should be taken seriously. “For the opposition parties to be taken seriously we have to be armed. So I do not understand and see Dr. Berhanu’s strategy as a call for a civil war. It is not about fighting for the sake of it. It is about using armed force as leverage. . . . This is my understanding of our party’s position. When we were negotiating with the government the reason why the government, including the United States, was unwilling to negotiate with the opposition and disregarded the opposition was because they did not have any leverage. GINBOT-7 understands armed struggle as leverage to have some influence in the political discussion and decision making. It is the only leverage the opposition could use.” For Daniel, “leverage” is a catch-all phrase. Like Daniel, many members of this party are of the age of the revolutionary generation.

The other meeting I attended was for the Unity for Democracy and Justice Party (UDJP), another newly reconstituted party. The UDJP’s goals contrast strongly with those of GINBOT-7 in terms of both political strategy and expectations of the United States. Like

GINBOT-7, the UDJP is led by the same old politicians; the only thing that is new is the party's name. In fact, some of the leaders of the UDJP and GINBOT-7 were members of the CUD, the party that made significant gains during the 2005 election. In 2008, the UDJP had not yet registered as a legal political party, but the ESFNA soccer event provided an opportunity that could not be missed—a chance to meet its constituency, keep the dollars flowing, and nurture transnational identities. Most of the members were of an older generation; very few young people attended the meeting. The absence of the young appears to have worried Obang Metho, a political activist who “saw no young people giving input or becoming involved. Those making the decisions for the future of Ethiopia were all older.” Neither GINBOT-7 nor UDJP seem to have been concerned about their generational exclusivity.

The UDJP meeting demonstrated to me the extent to which transnationalism runs through the veins of Ethiopian people in the United States. A speech by Professor Mesfin Woldemariam, a U.S.-educated geographer and one of the top leaders of the UDJP, clearly illustrated how much people are in love with the nation-state that is their homeland. The unique aspect of the UDJP was that they described and preferred peaceful alternatives to democracy and rescue the nation state. It was perhaps as a direct rebuttal to GINBOT-7 which did not rule military struggle against the ruling party. Based on his studies of Burundian political transnationals, Turner (2008) has discussed how various political entrepreneurs “attempt to discredit each other,” claiming to be the true representatives of the nation and offering better alternatives to democracy. For the UDJP group, whether or not they were true representatives was beside the point. Nor were they concerned with what the United States refused to do. What they could learn from U.S. democratic processes seemed to be the source

of their enchantment. Sometimes the meeting resembled an academic conference on U.S. democracy—its historical development, its achievements, its imperfections, and its implications for Ethiopia. Professor Mesfin seems to pin together disparate historical facts. “Women were not allowed to vote in this country. I was a student in the U.S. during the 1950s. African Americans were mistreated and a police dog attacked them. Did they pick up arms to get to where they are now? They worked closely with other Americans who supported their causes. We should extricate ourselves from Ethiopia’s tradition which sees power in the gun,” he counsels.

The best strategy, according to the UDJP, would be to stop calling the ruling party an adversary. Instead, the UDJP intends to put forward a bylaw that would guarantee peaceful exits for politicians who lose elections; in this way, they could avoid imprisonment. The reason why politicians cling to power in Ethiopia as well as in Africa, they argued, is because they are treated as enemies. “What remains uncertain is their fate when they lose an election,” UDJP’s North America Office representative stated. He also spoke of the long historical trajectories of the Voting Rights Act and the Civil Rights Act in the United States as reasons why transnational activists should not despair about bringing change to Ethiopia. “Democracy is a lifetime commitment to get what you want. You do not go to war because the government rigged an election. You lick your wounds and prepare for the next fight. If you fail this time, you reorganize for the next round. We have to learn a great deal from this country,” he said. I wondered if such appreciation for a matured democracy existed during 2005, when negotiation failed. In the days after the meeting, however, hardliners ridiculed the UDJP as a party engaged in public relations work for the ruling party. To show how divided and antagonistic they were, a popular opposition website (www.ethiopianreview.com) has had the

nerve to liken Woldemariam to “a Jewish professor asking Israelis not to call Hitler or the Nazi party their enemy.”¹¹

Nevertheless, despite the campaigns and intense and uninterrupted efforts by political leaders and activists to keep transnational politics alive, the level of grassroots support for transnational political action was not at an all time high. Many of the people who expressed frustration were the same people who were an integral part of previous political activism, the ones who made financial contributions, attended rallies, and went to meeting and vigils. As I briefly explain below, the absence of positive outcomes, opposition to war, the unethical and undemocratic nature of politicians, and fear of government reprisals have come to cast a shadow on their support for transnational politics.

The point my respondents mentioned most frequently about opposition political parties was the lack of a meaningful outcome. “I am one of those people who used to participate in rallies. Not anymore. I saw no result and wanted to get along with my life, you know. If you do something for twenty years, if nothing positive came out of it, that means that you really do not know what you are doing. It is time to let others take over,” Biruk told me. In addition lack of cohesion and coherence within the opposition and the absence of a strong opposition party seem to frustrate even the most ardent supporters. Many felt that the reason why the United States was “forced to stick with an evil dictator and did not take a meaningful action as they did in Kenya and Zimbabwe was largely because the opposition are not organized,” according to Getu. Ayalew seemed to agree. “My regular concern and worries are: Is there a prepared political party who is ready to take over responsibility right now if

¹¹ Matsuoka and Sorenson (2001) argued that politically connected Ethiopians tend to be haunted by their past experiences and that their beliefs can almost be described as fundamentalism rather than transnationalism.

Meles [Zenawi] is gone? No, there is not one. Even Americans know how divided we are,” he stated remorsefully. Such evaluations brought some people closer to a fatalistic view. “Meles is the closest thing we have to doing democracy. It is going to take a very benevolent leader. People do not realize George Washington was a single brave figure in the history of the world. After Americans declared independence he said no to a possible third term. George Washington . . . not America gave Americans freedom. Maybe our Washington has not been born yet,” Nebyu explained.

Regardless of generation unit, particularly the royalists and the DV generation, emphatically oppose armed struggle. They often cite two important reasons why they oppose anything that is not a peaceful avenue to democratization. First, they explained how a functioning society would be impossible if the people that are in power came to power through vengeance. “I do not like the political cycle in Ethiopia. Somebody gets upset. They raise arms to take power. So what is going to happen? The next one is going to come in by blood. I do not appreciate the fact that we are sending money and people get killed over it,” Mimi stated. Second, they ask who will suffer and who stands to benefit from possible civil wars. Expressing his opposition to war, Nigus, explained how his conscience does not allow him to support any kind of war or sanctions. “People here are still going to eat; they are still going to drive their cars to work, they still going to sleep in their beautiful bed, live in their beautiful house, etc. every single day. Not the poor people. Who are we to decide for those people? Who are we in the world to decide for those people? Who stands to benefit from it all?”

The most serious objection to Ethiopian politicians both right and left was their intolerance of difference. Most consultants seriously doubt the political leaders’ commitment

to democracy and free speech. This applies to transnational leaders in the United States as well. Astu went so far as to coin the term “diaspora dictatorship.” “The other day,” she said, “they almost harassed me because I did not attend Teddy Afro’s rally. I said to them ‘Democracy is about respecting people’s rights. You cannot force and coerce me to go for a rally.’ Everybody has the right to make a decision based on what they think and what it is. These are people who are in the U.S. but violate my rights. The only difference between the opposition parties and the Ethiopian government seem to be place. We have diaspora dictatorship here in D.C.” Some respondents mentioned how speaking in favor of the Ethiopian government would put them in hot water. For business owners, being pro-government would be professional suicide. Hardliners often go on Ethiopian radio stations to let people know which businesses and products they should avoid.

Tadde angrily told me of his experiences with diaspora dictatorship. “I am telling you this from my own experience. My brother spoke something constructive about the Ethiopian government. Something he saw when he was in Ethiopia. He is not even a supporter of the government. It was very difficult for my family and it was very difficult for our aging mother. People started shunning her. My mom is a frail churchgoing woman. The community reached a point where people did not even talk to her just because her son has a different opinion than the majority. It is sickening.” He explained what he called the “Ethiopian politicians’ principle.” “Ethiopian politics works this way. If I do not win, if you do not share my ideas, then you are not on my territory and I am going to cut or destroy you. I know the Ethiopian politicians’ principles in action. That is the whole idea. That is why since Ethiopia has been created we have no fair governance. If you do not share the majority political view you will be literally ousted and castigated.”

Seyoum: "I read, I listen, but I do not talk politics"

The actions of the Ethiopian government have made transnational political activities more difficult as well. The cloud of fear grew darker not only in Ethiopia but also in the heart of the United States. Most of the time consultants were afraid that I might be a government agent. When I would manage to convince them that I was not, they would almost plead with me to keep their names secret. "Like I said earlier, you are not putting my name down, right? Please," Zewde underlined. "They are watching," In a manner that showed how a transnational state asserts its power beyond conventional territory Seyoum told me:

We have a government that is even worse than 30 years ago. The reason I say do not write my name is that this government is very vicious. Even if they do not get you they go hurt your family. They will go tell my dad or mom, "If you do not tell your son to shut up we will put you in prison." Right now Russian scuba diving is less dangerous than Ethiopian politics, I mean it. I listen, I read but I do not talk politics.

An embassy official, Mr. Mule, who for more than an hour lectured me on Ethiopian democratic progress, disagreed with the claim that the government censors free speech. "Just because you said disparaging things about us does not mean that we are going to put you in." He gave me a sophisticated theoretical explanation of where the allegations are coming from. "The previous government killed people arbitrarily. Some of the people here were tortured. They carry around the physical and political scars from the past. Because of that they produce unfounded allegations." But he may have contradicted himself when he told me that his government has "lists of people we would incarcerate should they step foot at the airport." Despite the libratory significance of transnational migration, the deterritorialized nation-state is asserting itself in a variety of ways within the diaspora. In a related context, Pasura

(2008:156) described how Zimbabweans in London live under the threat of an all-seeing government.

Indeed, hardliners grudgingly accept that the support for transnational politics is declining. Ayalew stated, “Some Ethiopians say we have given enough. All we need is a peaceful life. I nudged them. They say, ‘Ayalew, you do it alone.’ They are not the majority, I do not think so.” At the same time Ayalew seems anxious about numbers. The social reproduction of transnational politics, particularly the shrinkage of the revolutionary generation, worries him. “How many are we? Our generation shrank significantly. Many of my colleagues passed away. We are very few who can feel this way. We have lived it and there is no other life that we know.” Joshua seemed dissatisfied when only “three thousand people showed up” at the Dulles Airport and at four subsequent meetings to greet opposition leaders when they came to express their gratitude to the diaspora for working tirelessly and effecting their release. “We gave them a heroes’ welcome. [But] only three thousand people came to greet them. That was [a] record-breaking crowd, but we have a quarter of a million people in the metro area. The most politically active were those who came here in the 1960s and 1970s including the 1980s. The majority of them are aging. We need to mobilize [the] youth population. Sometimes I do not think they think the country belongs to them too.”

Fresh Start and the Future of Political Transnationalism

As I have mentioned in chapter-two most of the DV generation—those Ethiopians came to the United States as economic migrants are rarely interested in politics. In fact the second generation Ethiopians—offspings of the Royalist and the Revolutionaries are more interested and involved in politics than the DV group. Of course these are very troubling signs for the continuously fractured, bickering and more alarmingly aging diaspora groups.

However, it would be inconceivable to imagine transnational politics as something that is finished and hopeless. The disaffected may reinvent and coalesce themselves. The complexity of transnationalism is such that people who seem unconcerned and perhaps marginalized by the revolutionaries may step up to the plate. For instance, the DV generation will soon be the majority of Ethiopians in the United States. Although how long they will remain politically passive remains unclear they will for sure thrust themselves into politics. Some of the DV generation who pays attention to politics are opposed to the confrontational approach to transnational politics. Needless to mention they are all for the democratization of the sending country. But they seem to be rooting for a fresh beginning. Negash speaks to the chorus of similar and increasing voices.

The government and those doing politics here know each other. They have frictions with each other. It is personal, not national. These are friends fighting. I feel, I feel personally that those people who fled the military government—my uncles' and aunts' generation—cannot do the fixing because they already have their biases, prejudice and hurts. They already have their brothers and sisters killed or they were the perpetrators. They will not say, "Okay, past is past and let's move on." I feel that the younger generation, especially those of us that are not too directly involved with what went on, we can start fresh. We can start by saying, Oh hey, I am an Ethiopian too. Past is past; let's start afresh."

In fact there are clear indications of change and a new beginning. One of the interesting statistics about Ethiopia is that close to 50% of Ethiopia's total population is under the age of 15 and a whopping 64% under the age of 25. It is a very youthful population. It is more than likely that they will not be haunted by the political violence of the 1980s and they could start new both at home and abroad. However, since many of them are naturalized citizens of the United States (the rate of naturalization is much higher among the DV

generation) and the Ethiopian government does not recognize dual citizenship, their political participation will be limited.

By way of summing up, Ethiopians participate in both homeland and host-country politics. At least four important points can be gleaned from the chapter. First, political transnationalism is rooted in history. Although Ethiopian migrants participated in transnational politics in the mid-1930s, the most important phase of transnational political activity began in the 1960s. Second, the political activities of Ethiopians in the United States are dominated by specific generational units, particularly those who were involved in political uprisings in Ethiopia during the 1970s and fled because of state violence. Third, transnational politics ebb and flow. During communist rule in Ethiopia (1974–1991), transnational politics was limited to the Ethiopian migrants living in the United States, although clandestine publications were smuggled into Ethiopia during this time. Some Ethiopians were helping insurgents struggling against the communist government. Only after the change of regime in 1991 could the engagement of Ethiopian immigrants begin again, and then it thrived. The 2005 parliamentary elections was a climactic point. Diaspora political enthusiasts contributed immensely to the strong performance of opposition political parties in that election. Alas, the outcome was a fiasco. The opposition claimed that it had in fact won the election, and many who had won seats in parliament chose to boycott instead of taking seats under a government that refused to acknowledge defeat in a democratic election. The “militant and uncompromising leaders” within the diaspora political structure (Lyons 2007, 539) urged this strategy and ostracized those who wanted to negotiate with the government. Through this election, the Ethiopian government saw the impact of the diaspora in its national affairs. Since then, the government has curtailed the role of transnational politics by passing onerous laws

that restrict the role of civic organizations funded from abroad. Because of such government actions and internal divisions among political activists, the past five years have seen a marked decline in transnational Ethiopian politics. Fourth, homeland and hostland politics are complementary. When they participate in hostland politics, Ethiopians are performing their civic duty, but all the while they also hope that their involvement in U.S. politics will help them advance their homeland causes.

Chapter- 5

Transnational Giving of Immigrants: “It is my spin to politics.”

Introduction

In chapter four, I discussed how Ethiopian immigrants seek to shape and contribute to the political landscapes of both sending and receiving countries. In this chapter I examine the transnational giving of immigrants. There is a consensus in the literature that philanthropic activity is an understudied but important theme in the identities of most migrants (Arthur 2010, 88; Johnson 2007; Geithner et al. 2004). It embodies their connections and commitments to the economic and social improvement of their sending countries. Indeed, the billions that have been sent in financial remittances have become a lifeline for many family members in home countries. Migrants also create institutionalized networks and activities that seek to ameliorate the social and economic hardships of the general public at home. Many sending governments recognize the development potential of remittances and work to cultivate migrant donors. Some of these governments have formed “creative policies” (Iskander 2010) to take advantage of diaspora resources, even though the research on how migrants interact with home states is limited to date (Mercer et al. 2008).

One important issue that is missing from studies of transnational immigrant giving is the contributions migrants make in their receiving countries. Does the omissions leave the impression that in their receiving countries immigrants are only beneficiaries, not givers? The focus on remittances can also raise the issue of how well integrated migrants are in their receiving countries. Are migrant organizations manifestations of progressive disengagement from the receiving country? Importantly, transnational giving thus raises more interesting questions. How has transnational giving shaped discussions of the impact of migration on development in sending countries? Why do people participate in transnational giving? What

kinds of transnational giving are they involved in? How have sending governments (in my case, Ethiopia) responded to the growing relevance of migrants in homeland development activities? Most of today's immigrants are the products of states that failed their citizens. As neoliberal policies become ever more entrenched, even the most powerful states are experiencing stress, and sending states have begun to construct plans to use immigrant resources as a survival strategy. This new economic world has created delicate power struggles between governments and immigrants, who may use their financial leverage to make certain demands.

Transnational Migration, Development, and the State

During my interview with Mr. Mule, an Ethiopian embassy official in Washington, D.C., he gradually piled on his desk two sets of dossiers. The documents contradicted each other. One dossier was a guilty verdict from an Ethiopian court against opposition political parties. "They conspired to overthrow the government. Had it not been because of government clemency, trying to overthrow the government would be a treasonous act and carry the death penalty." The other file was tentatively named the "Ethiopian Diaspora Policy." It was "a work in progress," unlike the completed court document. Mr. Mule talked, at times enthusiastically, about how the government plans to involve the Ethiopian diaspora in Ethiopia's economic development. The plan included a number of incentives, such as exemptions and tax breaks that the government plans to provide to persuade emigrants to invest in agriculture, industry, tourism, and so forth in Ethiopia.

The exemptions and incentives for diaspora investors include 100 percent immunity from income taxes for up to seven years for investors as well as a waiver on duty fees for investors who import equipment, machinery, and spare parts. The government also offers

special ID cards that give Ethiopian immigrants permission to travel in Ethiopia without visa. However, the most important incentive is a new type of bank account. Mr. Mule explained that in order to put the incoming bank deposits of expatriated workers to “productive use” and increase the country’s reserves of international capital, Ethiopia has “introduced three-tier foreign currency bank accounts such as fixed-time deposit with a minimum of US \$5000, a current-account with a minimum of US \$100 and a non-repatriable account for people of Ethiopian origin.¹²” Although these innovations are unprecedented in Ethiopia, other African countries are offering banking innovations to make investments and contributions more attractive to members of the diaspora too.

Government experiments to attract resources from immigrants who want to do what they can for the country they left behind have shifted the nature of debate and the focus of research on the socioeconomic consequences of South-North migration. The image of sending nations as perpetual losers hemorrhaging resources as productive and trained workers leave and receiving countries as the winners who benefit from an immigrant labor force that contributes to higher profit rates for the capitalist system is no longer the only way to analyze international migration. Some researchers have begun to look at transnational migrants as contributors to development in sending countries (Faist 2008: 22; Nyberg-Sorensen et al. 2002). Migrants have always contributed to sending countries. However, because of the increased intensity of the contributions of migrants to sending countries, researchers have begun to associate the financial resources they provide with development. This relatively new

¹²The main difference between the bank accounts needs to be clarified. The main differences seem to be in terms of the required minimum deposit amount as well as restrictions on withdrawals. The maturity period for fixed accounts is five years while withdrawals can be made at any time in the case of current account. Basically, while account holders get generous interest the government enhances its foreign exchange reserve and eases the balance of payments.

research focus is also an outcome of a general paradigm shift in social theory from structuralism toward hybrid approaches that are more pluralistic and the increasing dominance of the neoliberal paradigm in development policies (De Haas 2010: 2). Rather than taking sides in the controversy about whether migration produces development or not, it is better to concentrate on the processes by which migration sometimes contributes to development (Iskander 2010: 20).

The changing dynamics have been such that instead of trying to cling to workers, some countries are actively exporting labor abroad. Furthermore, in many countries, there is very little desire for the immigrants to return. A statement that Haiti's former president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, once made is pertinent. Aristide once appealed to Haitians to continue to help Haiti but said, "I am not asking you to return home permanently and forsake the other home completely" (quoted in Lewellen 2002: 147). In the neoliberal economic environment, the message to expatriates is to stay where they are but to remain economically relevant to their home country. When the Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi made a surprise appearance at one of the government-sponsored diaspora conferences in 2007, he equated transnational giving and investments with duty and national loyalty: "This is not a country where you invest because the bureaucracy is friendly to you. It is your national obligation. That is what makes you different from any foreign investor" (Ethiopian Students Association International, 2007). The prime minister's statement can be seen as a last-ditch effort by neoliberal governments in Africa to overcome its revenue crisis by using its diasporic citizens as a source of income (Mohan 2008: 475).

Immigrant remittances, which were once viewed as a source of inflation that aggravated income inequalities and promoted consumption while undermining local

production, have a new positive image. They are now seen as “new development finances” (Burgess 2009: 178), a source of revenue that is not burdened by the back-breaking conditionalities of the World Bank, the IMF, and other sources of international funds. States aim to direct these remittances toward investment activities. In Ethiopia, there is an officially sanctioned urge to push for immigrants to invest beyond policy making. Emily Wax (2005) observed that Ethiopian embassy officials in Washington, D.C., have been going door to door in Ethiopian American neighborhoods to urge patriotic entrepreneurs to make investments in Ethiopia. A radio program in Washington, D.C., paid for by the Ethiopian government advertises investment opportunities. Like the Ethiopian prime minister in 2007, the program invokes national duty as an incentive to invest.

Nonetheless, sending-country governments have not reached a consensus on how best to convince immigrants from Africa to participate in various investing schemes. Such a situation is certainly true for Ethiopia. The rights of immigrants are still being debated and interpreted. For instance, Latin American and the Caribbean countries (Levitt 2001a) and (to a degree) India and China (Geithner et al. 2004) have perhaps been most successful in terms of cultivating connections and benefiting from immigrant remittances. Many of these countries have been able to increase migrant investments, and the remittances they have received have improved the provision of public services. Yet such achievements came in baby steps. In the past, citizens who left their home countries were rarely allowed to keep their political privileges. However, this has changed. After decades of interpretation, experimentation, and negotiation, creative sending states have ceded some political privileges to their citizens in the diaspora such as the right to vote and the right to have dual nationality. Such political concessions have encouraged citizens to contribute financial resources

(Iskinder 2010). Recently, migrants have not only been allowed to vote but also have run and won elections in their countries of origin (Smith and Bakker 2007:109).

African states still have an ambivalent attitude toward emigrants. Despite the financial trade-off, the risks involved in yielding too much power to immigrants too soon are a primary concern. The reasons why members of migrant communities left their countries matter a great deal. Ethiopian immigrants who left before 1980 had been victimized by the government. Their attitude toward the Ethiopian state is apt to be hostile. Those who left in the 1990s did so because of the unfavorable economic situation which resulted from the neoliberal agenda. Although Ethiopia is a latecomer to neoliberalism, the government has been cutting back on the services it provides since 1991. As a result, over the past two decades, outmigration has emerged as part of young Ethiopians economic survival strategy (Mains 2007). Because of this, recent migrants are not likely to have cordial feelings toward the Ethiopian state. The burgeoning foreign debt; the fact that revenue from Ethiopia's chief export of coffee is unreliable (it is always subject to fluctuations in the world commodities market) resulting in low foreign currency reserve; and the onerous demands of the IMF and the World Bank have made courting the diaspora worth a try.

Much like the Moroccan diaspora policy of the 1970s and 80s (Iskinder 2010), the Ethiopian diaspora policy is mostly a policy of tame and tap--that is, avoid or tame the political demands while tapping into immigrant resources. As Lyons has stated, in Ethiopia, "Diaspora remittances and investments are welcome, but diasporans' political perspectives and resources are not" (2011: 278). That is why diaspora policy is a work in *progress*. Migrants are not docile remitters, investors, or philanthropists, however. Some have their own agenda. What has to be understood is how a balance is reached or could not be reached

between transnational immigrants, who bring interests and agendas to the table, and neoliberal states, who want to maximize revenue sources.

Receiving countries also seek to attract immigrant resources by granting residency rights to those who can invest (Mitchell 2001). In addition, migrant initiated institutions play an important role in an environment where national, state, and local governments are increasingly outsourcing social services to civil service organizations. Many immigrant groups provide services to needy migrants and other members of the society. The cutbacks governments have implemented in recent years are a clear manifestation of how neoliberal policies have strained receiving states as well as sending states (Mohan 2008: 467). Unlike the fragile sending states, receiving states have been able to transfer the responsibility for providing public services to the voluntary sector without losing legitimacy (Mitchell 2001: 173). I return to how the politically risky and the economically necessary invitations of immigrants play out in Ethiopia at the end of the chapter.

Motivations for Giving: “It is my spin on politics.”

The enticements states offer to encourage transnational giving are not very significant in the decision-making process of most transnational givers. In fact, state actions sometimes dissuade people from giving. And not all immigrants participate in cross-border giving. Yet those who do often are persuaded by factors that have nothing to do with state policies. Finally, economic capabilities have little to do with the proclivity to give, although it affects the scope and nature of giving. Some Ethiopian Americans juggle two or three jobs to support and help their families, close relatives, and even disadvantaged individuals back home in Ethiopia. Many who participated in my study formed or joined non-profit organizations, religious establishments, and professional non-profit associations to make a difference in their

new home and in their homeland. This group was mostly made up of those who had know-how, connections, and resources and were well integrated into the host society. Some refused to participate in anything related to development despite their comfortable economic status.

What then motivates people to give?

Mark Sidel (2008: 11), one of the pioneers in the study of transnational immigrant giving, notes the growth in studies of immigrant philanthropy. Yet there is far less research on what motivates giving (Brinkerhoff 2008). An inquiry into this topic may enrich research that has so far focused on the dynamics and mechanisms of the flow of philanthropic money. Here I find two clear motives for giving: the desire to help people in the homeland (sending country) and the desire to contribute to the new home in a meaningful way. I first make clear the explanations and justifications for giving practices in the United States.

Much of the research on diaspora philanthropy has focused exclusively on the direct flow of cash or supplies to the sending countries. The enduring connections immigrants maintain with the sending country seem to have captivated researchers. Yet the revelation that immigrants are more linked to sending countries than they were at some previous time has fostered resentment and indignation, particularly on the part of the American public. In the Spring and Summer of 2008 I attended a few neighborhood meetings in Silver Spring, Maryland, which were intended to bridge relations between immigrants and longtime residents. The discussions were extremely useful but also tense. One of the points that kept coming up was how the new immigrants--unlike the old ones--were not "assimilating," although they were "taking advantage" of the resources of the host country. Ms. Sherri (alias), an African American woman, had this to say at the meeting:

When I talk about assimilation it is not about letting go your heritage but embracing where you have chosen to live and embracing the

culture that exists in a country that you have chosen to live. It should not be all about your [home] country. If you do not do that you are then just a taker. You want to take and you want the benefits and you want to contribute in a minimum way. If you are not willing to fully participate . . . reach across and take risks and engage with other people, what is the point? Conversely, I as an American say to myself, “Why should I tolerate the entitlement for the immigrants who want to take over?” It does not work for me.

Ms. Sherri was teary as she spoke and her statement was widely approved. However, perceiving immigrants as “takers” and entitlement seekers may not stand up to an empirical test. In fact, a number of immigrant organizations are giving to local communities. Many of them are helping new immigrants integrate into the host society (Arthur 2008), although they do not tell the people they help to abandon their identities. I investigated what motivates members of such organizations to help their fellow immigrants and those interested in their services. Almost all of the Ethiopians involved in helping those in need have lived in the United States for a significant period of time. By and large, they had been able to achieve their American dreams. And many saw contributing to the community as much as they could as a way of belonging, an expression of gratitude to the country, and even a duty. “It is the least I could do for this country that has given me all the opportunities. I am passing on the favor,” Dr. Teferra stated. Mr. Korme was a bit philosophical. “Charity begins at home,” he says. “I am serving my new home for the same reason any citizen helps his country.”

Despite such thinking on the part of immigrants, the notion that immigrants to the United States are takers persists. In her study of immigrant philanthropic engagement in Canada, Katharyne Mitchell (2001: 108) stated that recent Chinese immigrants used giving as “an important social lubricant.” Philanthropy became a way for the immigrants to express their commitment to the values, norms, and history of the new country in an environment where “natives” often questioned their allegiance. Perhaps Ethiopians have encountered

rejection and resistances beyond the intermittent “go back to your country” remarks. The failed initiative to create a “Little Ethiopia” neighborhood could be a case in point. The attempt to name the intersection of 9th and U Streets in Washington, D.C., Little Ethiopia was seen by African Americans and other residents as a profit-driven gambit that trampled on local history and local landmarks. The economic contributions of Ethiopian-owned businesses in the area were seen as “peanuts in the matrix of economics in Washington, D.C.,” as one of my consultants put it.

However, none of my consultants saw their giving practices as payback or as something foisted on them by their host society. Interestingly, some of my respondents saw local giving as something that accomplished two goals simultaneously; it helps both Ethiopia and the United States. “It is like killing two birds with one stone,” stated Ms. Hermela Kebede. Immigrants who quickly familiarize themselves with the new country are more likely to become productive citizens. It is seen as “taking the weight off the shoulders of the local government. Successful immigrants will not be a burden on the new society. They also give a positive image about our home country. Moreover, they will be able to send remittance home. In fact, if you build your wealth you can be helpful to your communities in both places,” Ms. Kebede stated.

Although the rationale for giving in the new home country may be clear, the motivations for giving to the sending country seem to be multifaceted. Respondents provided a laundry list of impetuses. These included, in no particular order: economic success and the willingness to share with others, responses to disasters, binding family responsibilities, religious beliefs, the influence of the philanthropic culture of the United States, and feelings of guilt. Yet the most pervasive motives for almost all forms of giving among Ethiopians were

the feeling of guilt and the desire to stay out of transnational politics. Many of my consultants mentioned that not being able to help people in Ethiopia while they were living a relatively “better life” in the United States was shameful. Even those who had to juggle two jobs and live in low-income apartments felt the need to share. As my informant Sisay put it, for many newcomers in America, helping relatives “in a much worse situation than us” was a moral responsibility that could not be evaded.

The weight of guilt is even more intense among well-integrated Ethiopians who have been in the United States for a long time. Dr. Bisrat told me:

I made a good life for myself. But after all these years of soldiering in the diaspora I ask myself, “What have I done for my country?” It is an awkward feeling to be in. Remember, anyone who went to the Ethiopian Medical School and now lives a better life knows well that their family is not the one that paid the money. The country paid it. . . . I and my friends started the Twinning Program between Howard University and Addis Ababa University. Over the past four years, along with my colleagues from Howard University, we assisted AAU School of Pharmacy to adopt a five-year curriculum for undergraduate pharmacy education and a post-graduate program in pharmacy practice, and we helped create the first drug information center in the country.

In her study of the philanthropic behavior of Egyptian Coptic Christians in Virginia, Brinkerhoff (2008: 412) underscored how transnational giving serves not only as an expression of an allegiance to the ancestral homeland “but also, or instead, [because of] a nagging sense of obligation owing to their relative wealth and/or higher quality of life in the adopted society.” That nagging feeling becomes even more persistent when immigrants attribute their success in part or in full to the sending country. Dr. Mulugeta noted,

I feel like I owe everything I have to my country, of course to this country too. I was educated free from grade one through college. Even when I was sent to Harvard my government paid for it, not all of it but most of it. Yes, I feel like I owe my country more than what I have

given. Because of the military regime I did not pay back. . . . I feel sorry that I did not do as much as I wanted to. Maybe I have not done enough, maybe I have not looked enough, and maybe I was too much preoccupied with my life for over twenty years, maybe not sufficient opportunities have come my way. Now some of us are helping college students, provide money for female-headed households to start business, support monasteries, etc.

Coming to the United States and interacting with Americans and with other immigrants who are involved in transnational activities in their sending countries has a profound impact on Ethiopians' desire to give. Of course, giving back to one's community is by no means foreign to most Ethiopian cultures. Yet many draw the lesson of giving from the ethos of the society they are immersed in. Several second-generation Ethiopians (as I discuss in chapter seven) emphasized how they appreciate and are influenced by the cultures of giving and voluntarism in the United States. Similarly, Messi worked for a local NGO in Ethiopia but always thought that international NGOs operating in Ethiopia had some kind of trust fund or depended on the American government's financial backing. Although Messi understands that some of the NGOs working in Ethiopia rely on the US government financial assistances, she rarely thought they also rely on donations from members of the public. "I have never thought that they have to collect pennies and dimes from people like us to help the poor. What do you learn from this? We need to adopt such tradition. If Ethiopia has to change, it requires us. It is not them. It has to be us who really . . . help out," explained Messi.

In a related context Mr. Teferra and Mina were influenced by the philanthropic practices of Vietnamese and El Salvadoran immigrants, respectively. Like Ethiopians, these immigrants are concentrated in the D.C. metro area. Mina explained that compassion is an important component of many Ethiopian cultures, yet it is mostly limited to individual "alms-

giving stuff” instead of social investments. She felt that the social investments of El Salvadorans in their home country were very enviable. She stated,

I have a lot of friends from El Salvador who are inspiring me. Many of them send money back home. Sending remittances and helping their country is a serious thing for them. Although they send money to their immediate relatives, as many Ethiopians do, they do much better than that. They were able to get their heads together to do something at the community level. These people are building schools and clinics and rehabilitating roads. We rarely get our heads together to do a serious thing. We have a lot to learn from them about helping our core homeland.

Transnational philanthropy may also be a means of reviving, recreating, and enhancing a family legacy that may have been lost, forgotten, and undermined during Communist rule in Ethiopia. For the past several years, many people (including Mina and her father, Dr. Abiyi) have been working hard to reestablish the heritage of Mrs. Mignon Lorraine Inniss Ford. The late Mrs. Ford was a Barbadian who repatriated to Ethiopia in response to Ethiopia’s call for technical assistance from the African diaspora during World War II. Mrs. Ford “dedicated her whole life to the modernization of the educational system. She founded the first co-educational boarding school in Ethiopia. It was the first in the country. My grandma’s home was like a school,” Mina recalled. In partnership with other Ethiopians and African Americans, Mina founded the Mignon Lorraine Inniss Ford Foundation, which has constructed a two-story school with eight classrooms and renovated many other buildings. “It is the beginning of our efforts to recapture the legacy of my family and many of the African diaspora who have been forgotten,” Mina noted.

Finally and decisively, the involvement of Ethiopians in transnational giving is shaped by their pre-immigration experiences. This point helps us differentiate between willingness to give and ability to give. Some Ethiopian Americans were indifferent to giving back although

they were capable of doing so. One informant explained that many of the people holding back “could cover all government annual expenses.” Although I am not sure if the group that refuses to give was wealthy enough to cover the annual budget of the government, readiness to give is a product of the relationship between the diaspora and the country of origin (Kapur et al. 2004: 194). Many, if not all, of the Revolutionaries—those Ethiopians who came to the United States after being purged by the Communist government--spar with the current government on a regular basis about political developments. They often boycott anything that would put money into the hands of the government unless there are assurances that the political situation will change.

Indeed, migrants who left their country of origin because of political violence and insecurity are often unwilling to give back (Johnson 2007: 40). Of course not all political migrants are adamant, nor is their resistance rigid. Case studies of Iranians and Cubans in the United States show the tug-of-war between political émigrés who hang on to radical political views and many of the recent immigrants who are using philanthropic activities or investments to rebuild their old homes (Ghorashi and Boersma 2009; Eckstein 2009). Likewise, in the Ethiopian case, philanthropic activities are dominated by members of the DV generation (the post-1990 economic immigrants) and the royalists and their children who came to the United States in the late 1970s following the fall of the imperial government. If the royalists had stayed in Ethiopia, they would have been apprehended for being feudal by the Communist government. For them, the current political system is navigable. “Perhaps compared to the previous [Communist] regime nobody frowns upon you now. So it is time to make a difference in peoples’ lives before it is too late,” Dr. Teferra explained.

For the DV generation, the decision to come to America was simply about helping families. It could not be postponed. The memory of seeing family members not able to provide for themselves is still fresh and haunting. Thus, pulling the family out of poverty by establishing small-scale business ventures in Ethiopia that can make these family members self-sufficient remains the top priority for DV-generation members. The views of Ayele may represent the views of many who belong to the DV generation.

Lots of people suffer in that country. We suffered. The Ethiopian people are suffering and suffered enough in the hands of the same people living here as much as they are under the current government. I think some of the people living here are disconnected. I just came from Ethiopia. Kids go to school without eating their breakfast. Not to help is cruel. So living in another country is tough but there are opportunities. When life throws at you a lemon you have to know how to make a lemonade kinda thing. Sitting down in an American café and blogging about politics is annoying.

Not all political exiles are opposed to charitable activities. For example, some Iranian and Cuban political exiles are softening their rhetoric with the passage of time (Ghorashi and Boersma 2009: 682–683; Eckstein 2009: 202). Some Ethiopians have either joined the current political system or have given up on politics altogether. Mr. Kassa told me that he had become “totally apolitical.” “When I say I am apolitical that does not mean I do not take part in politics or understand politics. I do have opinions. I followed what the elites of our society were keeping themselves busy with, i.e. politics. I tried to do that all the time. It is not effective. I got in my thinking that it is better to do something that changes peoples’ lives as [long] as the money does not go into the coffers of the regime. It is my spin on politics.” Similarly, Mr. Tibebu told me that, “When we started Greener Ethiopia (GE) with my friend we said farewell to politics. In just eight years GE planted 20 million trees.” He seemed content with the achievements of GE.

The differences in how the DV generation and the royalists give back to Ethiopia seem to be about levels of earning rather than about commitment. The royalists achieved higher economic standards. Many were better educated than recent Ethiopian immigrants, and consequently they were able to turn the lives of their relatives around. Their focus has since shifted from family to community-wide social investments. As Mr. Tibebu explained,

For me, I wanted to see change at a macro level, not at [the] micro level or not at my family level. My families do not need anything from me. I really wanted to see change in big sense. I am not terribly concerned [with] whether my brother has a job. I am more concerned [with] whether or not the society has something to offer to its citizens as a whole. These are the things that I was always concerned about. When I think of Ethiopia, it is the whole country as a whole. Imagine how dysfunctional we are, how poverty is everywhere, how children do not get proper nutrition, etc. That is what I want to change.

Many royalists pass on a sense of duty about helping their ancestral land to their children. Many of the second generation that I interviewed belong to this group of Ethiopians, and they are trying to change the image of Ethiopia as a place of chronic poverty and famine. They were involved in different kinds of transnational activities, as I discuss in chapter seven. Many consultants, such as Dr. Mulugeta, were proud that their children are doing a “magnificent job” in Ethiopia.

Transnational Giving in the New Home

Giving in the new home may consist of a onetime cash donation and forming non-profit organizations. Several organizations and centers established by Ethiopians in the D.C. metro area and beyond are making differences in the lives of individuals and families who come from all walks of life. Most of these organizations were initially created to help Ethiopian immigrants adjust and become productive and successful citizens. Over time, however, they have expanded and broadened their missions in terms of the ethno-national

groups they service and the services they render. Because of their efforts many peoples' lives have been changed for the better. Here I present the activities of three such organizations. It is to be noted, however, organizations based in the United States are also sometimes involved in transnational activities in Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian Community Center (ECC): The ECC is one of the oldest Ethiopian community institutions. It was established in Washington, D.C., in the early 1980s. The ECC was founded because no organizations existed that could adequately address the needs of the thousands of Ethiopian and Eritrean refugees who were arriving in the United States at that time. Ms. Hermela Kebede, an executive director of the ECC, told me that although the United States has always been the country refugees try to come to, few U.S. agencies were ready to help refugees adjust to their new home. Washington, D.C., was quite unprepared to receive thousands of refugees. "Washington, D.C., has not been a gateway city although it has had a long history of immigrant settlement. It was very difficult for immigrants in terms of languages, resource availabilities, and so forth. Most refugees were in desperate need of services. . . . Now there is so much diversity and so much multiculturalism and so many organizations. It is getting there, although it is not up to where other gateway cities are, such as New York," Ms. Kebede told me.

In response to this desperate demand, a group of Ethiopians came up with the idea of a community center to help other Ethiopians. Many of them had come to the United States before and immediately after the collapse of the imperial regime (ca. 1974). Several of the Ethiopians who floated the idea of a community center were working at Howard University, including Ms. Kebede. They had knowledge, resources, and funding connections. For instance, Ms. Kebede, who had left Ethiopia in the early 1970s, had been working at Howard

University for almost fifteen years before she joined the ECC. Dr. Mulugeta Wedajo, who called himself “not a text political man,” was the first president of the ECC and was instrumental in getting the center started. At the time, he was an expert at the World Bank. Gradually, but surely, the ECC began to serve the community with support from the local government, individual donations, and volunteers who agreed to share their expertise.

The ECC’s headquarters soon became a spot for informal socializing (a role now taken over by Ethiopian restaurants). But beyond that, the ECC provides services that include translation and information about legal issues, education, health care resources, employment, immigration issues, etc. The ECC became all the more efficient and immigrant friendly because it found answers for most of the questions recent immigrants ask without referring them from one government organization to another. Just like most other immigrants, Ethiopian newcomers appreciate the “one-stop-shopping” (Hume 2008: 498) approach to services and the ability to get around bureaucracies. It also provides them with a place to voice their frustrations about the struggles of adjusting to life in a new country. Ms. Kebede took me to her office once or twice to listen to some of the voice messages she receives from Ethiopians who just call to vent their frustrations.

Over time the ECC has expanded its services in response to the changing demographics of Ethiopian immigrants. Before the 1990s, Ethiopian immigrants needed little or no English language training. Mr. Gudeta an English as a Second Language (ESL) teacher at the ECC explains that “ESL was not a major issue because the first and second groups of Ethiopian immigrants were educated and skilled in English before they came to America. Many of the DV people have a language problem because the communist government shattered the educational system the imperial government built in partnership with the U.S.

government and the U.S. Peace Corps.” In fact, computer training and ESL services attract people from a variety of ethnic and cultural backgrounds--particularly Latinos and African immigrants. “We are helping people coming from all walks of life to make sure that they are productive, self-sufficient and stand on their feet,” Mr. Gudeta says.

The ECC has no ongoing project in Ethiopia, although staff members occasionally respond to emergency situations there. Ms. Kebede contends that helping Ethiopians have a smooth transition in the receiving country is a significant way of helping both countries. She explained the rationale behind the ECC’s policies: “We link Ethiopian immigrants and the host society. It is only when Ethiopians succeed economically that they help their families in Ethiopia. We should not be living from a suitcase. We should be living a comfortable life by building wealth. Wealth building is, in a way, you see, part of a society’s security, part of the security that you create for yourself, your family, and immigrants like you. If we are here because we have opened this space, I feel like I am helping Ethiopia and the U.S. as well.” Nevertheless, Ms. Kebede says she intends to return to Ethiopia someday.

Ethiopian Community Development Center (ECDC): The ECDC was established in 1983 as a nonprofit, tax-exempt 501(c)(3) community-based association in Arlington, Virginia. Its main founder and head is Dr. Tsehaye Teferra, a former professor at Catholic University in Washington, D.C. Even though “Ethiopian” is part of the center’s name, the ECDC distances itself from and does not want to be seen as representing or serving a single ethno-national institution. “We have representation from different groups and we are multicultural. We are a professional organization. We are an international organization. We are not a community organization. We hire people based on qualifications. People are here because of their professional caliber, and their ethnicity is secondary,” explained Dr. Teferra. Nonetheless,

like the ECC, the ECDC was also founded in response to the arrival of political refugees from Ethiopia.

Over the past three decades the ECDC has resettled thousands of refugees. “We introduce newcomers to the U.S., promote health education, and conduct public education outreach. We enable them to learn English and learn the skills that will enhance their employment chances so that they do not fill the alleys of ghettos. They become productive, responsible individuals who give back to their immediate community,” Dr. Teferra said as he handed me several booklets containing testimonials from project beneficiaries. Because of such success stories, the U.S. government has outsourced resettlement activities to the ECDC. With approval and financial backing from the U.S. State Department, the ECDC opened branch offices in Denver, Colorado, and Las Vegas, Nevada, to resettle refugees. Perhaps the most successful of the ECDC’s programs is the Microenterprise Development Program (MDP), which encourages and promotes economic self-sufficiency by providing loans, technical assistance, and business counseling to minority and women business owners. The loans this program offers focus on small business. The center has been recognized for its work with this program.

Both Ms. Kebede and Dr. Teferra answered the challenge of helping refugees adjust to the new country. Dr. Teferra explained that before in fact even after these organizations were formed, many Ethiopians planned to return to Ethiopia and were apathetic toward integration. In addition, most Ethiopian immigrants espoused a leftist outlook and had a negative view toward accumulating and owning property. Helping such Ethiopians adjust involved a lot of patience and hard work. At one time, both centers were blamed for making life too comfortable for immigrants, thus encouraging people to defer a return to Ethiopia. Today,

however, there are many Ethiopian-owned businesses, and an Ethiopian owns almost half of the gas stations in the District of Columbia--a prime example of achieving the American dream. The 2008, the voluminous Ethiopian Yellow Pages (which is now in its fourteenth edition) listed hundreds of Ethiopian businesses and at least 35 restaurants in D.C. The current drive of Ethiopian immigrants to succeed contrasts with the attitude in the 1970s. Dr. Teferra provides a clear contrast between then and now.

Then, buying a home, starting a business, and developing roots in the new country was unpatriotic. It was seen as a betrayal to the sending country. Physically they [were] somewhere else. They always wanted to return. Not only return . . . it was the era of leftism, you know. Buying a house and owning property of any sort was a capitalist mentality for most people. People did not advance economically as quickly as they should, but [they] are catching up.

Now, if you do not own a house, they ask, “What is wrong with you?” You will be treated as a loser. There are people who have two or more houses. . . . They are beginning to realize, as they get older, that their children are here, [and that] kids are not going to pack [up] and leave with them. They are realizing that there is no conflict in becoming American and Ethiopian. And there is nothing wrong with building wealth here. In fact if you build your wealth you can be helpful to your communities in both places. In fact, there some who now come here that are very sharp, smart, and astute and have eyes set on business, and some of them became millionaires.

The ECDC’s philanthropic activities are not limited to the United States. Since 1992, the organization has participated in development activities in many parts of Ethiopia. Among other things, it built a school and a library in Dr. Teferra’s hometown. The center also collects and ships books to universities across Ethiopia. Although many individuals and organizations ship used books to academic institutions, the ECDC handles book donations on a much larger scale. The center has donated more than 647,352 books valued at over \$27.6 million to Ethiopian universities. Dr. Teferra recalls that when he traveled to Ethiopia in 1992, he had a chance to visit schools, universities, and colleges. “I was shocked. The libraries were empty,

bare. I said, ‘Well, this is something I can help. How can universities function without books?’” He continues,

In the U.S. it is a different story. Once the academic year is over most of the books are outdated. Next year the professor wants the newest edition. And so the earlier edition is no longer useful. When you open the books, compare the old and new editions. Other than the introduction and the preface, there is literally nothing new. Basically these publishers, you know, they cannot sell these books. They have two alternates—dump or donate. If they donate to us they get tax credit. In fact, direct overseas donations may not be deductible. They give it to our organization, which is a registered tax exempt [organization]. Therefore they get tax credit as an incentive.

The book donation is viewed as a “win-win” situation. The United States is a “wasteful society,” according to Dr. Teferra. “Being a wasteful society, there is lack of respect for the environment. I am helping this country basically to save energy. If books are going to the dumpster every semester because they are outdated it means we are wasting resources .. If you export this so called outdated books, some people can use them. It is saving Ethiopia, a very poor country, millions of dollars. So Ethiopia benefits too. There you have your transnationalism,” he concludes.

The Multicultural Services Center (MSC): The MSC operates under the District of Columbia’s Department of Mental Health to provide mental health services and counseling to ethnic and linguistic minority communities. The center is staffed by bilingual professionals who speak Amharic, Vietnamese, Spanish, Mandarin, and so forth as well as English. It was initiated and founded by Dr. Tedela W. Giorgis, an Ethiopian. I tried several times to contact Dr. Giorgis, but I was unsuccessful. In addition to his busy schedule, Dr. Giorgis often travels to Ethiopia. He has been organizing the Ethiopian Diaspora Volunteer Program in order to reverse the brain drain and is working to develop a database that tracks the Network of

Ethiopians in the Diaspora (NEPID). A key person at the MSC is Mr. Ismael Korme, the center's current manager. Dr. Giorgis and Mr. Korme are of the same generation. They came to the United States as students during the imperial regime. Mr. Korme talked with me about his privileged economic status prior to coming to the United States.

Mr. Korme explained the center's activities in great detail, although he warned me from the outset that I should not ask him anything about Ethiopian politics. A social worker by training, Mr. Korme contends that immigrants are people at risk of social and psychological stress because of lack of support systems; he says that they feel alienated. Dr. Giorgis and later Mr. Korme saw this as a cultural problem. First, most immigrants do not talk about mental illness because of cultural taboo. Second, despite the favorable policy of multiculturalism and the notion that unique ways of life enrich America and diversity strengthens U.S. society, the number of institutions that work to smooth an immigrant's transition to the new home in the United States is small. The MSC meets the counseling needs of members of the many communities that have moved to the Washington metropolitan area over the past several decades. Although any psychiatrist or counselor could provide the services the center offers, its services are distinct because of the center's cultural competencies and cultural sensitivity and (and this is something Mr. Korme emphasized) because of the fact that "nobody will be turned away because of an inability to pay for the treatment."

The MSC has received a number of awards and public recognition for its contributions to community well-being. Such recognition is a far cry from the hostile reception it received when Dr. Giorgis and Mr. Korme first established an outpatient center at the Pride Building in D.C. "People thought we would bring in the mentally ill, schizophrenics, and depressed

individuals into the neighborhood, and nobody understood in the community what they [were] going to be dealing with. People were scared, [they feared that] real-estate prices were about to come down, people were experiencing anxiety, etc. Nothing happened, nothing.” Mr. Korme says. For the past three decades the center has focused on educating ethnic and linguistic minority communities about depression and mental health. The target populations are Latinos, Ethiopians, Chinese, and Vietnamese because most of the clients requesting mental health services are from these communities.

Mr. Korme concludes, “I am mostly interested in those groups and organizations that are helping the underprivileged. When events come up I make monetary contributions to causes saving lives. They captivate me the most. Forget about the political junkies. We are obligated in the sense to those Ethiopians who are here. Many Ethiopians get treatment here. They feel better and get back to work. You see, that is our way of giving back to both countries.”

These three organizations are examples of institutions that help Ethiopians and non-Ethiopians integrate themselves into American culture. They were founded by Ethiopian immigrants. The U.S. government also supports their work. Several other institutions provide services that are similar to those the ECDC and the ECC provides; these include the African Resource Center, the Ethiopian Community Service and Development Council, and the First Hijira Foundation (an organization of Ethiopian Muslims in Washington, D.C.). Like the ECDC or the ECC, they provide information about health care, immigration, English language classes, education, and so forth. In addition, nationally recognized NGOs have been established by Ethiopians, such as People to People Inc., based in the state of Kentucky. Beyond its service in Ethiopia, People to People opened The People’s Free Clinic in

Morehead, Kentucky, in 2005. It now serves half a million individuals who have no health insurance. Rising Tide Capital, based in Jersey City, New Jersey, provides entrepreneurship training to hundreds of small business in underserved urban areas. Alfa Demelash, one of the founders, has been honored by President Barack Obama for making differences in the lives of struggling families.

Transnational Generosity across Borders

In the wider literature, the way we think about giving to the “old country” needs to be broadened. Oftentimes sending remittances to families and close relatives is excluded from the definition of philanthropic charity because philanthropy is understood as a private, voluntary transfer of resources for the benefit of the public while remittances are seen as monies sent to families and friends for consumption purposes. It is true that a large proportion of remittances is spent for personal use or individual investment. Yet several studies (Arthur 2008; Cohen 2001; Iskinder 2010; Johnson 2007: 6–7) challenge such assumptions.

Remittance transfers may contribute to philanthropic endeavors in at least two distinct ways: Senders may allocate a portion of the money they send to their families for public goods, and households that receive remittances may donate to public projects in the area. For this reason, I have divided the discussion of cross-border transnational giving into two sections: one on sending remittances in general and the other on formally organized philanthropic activities.

Remittances and the Billion-Dollar Threshold

When I asked Dawit if he sends remittances, he replied, “Not so much. . . . I do send money to my families from time to time. It is more of a compensation for my absence.”

According to Dawit and several other consultants, their parents “do not need anything” from them. However, these consultants are the exception rather than the rule. The overwhelming

majority of Ethiopian immigrants send remittances to families, close relatives, friends, and unrelated individuals because they need the money. For many Ethiopians, remittances are not a form of token compensation for absence; they are a lifeline. In fact, many immigrants have been able to improve their families' economic well-being. Seeing familial conditions improve is the most rewarding and satisfying aspect of being in America and being an immigrant. Perhaps the stories of Messi and many more illuminate and reflect the opposing duality and incongruent realities of sending money home—working long hours and withholding time from immediate family here in the United States, on the one hand, and being able to help family in Ethiopia, on the other. Even though for Messi working at the Red Lobster was the most demanding job she seems happy with what does—sending money home. “For the most part my family depends on me. I feel like I am Joseph for my family. You know the story of Joseph, although I am here at my own volition.” Messi’s story is common, although several are not as cheerful as hers. Because of a commitment to helping families in Ethiopia on the part of immigrants like Messi, the amount of remittances Ethiopia receives has increased every year since the early 1990s. From 2003/2004 to 2007/2008, Ethiopia received a total of \$2359.7 million in remittances (Zewde et al. 2010: 14).

In 2008, Ethiopia received a record amount of remittances despite a looming economic recession worldwide. The money Ethiopians sent home that year crossed the billion-dollar threshold. This was an exponential growth from \$0.3 million the country received in 1992. It is proof that even in the midst of a worldwide financial crisis, financial remittances remain steady. Large sums are also transferred through informal channels. In most cases, consultants choose the informal way because it is cheaper and “better suited for transfer[ring] funds to remote areas and maintain[ing] anonymity at both the send[ing] and receiving ends” (Zewde

et al. 2010:14). Remittance to Ethiopia originates from all over the world, but according to the World Bank (2010), an estimated 40 percent comes from the United States. Whether remittances are sent through formal or informal channels, they are quickly outpacing just about every other source of foreign revenue in Ethiopia, including foreign investment, official development assistance, and income from coffee (Gill 2010: 178).

Given such a steady and large flow of cash, the Ethiopian government wants to direct remittances into investments. In 2008, Ethiopia was the first African country to set up diaspora bonds, which are issued by the state-run power company. The plan is to use these bonds to build the largest hydroelectric dam on the continent, since international financiers have rejected the project in order to avoid a water war between Egypt and Ethiopia. However, this ambitious plan to tap into diaspora savings seems to be a fiasco because of a clash between migrants (“transnationalism from below”) (Guarnizo and Smith 1998) and the state (“transnationalism from above”). The government wants money without having to yield political rights to migrants. Yet political activists are frustrating such efforts. In most cases political transnationals in Washington, D.C., and beyond who oppose the government feel that Ethiopians in the diaspora are their informal constituency. They feel they have control over them, and they oppose any government plan that would put dollars or Euros in its coffers. Many tell members of the community not only to boycott investments but also to avoid consuming products imported from Ethiopia. Goods believed to be owned and produced by the Ethiopian government are singled out for an embargo. Sometimes these messages are accompanied by threats.

In June and July of 2008 there was a month-long heated controversy over imported *injera*--a spongy Ethiopian bread that most Ethiopians swear they could not live without.

Close to 40,000 *injera* were being imported every week from Ethiopia to D.C. What was particular about the *injera* coming from Ethiopia, unlike the many varieties made in D.C., was that it was made exclusively from *teff* flour. Therefore it was more “authentic.” However, many people linked the business that was importing the bread to the Ethiopian government or to people who supported the government. A massive media war was waged against the imported product on both moral and political grounds. Some argued that the imported *injera* was creating a food shortage in Ethiopia and that people there were “eating animal feed,” while others felt that the business was financing the repressive actions of the government. “Basically, it is not because there are moral or political grounds for the boycott,” one of my consultants stated. “It is because those who are making *injera* in the U.S. are financing diaspora radio talk shows. Their livelihood is at stake so they manufacture propaganda. Can you see where it is coming from?” The authentic *injera* was quickly driven out of the market, a demonstration of the power of opposition political activists.

While the amount of money Ethiopians send back to Ethiopia is impressive, the amount of remittance money that Ethiopians send home is very low compared to the level of remittances Kenyans send home, for example. “In 2007, Kenyans in the Diaspora had sent home nearly 1.6 billion dollars, achieving a per capita remittance of 42 dollars. Ethiopians on the other hand sent home only 359 million dollars, with a per capita remittance of only four dollars, according to a United Nations report for 2009¹³,” (Teshome 2009: 1). Despite the best efforts of the government to attract investments from the diaspora, contributions for state-run projects accounted for only 10 percent of total “domestic” investments from 1999 to 2008

¹³ The UN figure is very conservative. For instance, based on data from national bank of Ethiopia Zewde et al (2010: 14) reported that for fiscal year 2007/2008 Ethiopians sent home US \$800.2 millions a form of private remittances.

(Chacko and Gebre 2009: 3). Nonetheless, remittances for families or money for charitable activities continue at high levels. A World Bank (2010) survey in Ethiopia found that in the 2010 Ethiopians sent home an estimated \$3 billion to families and close relatives. For many recent immigrants, helping their families and improving the living conditions of their parents was something that cannot wait. “I do not understand the political controversies. I really do not. My family is waiting for me!” exclaimed Messi. Sisay stated, “When I came here I used to work the graveyard shift. It was the only job I could get. I became sick because of sleep disorders. I could not bring myself to sleep during the day. Why did I do that to myself? I have to help my family. I have to. I am all they have.”

Although many of my consultants reported that the money they send home is used to pay for expenses such as health care, school fees, and so forth, others allocate a portion of the money they send for charitable donations, particularly donations to churches. Even the consultants who told me that “my family does not need anything from me” send money to help disadvantaged individuals and households. In most cases, money sent through family networks is used to pay school fees for children from poor families, support college students, and help female headed households establish small businesses. These are mostly non-institutionalized charitable activities. Many of these individuals have their own reasons for not participating in institutionalized ways of giving back. Several of them express distrust giving money to philanthropic institutions; they are afraid that the money may not reach the intended recipients. “Everybody is asking for money to do something in Ethiopia. I am very leery. I wanted to do it by myself. I make sure every dime counts,” noted Bethlehem, who arrived two years ago and helps two children from a poor family.

Bureaucracy and the time it takes to form an NGO are factors that forced Ms. Marit to help unofficially. She supports seven female-headed households, although according to her, this contribution is very modest and “too small to talk about.” “I adopted some of the techniques of NGOs in terms of a means test. My means test is rigorous. I look at not only their economic needs but their human capital. They have to be prepared to engage in gainful business activities. Stuff like how committed they are.” She also pays for the school fees of the children in these households. “They have to make sure their kids are going to school and getting proper vaccinations. My aunt oversees what they are doing. Every four months I send them some money. I told them it is not a lifetime commitment.” She critiqued the way other Ethiopians help “poor folks and even their own families.” “I am against giving money with no responsibilities and accountability. I feel like it is crippling and creates dependency. They spend the way they want to. I am a family social worker, as you know, and I believe in family-based support. If you help a family or a household, you make a difference,” she said.

In the past few years Ms. Marit has noticed an increase in the number of people helping poor people. “I am hearing the last ten years [that] it is growing. People are helping, although what they do is not systematic enough.” She educates those who want her counsel. She explains:

Some of them are helping their old friends. Some are helping schoolchildren, even building schools on their own. I tell them to do what I am doing. I tutor them how they could be effective. People come over to my house. I share with them what I do, you know. I share with them the philosophy—no money with no strings attached to it. If people in Ethiopia are compelled to ask for money you have to take a liberty to ask them what they would do with the money. I express my views unreservedly. I do not know how many people were persuaded and changed the way they used to help whoever they are helping.

Institutionalized Mechanisms for Giving Back

Institutionalized mechanisms for transnational giving in Ethiopia are a post-1991 phenomenon. The demise of the communist regime and the introduction of some liberalization measures led to a considerable growth of civil society. Many organizations have been granted legal recognition and are allowed to operate. Here I present a few U.S.-based immigrant organizations that are engaged in transnational activities. Most of them are organized as professional, religious, alumni, or hometown associations, while some are “friends of” NGOs based in Ethiopia. Because of the absence of any umbrella organization that facilitates and coordinates their transnational involvements it would be difficult to compile a comprehensive list. The ones I selected to present here were chosen because I interviewed individuals who were instrumental in the formation of and/or support of these organizations.

Fistula Foundation Project: I interviewed Helina at a Starbucks in Alexandria, Virginia. She told me that she was on an F-1 student visa and had come to the United States “just four years ago.” Because she was a full-time student and a recent arrival, I thought that she might not be an ideal candidate for my research. Determined to cut the interview short, I asked Helina if she was involved in any transnational activities. Her responses surprised me. “Are you kidding me? Ethiopia is my life. I do lots of things. Do not underestimate me. I may not have a green card like other people. I may not be allowed to work more than twenty hours and send money home. I have my own ways of giving back. I fund-raise for NGOs in Ethiopia. In fact, what I give to Ethiopia is nothing compared to what I took from Ethiopia,” Helina told me.

She went on to list the many transnational activities she has been involved in, mainly as a fund-raiser. However, the issue of providing care for women with fistulas is very close to

her heart. She told me that she would be “working hard” until fistulas are “wiped off the face of Ethiopia.” As if she was turning the table on me for “underestimating” her transnationalism, Helina inquired if I knew anything about the Fistula Foundation or the fistula problem. Surprised by my “no” answer, she quickly said, “Fistula is a debilitating childbirth injury that thousands of Ethiopian women suffer from in rural Ethiopia.” She readily described the complications caused by fistula. It was clear to me that she had given this explanation many times before.

The problem starts from early marriage. Young women are married off and they get pregnant. These are girls as young as eight and nine. They are very young. They are not capable to have a child. Their bones are not wide enough. Since it is home delivery in Ethiopia, people do not have access to medical service. When they are in labor they push the baby physically. The baby is [putting pressure] on their tissue, the tissues are pressed hard and blood stops circulating. The baby dies. They are suffering from constant incontinence. Because of their smell obviously nobody wants to come close to them. They are shunned by society and husbands do not want them in the hut. Huts are one room and they do not have separation. They do not want them in the hut. They make them [a] small little hut or leave them on the streets. A lot of the women we have found are in their old age because they lived with fistula. I mean it is heartbreaking.

The Fistula Foundation Project was started by Dr. Catherine Hamlin and Dr. Reginald Hamlin. Members of the diaspora joined the project to make their fair share of contributions to ensure care is given to fistula patients. “The Hamlins went to Ethiopia from Australia to give free medical services. By the time they saw a lot of women with that kind of issue they decided to help. They made a survey and the numbers were crazy. They established a center or a wing in a hospital for fistula patients. And that grew into an actual Fistula Hospital. So many people were cured and returned to their homes. Some of them actually stay in the hospital and become a nurse because they are young. One of them became a surgeon. You can

read the *New York Times* article on ‘The Illiterate Surgeon.’ I forgot her name but she became a surgeon. Dr. Catherine Hamlin passed away but her legacy stays with us,” Helina told me, making clear her admiration for Dr. Catherine in particular.

Members of the diaspora established a sister organization in the United States. Helina and several other people are part of a DC chapter called Tesfa Ineste (Let’s Give Them Hope). They began collecting money to build another hospital in Ethiopia because, as Helina put it, “It is really crazy because the demand is growing as people are coming out of the closet.” Dr. Mohammed Muhe talked enthusiastically about the fistula project:

Twenty-five Ethiopian women and three men got together [and] in three years built a hospital in Harar for fistula patients. It is a hospital built by Ethiopians, from Ethiopians and for Ethiopians. Two hundred seventy five thousand dollars raised by us. We said “We do not accept outside help.” You know the Fistula Hospital in Mekelle city was built by the British. The one in Yirgalem is a gift from the Norwegians. Ethiopians in America said no. We said, “We do not need assistance.” We said, “Let’s do it ourselves.” I am just telling you we have something to be proud of. We can get together and do something amazing. It is our millennium gift to Ethiopia.

In addition to the hospital that has already been completed, the project plans to build five satellite hospitals to treat women who cannot afford to travel to Addis Ababa or the nearest hospital. Each satellite hospital costs hundreds of thousands of dollars. In order to raise funds, the project’s supporters organize fund-raisers frequently.

I involved my aunt, who almost gave up on Ethiopia. She is enthusiastic now. There is an annual event in December. We work hard for the project. There is nothing more rewarding than changing the lives of women who have been shunned . . . by society and [are] waiting to die. Remember the surgery only costs only 300 dollars. Imagine if all these political junkies contributed a dollar a day to the cause.

Not all fistula patients are cured. The project created Desta Mender (lit. Joy Village), a community that was built for those who cannot be cured. The land was donated by the Ethiopian government. The village's 10 houses host 45 women with chronic long-term injuries that prevent them from returning home. "They have a little society. They teach them skills," Helina told me.

Ethiopia Reads (ER) is another vibrant, popular, and successful diaspora-based NGO. Formed in 1998, ER became operational in Ethiopia in 2003. By planting libraries in public schools, ER aims to create a reading culture in Ethiopia. The targets, project beneficiaries, and perhaps voluntary "captives" are Ethiopian children. I met the project's founder, Mr. Yohannes Gebregeorgis, briefly at a fund-raising event in downtown Washington, D.C. Mr. Gebregeorgis was a political refugee of the 1980s. Hoping to draw me into the project, he explained how "easy and inexpensive" it is to sponsor a library in Ethiopia and directed me to the ER website to get answers for my research questions. "Full library sponsorship costs 6 thousand dollars only, you know. The school where we plant a library provides a room and we supply books, furniture, educational materials as well as training in literacy and librarianship for up to three years. You could get together with your family or friends to fund a library. It will be dedicated to family members, yourself, or anyone that you want as a token for your support," he said.

The concept of "doable" dominated his fund-raiser speech, which appealed to the audience's sense of patriotism. "Our goal is to build one hundred libraries throughout Ethiopia," he told his audience, which was clearly captivated and motivated by Mr. Gebregeorgis and "doable" heroism of putting books in the hands of as many children as possible in Ethiopia. He added, "Reading and learning is an escape out of poverty. So many

Ethiopians [have] started to realize this, and they are sponsoring school libraries. They put trust in us based on the result we deliver. We can produce and show the results,” he said. For many of my consultants, ER is the only philanthropic project they know about and contribute to.

ER first started in San Francisco. Mr. Gebregeorgis, a librarian at the San Francisco Public Library, was told to buy children’s books in various languages. He was unable to find any books in any of the Ethiopian languages even though there was a large Ethiopian population in the area. This was a turning point for him, although he had always harbored the ambition of giving Ethiopian children the gift of reading. The absence of children’s books on the market proved to him that even when Ethiopian children go to school, they do not have access to books for pleasure reading. “The first time I picked a book for pleasure reading I was 19. . . . Surrounded by thousands of books in an American library, I always thought about Ethiopia during the summer when the American children made long lists of the books they were reading. Ethiopian children are apparently playing with rag balls and tins.” (This is a line he repeats at almost every fund-raiser.) He later learned that his worst fear was true; an astounding 99 percent of public schools in Ethiopia do not have a library.

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step. Mr. Gebregeorgis realized his longtime dream by forming a 501(c) (3) nonprofit organization--Ethiopia Reads--together with Jane Kurtz. Ms. Kurtz, a child of missionary parents, spent much of her childhood in Ethiopia. She has published several books about Ethiopian children in English and she is now the main supporter of ER. Mr. Gebregeorgis opened Ethiopia’s first free children’s library with 15,000 used books donated by San Francisco’s children’s library in 2002. He converted part of his house in Addis Ababa into space for the library. More than 40,000 children used

the library during the first year of service. For the past five years ER has brought libraries to public schools in Ethiopia at the rate of one per month. ER ventures into rural areas as well. Books are transported to less accessible rural villages using a donkey cart that serves as an open-air library. “The Donkey Mobile Library is parked underneath a large tree, the thirty or so stools placed in the shade with space for as many as 200 children to sit in the grass or dirt nearby. A trained librarian or library assistant distributes the books to the children and the children take turns reading to each other under the guidance of the librarian. When the session is over, the books and stools are packed up and the Donkey Mobile Library is off to the next reading site” (ER 2010). A picture of a Mobile Library being drawn by a donkey with book-crazed children chasing the cart has become its emblem.



Figure -4: Ethiopia Reads (ER) Donkey Cart Library (source: ER website)

Ethiopia Reads receives funding from individuals, organizations, schools, and the sale of books. In fact, ER has received a lot of media publicity recently. Mr. Gebregeorgis was named a top ten CNN hero in 2008. CNN Hero is a program that awards everyday people changing the world based on Cable's website. The creditability and popularity of ER has soared since then. Each year ER organizes an Ethiopian children's book week in Washington, D.C., and a fund-raising event. Mr. Gebregeorgis often invokes the nationalism of the participants to convince them not only to contribute but also to write children's books.

Please write stories and send [them] to us and we [will] publish them if it fits children from age 2 to 18. We are interested in stories and biographies that honor Ethiopian heroes. The biographies of Ethiopian patriots who resisted Italy's harsh aggression and who died honorably are the kind of stories that we need to bring out. These are the kind of stories we are interested in. Such stories help them to know their history and seek higher ground. I challenge you and ask you to help Ethiopia Reads.

In a country filled with children, ER brings a flicker of hope by exposing the youngest Ethiopians to the power of reading.

Friends of HAPCSO (HIWOT HIV/AIDS Prevention, Care and Support Organization):

In the summer of 2008, Friends of HAPSCO held a meeting at the headquarters of Impact Silver Spring (ISS), a non-profit neighborhood organization that works to help members of the community interact and work collaboratively for the betterment of the area. One of the project coordinators for ISS is an Ethiopian American who strongly supports the work of Friends of HAPSCO, and it was through her that we were able to meet at the ISS facility. The main purpose of the meeting was to plan for a fund-raiser that would take place over the 4th of July weekend, when thousands of Ethiopians converge in Washington, D.C., for the annual soccer tournament organized by the Ethiopian Sports Federation in North American

(ESFNA). Friends of HAPCSO always takes advantage of this gathering to showcase HAPCSO's development activities and to seek donations. People appreciate what HAPCSO does, and in the past five years Friends of HAPSCO raised over \$130,000 from 2003-2008.

HAPCSO, an Ethiopian NGO, was established in Addis Ababa in 1999 by Sister Tibebe Maco. It was formed when the HIV pandemic began to ravage the society. Sister Maco, in order to play her part in fighting HIV, formed HAPCSO and implemented what she called "an integrated approach in an effort to avert the spread of HIV/AIDS and care for those living with the ailment." The NGO has four major programs: HIV/AIDS prevention, home-based care for patients, orphan support, and some training in skills for orphans/older siblings. Friends of HAPCSO is a 501(c)(3) organization that was established in 2003 to support the good work of Sister Maco. It is more like a fund-raising wing of HAPSCO that also functions as a satellite support organization aimed at creating awareness about HIV. Friends of HAPSCO facilitates the diaspora's involvement in the United States in the fight against the disease. The organizers of Friends of HAPCSO knew Sister Maco personally. Sister Membre worked with Maco from 1992 to 1997 for the Norwegian Save the Children Fund in Ethiopia before she came to the United States. When she became aware that Sister Maco had started a NGO, she decided to help. Sister Membre stated,

I know that Sister Maco is altruistic. I know that she has a big heart for underprivileged children and how much she used to assist and support those who needed her help. Although many Ethiopians mistrust organizations trying to help the poor, Maco and her organization have no trust problem. We believe her. You have to see the good job they are doing. HAPCSO puts the money where its mouth is.

Ms. Abeba, the president of Friends of HAPCSO, told me that she liked Maco's dedication and that for her she embodied "the meaningful ways to contribute to my country."

For the past several years Friends of HAPCSO has recruited members, hosted fund-raising events, and marketed cultural artifacts produced by the project's beneficiaries. Friends of HAPCSO also works to involve both second-generation Ethiopian Americans and non-Ethiopians in the hope that they will make financial contributions. They also recruit volunteers to go work in Ethiopia. A well-known second-generation Ethiopian American hip-hop singer, Mike-E (his stage name), is also an admirer of HAPCSO. Mike-E told me at the fund-raiser during the soccer tournament that he was donating the income from his upcoming album to the organization. Mike-E performed during the closing session of the soccer tournament. Before he took the stage to perform, he paid homage to the suffering, poor women in Ethiopia by carrying a load of wood barefoot around the stadium. He urged people to support HAPCSO. He compared Sister Maco to Mother Teresa.

The child sponsorship program of Friends of HAPCSO is very successful. The sponsored child receives educational support, health care, and nutritious snacks and meals. The organization regularly posts information about children who need sponsors on their website. Ms. Ababa explained:

Sponsoring a child costs only \$20 (US) a month, less than a dollar a day. The best arrangement would be to send \$120 (US) as a donation every six months or 240 a year. Once HAPCSO receives the money they pay for [the] sponsored kid's school fees, school supplies, health care, etc. Thus far, Friends of HAPCSO has facilitated the sponsorship of 300 orphans and vulnerable children of all ages and living conditions. We also arrange for volunteers to go to Ethiopia and help. You know, most of us doing this are women. We are practical, but men are political. Anyone who does something in the name of the poor children [has] helped Ethiopia.

Project Mercy (PM): For several months I hung out at the Kefa Café in downtown Silver Spring. The café is owned and run by Lene Tesfaye and Abeba Tesfaye. The Tesfayes' cafe

specializes in organic free trade coffee, gelato, and homemade sandwiches. Beyond my formal interview with Abeba, we spoke informally about almost everything, including their immigration experiences. One day, however, Abeba surprised me. “Our aunt Marta Gabre Tsadick is the first woman senator of Ethiopia,” she stated. I had never heard about an Ethiopian woman senator. Senator Marta received her BA degree from Adams State College in Colorado in the 1950s. As one of the few Ethiopian women to have graduated from college, she was appointed to Parliament and used to travel with the emperor on many of his foreign trips. After she was exiled, Marta Tsadick established one of the most highly respected international philanthropic organizations, Project Mercy (PM). “You should talk to her,” Lene told me. “She will visit DC in August to receive an award for her humanitarian assistances in Ethiopia.”

Even though I was not able to interview Senator Tsadick, the Tesfayes were a good source of information about the organization. Both are members of Project Mercy. Established in the late 1970s as a U.S.-based 501(c)(3) organization, PM is headquartered in Fort Wayne, Indiana. It is the city where Marta Tsadick’s family and the Tesfayes settled after they were given asylum in the United States. Project Mercy’s initial plan was to help thousands of refugees in several Africa countries. The political situation in Ethiopia did not allow her organization to operate in Ethiopia. PM has done a lot of humanitarian work in Africa. It has fed and clothed thousands of refugees, from the Ivory Coast to Malawi. The signature innovation of PM is its reinvention of an Ethiopian recipe called *atmit*. *Atmit* is a special barley- or oats-based porridge prepared for people who need to recuperate from sickness. It is also consumed when there are food shortages. In consultation with Indiana University, PM has transformed *atmit* into a vitamin-fortified, high-protein, easily digestible

food. The organization mass-produces and ships *atmit* to refugee camps across Africa. It is considered life-saving food for undernourished refugees.

Lene and Abeba moved from Fort Wayne to Ohio and finally settled in Washington, D.C., to be close to the Ethiopian community. They recruit Ethiopians to support the project, and they themselves make regular contributions to PM's activities. They were particularly excited about Project Mercy's operation in Yetebon, Ethiopia, a rural village some eighty seven miles away from the capital city that is the home village of Marta, Lene and Abeba. In 1991, following a regime change in Ethiopia, PM began a holistic development program in Yetebon. Like most other communities in rural Ethiopia, Yetebon is impoverished. Many of the villagers earn less than 50 dollars a year. Prior to the project, villagers had no access to clean drinking water or latrines and were very vulnerable to diseases. Project Mercy has built a school and a hospital in Yetebon and also provides access to clean water, among other things. PM aims at creating economically self-dependent communities and it has been doing that for the past decade. More than 70,000 Yetebon villagers and people in the surrounding area benefit from the project. In addition to collecting funds from donors, PM receives funding from churches to finance its development activities.

Greener Ethiopia (GE): GE is an environmental group that works to conserve and rehabilitate the natural habitats of Ethiopia. Its goals include restoring lost forests, advocating for sound environmental policies, and empowering others to work for environmental accountability. Tibebe Assefa is the project's hero in Washington, D.C., area. When I interviewed him, he was very much focused on the Greener Ethiopia Project. "At one point in time," Mr. Assefa told me, "Ethiopia was the most forested country in Africa." Greener

Ethiopia works in partnership with Trees for the Future, to plant trees so the mythological “most forested” Ethiopia will once again become a reality.

In fact GE was first founded in Ethiopia in 2002. Many of GE’s the founders lived in the U.S. For instance, Bedru Sultan one of the founders and chairman was a Washingtonian for a number of years. “He went to Ethiopia after the communist government was removed, in 1991. He was struck by what he saw. The forest was complete devastation. The food production was starting to slide...He understood what is at stake is huge,” Mr. Assefa told me. Mr. Assefa gave me documents, a DVD, and a YouTube link that shows landscapes Greener Ethiopia has rehabilitated as well as vast expanses of land that need trees to heal. “Environmental degradation is at the root of rural poverty,” Mr. Assefa notes. “There is a lot of population growth and lack of capacity to take care of the land properly. What we have is decades of wanton tree cutting and a severely degraded land. In some places the farmers [have] stopped using the land. It is sad. . . . [In] the places where we work, peasants were eking out a living, and some of them have left the area in search of livelihood. . . . We are not taking land away from them. We work with them in order to reverse the trend. It is [a] community based and community owned project,” explained Mr. Assefa, using NGO language.

During our second interview Mr. Assefa took me to the headquarters of Trees for the Future (TFF), the major sponsor of GE. When I interviewed Mr. Dave Deppner, president emeritus of TFF, he spoke highly about Mr. Sultan who came to his office, “in one cold January day,” and explained the deforestation of the country. Mr. Deppner agreed to help. Yet, the political conditions in Ethiopia were a major challenge. When they started the project the government was less welcoming. “After twenty years of Russian mess it was too

hard to expect something for no profit from America. It took a while to get the credibility,” he recalled. At the same time, he argued, most Ethiopians in the D.C metro area are obsessed with politics while people are crying for help. He told a long story about why one should not trust government and then said, “Government is for those guys who cannot get a job anywhere else.” Despite these views, Mr. Assefa and Mr. Deppner were glad to accept an invitation to a dinner at the National Palace in Ethiopia in honor of their contributions to environmental protection. It was a long way from the initial rejection they faced.

The project’s aims are twofold. GE is planting Moringa trees which are edible and help fight food insecurity. GE also plans to market wood globally. “Safeway and a major company in Western Europe, Standard Brands, are interested,” Mr. Deppner told me. For Mr. Assefa, however, planting trees has a spiritual significance. Lighting up one cigarette after another, he talked about the conflicts between materialism and spirituality. “If you want me to simplify it, one can be pursued at the expense of the other. Africa is richer with spirituality but lacks material comforts. Africa is willing to sell and mortgage its spirituality for the acquisition of material things. The West has abandoned spirituality and looks the other way. The journey and the exodus from the South to the North is a search for material wealth.” For him, planting trees, restoring the honor of degraded land, and at the same time helping people are part of reconciling spirituality with material benefits.

GE has an ambitious plan to plant a hundred million trees in the next few years. In order to accomplish this goal, GE has partnered with many diaspora members, Trees for the Future, and Ethiopian Airlines. The organization also came up with the innovative idea of the Fly Greener--Fly Ethiopian campaign. Mr. Deppner explained how the campaign works: “Ethiopian Airlines is paying us 25 cents for every passenger who flies. That means they are

planting one tree for every passenger. It is like a million trees a year. Supporters of the campaign will be able to monitor our progress through in-flight publications, films and site visits. Promotional events, posters, billboards and media projects will be regular features of the Fly Greener--Fly Ethiopian campaign. We are going to say the first airline in Africa is now going to be the first green airline in the world. The other airlines are looking at them and they are in trouble. Ethiopian Airlines are making people happy.”

These are not the only diaspora philanthropic organizations that Ethiopians participate in. I have not discussed several professional and religious-based organizations that are making significant contributions. The Network of Ethiopian Professionals in the Diaspora (NEPID), the North American Health Professionals Association (NAHPA), People-to-People, Inc., and the Ethiopian Infectious Disease Network (EIDN) are just a few of such associations with extensive contacts in Ethiopia. In addition, although many organizations are involved in the delivery of emergency relief in the form of food aid, some religious-based charitable organizations are involved in development. The International Ethiopian Evangelical Church (IEEC), one of the biggest and most organized Ethiopian American churches in the District of Columbia, has a orphanage called Joshua Youth Academy located in Debre Zeyit, Ethiopia. IEEC opened the orphanage in 2001; 108 children aged 3-13 now live there. At the Joshua Youth Academy, the children are provided with food, clothing, health care, and (most importantly) education. Pastor Dr. Emmanuel Haile told me that “our goal is to give as many orphans as possible a safe home and hospitable environment where they can obtain quality education and become successful members of their communities.” Every Sunday I have been to IEEC there was a fund raiser for the academy as they plan to increase the number of beneficiaries.

Another Ethiopian denomination, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, established Gedame Tekle Haymanot Bible Association Emergency Hunger Relief Committee as a 501(c)(3) in 2000. Its initial aim was to contribute to efforts to save lives in the wake of the droughts of 2000, which affected nine million Ethiopians. In that year, the association raised more than \$400,000 from Ethiopians and Friends of Ethiopia. Gedame Tekle Haymanot Bible Association Emergency Hunger Relief Committee gave the money it collected to the World Food Program and other hunger relief NGOs. After the year 2000, however, the association has shifted its focus from providing emergency relief to development. It works to provide clean drinking water and help disadvantaged children succeed. The association provides over seventy children in two parts of Ethiopia with tuition and money for living expenses and health care as Mr. Teferra Zewde told me. He added, “I dedicated every Friday for the association’s work. . . . Our goal is to reach out to as many children as possible by feeding, educating, and getting them medical care so they will be healthy and productive citizens. It is our way of addressing a fraction of the multiple challenges of our country.”

Philanthropies under Fire: “They are neoliberal foot soldiers . . .”

These brief accounts of philanthropic activities are illustrations of what Gillian Hart (2001) has called “little d” development--that is, development that does not fit the rubric of the planned interventions undertaken mostly by many post-colonial governments. Since the 1960s, the African continent has been the site of many government plans intended to reverse the injustice of the colonial state, what Hart calls “big D development” (Hart 2001). However, political independence did not produce the hoped-for changes. Instead of economic development, Africans have suffered much disillusionment, pain, and suffering at the hands of rent-seeking neo-patrimonial governments. In the neoliberal era, many policymakers blamed

these governments for the development crisis in developing countries, particularly in Africa. State-run development programs were severely criticized for their failures. Thus, “little d” development has been in full force since the neoliberal agenda was implemented, and governments are retreating from the provision of public services (Mercer et al. 2008, 54).

The intermediaries between the withdrawing state and market-based cash-and-carry policies are charitable organizations, including those run by transnational immigrants (Mohan 2008). NGOs became a sort of “shadow state,” often filling the gaps where the hands of the government could not reach, although states still provide the greater part of public services. In Ethiopia, for instance, many the NGOs were formed in response to inadequacies of the state. They began operating in the wake of the dreadful mid-1980s famine. After the 1991 regime change and the toning down of government rhetoric about Western countries intervention in Ethiopia’s internal affairs, international NGOs proliferated. There are close to 3,000 NGOs in the country (Gill 2010: 177). The services they provide sometimes surpass the government’s services.

The impact of NGOs on their beneficiaries, including the impact of immigrant-based transnational giving on household well-being and public welfare, has not yet been systematically studied. In their study of the impact of remittances on households in Ethiopia, Aredo (2005: 28) and Nega et al. (2004) found that households who received remittances coped well in spite of withdrawal of government subsidies and social welfare provisions. A recent study by the World Bank (2010:10) reveals that 14 percent of surveyed households receive remittances on a regular basis and apparently their living standards have improved significantly. Zewde et al. (2010) demonstrate how diaspora philanthropic activities are making differences at the community level. Their study explored the philanthropic activities

of Tigray Development Association (TDA). TDA was established in Washington, D.C. in 1989. Within about two years of its founding, dozens of TDA branches were established in the different parts of the Western world. Given its fund raising prowess the association built 121 primary schools and built 62 rural clinics in the Tigray region (Zewde et al 2010: 20-21).

Different international resources--including diaspora remittances--have come to fill the gap of an increasingly bruised, if not incapacitated, neoliberal state (Gill 2010: 182). These organizations have shaped the attitude of the general public toward the government, which is no longer the sole proprietor, underwriter, and the provider of social services. In their study of diaspora hometown associations in Cameroon and Tanzania, Mercer et al. (2008: 231–232) identified contradictory outcomes of the philanthropic activities of immigrants. These expatriates may shield the government from criticism by assuming the blame for the dysfunctional aspect of the patrimonial state. They may also “highlight the failures of the state by delivering or initiating projects successfully, and may even mock the government in an attempt to goad it into action” (ibid.: 32; see also). The latter seems to be the case in Ethiopia.

Ethiopia is one of the few African countries that officially seek diaspora partnerships in development and poverty reduction. The naming of African Diaspora Square in 2005 in Addis Ababa and the organization of Ethiopian Diaspora Day are symbolic moves to entice diaspora members to invest in Ethiopian projects. Yet what the Ethiopian government desires and what transnational migrants often do are frequently at variance. The state wants members of the diaspora to invest in long- and short-term activities that would generate foreign exchange earnings. Despite many incentives, diaspora migrant dollars have not flowed into such investments. In fact, either because of diaspora political activism (especially after the contested 2005 parliamentary election) and the wobbly policies of the government, diaspora

investments in Ethiopian projects have even declined (Chacko and Gebre 2009: 15). Many expatriate Ethiopians are more interested in helping families or giving their money to philanthropic organizations. To make matters even more complicated, some of the organizations are doing more than delivering social services. They are undertaking programs that advocate for the rights of women, children, and the disabled and a whole host of other issues.

Even if it is too early to declare, at least in the Ethiopian case, that immigrant organizations are part of a broader effort of Africans to construct “their own state” within a state (Chikenzie quoted in Mohan 2007: 467), at least they shine a light on the incapacities and inadequacies of the government. Consultants often mention “Gash Aberra Molla’s Environmental Clean-up Project,” a unique project. Mr. Molla returned to Ethiopia after living for many years in Vermont and Washington, D.C. He started a substantial environmental sanitation project in Addis Ababa in the year 2000. Up to that point the municipality had either ignored the city’s sanitation problem or was unable or unwilling to clean the city up. The project mobilized close to 30,000 street youth to build a livable city and was a great success. A city that was once filled with trash was cleaned, and city corners that had been known for severe pollution, poor sanitation and so forth became recreation grounds.

Apparently the project did not sit well with the government particularly the city administration. On several occasions, the mayor of the city blamed Mr. Molla for staff defections. City residents began to ask, “If a single person [can] make a significant impact, why does it take the government to mend a pothole?,” as one of my consultants put it. Mr. Molla’s project was an early example of tension between diaspora initiated non-profit activities and the government although he generated much of the funding internally.

Diaspora-supported NGOs that seek to raise awareness of social problems and increase the protection of human rights of specific social groups often find themselves in conflict with the state. This tension became evident after the 2005 parliamentary election. In chapter four I discussed how diaspora-supported transnational political parties had a strong showing in the election. The government grew suspicious that NGOs were behind the political tides of the opposition. One NGO director stated, “There is no trust in the diaspora despite all the contributions we make. They consider us . . . outsiders, critics, and sometimes even as competitors. . . . I almost said enemies, but not quite that, perhaps.” The government is more explicit; the Prime Minister Mr. Zenawi has called NGOs “neoliberal foot soldiers” and “oppositions in disguise” (Quoted in Gill 2010:182).

The Ethiopian government was the first African state to pass a law designed to preempt, manage, and control NGOs. The Charities and Societies Proclamation, which became law in January 2009, officially restricts the activities of NGOs to provision of services. In order for an NGO to participate in activities related to justice, democracy, human rights, children’s rights, conflict resolution, and gender rights, it has to generate 90 percent of its funding from inside Ethiopia. If more than 10 percent of its funding originates from outside Ethiopia, it is considered a foreign NGO, and foreign NGOs are restricted from participating in matters pertaining to the advocacy for rights. With this policy, the Ethiopian government has attempted to assert its diminishing power and minimize the influence of NGOs even as it benefits from the services they provide. Because of this policy, it is unlikely that the majority of the NGOs will be able to raise funds domestically, given the lack of expendable income within the country.

Some philanthropic organizations anticipated what was coming. “I knew this was coming. In order not to be accused of political involvement our organization has been working with institutions headed and founded by the government,” stated a person who has partnered with the government since they started the project. Other organizations responded by deciding to eliminate anything that gives any hint that they are engaged in advocacy, although they argue that providing services and teaching about rights are inseparable activities. Other NGO officials told me that they plan to end their program in Ethiopia. “There are problems now. They rewrote the laws that govern NGOs. It could be likely that our NGO will not be allowed to operate or [its] operation will be severely curtailed to the extent that we will not be able to do what we like to do—which is advocacy for children and women. So our services are not needed and we will stay out,” stated an NGO director. Closing down and staying out seems to be the fate of many organizations. All NGOs will be supervised by corresponding government ministries. It would be easy for NGOs to be labeled as anti-government and political given the manipulability of the new NGO law (Zewde et al. 2010).

In this chapter I outlined and discussed how immigrants construct selective connections with receiving and sending countries. By selective transnationalism I mean that while the revolutionaries as discussed in chapter four work like a dog to improve the political situation in both the sending and the receiving countries, they rarely participate in other transnational groups. Others particularly the royalist and the DV generation prefer to be engaged in the philanthropic arena. They were involved in NGO giving in order to avoid politics. Such divisions of transnational activities are the product of pre-immigration experiences as I have extensively discussed in chapter two. However, transnational giving involves politics, albeit less obviously than in the previous generations. Politicians fear and

question the implications of transnational giving. In 2008 the government instituted a law called the Charities and Societies Proclamation, which makes transnationalism a transgression. The law restricts organizations with funds largely from abroad from participating in fundamental civil society pillars such as human rights, conflict resolution and reconciliations, citizenship and community development, and justice and law enforcement services. The law was designed to curtail transnational activities that challenge the status quo in Ethiopia. Sending governments are apprehensive of the consequences of transnational giving mainly because these NGOs expose the inefficiency and nepotism of the government.

Nonetheless, philanthropic activities are growing areas of transnational connection. Just like transnational politics a number of immigrant organizations not only contribute to their new homes but also help newcomers make the adjustment to the receiving country. More than the political activities and investments immigrants participate in, diaspora philanthropy is making significant changes in the lives of the people they are helping. Perhaps these contributions have shifted the debate around migration. Most of the time international migration is seen as detrimental to the sending countries and a burden to receiving nations. The resources migrants transfer to their home countries and the institutions some are creating to meet the needs of disadvantaged people in the receiving countries are creating significant changes, and researchers have begun to analyze how migrants contribute to social and economic improvement in both sending and receiving countries. For all of these reasons, defining transnational giving as something focused on the sending country (Opiniano 2002: 3) needs to be broadened. Migrants forge and sustain relations with both the sending country and the receiving country and allocate a certain portion of their resources to the support of development activities in both homes. By this I mean that they participate in activities that

bring a socioeconomic benefit to their fellow nationals in both locations; in essence, their activities either replace or replicate institutions that used to be considered the responsibility of the government.

Chapter- 6

Lived Hybridity: Second-Generation Ethiopian American Identities

Introduction

In the following two chapters, I present the transnational lives of second generation Ethiopians. Chapter 6 explores the construction of transnational identities among second-generation Ethiopian Americans. Many of the second generation Ethiopians I interviewed belong to the royalist and revolutionary generation units that I have discussed in chapter-two. That being said, I argue that their identities are an outcome of, among other things, the transnational existence of most Ethiopian immigrants and everyday forms of navigating their way between and within the American society. In order to understand their identities better I draw on literature across several disciplines by authors that are beginning to understand the experiences of the members of the New Second Generation (NSG), whose parents hail from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin American countries (Haller and Landolt 2005; Menjivar 2002; Portes and Rumbaut 2001; Abelman 2009; Kasinitz et al. 2004, 2008; Foner 2009; Levitt and Waters 2002). My use of the word “new” when referring to the second generation is deliberate. Oftentimes the term Old Second Generation (OSG) refers to children of European immigrants who came to the United States during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many of them were Italians, Irish, Jews, and Greeks. In contrast, the NSG has often been used to specifically describe offspring of those who immigrated to the United States from different parts of the world after the 1965 Immigration Reform Act was passed (Portes and Rumbaut 2001).

The most original and groundbreaking work in relation to the experience of the NSG is that of Mary Waters (1999). She explored the experience of second-generation West Indian immigrants. Her research disclosed a range of identities and noted the “decline” of some West

Indian youth in New York in response to experiences of racialization and other identity-conditioning situations. The young second generation's responses included identifying as inner-city black Americans, identifying as ethnic Americans with some distance from black Americans, or identifying as immigrants in a way that does not reckon with American racial and ethnic categories (Waters 1999). With this analysis, she partly argued against the major argument that has been swirling around the NSG, that is, they have not been and will not be assimilating as their predecessors did (Gans 1992; Jensen and Chitose 1994). Nevertheless, Waters made one premature conclusion that contradicted her earlier thesis. She suggested that most young people who participate in the quest for upward mobility would feel that the effort to distance themselves from American blacks would simply be a "futile one" (Waters 1999: 325). She added that they find that by the time they had their own children, they would have joined the underclass because they would have accepted the identity of inner-city blacks in the context of U.S. culture. However, it is too soon for such predictions. Our understanding of the NSG is far from being definitive partly because it is still coming of age (see Kasinitz et al. 2008).

Ethiopian immigrants provide an interesting case study because research on the experiences of contemporary African immigrants, particularly their immediate descendants, is very scant (Chacko 2003b; D'Alisera 2009; Awokoya 2009). In this chapter, I explore how second-generation Ethiopian Americans construct their identities. What roles do racial construction and does racial discrimination play in their identity choices? In particular, as members of the offspring develop racial and ethnic identities, what roles do the socioeconomic backgrounds of their families and the participation of their families in transnational social space play? How do they perceive their being American? In its answers to

these questions, this chapter contributes to our understanding of second-generation contemporary African immigrants.

Some Theoretical Perspectives

Several theories have been proposed about the identity of immigrants in general and New Second-Generation (NSG) immigrants in particular. Massey and Sanchez (2007) have identified three theoretical frameworks. First, the assimilationist paradigm, which has been in place since the 1920s and was revived and updated in the 1990s, predicts that immigrants, particularly the second generation, will embrace mainstream cultures and adopt the way of life of the host society (Alba and Nee 2005). Proponents of this model often assume that immigrants (if not their children) will become “pale reflections of dominant national identities” (McAuliffe 2008b). Yet one aspect of the new assimilation paradigm has become quite controversial. Gans (1992), who frames this as “second generation decline,” notes that some of the offspring of the post-1965 immigrants have developed negative attitudes about school, opportunities, and hard work and no longer believe that the American dream is for them. Persistent poverty is not the only problem of the NSG of today. They may graduate into crime and other social ailments, Gans argues. Such generalizations, children of immigrants are assimilating but they are assimilating into a minority group instead of embracing the majority norms, behaviors and values, created a crescendo of interest in the NSG and a desire to understand how well it is faring (Kasinitz et al. 2008).

The second theoretical model that specifically focuses on post-1965 immigrant youth is the notion of segmented assimilation. Mary Waters (1999) argued following anthropologist John Ogbu’s suggestion that some immigrant children adopt the norms of the host society’s “underclass” while others remain within the embrace of their parents’ ethnic circle, which

helps them do well. In my view much of the empirical support for and development of this model has been done by sociologists (see, Kasinitz et al. 2008). Proponents of segmented assimilation propose that the NSG follows three potential avenues of adaptation and integration. The first segment includes young people who are upwardly mobile and move well into middle-class America, learning the culture and language. The second group becomes a minority underclass; examples would be inner-city African Americans or Puerto Ricans. Generally, they exhibit an oppositional culture that includes such values as lacking faith in the value of schooling, rejecting their parents' ethic of hard work, and joining gangs. They produce and reproduce the American underclass, as it were. The third segment consists of those who cling to their parents' ethnic identities and legacies (Portes and Rumbaut 2001). At the same time members of the latter group practice selective assimilation. They stay within the tightly knit economic and social circle of the first generation. This may provide them with employment and other opportunities, thereby making "rapid economic advancement" possible (Portes and Zhou 1993:82; Waters 1999).

The usefulness of the segmented assimilation approach is twofold. First, it argued that downward assimilation occurs not because the NSG fail to Americanize, but because they do it quickly (Kasinitz et al. 2008:346-347). It also identified major factors that structure how immigrants and the identities they construct are received in the host society. Such factors include "government policies (whether favorable, neutral, or hostile), the societal response (whether prejudiced or not), regional distribution (whether concentrated or dispersed), and the class composition of the co-ethnic community (whether poor, working class, entrepreneurial, or professional)" (Massey and Sanchez 2007; Itzigsohn 2009). These are extremely useful variables with which to work. Yet the segmented assimilation model *partly* endorsed the

pathologization of immigrant youth. By arguing that not *all* second-generation youth are in economic decline, it implied that economic decline was the norm for a portion of the children of immigrants.

However, it may not always be the case that an immigrant group will follow the three paths the segmentation model outlines. Ethnographic studies have suggested other paths and more broadly defined outcomes in the lives of young people of the NSG of an immigrant family (Garcia 2004; Smith 2006; see also Abelman 2009, a study of second-generation Korean youth in Chicago). In addition, the perspective suffers from methodological nationalism; it views identity formation and the sense of belonging of the members of the NSG within the boundaries of a nation. It erroneously assumes that a person develops only one racial, ethnic, or national identity (Fouron and Glick Schiller 2002; McAuliffe 2008b; Kibria 2002a; Batainah 2008).

The most recent theoretical perspective is the transnational approach. This approach adds several valuable perspectives. First, it gives attention to intersecting realities at play in the lives of immigrant families, particularly the ways that continuing interactions between migrants and their homelands affect the second generation. Second, it takes into account the ways the NSG have increasingly found themselves part of the social fields that tie them to complex relations between one place and another (Lee 2008; Skrbiš et al. 2007; Das Gupta 1997). Wolf (2002:257) has introduced the notion of “transnational struggles” that attend to “differing codes, cultures, ideologies, and goals that circulate in the lives and minds of children of . . . immigrants.” Parents and grandparents of the NSG seek to create facsimiles of their family’s ethnic identity in ensuing generations. But they also require that their children acquire the ways of the host society’s cosmopolitan, global outlooks (Levitt 2009; Wilding

2008). What sometimes emerges from these dual sets of expectations is an attention to transnationalism that varies from household to household and from individual to individual. Instead of using segmentation as a way to understand this fluid process, the intersecting, overlapping, and multiple fields of relations that members of the NSG engage in might better be described as “in-between” identities. As Kasinitz and his colleagues point out, social scientists have not yet “sufficiently appreciated” these identities (Kasinitz et al. 2008:20).

The struggle for the creation of transnational identities can be seen and understood at different levels. It may involve struggle against preexisting racial categories that may eclipse and even deny other ethnic identities. Some individuals may want to be viewed as “ethnic-American” or even as an American period—without the hyphen. Transnational actors often frustrate the structuralist expectation that immigrants of color will succumb to the American racial and ethnic groupings in which native-born Americans tend to place new immigrant ethnic groups (Garcia 2004: 26). With a discourse that challenges the racial structure in the United States and the notion of belonging, Haller and Landolt (2005) describe an ongoing struggle in which contemporary African immigrants are “unsettl[ing] U.S. racial formations.”

The racial categories used in the U.S. mix and compete with the racial formations into which immigrant parents unwittingly socialize their children at home. In this light, the ability of immigrants of African heritage, for instance, to unsettle U.S. racial formations through *diasporic and transnational ways of belonging* must be recognized as a powerful resource for children of immigrants as they experiment with identity construction. (2005:1187; my italics).

The powerful strategies that Haller and Landolt (2005) discussed involve sending children to a parent’s homeland or changing where the family lives in order to be close to or live away from a particular ethnic group. They also include what Levitt called “circulating” grandparents who serve as cultural mediators (Levitt 2009; Louie 2006; Wolf 1997; Lee 2008;

Kibria 2002a, 2009). The length of time since a family migrated is also relevant to transnational activity. Some immigrants are new and are in the process of forming ethnic social space—residential, business, and worship areas (Brettell 2008; Chacko 2003a). These activities profoundly shape the lives of the NSG. Many cultural codes and symbols are present in the life of a migrant community that go beyond the nation state and the multiple locations of “home” that may exist (Wolf 2002:257). The transnational approach helps us to depart from models that would search for how the children of immigrants identify racially and ethnically and those that seek to measure to what extent the new generation resembles a particular ethnic group, such as their parents’ group or an already existing ethnic group in the United States such as African Americans. Transnational perspectives appreciate how children of immigrants select among the ways of their parents’, of broader American society, and their peers, or possibly, create something altogether new and different (Kasinitz et al. 2008; Garcia 2004: 26).

Identity Shaping Contexts: “*BET was out of the question*”

In the following paragraphs I present the rollercoaster of identity formation mainly from the perspective of the parents of children in Ethiopian migrant families. My research shows that identity formation is the product of the continuous efforts of parents to indoctrinate their children with Ethiopian values, the social landscapes in the neighborhoods in which second-generation Ethiopians grew up, and the growing strength of immigrant ethnic institutions. To restate many parents have a dual agenda for their children: they want them to acquire Ethiopian values and culture and at the same time want them to embrace the identities U.S. society offers them (see Levitt 2009). The forces of racialization also need to be appreciated. It is one of the most powerful external forces that parents must cope with as they

raise their children. Being black in the United States, for instance, has the potential to eclipse and trump all other ethnic identities. This complicates the struggles of parents—transnational struggles—to instill pride in ancestry and a desire to succeed in their children (Kusow 2006; Rahwa 2007; Chacko 2003b).

As I have discussed throughout this dissertation it is also important to take a close look at generational diversity among first generation immigrants. Diverse backgrounds influence the identities of their children. The observations are borne out in my research findings. Many of the royalist generation who migrated in the early 1970s were college educated, English-speaking professionals and belonged to the elite class. In the U.S. they built solid careers that afforded them a better living standard and they rank high on the economic and social profile: typical occupations for this generation of immigrants are World Bank experts or university professors (Getahun 2007a; Selassie 1996; Mohammed 2006). This group of immigrants and the economically secure Ethiopian families I spoke with seemed more concerned with their children's performance in school and with integration in American culture than with whether or not their children were bicultural and had held on to some aspect of Ethiopian identity.

Interestingly, sometimes the people who report that they are less concerned about the bicultural identity of their children make self-contradictory statements. For example, Ayu a successful businessperson, Dr. Mulugeta and Tsehai initially said that whether or not their children acquired Ethiopian culture would not be their "headache" or did not cause them "sleeplessness." Yet later, Ayu talked about how he brought his cousin over to make sure that his children get to know their roots. Dawit, who reported that he belonged to the upper middle class, stated that his son is an American and he would not question his son's

“Americanness.” However, his arguments against those Ethiopians who “force their identities down the throats of their children” are a matter of styles rather than substance.

I do not wake up in the morning to lecture my son that he is an Ethiopian. He is an American. This is his home. He goes to school at this age and pledges allegiance to the flag of the United States. When he says allegiance he did not just say it, he meant it. He knew that he is an American. He is an American as any American would be. I have no doubt in my mind nor would I question it. There are some who would question. In many ways Ethiopians force their culture and their identities down the throats of their children. ... I also do that. I do all the time but I do not impose. I sit down and talk to my son; just a few things. He will tell you all the things in Amharic. If he talks to him in Amharic he understands. If somebody talks to him in Amharic he understands.

Perhaps the royalist generation did not have the benefit of tightly knit Ethiopian immigrant communities. As a result, they may not have been able to socialize their children in strong Ethiopian traditions. Tightly knit and vibrant immigrant institutions were built by the Ethiopians who migrated to the United States during the 1980s. Unlike the Royalists they may not have built a better living standard partly because the U.S. economy had moved away from well-paying manufacturing jobs and was shifting to one based on the service industry. However, in spite of these obstacles and disappointments, because of their numbers and a shared, entrenched nationalist feeling they were able to create vibrant social institutions, including churches and cultural centers and ethnic restaurants that have become the center of gravity for most second generation Ethiopians. Perhaps the post 1980s Ethiopians aspiration to return to Ethiopia influenced second-generation Ethiopians. Emu whose father belong to a revolutionary generation, stated,

Growing up I used to hear my dad saying, “I hate the U.S. I want to go to Ethiopia and I just want to live there once the country returns to normalcy. It is a beautiful country.” Anything that makes sense to him was a perception of having stood up to the U.S. during all his student years. He even has a picture of Che Guevara. My mom always says,

“Why do not you go?” She tells me, “The U.S. is amazing and the best country in the world.” [She says] I should get focused [here]. She was religious with pictures of Virgin Mary all over the place. Going to Ethiopian Orthodox Church every Sunday was compulsory. Those are the two types of stories I use[d] to hear growing up. I have to make up my own mind throughout those rollercoaster years, putting and synthesizing together my experiences.

Although Emu’s household may have been unusual in the extreme differences between the values of her parents, her father’s nationalism is more typical for Ethiopian immigrants of her generation. The community institutions and social spaces the revolutionary generation of Ethiopian migrants has created has been immensely important for the second generation. It is how they stay connected with their roots. Even some members of the second generation that belong to the royalist generation of immigrants are gravitating to these growing social spaces. Alem, grew up in “middle class, primarily White, suburban communities,” as his father was an employee of an international bank. He has moved to Washington, D.C., so that he could work in a real estate business that partly targets Ethiopian clients and be close to his kindred. He found that when he relocated, he connected with his roots for the first time. “I just came to know the Ethiopian community. I am being Ethiopianized,” he said.

The question is not *whether* parents construct a world for their children that emphasizes both being Ethiopian (knowing one’s family roots) and being American (getting a good education as the gateway to success in U.S. society). The question is *how* they accomplish this complex task. Consultants mentioned a variety of methods. Parents and grandparents were active agents in teaching their children and grandchildren about their Ethiopian heritage. Pastor Solomon expressed admiration and gratitude for his mother-in-law, who taught his two sons Amharic, “proper Ethiopian greetings like bow to older people as a

sign of utmost respect and all the good stuffs about Ethiopia.” Selam, a second-generation Ethiopian talked about how her father a student revolutionary during the 1970s told her so many good stories about Ethiopia. She however revered her grandmother, who told her many things about Ethiopia. According to Selam, her grandmother used to tell her, “In Ethiopia the oranges are sweeter. The water heals your skin. The food tastes great and [you will hear] all the good stories you can possibly imagine.” Of course, the socialization of the second generation was not always about Ethiopia. As Chacko has observed, the lives of young Ethiopians are moored in a profound awareness of being an Ethiopian, and their training also incorporates American life.

At communal gatherings of coethnics that are often attended by entire families, ties of origin, familiarity, and national pride were reportedly reinforced, powerfully impressing the exclusivity and wonder of Ethiopian culture on those attending them. At home young immigrants’ daily lives incorporated elements of both home and host country cultures. Conversations took place in both English and native languages; home-cooked meals including dishes from a wide varieties of American and ethnic cuisines; home interiors reflected Ethiopian as well as American influences. (Chacko 2003b:500)

Parents mentioned other ways of keeping their children “on track.” These included sending children to smaller towns in the United States, where they would not be as exposed to inner-city cultures, and employing Ethiopian nannies. The most frequent strategies were sending children back to Ethiopia for “cultural vaccination” away from metropolitan areas, for instance from Washington, D.C., to the suburbs of northern Virginia or Maryland as soon as their economic situation improved.

Getu: “I made them walk barefoot”

But sending children to Ethiopia, however valuable its reported positive outcomes might be, also created tension within families. Family members disagreed about whether or

not to take this step, and some children resisted when a parent decided that they should make the trip. Getu explained the initial challenges he faced from his two children, his wife, and his neighbors the first time he decided to take his children to Ethiopia.

First my children thought that they were going to have a rough time. Of course they were influenced by the media. I almost persuaded them to go. Let alone my kids, some of my neighbors including my wife were against such a plan. My wife said, “If my kids get malaria or some water borne diseases over there you are responsible.” I said, “Wait a minute! Addis Ababa has no malaria. Do not you forget that?” Then our neighbors joined the chorus denouncing my plan. Anyway I took them to Ethiopia. They loved it. We saw several historical places. Ethiopia was not what they had thought—like a disaster zone. I made them walk barefoot from my mom’s home to the nearest elementary school. I wanted them to have a memory, you know, there are lots of kids walking barefoot every single day. Ever since their first visit they want to go to Ethiopia every summer. I tell them, “If you guys want to go to Ethiopia you must get excellent grades.”

Like Getu, most parents reported the same experiences, particularly regarding convincing their children to go to Ethiopia.

Neb: “I could not imagine there could be so many things to do with mud”

From the other side of the family conflict, second-generation Ethiopians often confessed that they initially refused to go to Ethiopia but noted how travel there gave them a much better understanding of the world and their parents. Neb, a NSG Ethiopian, spent several summers in Ethiopia. He explained how he “loathed” going to Ethiopia the first time. “I thought there was no cable television, no Power Ranger toys and video games. How do I spend my time?” However, he found other ways to spend his time and underlined how the trip changed his life “more than any single event” that had happened to him.

I spent several summers in Ethiopia. I played with mud with other kids of my age. I picked up the local language. Instead of Power Ranger toys I went outside to play the game of marbles called *biyi*. The marbles were

made of dried mud hand-rolled in ashes. The game is played by knocking one marble with another to direct the target marble into one of six holes. I could not imagine there could be so many things to do with mud. During summer there was always plenty of mud that we could use for building elaborate miniature houses, forts, mud bombs to throw at one another, or, my favorite, mud action figures that would rival any Power Ranger toy. My experience with Ethiopian kids opened up a whole new world for me and taught me a simpler way to enjoy life.

Beyond traveling to Ethiopia and the many other techniques parents deploy to help their children become more Ethiopian, many parents in my study have been engaged in “transnational struggles” every day in the United States. The arenas that produce these struggles are the media, schools, and peer pressure. Schools appear to be at the epicenter of such confrontations. That is not to say that schooling is an altogether negative experience for Ethiopian American children. On several occasions during my study, parents expressed appreciation for extracurricular school activities that are multicultural. In some schools children with immigrant backgrounds were encouraged to express and be part of cultural performances. Beke gave me a newspaper clipping about an intercultural night at his daughter’s school. The newspaper published photos of children dressed in traditional outfits to represent the nationalities of their parents. The journalist who reported on the occasion called it a “Global Love-Fest” and referred to the children as “*carriers of so many ancient cultures*” who grew up in a “*glittering mosaic*” (Miller 2008, my italics). Miller wrote, “Students from Ethiopia performed impressive shoulder dancing, to the ululations of their mothers” (ibid.). Most parents appreciate such public school traditions in the metro area because it gives their children an incentive to become interested in their roots.

Yet educators do not always get it right when they attempt to bring multicultural themes into the classroom. Parents felt tension when schools teach “weird” things about Africa, talk about Africa as a country, assign reading materials that negatively

mischaracterizes Africa, and indulge in discussing “race and racial issues more than algebra,” as Elias characterized it. In response to these problems, Elias homeschools his three children. He is able to do this because he works the night shift at a hospital as a nurse. He told me that he distrusts educators that had already given up on some children before they even met them because they are of a particular race or from a particular neighborhood. Abdul took me to his son’s suburban school, where I noticed that the majority of the students were members of racial minority groups. He remarked, “You know, when minorities are a majority in this school. I always ask, ‘Why is that the case?’” Abdul objection to the racial composition of the children at his son’s school were multi-pronged. First he wanted his son to learn more about mainstream U.S. culture. Second it was because he objected to “white flight” and worried that his son’s school was not offering the same quality of education that white children at another school might receive. He also thought that the school was allocated fewer resources from public funds.

Tsehai: “Please, take that book off the reading list”

Some parents were proactive about intervening when a school promoted inaccurate images of Africa and Africans. Tsehai shared with me an interesting story about her son, whom she called a “quiet kid.” When he disrupted his class, which she said was unusual, the principal summoned her to the school.

When I got a phone call that my son was making trouble in the school I could not believe it. Maybe they were confusing him with Spanish kids because my son looks like them. I had to double check that they were talking about him, you know. I know he is a quiet kid. If it were about my daughter I would not be surprised. She is crazy. I actually found out that it was him. What upset him was a book assigned for an English reading class. It describes an African man with multiple wives, wandering around and not taking care of his families and so forth. My son was appalled by it. He said, “My father is from Africa and he never

had multiple wives.” I went to the school and told the principal what really disappointed him. . . . They were like “We did not know he is from Africa.” I was like, “Why does it matter if he is from Africa or not? I told them, “Please, take that book off the reading lists.”

Bersa: “BET was out of the question”

In addition, parents often educate themselves about what kinds of music their kids should and should not listen to, which television channels they should not watch, and so forth. While parents tend to approve of children’s programming that airs under the PBS Kids brand, they often censored television networks such as Black Entertainment Television (BET). For most parents BET offered a racial model they did not approve of and portrays family life in ways they are not comfortable with. Much more than that because of sex, swearing and clothing parents were opposed to BET. During my interview with him, Beke asked how to use the parental control feature on his TV remote. He wanted to block two cable channels in particular that were streaming pop singer Hanna Montana, whom he called “the crazy girl that my daughter is passionate about,” adding, “I always direct her to watch PBS Kids.” Several second-generation Ethiopians explained how as they were growing up they were not allowed to watch certain TV channels. Bersa, whose parents’ came to the United States prior to the revolution, explained her experiences:

Mom was against almost all TV channels, not all of them but most of them. She thought it spoils me. BET was out of the question. Of course there were some channels that I was allowed to watch. To be honest with you there were more TV channels that I was not allowed to watch than I was allowed to watch. Mom used to police the music I listened to. She kind of filtered everything I did. I always tell her that listening to hip hop does not have any impact on me. She then used to say, “This is my home. You do what I am telling you to do.” She also use[d] to say, “You move out when you get married.” Because of those parental controls I think I was very mature and a model for most Ethiopian kids. I use to take the responsibility to take a bunch of Ethiopian kids to movies and places. I am not bragging but most parents tell their kids to be like me, you know.

Beyond family circle influences of immigrant social and cultural resources that target youth are very important. Over time, the concentration of Ethiopians in the D.C. metro area and the proliferation of social institutions have created places where second-generation Ethiopians can connect with their roots. Churches are some of the most visible institutions. They also serve as secular spaces much like a community center with programs that specifically target youth (Chacko 2003a, 2000b; Chernela et al. 2009). The International Ethiopian Evangelical Church (IEEC) has a Joel Generation Program where young people learn the Bible and about their heritage. Other opportunities take place in secular locations. For example, at a local bookstore in Washington, D.C., young people congregate every other week to study Ethiopian history and culture. The Ethiopian Community Center offers a summer camp program where children spend all summer learning about Ethiopia, including traditional dance styles. Since 1994, the Society of Ethiopians Established in the Diaspora (SEED) has given awards each year to second-generation Ethiopians who have been admitted into Ivy League universities. In one of its newsletters, SEED stated that it “puts its youth first by recognizing young individuals who have excelled academically and demonstrated community service” (SEED, n.d.).

Parental Reflections on Second Generation Identities

Most parents I interviewed proudly spoke of two aspects of their children’s learning: their strong academic performances and the fact that they also speak at least one Ethiopian language. Astu, a strong single mother, could not say enough about her two children. She thought that SEED, which only awards and recognizes high-achieving Ethiopians, is “an elitist organization.” Her perspective eloquently illustrates the feelings of a parent who has pursued the dual strategy of raising children to be Ethiopian and at the same time to succeed

in U.S. society. She says, “I have successfully raised my two children despite enormous pressure that could have derailed their future. I raised my two kids much more than the Ethiopian way. They did well in their studies and I am proud of them. They respected me.” Her pride in her accomplishments as a parent is clear. She looks forward to the day when they will be completely independent.

Of course, not all parents were as satisfied as Astu with their efforts to keep their children in the orbit or to socialize them in “much more than the Ethiopian way.” Tesfu told me with excruciating pain how he took up two jobs after he came to the United States—as a parking-lot attendant and as a cab driver—to provide for his children. His son ran into a lot of trouble and had to be deported to Ethiopia because he was not a citizen. Tadde, who has worked as a social worker for the past twenty years, wanted to raise his kids in “an Ethiopian tradition,” but does not seem terribly content with the results.

As much as they do not understand me I do not understand my two boys. Just this morning I got into a fight with one of them. I just cannot figure them out. I send my kids to Ethiopia every year. At the same time they just cannot wait to come back and get McDonalds here. What I am saying is that I am not stating the fact that they are rejecting the country of origin. They are trying to understand each culture. Their understanding is different from me. I thought I brought them up to be Ethiopians but they are not Ethiopian. You can slice it and dice it the way you want but they are not Ethiopian.

Tsehai: “I do not beat them, this is not Ethiopia”

Interestingly the above story contrasts with that of parents such as Dawit, Tsehai and a few others who tend to depart, to a certain degree, from most Ethiopians. In some ways I observe divisions among the parents about what success looks like and how to have children that grow in Ethiopian and American traditions. Parents who feel they have not succeeded in raising their children “to be Ethiopian” experience social pressure from other parents. For

instance Tsehai in some ways has pursued a relatively “U.S.” path of parenting. She gives her children the space to figure out who they are although she also explained the Ethiopian cultural traits her children exhibit. Her parenting style, although she seems to be doing a great job, was costing her both personally and in her community. Tsehai said that at each community gathering, dinner party, and church gathering, parents like to talk about their children’s academic performances. She felt embarrassed and even humiliated because her two children were not as successful as she wanted them to be. Most of her friends blamed her because they feel she is “too Americanized” and too lenient with her children. Tsehai explained:

When you are in Ethiopian society they like to talk about their kids and kids education all the time even in the church while the mass is underway. It is so wicked. They then swing around and ask you questions about your own children. I really get pissed off when they do that. We were at this dinner party and everybody started talking about, oh, my lawyer son, my doctor daughter, my engineer this, etc. I kept quiet. One of them turned around and said, “How about your children? Did they finish college?” I almost snapped. I said to her, “They are illiterate!” She was like shocked. I told her, “My sister, do not to worry. It is their choice to be what they want to be. Sometimes I take my kids to Ethiopian events but they get bored. They do not like to be interrogated by Ethiopians, they too do not feel at ease.

I have been talking to my daughter about going back to college. She went to college for two years and half. She said college is not her cup of tea. What she really wanted to do was join the military. She got out when the Iraq war started because she opposed to it. You know, I cannot control them. My kids, I gave them what I can. I pray for them. When they come to talk to me I talk to them, encourage them, and help them. Besides that there is nothing I can do. A lot of people including my brother think that I am Americanized. According to them I should force my children not only to go to college but decide what they should do in college. I do not beat them, this is not Ethiopia. If they wish they can go to college when they are 30 or 40. They will get it the hard way if they do not want to do it the easy way.

For many parents, it seemed, moving to a suburb, having relatives to visit, and a combination of other strategies led to success in the delicate balancing act of raising children to be Ethiopian at some level while also raising them to be successful in U.S. society. An Ethiopian American journalist working for a News Agency told about how sending his son to a rural town in Pennsylvania had “straightened” and “saved” his son. He believes that his son would not have graduated from high school and college if he had not been able to move him to a small town, where there was less peer pressure.

Many parents are deeply concerned about their children’s education and have enormous expectations about schooling that they make clear to their children. At the same time, their anxieties and fears that their children will be “spoiled” and “lost” keep them on their toes, even paranoid. They continually struggle to create a second generation whose members are rooted in America and do well there and yet are also connected to Ethiopia. In the following paragraphs I will discuss how second-generation Ethiopians describe and articulate their identities as the products of this ongoing transnational struggle.

Second-Generation Identities: Traversing Race and Ethnicities

Almost all second-generation Ethiopians use the label Ethiopian American. Some even add another identity to the ethnic label: Ethiopian African American. They often say, “I do not like to admit but I am assimilated” into America, but they also think that they have what they call Ethiopian cultural traits. Of my sample, nine were born in Ethiopia migrated before the age of 18¹⁴ while twelve of them were born in the United States. Almost all of them had a college education. Two were medical doctors in private practice. Two had doctorates (one in

¹⁴ In fact only five of them would qualify as 1.5 generation—those who came to the U.S. between the age 5-18. I purposely and mostly selected the second generation with the intention of drawing as sharp a line as possible between the first and second generation (see Garcia 2004 on such methodological suggestions).

public health, the other in psychology), while one was working on graduate studies in business administration. Four were college students at the time I interviewed them. The rest of the group had at least an associate degree. In our interviews, we talked about ethnic and racial identities, relationships with their parents, parental expectations, and generally how they identify themselves ethnically and racially.

In our discussions about self-identification the most interesting issue that emerged was the fact that they did not see themselves as having fixed identities. Their personal stories made it clear that throughout their lives, especially since their teen years, they have experienced degrees of uncertainty, ambivalence, and even confusion about who they were. Because they have emerged from such ambivalent situations, they frequently noted the need to see beyond borders and national groups. As McAuliffe (2008a:146) argues, today we need to see each other not as “the people”—that is, as homogenous national groups—but as groups who are continually evolving, “the ‘people in conversation.’” In the following paragraphs, I present those unfolding conversations.

Ethnic and Racial Self-Identification: “You cannot say the N word”

In most cases, the most exciting and animated discussions were about issues dealing with race and ethnic formation. Young Ethiopian Americans recounted the challenge and bewilderment they faced growing up in an American society plagued by the racial dichotomy of black and white. Beth described it as “a racial and ethnic turmoil.” The members of this group had to work hard to define and redefine how they belong. As one might expect, doing so often involved confrontations with parents; some members of the group had even disowned their parents.

However, most of them described how ethnic and racial indoctrination had smooth beginnings. That was before they went to school, when home has more influence on a child than the outside world does. At home their parents and visiting relatives emphasized not only what they were but also what they were not. They were told in particular that they were not blacks but Habasha. The coming and going of cousins and a home that looked like “little Ethiopia” reinforced Habasha ethnic and racial distinctiveness. Beza, whose father was of revolutionary generation said, “We always had a cousin visiting, always. It is funny some of them I do not get to see them for the second time. I am not sure if they were real cousins. They always comment that I am becoming too American and need to learn Ethiopian culture.”

Hymie: Exploding cousins

Haymi’s father worked for the Imperial Ethiopian Government as a minister. She spoke about the increasing traffic of cousins, which helped create a home infused with homeland values and behavior. She emphatically said that her relatives have always been “*the reality and base of my life.*” Their numbers and influence increased over time. She explained:

When we were exiled during the late 1970s there were only eight family members that I could count. That number exploded. My mother has six or seven brothers and sisters in the U.S. The same is true with my father. Last Thanksgiving, I have to tell you, we had more than one hundred close relatives at my dad’s home. Dad invites everybody for Thanksgiving dinner before their winter retreat to Ethiopia. When I walk around downtown Silver Spring, Md., I often run into Ethiopians who know me. Of course it is not like in Ethiopia, where five people greet you when you walk from one block to another. But still you have to watch your back here. I think in terms of close relative[s] I have an equal amount here as in Ethiopia, and you never know who is watching.

Despite the rich cultural environment family members create for second-generation children, many of them reported that they realized when they reached their teenage years that identifying exclusively as Ethiopian/Habasha would lead to a cultural dead end in the U.S.

context. Because Ethiopian immigrants live in ethnically and racially diverse neighborhoods in the Washington metro area, children interact with peers of different backgrounds at school and on playgrounds. A seemingly secure and internalized Ethiopian identity starts to fracture. The challenge often starts with the issue of having an Ethiopian name. Neb stated how having a “weird name” became “a flag” that drew attention to him. “Neither the students nor the teacher get the hang of it. They were not able to pronounce it. They use[d] to ask me, ‘What is that name? Where did you come from?’ Even if I tell them that I was born here they look at me as if I am different.” In an effort not to be seen as different and “weird,” most of the respondents in my study began making their names simpler for Americans to pronounce. Moreover, they began to blend in with the dominant social group by making black their primary self-identification. Eyo said, “Even if you do not want to be an African American, based on your skin color most Americans treated you like one of them. You are looked [at] in the same way, the same way [as] African Americans who have been living here the whole time. Nobody gives a damn if you think of yourself as an Ethiopian.” He expressed this treatment as being “shoved into” an already established category.

Participants in my study reported that their identity troubles became a major issue when they began adopting certain manners and dress styles. They spoke extensively about the negative reactions of their parents and how they “grilled” their parents with the most fundamental question of “Who are we?” Bersa, Neb, Teddy, and Beth remembered the arguments they had over their identities around the dinner table. Parents’ responses were mostly consistent: “You are an Ethiopian. Just focus on your studies.” Teddy likes to talk about his royal roots, his being close cousin to a distant emperor, and his parents’ effort to instill Habasha identity did not work well. He recalled, “My parents had a hard time

answering all of my questions. Who are we? Which groups should I identify with? Why do we think we are different? I constantly grilled them.” Far from being satisfied with parents’ responses, members of the second generation often engaged in open rebellion sets. Moges recalled this period with a sense of guilt: “Before moving to Virginia I rebelled, you know. I wanted to be cool. Dad used to lecture me and my sister how we should behave every night. We were like his captives until dinner was over. He talked and talked about all his sacrifice to make sure we understand. We had to listen. Despite that I made my rebellion known wearing pants down, playing loud music, refusing to speak in Amharic and swearing all the time. I walked down that lane for some time. My dad used to get really angry. He hated how I behaved. He even threatened to send me to Ethiopia.”

Like Moges, for example most of the respondents indicated that they had disowned their Ethiopian identities during their teenage years or at some other point in their lives. The teenage years in particular were a time of turbulence about identity. What made the instability even more ambivalent was the fact that they were not accepted by African Americans even if they tried to emulate some of the stereotypical characteristics of that community. As Michael put it, “They do not think we are lost cousins or something. They even looked down upon us because we are from Africa.” Many attributed their experiences of being excluded to the fact that they spoke “White English.” Bersa described how she was often called “Oreo cookie”: “You know Oreo cookie? It is white inside and black on the outside. African Americans say except for my look I am the whitest girl ever.”

Teddy: “[They] called me a white boy”

Teddy was called a “white boy” by his African American peers, and he had to gradually “distance” himself from that group, although he did copy some of their styles.

Especially when I was at school, the teacher would say I speak proper English, I was smart and all that. Back in the days speaking proper English was a cool thing. African Americans in my neighborhood and school called me a white boy. Cool. I know what they meant but for me it was just normal. Such ridicule made me to distance myself from them further. Whites accepted me as somebody that I am not. For them I am a cool black kid. I went to college where I started reading the real African American history and came to know the civil right[s] icons. My effort to define and redefine my identity has been going on throughout my life. I struggled with my identity growing up. You have to always ask, “Who am I? Where do I fit in?” Also my parents had a lifelong challenge with those questions.

Second-generation participants in this study indicated that this struggle—how to deal with being excluded by the African American community while at the same time whites saw them only as members of that group—is ongoing and continues into adulthood.

Neb: “They . . . call you names like ‘jungle bunny’”

Neb emphasized the difficulties he experienced because African Americans treated him as different. That experience was more pervasive when his family lived in the inner city. He has his own explanation about why he was not accepted.

When I tell my African American friends that my parents were from Ethiopia they quickly say they too were from Africa. Then they quickly turn around and call you names like “jungle bunny.” You know why? They see fellow Ethiopians eating *injera*, listening to Ethiopian music, and having such a great time and having so much pride and history. African American’s say, “This is my brother, my so-called brother who sold me to slavery. Here I am detached. I have been oppressed in this New World society that does not accept me because I am black. . . . I see you and I hate you.” I am totally making this up but I think there [has] always been this longing among African American[s] that you are what I could have been.

In some ways Neb points at a complex intra-racial interactions. He brought out the complexities of Ethiopian Americans—and, for that matter, contemporary African immigrant identities--in the context of the history of U.S. slavery and colonialism. He may or may not

be right in his analysis, but he has certainly brought the whole iceberg of African Americans discontent that fellow Africans were the ones who sold their ancestors into slavery (see Stoller 2002: 153). The subject requires separate treatment but such thinking might have some impact on how the second generation interact with African Americans.

Maraki: "We were different in height and weight only"

Those respondents who had come from Ethiopia, even if they had come to the United States at a very early age, found themselves unprepared for the challenges of the whole issue of racial and ethnic belonging. Maraki and Sossena were twelve and eight respectively when they came to the United States. They spoke fluent English, or "White English," because they had gone to the most prestigious schools in Ethiopia. Maraki was surprised how the issues of being black or not being black had not surfaced in Ethiopia even when she went to an international school where the majority of the students were racially diverse.

You know it is funny. The idea of being black or not being black never dawned on me when I was in Ethiopia. I always ask myself this question: "Why did not the topic of race come up while I was in Ethiopia?" As I told you, I went to an international school. We had a lot of international students. It was a very multicultural community. I mean we had students whose parents were Italians, English, Germans, Russians and you name it. Between us as far as I can remember I did not consider myself a black person nor did it come up. It was, it was just we were different. We were different in height and weight only. That is how we looked at it. This race issue did not come up.

Sossena: "Girl you do not talk black!"

Sossena also recalled how when she came from Ethiopia the issue of racial and cultural identity was difficult and made her feel lonely.

I remember when I first moved to the U.S., I went to a predominantly African American school and we lived in an African American neighborhood. I did not know where to place myself. Because you know, I am black but I do not talk black. I had people come and say, you know, "Girl you do not talk black!" My English was perfect with no inflection,

but it was almost an accusation of me for not being black enough. I do not act like, necessarily like African American. So I did not have black friends [and] certainly not whites. At school during lunch period, whites are together and blacks are together. So I ended up eating my lunch in the classroom because I did not know where I would belong and what they [would] think of me. Looking back now I remember the feeling. The other thing is, had I even wanted to have friends I would have had to go under drastic change in terms of the way I look, the way I dress, and the way I talk. The hip-hop culture, and there is also the African American lingo. [Even] after doing the drastic changes you just did not get accepted that easily.

Some members of the second generation who moved to the suburbs or were born in the suburbs had a variety of experiences. Children of the immigrants of the early 1970s had lived for most of their lives in the suburbs because their parents had a better economic standing. Alex explained how his father was educated under the imperial administration. His father secured a decent job and they lived in the suburb. “I grew up in Tuscan, Arizona, and jumped into American society with both feet,” as he put it, although he came to the United States when he was seven years old. “I knew five Ethiopian kids of my age outside of my two sisters. We [would] run into each other maybe three or four times a year. Typically it was my parents at home and white people outside. I do not like to admit but I think I have assimilated. It was the only avenue. I believe it would have been different if I grew up in D.C.” Beth, Moges, and Asfaw lived in middle-class residential areas of the Washington metro area. Their association with being Ethiopian has intensified recently. Prior to that, during their teen years, there were few Ethiopians for them to associate with, let alone Ethiopian social institutions. They were seen as African Americans and faced overt racism, although they felt it was misdirected.

Moges: "You know what [an African booty-scratcher means]?"

Occasionally kids would make jokes about your African origin. I recall people calling me names like "African booty-scratcher." You know what that means? A slave that used to scratch their master because the master was too lazy to scratch their ass. As a child being called that hurts but knowing that my ancestors never engage[d] in that type of activity, probably they were on the opposite of such activity, it did not necessarily get to me. I knew where I came from. It was misdirected.

Emu: "You cannot say the N word"

These young people, who were often rejected by African Americans, who were treated as African American by whites, and whose parents saw them as too American, are extremely ambivalent about where they exactly fit in. In adulthood, they have continued the search for their identity. Some of them identify a major life-changing event that has precipitated a gravitation toward their Ethiopian roots. Their parents, who have consistently reinforced traditional cultures through legends, myths, and memories have had an impact on this process, of course. The shift in identity sometimes happens because of a trip to Ethiopia, sometimes because of continued negative personal experiences with African Americans, sometimes because of a college course, and sometimes through informal conversations with a schoolteacher. Continued exclusion from African Americans stands out as a major reason why some of the second generation desires to construct an Ethiopian American identity. Emu described the incident that pushed her to rethink her sense of self.

I thought that whatever my parents told me about Ethiopian distinctiveness was weird and weird. I just did not buy whatever my parents were telling me like "we are Habasha." I made myself part of the African American circle. I always thought we had much in common. I would say I wholly became part of African Americans and I felt I got away with it until one fateful day. During casual conversations I dropped the N word, niggaz, you know. You would not believe how the conversations ended abruptly. This kid who was living in projects like me said "You cannot say that. No." They told me to be who I am. Well, I am black. I am an African and I am an Ethiopian. I have been called by a brat racist a nigger before. Yet I realized that I do not have that right. I

cannot use nigger because African Americans are the ones who struggled to overcome the burden of slavery. Okay. Since then I started searching for my own roots and identity. It was not an excuse but it was a profound wakeup call for me.

Sossena: “You try to figure out where you belong”

Beza and Sossena both felt that their college experiences provided the impetus for a reshaping of their identities. Sossena stated how she felt out of place both among African Americans and White Americans:

I remember I had a teacher, [a] U.S. history teacher, who pulled me aside once and told me that I was not black. By that she meant that I was very different. You go through all of that and [an] identity crisis sort of—trying to figure out, boy, who am I? Are you black? Are you not? If you [are] black, which eventually you would have to admit that you are [laughs], you know that well, can I identify with these people [African Americans]? Well, not completely. I would have to be honest with you. And then you try to figure out where you belong. And you find out that you really do not belong anywhere because your skin color may say one thing but your historical and cultural perspectives are different. I said I better build on my Ethiopian heritage.

Beza: “So black that they are almost blue”

Beza also told me how an African history course had a profound impact on her. She learned that “historically, in East Africa for the first time, not necessarily scientifically as the Europeans did, racial classification was developed.” She elaborated:

In East Africa there were four racial categories: the Habasha, which were close to the Arabs and they are considered as burnt face, not exactly burnt face but almost dark, not as dark; the second Zandj—these people were dark. The third ones were the Sudan—so black they are almost blue, something like that very dark. What was the fourth one? I forgot the other group. Is it the Nubia? It is the first evidence of racial distinctions among black people. All my friends are blacks, sorry, I mean African Americans. I am black but I know that I am different. Come to think of it I am not. I do not think all Asians look alike. Do they? If you are careful I am sure they are very distinct. You may perfectly tell a Chinese from a Korean. I think that is exactly what most Habasha people were referring to. Maybe they were not unusual when they say they are different. We brought dynamism to the discussion of race in this country.

Beth: "I solved my identity problem"

For others, travel to Ethiopia was the factor that either consolidated their identity or made them to realize their Ethiopian American identity. Beth said that going to Ethiopia helped her calm the racial and ethnic "turmoil" she experienced in the United States.

As an Ethiopian American we were born into this racial turmoil without a clue as to where we fit. As a child born in America I felt that I belong to some group, [but] I never quite found it. You go through a lot of things. People labeling you and calling you what they think you are. African Americans in my school saw me as different. They saw me as having a long hair and a different nose. Yet as much as I want to consider myself Ethiopian I had little in common with the actual Ethiopians. I finally solved my identity problem when I first traveled to Ethiopia for the first time last summer. I was surrounded by my people, my kindred, and my language. People like me make me mesmerize[d]. I learned about my culture. More importantly however I realize that it is not about being black or anything else. You do not have to conform to stereotypes. All you have to do is always be who you are. I am an Ethiopian American. I am black. I am proud.

The profound undertone that dominated the racial and ethnic conversations with my respondents was the fact that they are black but they are "different blacks" than African Americans. Some emphasize intraracial differences, while others dwell on historical and cultural differences that set them apart from native blacks. For instance, Alex explained, "For many people I am different because of my look. People always ask me where I am from. I do not have an accent. My grammatical syntaxes are not incorrect. It is my look. It happens to anybody who does not look black or white. They say, 'Oh, I thought you are a Hispanic. Where is Ethiopia? Is it in Europe?' It is a dumb question. I know what they mean though. It is my look, my look is different." Beza also underlined intraracial differences. "A lot of people think I am mixed. Or they think I am just something and they just do not know what. You know what I mean? During one of the job interviews I had, the lady wanted me to open

my mouth and have an accent. I was like, I know what you are thinking. I am an Ethiopian born in America.”

A few of them understand their racial, ethnic, and cultural distinctiveness and difference from African Americans and suggest that I should not overemphasize the exclusions they experienced and the fact that they were seen as different. Alex said, “I appreciate a lot of African American culture. I listen to hip-hop. In college we helped each other because it was [a] dominantly white school.” Asfaw said something that most young Ethiopians would agree with: “There is always some degree of camaraderie with African Americans. I do not seek them out. Their history and culture has nothing to do with me. I did my medical specialty training at Howard University, [and] I found it [to be] the most familiar and comfortable place. When I see African Americans there [is] some immediate intuitive bond that occurs. I think also African culture has certain things which cross and transcend boundaries. There is this issue of the importance of family which transcends the colonially constructed boundaries. In that sense I think I am African too. It is intuitive. When possible we support each other, like I help minorities to get a leg up in medical fields. So it is not intuitive alone.” Most of my respondents reminded me, however, that even if they think they are different from African Americans, they were still seen as “faceless” black people by mainstream Americans. At the same time, they emphasize that being seen as black and racist remarks that others make has little impact on their academic performances and in identifying themselves as Americans.

“Not Wholly Ethiopian:” Embracing Aspects of Ethiopian Identities

During the interview sessions, almost all second-generation Ethiopians emphasized that they were Ethiopians and Ethiopian Americans. They used the word “Ethiopian” and

Habasha conspicuously and interchangeably. All of them said that being an Ethiopian runs through their blood and that “deep down inside” they were Ethiopians, as Selam put it. Following the methodology of Das Gupta (1997), who studied second-generation Indians in America, I consistently asked what was, Ethiopian, about them. In what ways and under what circumstances do they express their being Ethiopian? After a puzzled silence, most of them began to list the cultural attributes and values that they thought would make them “sort of like” an Ethiopian. Interestingly, however, the responses—“sort of like” and “kind of” -- pointed to their ongoing struggles about being transnational. These involved how their parents expect them to be “more Ethiopian” and marry an Ethiopian while at the same time they also want them to know about America. This is the other side of the dual strategy parents pursue—how children struggle with identity issues as they strive to meet both sets of expectations.

As my respondents spoke with me, it became clear that they have experienced frustration as they have tried to bridge contradictions and chasms related to negotiating Ethiopian identity. As Elias put it, “emphasizing [the] cultural nuances [of] Ethiopians made being an Ethiopian out of reach.” Alem lists what he called his parents’ “unrealistic” expectations: “speak fluent Amharic, date and marry an Ethiopian, attend Ethiopian churches, eat Ethiopian food all the time, etc.” Even if the second generation explanation about their Ethiopian cultural traits their narratives were flooded with “kinds of” or “sort of” Ethiopian their Ethiopian cultural traits could be a win-win situation for both parties. Despite some internalization of Ethiopian culture traits most of the second-generation respondents were quite conscious that they were not “wholly Ethiopian.” Part of it was resistance to parents indoctrination while the rest is lack of exposure to Ethiopian cultures. As Asfaw explained, “Whenever I am in an environment which is Ethiopian I may not completely understand what

the nuances are. I may miss some of them. Many of them I grasp intuitively. I grew in the suburb where there were few Ethiopians.” Selam, like most others, said that she too was not “completely” an Ethiopian. Yet she stated, “Sometimes I say I am from Ethiopia regardless of what my American traits are. I clarify that I am not physically from there but culturally I am from Ethiopia. I speak a little bit of Amharic but not a whole lot. I eat *injera* (the tartlet, spongy flatbread that is, literally, the foundation of every Ethiopian meal) but I am not like my dad, who cannot live without it. These kinds of bits and pieces of Ethiopian cultures make me feel I am *kind of* an Ethiopian.”

I probed what those “bits and pieces” of cultures were. Having a strong family connection, socializing at Ethiopian American events, and showing utmost respect to elders and guests top the list. My respondents consistently mentioned speaking the language, eating traditional Ethiopian foods, going to Ethiopian churches (Orthodox and Protestant), embracing the value of hard work, and acquiring education as values that were “drilled in them,” to use Neb’s expression. Beza added the issue of Ethiopian hospitality as something of which she cannot dispose . “If you look at how we treat guests, just the home mannerism, I am kind of an Ethiopian. Just the fact that every time cousins and anybody comes in we always oblige them to eat, serve them coffee right after that and a whole lot of things makes me more sort of like an Ethiopian. It is not something expendable.”

What is especially interesting is how these young people strongly relate themselves to both Ethiopian Orthodox and Protestant churches. The Orthodox Church in particular has become the hallmark of their Ethiopian identity in America. Churches were among the first social institutions Ethiopians established in America. For some, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has become a miniature version of the social space of the sending country in America.

Bersa stated, “I grew up in an Ethiopian church.” For Selam, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church was “like the country—Ethiopia. I always go there to have connections with my core. That is when I feel I am an Ethiopian.” I noticed that for many, church was more than a place of worship, even when they said that religious devotion was the main reason why they attend church services. For them, the church had served since childhood as a place where they felt connected to “people like them.” That connection grew stronger as they grew up.

Even the lack of language skills did not deter some second-generation respondents from seeking out the social and religious space of the church. Like others, Alex, in his late 20s, barely spoke Amharic. But he still occasionally attends Sunday services. He thinks of his Ethiopian Orthodox religion as something that makes him Ethiopian, although he does not follow all the observances. “I go there because it is a church. I also feel the church is a place and time to be with people like me. I do get the feel of being part of the community. I know I may not fit in completely. I do not necessarily feel excluded in any way as well. I do not know even if I am not really that similar; I just know that they are a group of people to whom I relate.”

One of the major controversies about being or not being Ethiopian was language. Some second-generation respondents mentioned that they speak at least one Ethiopian language but prefer English as their primary language. However, parents always sought to prevent the loss of language. As a result some of the second generation were fairly proficient in an Ethiopian language, although a few of them lost it during the teen rebellion or because they grew up in predominantly non-Ethiopian areas. Chacko (2003b) found out that 90 percent of the second-generation Ethiopians she interviewed understood native languages in their conversational forms but had difficulty comprehending literary versions.

Respondents who did not speak Ethiopian languages fluently lamented that most Ethiopians questioned their Ethiopianness. Alex, Asfaw, Beza, Elias and Teddy who had limited proficiency in Amharic, expressed their great frustration that Ethiopians emphasize language as the only way to be an Ethiopian. Asfaw stated that Ethiopians he meets even in an elevator like to start the conversation with Amharic. “Most of them are not used to a category of Ethiopians who have cut the cord and [are] Americanized. For them it is a failure; most importantly a failure of your parents. That would always be the frame they start with. Where did things go wrong? They just have to fathom how the terrible thing occurred. They ask you, ‘You do not speak the language?’ If that is how the conversation goes I just shut it off. I do not admit understanding and act American and let them scratch their head and go away.”

Beza: “Identities are huge and vast”

Likewise, Beza talked extensively about how she wishes she spoke better Amharic. Although she understands that the lack of it is a barrier to full participation in Ethiopian society, she was displeased by how most Ethiopians think she is not an Ethiopian because she does not speak the language. This situation had unintended consequence.

My mom always regrets that she did not teach me the language. She always says, “Why did not I talk to her all the time?” I traveled to Ethiopia four times. Part of the plan was for me to pick up some Amharic. I realized it was overwhelming. Why is language such a big deal for most Ethiopians? They say, “You think you are an Ethiopian [but] you do not know Amharic? Then you are not really Ethiopian.” I think it is kind of dumb to think that language is the only factor to consider me an Ethiopian. That is a huge mistake. It is probably part of the reason why I did not have so many Ethiopian friends. Some of my friends told me that when they speak Amharic people express surprise. Things like, “Where did you learn it?” Amharic is so unique that people can not relate to it. You should not be able to speak Amharic, you know. It is like damned if you do, damned if you do not. You know, I sometimes avoid Ethiopians.

There are overlaps of humanity. Identities are huge and vast. Ethiopia exists outside of the paradigm that we perceive. Italians from Brooklyn,

you cannot tell them they are not Italians whether they speak Italian or not. The Italian from Brooklyn, N.Y., would be different from Italians from Sicily, Italy. It is a hybrid identity. We cannot fight that force. Whatever they think makes them an Italian, they are Italian. I think we are an example of that too.

Indeed, Beza and most other second generation members underscore something important about how they perceive what makes an identity. Contrary to the first generation who emphasize language they argue that language alone should not constitute and define an identity. Beza stated very clearly that the *community* is who decides what constitutes its own identity when she used the Italian experience. Whatever they think makes them an Italian, they are Italian. It is indicative of how this second generation undertakes a long and hard struggle to define the concept of identity and belonging.

Another area of struggle, even “fierce struggles,” is the issue of whom the second generation should marry. In most cases parents insist and expect that children should marry an Ethiopian. Parents see marrying outside the Ethiopian community as a real sign of identity decline, and they seem unwilling to leave the choice to fate. “That instructions you should marry an Ethiopian started early. I had a Latino boyfriend. I always wonder where are the Ethiopians,” Beth said. Only three of my second-generation respondents were married, and it appeared that their parents were the winners in all three cases. Neb talked about how his parents were on the “liberal side” and said that they would not object if he marries a non-Ethiopian. However, what would make them happy would be if he married an Ethiopian. “Primarily I see myself with an Ethiopian because of my friendship circles. I think, you know, most likely I would see myself with an Ethiopian. Obviously they want me to marry an Ethiopian woman. That will make them happy.” Helina and Eyo told me how dismayed they were because their parents did not accept the people they dated. Helina told of her experience:

“I almost had a nervous breakdown. Mom grumbled when I started dating this guy who happened to be an African American. Mom said, ‘I prayed and prayed about your relationship but I do not see the two of you together.’ I was sort of ‘I love him. What were you praying about?’ When we broke up she was so happy.” Helina was deeply hurt by this episode.

Asfaw spoke of his and his sister’s experiences. “My sister married a white American. He adored my sister. There was always some tension. I mean my mom, you know, you know, you can hear the tension or feel the tension. She desperately wanted him to be part of the family and all that but the marriage ended in divorce.” He emphasized that to parents, the race of a potential partner is important: “Ethiopians get negative when one dates [an] African American. [A] white guy is not fine, but better at least. I think you guys are really racist. The racism in this country is different from the racism in Ethiopia. Unfortunately, they point in the same direction.” He explained the role of the family in his choice of mate as an attempt to keep him Ethiopian. “First they put us together with an Ethiopian woman. It never clicked. In fact it was a very uncomfortable moment. It was a culture clash. My current wife she is an Ethiopian. I met her in the hospital hall. It was an immediate attraction. Within two weeks we were inseparable. My families were pretty content with it.” It is clear that members of the second generation experience intense pressure from parents to marry an Ethiopian.

Young people are not pawns of their parents, however. Even though they attempt to speak Amharic, learn certain cultural values, and yield to their parents’ desire that they wed Ethiopians, they reject certain cultural values of their parents and Ethiopian immigrants in general. Some of them refuse to eat Ethiopian food, resist certain etiquette rituals, move out when their parents want them to stay, and emphasize their independence. Beth joked that Ethiopian greeting rituals take half an hour and include inquiring about “family, job and all

that. I respect elders. I do not bow for everybody and I do not like those kisses on the cheeks. Mom and dad always like to complain because I do not stand up when a guest enters our house. I say to her, ‘Mom, do not worry; they know that I am an American.’” Most young people underscored how Ethiopians “cling and cluster together too much” in terms of residence and employment and noted that these practices denied them privacy. Hymie stated, “Those are practices they brought to America straight from Ethiopia. If somebody starts a restaurant business other people follow. Ethiopians here act like a herd. I do not follow that trend.” Similarly, Bersa noted that she distanced herself from “her people” because they do not “accept going against the grain.”

Bersa: “I am sorry; I am saying such bad things [about my people]”

We Ethiopians like something we get used to, don’t we? When you try to break from the pack and go against the grain they have the habit of saying: “Oh, you are doing that because you are better than us?” I think I love my people, but I learn to, I say this all the time, I love my people but I have to love my people from a distance. Part of that is a joke and part of that is true. It is very much, how do I respond to this question. It is good that you are networking and you are close to one another. As much as we are Ethiopians remember that we are not in Ethiopia. In a country where you have to deal with a whole lot things, not just your own people, we need to loosen. If you eat out, how about you go to non-Ethiopian place, you know. I am sorry I am saying such bad things.

Some members of the second generation feel ambivalent about the values and ways of life of the first generation, especially what they see as a culture of secrecy. The culture of secrecy and treating “the most obvious issue [as a] secret” is something they rarely accept and appreciate. Teddy talked of where the culture of secrecy has come from. “I understand that we were people that have known many years of fighting and surviving. That natural instinct to distrust streams a lot deeper than many people can really comprehend, but I found it too much. Among Ethiopians almost everything has to be a secret. Bad health is a secret.

Receiving government assistance would be a secret. I sometimes do not know the divide between what is and what is not a secret.” Neb and Selam also expressed ambivalence about this secrecy, although they realize its merits. The Ethiopian community may not be “exposed,” Neb argued. Selam sees both the benefits and the costs of the low profile the community keeps: “I would say there is nothing about the Ethiopian experience that you can Google, you know what I am saying? Unless you have an Ethiopian friend and you live in their home and see them on a daily basis you really never get it. You never understand what is happening and the essence of being an Ethiopian. Instinctively as an Ethiopian personally I like it. As a politician and as an organizer it is my nightmare. It is sort of I am living this dual lifestyle.”

Most second-generation respondents told me that because they do not keep secrets they were treated as “too American” and even treated as an “outsider.” One person said, “My parents would not tell me a lot of things because I do not keep them. They think I go about and talk about it and embarrass them.” What really emerges from the conversation with these young people were some cultural self identification with Ethiopians but also the realization and the feeling that they were not “wholly Ethiopian” because they miss the cultural nuances. My respondents have wrestled with ideas about who gets to define what a community is, how to meet the dual obligation their parents give them of being Ethiopian and at the same time succeeding in U.S. society, complex ideas about race and black identity in the United States, conflicting standards of privacy and autonomy between the generations. It seems that if the second generation meets one of the dual standards (being Ethiopian), they may face trouble succeeding in U.S. society. If they meet the other standard (succeeding professionally), they’ll involuntarily be disappointing their parents in some way (choice of where they live, who they

choose to marry, how connected they stay to the Ethiopian community, whether or not they speak an Ethiopian language, how they dress, what they eat, and so forth). What I see here is how this generation has had to live on its own particular tightrope and as Kasinitz and colleagues repeatedly emphasized the new second generations are individuals who are mostly “free to ascertain aspects of their parents’ way and to reject others—allowing this cultural creativity to flower” (p. 357).

Being an American: “I am as American as an apple pie”

Just as we discussed what was Ethiopian about them, I also asked them how American they were. All second-generation Ethiopians repeatedly mentioned that even if they try to be more Ethiopian their parents and first-generation Ethiopians consider them as “too American.” Of course, regardless of what others think of them, they also feel that they are American. They responded by talking about what made them American in concrete and rhetorical terms. They also made it clear that they are emotionally attached to America but also have some criticisms of their country. The discussions we had also touched upon race and racism and their interactions with other ethnic and social groups.

Neb’s response to my question about what made him American emphasized that there is no such a thing as “what an American should look like, behave like and act like.” For him, being American means that people like his parents are free to exercise their cultural values. “I always make an argument that American culture as a concept does not exist. By that I mean like some uniform culture. It is not one thing and it is not defined by one thing. In the extreme one may say it does not exist. I prefer the notion that there are cultures in America. It is the sharing of other people’s cultures that makes you American. In that sense I am an American.” Instead of listing what it actually means to be an American, Neb noted how broad American

identities are. “My understanding of American culture, quote unquote, is America 50 percent Irish, 30 percent Italian, 10 percent Polish and whatever. Hey, let’s eat Chinese today or whatever. Let’s have Ethiopian food another day. Food, culture and identity go hand in hand in America, and if you look at it from that perspective then there would not be a specific culture that makes you an American.”

Beyond such philosophical responses others preferred to be very specific. Asfaw responded, “I am as American as any American can be. I am culturally American. My goals, aspirations, interests, hobbies, and artistic interests are American.” Helina stated, “I speak fluent English. I have grown accustomed to the way of life here. Jokingly, I have tons of student loans that I need to pay off. Does that make me an American? I am as American as an apple pie.” The apple pie analogy was used frequently. For Sossena, beyond the apple pie comparison, being an American means embracing the spirit of volunteerism. “Volunteerism is a quintessential American ethos. Imagine doing something for people that expect nothing from you. That would be my biggest American trait. Although I am based in Ethiopia I have been paying taxes. I file my taxes as honestly as I can. I am an informed productive citizen. I vote in every election. I recycle. It is not a joke, recycling is something I take seriously.”

Second-generation consultants regularly mentioned being independent and free as something that they cherish about America. They were critical of Ethiopian culture, which they think of as “controlling” and even intrusive. Maraki stated, “Although I came here when I was fifteen, being independent is something I cannot trade for anything.” She enthusiastically explained,

I feel that in Ethiopia you have, it is just like, the entire neighborhood is a big family. You are loved, you eat fresh food and somebody does your laundry. But before you make any decision everybody has to discuss upon it. You have to get everybody’s opinion to do something. I became

more independent and I think that is one of the most significant things that make me an American. You are required to do things by yourself. Even for school I decide almost everything by myself and my parents respect that. I decide, be it something as small as the class I should be taking this semester and something as large as picking up internships that will help me with my career. I make decision[s] that I would have usually have done with ten or fifteen people. I am not saying the Ethiopian way is something bad, but I think it is too much.

The most frequently noted American traits were participation in American elections. Beyond the Obama candidacy, which frequently brought political issues to the surface during my fieldwork, second-generation Ethiopians frequently mentioned how they exercise their voting rights. Eyo emphasized, “Lack of political participation and democracy was the reason why my families were yanked out from Ethiopia. I take it seriously by voting in every election, including in every ward and country election. Voting makes an invisible citizen visible. Having a voice I think is the greatest privilege. It is the pinnacle of being an American.”

Bersa: “I am the one who made sure that everybody voted”

Bersa talked about her political involvement as a hallmark of her Americanness. She emphasized passionately that her commitment to participating in the political process came from her knowledge of the history of voting rights for people of color in the United States.

The fact that we have quote unquote the same opportunities as a white person I feel like it is the result of many years of struggle and generations of hardships. When I was old enough I started voting. I never missed an election since I reached my voting age. I just know that the voting right was not always a right. We, as colored people, did not have that right at one point in time. If you do not vote it is like a waste of your rights. Not voting is easy. It may not cost you a dime. If those rights slip away then we have to fight for it, you know. Actually I use[d] to register people of voting age at my high school, you know. I am the one who made sure that everybody voted in my family and circle of friends. It is not because of Obama. I am not one of those people who say he will change everything. No. You are only given so much leeway. . . . What he

represents the change thing sounds so corny. It is a propaganda that I am willingly falling for. I am willingly falling for it and [will] vote for him. I just want you to know that my political participation has little to do with him.

Another question I asked second-generation respondents was if they feel that they are included and accepted as Americans. I also asked them if they had experienced racism and if such incidents made them doubt their Americanness. All of them replied that nothing could make them doubt that they were an American. Bersa told me: “My perception is that America does not belong to the people who claim they own it, you know what I mean. By most people[s’] standard, American means a rich white person—not even women. By that standard, the standard I totally reject, I am not obviously an American. We all have our own ways of becoming an American. I do not have a goal to meet and a group I compare myself with to see how much American I am.”

Although second-generation Ethiopians do not feel alienated in any particular way, their friendship patterns indicate what Itzigsohn (2009) has called the American fault line. In most cases, their friends were mostly Ethiopians and second-generation immigrants. Asfaw mentioned that his closest white friends, who were “still old buddies,” as he put it, were born and raised in New England. He tried to emphasize the cosmopolitan and accepting nature of people from New England. Eyo and Neb remarked they do not know or they certainly cannot report that they faced external pressure to identify with a certain group of people, but they had more friends whose parents had an immigrant background. “It is like immediate, you identify with people born somewhere else or whose parents were born elsewhere. It clicks. You do not have to explain it,” Eyo said.

Although respondents did not see overt racism as shaping friendship choices, their experiences and interpretations of racism seem varied. Some of them reported that they “did

not suffer from racism.” Maraki said, “I really do not feel any kind of discrimination. You know, because I am just very, I am just very blind to it, I guess. If it existed maybe it has not really sunk in. Even if I feel [it], I do not categorize it as such.” This group argues that African Americans are most discriminated against in U.S. society and that they were treated better because they make other people know that they were Ethiopians. Others, perhaps, a significant number of them, saw racism as something “natural and normal” in America. However, they avoid being trapped by it or were not excessively concerned about it. Helina stated, “Yes, everybody has been discriminated [against]. That happens all the time. Sometimes it is hard to tease apart whether it is because of race, ethnic background, or even gender. All of these could play a part. When I apply for a job and they interview me I am probably helping them feel like they are more open minded. I may not be paid equally like others.”

Asfaw: “They do not hold your color against you”

Asfaw stated he was “very glad” that I had asked about racism. He carefully worded his answers.

I know racism is there. There are racist tendencies that come from the American culture. You meet a black person and you feel negative before you even know it. You know it is there. What I have found and my experience is that I do not. And I have talked to other doctors; they do not sense it from their patients. If anything, you sense it from your colleagues even that is an overstatement to some extent. With patients it is your job to establish trust, offer your experience and knowledge. If it is good for them they do not hold your color against you. Of course we all know something is always there.

There were deviations. Few of the second-generation respondents I interviewed disagreed with the idea that second-generation Ethiopians who claim that “they are blind to it” are in “denial.” Redi argued that Ethiopians have “a complete misunderstanding of racism, and white hegemony.” He thinks that those Ethiopians who told me that they did not “experience racism do not have a direct contact with the rest of the Americans. A lot of

people who work service jobs, manual jobs, are people of color. You have it in front of you.

We need to understand the complicated realities of racism and [the] race-matrix in America.”

In relation to the above narratives Beza recalled specific instances where she experienced racism.

Beza: “I look at them skeptically”

You know how racism operates. It is more subtle. I remember, okay. I was insulted in a way. It was not towards me. I was at work and this white guy decided to say something offensive. He was one of my co-workers. It was in this small town in Pennsylvania which is really racist. He said, “It is not that I do not like black people, I hate niggers.” I was like, I am like, what? What did you say? He just repeated and all that. I told him do not ever say that again. I was trying to scold him. Because I knew him and I knew how stupid he was. I even went to the manger, “Do you know what he just said?” He reprimanded him or something. It was not towards me but it was towards my race. In another circumstance in a hospital these real rednecks [were] in the waiting room. I was with my ex-boyfriend. I heard him whisper like something, something. I just shut up and waited for the doctor. Every time I see certain people that I suspect that they are right from the country I look at them skeptically. They are probably racist. There probably are many such cases but I did not notice.

Despite such divergences in how second-generation respondents understood and experienced race and racism, there were some commonalities in how they responded to these topics. Many of them take great pride in their parents’ heritage. They often compare themselves favorably to African Americans, pointing out that African Americans experience the brunt of racism in the United States. There was also some resemblance with the way the first generation coped with racism. I heard statements such as “I ignored it,” “It was that one time but I moved on,” and “I do not let it get under my skin.” Beth in fact joked and laughed a lot about what she called “name calling,” saying that what she experienced was directed to the wrong person or dismissing it as simply “stupid.” None of the second generation tends to see

excessive concern about racism as detracting from the hard work necessary for achieving the American dream. Helina, whose mother works as a World Bank expert, stated, “Mom always says you have to do well. Education is very, very, very pushed.” She described her mother’s standard: “If your friends read one book, you have to read two. That would be like a hundred percent ahead of others.” This strategy is clearly a mechanism for compensating for and overcoming racial barriers to upward mobility.

Lived Hybridity: Second-Generation Cultural Competencies

From their narratives most second-generation Ethiopians do not feel that they belong to a specific ethnic and racial group. Although they were critical of some of the values, ideas, and orientations of their parents, they were equally critical of the values of American society at large, as much as they embrace much of it. How does the second generation cultivate a feeling of belonging in their daily experiences? In their narratives they express how comfortable they were about sharing more than one worldview. “Ethiopians often say I mean like, you know, ‘You are not really Ethiopian, are you? You are very much Americanized.’ I agree I am even if it is a misrepresentation of who I am. Here on campus my American friends comment, ‘You are so Ethiopian.’ I really am not *so* something. There is always another side to me. I am simply Beza, an Ethiopian American. I do not like to typecast myself.”

Instead of being typecast and confused by the concern of others that they do not fit an ethnic mold, the second generation demonstrates greater cultural competencies that help them navigate among different identity groups. Fournon and Glick Schiller (2002:176) stated, “As young people mature they develop multiple, overlapping, and simultaneous identities and deploy them in relation to events they experience at home, at school, at work, in the country

of their birth, and in the country of ancestry.” Some scholars use the terms “cognitive flexibilities,” and “cultural chameleons” to explain the scenario of being able to adapt to the demands of different situations and contexts. Skrbiš et al. (2007) used the concept of negotiating identities.

However, my research findings do not always fit the prevalent academic models. Most of my respondents were not comfortable with the concept of “negotiating identities.” Hymie criticized the basis of the concept. “I have nothing to negotiate as to who I am. I am not fooling anyone. Negotiating does not sound right to me. I am simply comfortable living my lives. It is natural.” Bersa put it clearly: “For me it is not putting on a dress and taking it off. I am an American and I am an Ethiopian. *I cannot live without both.*” For them the concepts that explain their lives more accurately would be “blending” or what Alma M. Garcia (2004) described as—“palimpsest of identities” in her study of second generation Mexicans. “Identity,” Garcia (2004: 26) argues “emerges as writing on individual “manuscripts” in which layers of texts can appear, reappear, and disappear only to appear once again.” My respondents saw such strategies and situations as “natural”; to them, they are made unnatural only by those who have a singular ethnic identity.

The following three narratives may elucidate if not represent what seems to be at stake as the second generation does and performs belonging. For instance, Hyme not only sketched the everyday experiences of moving between different sets of identities but she saw her ability to juggle different expectations as something “normal.”

Hymie: “They would simply think I am a bicultural woman”

We immigrated as a family. I grew up with my twin sisters and my only brother. I am the oldest. Even though we left in 1977, we still speak Amharic at home. My best friends were my sisters and my brother, even though I have so many other friends. I went to school with Americans

and I work with them. After school and work I go back to my base—my family. To be honest with you, I can be with Americans and they would never know if I have an Ethiopian background. Even if they come to know, they would simply think I am a bicultural woman. I do not feel like I am divided. I do not feel like I am acting. You have your culture at home. You take a break to go to school where you mingle with non-Ethiopians. At the end of the day you come back home again. The cycle continues. For me it is just normal, I do not feel split.

In many ways, Beth presents the lived experiences of many second generation Ethiopians. She explained how her parents put a lot of pressure on her to hold onto Ethiopian culture. At the same time, they often treat and expect her to be an intermediary, broker and perhaps a cross-cultural interpreter when it comes to American ways of life. Interestingly, Americans consider her as an expert or as their point person on Ethiopia because of her roots. Her narratives may elucidate the situation clearly.

Beth: "I am stuck in the middle"

I have my Ethiopian roots and I have my American roots. If you take me to Ethiopia they may look at me as an American. I do not hold that against them. I am a little bit different in terms of understanding the culture. I speak the language but there are times I may miss the nuances. When I went to Ethiopia I hated how women were treated. In a restaurant I had to wait for minutes before I [could] place my order. They assume[d] that I [was] waiting for a man. Girls were harassed on the street. Here in the U.S. at the workplace people are looking at me as an Ethiopian woman. I am no less an American. My English-language ability and my understanding of American cultures may not matter to some people. I do not object to it. I am the local expert on Ethiopia. "Hey Beth, what is happening in Ethiopia these days?" Americans value the aspect of Ethiopian cultures I bring in. At home I [am a] consultant and answer questions on America. It could be anything about America. They at least think I am more American than they were. I am stuck in the middle.

I was also interested in how specifically they interact with different ethnic and social groups in the United States. By that I meant how their blending of cultures—perhaps "lived

hybridity” best describes how they emphasize elements of “volition and agency in boundary and identity construction and transgression” (Brettell and Nibbs 2009: 680) and how they wrestle with that on a daily basis. The following three responses explicate and demonstrate their understanding of the expectations of different identity groups and how their blended identities play out.

Neb explained how over the years he learned how to behave in terms of the social groups he interacts with. While he understands and adopted some the behaviors and styles of African Americans and white Americans he maintains his Ethiopianess. As he put it, “You have to be bold enough to cross the borders but you do what makes everybody comfortable without compromising your moral grounds and get on with your life.” He further elaborated the nuances of balancing while traversing borders.

Let me tell you I can live with African Americans much [more] comfortably. African Americans—they size you up and measure somebody. That is to see how tough you are. They want to see what you have been through, to see your strength and to see where you stand in a sense. They will stare you down to test if you look down. They push you back hard, real hard. And if you look down it is a sign of weakness. It means that you were born to be taken advantage of. If you show contempt that means you are prejudiced. You need to look them straight in the eye, confident, even when they make fun of you. Over time it is easier for them to take you in. Stereotypically speaking I do not wear pants all the way down to be in. I wear baggy pants. It is comfortable but not to the extent where it is ridiculous. You see, I would not do things to the extremes.

Whites are more receptive and welcoming, initially. The curiosity seems huge. I have been told by Ethiopian immigrants in Europe that Europeans are very curious too. They ask you and bombard you with thousands of questions. Once they learn who you are they leave you alone. Probably this is not the same for everybody across [the] board. I meet them at the workplace. We are [on] good terms. For most of them, at least those in my circle, everyone is business minded. I too am business minded.

In his extensive narrative Teddy makes clear three important points in his life and by extension the lives of many second generation Ethiopians. First, he showed lived hybridity is dynamic and continuous process as he builds what he called identity “box.” Second, he underscored that there is no confusion whatsoever in combining and merging identities. Third, despite heuristic constructions of African American, Ethiopian and American identities as standalone, he emphasized there is a lot of overlaps and interdependencies.

Teddy: “Maybe it is a box; I made it to fit in.”

I have been telling you how I acquired my identities and moved on as I grew up. For far a long time I only identified myself as Ethiopian. When I was 13 years old my parents moved to Woodbridge, Va. Woodbridge is a majority white place. I grew up more with whites and speaking proper English. American history was the subject I love most. My real hero, to tell you the truth, was the United States general from the confederacy. I later came to know that the man was fighting to keep the slavery intact, you know. I said good to know.

When I went to college I started appreciating the real African American history and culture; not the jaded one I experienced when I was young. I started identifying with some of it. I started reading books like Malcolm, Martin Luther King, Jr. and a bunch of other civil right icons. I started seeing myself as being part of African Americans. Of course I am an Ethiopian. I lagged behind doing my assignment learning Ethiopian culture. After years of isolation living in a small city I am beginning to find my place in the Ethiopian community. Now and here I feel like I am walking an invisible line, you know, between being Ethiopian and being black, or if you wish between being Ethiopian, being American, and being African American. I always feel that I am walking the tightrope. I think that is a good thing.

I do not believe separate ethnic identities exist out there. Certainly there are lots of overlaps and interdependencies. For me my language changes depending who I talk to, where I am, and what I am doing. [When] I go to my African American friends, I speak like them. I say, “Hey what’s up dawg?” We hang out with friends to watch football and we drink beer and curse, right? I go to work, I act differently. I speak proper English and [get] dressed up. When you go to work, no cursing and of course you do not drink beer. [Smiles]. I go home and act like a homey. So I change, so it depends. . . . You are asking me if I am triangulating? How do I answer this question? May be not, you know. I do not know if it is a triangle or a box. May be it is a box; *I made* it to fit

in. For me only, you know, in life different circumstances and different situations mean that you [are] acting based on situations. That just is part of life. Like I said, I do not see myself as unique and different from any American.

Finally, Asfaw concludes using President Obama as a metaphor and an embodiment of a lived hybridity. In doing that he showed how people based on their race, migration trajectories, and religion relate to Obama. His idea that lived hybridity as the future of America and as something dynamic rather than an “archaic monolithic” are very interesting.

Asfaw: “Converting none of the above into all of the above”

I am sure the question of identity is confusing particularly when you are so young. I sometimes think of Barack Obama. In some ways when you look at his life history he is not really an African American the way we know it. He is not an African and [he is not] white. What did he do? He converted none of the above into all of the above. He married an African American and worked in an African American neighborhood—of all places Southside Chicago. He became an African American. For African immigrants because of his father he is an African. Obviously he grew up as a white kid. Because of his white mother most white people relate to him. Everybody has got a portion of what they like about him. He puts himself as, I am black, I am white, and I am everything. The unification was around him. Of course he is his own person. His understanding of all these cultures and the ability to articulate these cultures is fundamental. All of us may be not be [as] incredibly sophisticated as Obama is but we are heading in the same direction. I do not have the archaic monolithic view of who I am and where I belong.

Three things clearly emerged from the extensive conversations I had with these second-generation Ethiopians. First is the fact that they are not “pale reflections” of a particular and normative identity group, be it African American, Ethiopian, or American. Second, they seem comfortable in different settings and contexts. Furthermore, and in fact importantly, most of them understand that their identities are contingent and capable of

changing over time. In conclusion, second-generation Ethiopian Americans do not consider themselves to be a generation in decline or think of themselves as segmented into three exclusive groups, as researchers such as Portes (2009) and colleagues contend. Having grown up where cultures intersect and overlap, they see themselves as well equipped with resources that enable them to blend and juggle identities. They draw upon the appropriate aspects of multifaceted identities to meet particular situations. What echoes through the chapter is the fact that the second generation cannot be pigeonholed into one culture. Their identities, their lives, and their thinking make sense in terms of both Ethiopian and America identities. They have components of both identities, a duality that is desirable in a globalized world.

Chapter-7

Images of an Injured Home and Second-Generation Immigrant Transnationalism

The most exciting question, one that remains unanswered, in relation to the New Second Generation is not only the kind of identities they construct and reconstruct it is rather how transnationally invested and involved they are. Do they send remittances? Are they involved in transnational political activities? How do they express their connections, concerns and commitments to the ancestral land? In most cases the study of second generation transnationalism has yielded either skepticism about or only lukewarm acceptance of the reality of the experiences of second-generation transnationals (see, Levitt and Waters 2002). Thus, they tend to reject the likelihood that contemporary transnational practices will be reproduced beyond first generation migrants (Guanizo and Smith 1998:17; Lee 2008). However, there are at least two major problems with the study of the second generation transnationalism. As Lee (2008, 10) clearly observed “there is less explicit emphasis on” their transnational connections beyond a sharp focus on their experiences in the host country. Indeed, the New Second generation is just now “expanding and maturing” (Levitt and Waters 2002:3) and that it is too early to make any conclusions about their level of commitments to their ancestral lands. Moreover, several researchers published empirical evidence that suggests that the second generation is indeed committed to transnationalism (Levitt 2009).

Regardless, the fact that most of my respondents overwhelmingly were connected to their homelands and that the connection was an integral part of their identities made me to focus on second generation transnationalism. Particularly, my initial interview with Bersa and later other second-generation Ethiopians compelled me to change course and to focus instead upon exploring the transnational *practices* of second-generation Ethiopian Americans. In her disarming and compelling testimonial Bersa, 25, said, “I have two kids to take care of

in Ethiopia. These are not my kids, my kids, no! These are HIV-orphaned kids that I have been sponsoring through a nongovernmental organization. I pay for their school fees and stuff. The root reason why I am doing it is because it is my mom's desire. I started [doing this] to please my mom. She is like a community ringleader. It is legit. I get to talk to them over the phone once in a while. I believe if we just sacrifice a cup of latte that most Ethiopians love at least once a week, I guarantee you we can make a difference in the lives of a few children around the world.”

In this chapter, I explore the transnational practices of second-generation Ethiopian Americans. What kinds of transnational activities do these young people participate in? What motivates the second generation to be part of transitional social field? What is the chance and how do contemporary transnational practices will be reproduced beyond first generation migrants? What strategies are put in place by their parents, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), or even the Ethiopian government to draw the second generation into transnational ties? I also assess how the transnationalism of the second generation relates to and differs from that of the first generation. Because second-generation transnationalism could have long-lasting effects—for this generation itself, for the United States, and for their parents' countries of origin, it merits further research.

Doubts and Debates about Second Generation Transnationalism

Given the short time span of immigrant transnationalism as a research topic, a great deal has been done to define, refine and develop the scope of transnational studies. (See Levitt and Jaworsky 2007; and Vertovec 2007 for superb reviews of the transnational literatures and recent developments.) Nonetheless, just as the topic of transnationalism has largely been neglected in the studies of the experiences of the first-generation immigrants, the second-

generation transnational connection has attracted only modest attention (Lee 2008:10). For example, Michael Smith and Luis Guarnizo (1998), whose ground-breaking work identified future directions in transnational studies, did not focus on the second generation as an area of study.

Several studies have begun to explore the issue of transnationalism among members of today's second generation. One of the first questions that emerged was the extent to which members of the second generation directly participate in transnational activities. This focus on quantitative data seemed to present an obstacle to further inquiry. Rumbaut's longitudinal survey data (2002:90) found that "only ten percent" of NSG immigrants are transnationally active. Based on these numbers, he chose not to explore more substantive research into the topic of transnationalism. He argued that because children of immigrants unlike their parents do not have a strong feeling about the home their family had lost, their transnationalism would not be on par with that of their parents. Nevertheless, other researchers suggest that the second generation has its own ways of being transnational. The 10 percent survey finding does not imply that transnational practices will all but disappear among the second generation (Jones-Correa 2002; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007; Haller and Landolt 2005; Lee 2008). Today over 23 million members of the new second generation live in the United States. If we accept Rumbaut's finding of 10 percent, that would mean that approximately 2.3 million members of this generation have a regular pattern of transnational behavior (Jones-Correa 2002). In fact 2.3 million is not an insignificant number. Of course, transnationalism is unevenly distributed, and some immigrant groups are more transnational than others (Kasinitz et al. 2008).

Two recent publications have provided significant forays into the subject of second-generation transnationalism. In *The Changing Face of Home: The Transnational Lives of the*

Second Generation, Levitt and Waters (2002:3), in what they called “first round of research on the transnational practices of the second generation,” extensively discussed how many young people are engaged in transnational social fields, as did most of the contributors to the volume. Similarly, in, *Ties to the Homeland: Second Generation Transnationalism*, Helen Lee (2008) and her colleagues have made another major contribution to this literature. Their work injected much-needed momentum into research on the second generation. Their work on second-generation transnationalism moves beyond the strong focus on North American by drawing on research with a number of migrant communities in Australia.

The major points that emerge from a review of the literature on second-generation transnationality are the following. First (and this is the dominant claim), is the argument that transnationalism is not “central” to the lives of the second generation. However, some scholars based on fresh studies argue that, second generation transnational practices “emerge in unexpected forms in unexpected places” (Levitt 2001b:12). The second claim is that transnationalism may exist but it is mostly at an “emotional” (Wolf 2002:259) or “symbolic” (Espiritu and Tran 2002:367) level. In particular, these researchers emphasize how the children of immigrants experience their parents’ home mostly as an integral part of socialization that creates a “transnational family” (Bryceson and Vuorela 2002; Wilding 2008; Giorgas 2008; Aranda 2007). In other words, much of the scholarly analysis seems to focus on how transnational living shapes the formation of identity.

I argue, as others have, that more often than not transnationalism experienced at the level of socialization and growing up in a transnational family may lead to concrete actions (see Fouron and Glick Schiller 2001; Lee 2008). In what particular ways symbolic transnationalism translates into action and identification with a homeland produces deeds

remains a thick empirical question. Helen Lee (2007:17) introduced the notion of “indirect transnationalism.” She argues that when members of an immigrant group retain ties with “their ethnic groups in the host nation they are likely be part of a web of transnational ties even without direct involvement with the home nation.” This could include participating in ceremonial events, donating money for a transnational cause and contributing money as part of the family’s collective remittances, making home visits, and so forth (Lee 2008, 2007; Espiritu and Tran 2002; Fouron and Glick Schiller 2002; Smith 2002).

Here I am more concerned with *the factors that motivate and cultivate transnational connections* than I am with such activities per se. As I have just mentioned some researchers appreciate the role of families and the “institutional completeness” of immigrants as a major driving force behind transnational activities (Kibria 2009; Menjivar 2002; Wolf 2002; Louie 2006). The presence of active and robust first-generation associations and organizations in the diaspora such as religious institutions and ethnic spaces make available ideas, information, and elements of popular culture that draw the second generation into the transnational social field. Vickerman (2002:362) cautions, however, us not to invest ourselves too much in immigrant institutions as the major impetus. Based on the experiences of West Indian immigrants in New York, he argues that robust ethnic enclaves and ethnic institutions may “undermine their incentive to maintain contact” by creating a “homelike” situation in the United States.

The most important and most commonly cited factor behind transnationalism seems to be the discrimination and prejudice that second-generation immigrants experience. Ethnographic studies that look into the lives of second-generation Koreans, Filipinos, Chinese, and Indians in the United States show two intersecting dynamics. First, many

members of these immigrant groups have been appreciated as model minorities in the United States, a factor that encourages them to emphasize their roots. Conversely, sometimes they also face racism (for example, they are often referred to as the “yellow hordes”), which in some ways and depending on the context may compel them to disassociate themselves from their roots (Kibria 2002a, 2002b). Much more than “Asian Americans,” Hispanics and Blacks encounter strong prejudices in the United States. In fact, many parents realize the kinds of racialization that await their children, and as a response to negative racial experiences, they make sure that their offspring remain connected to their ancestral land. Connections to ancestral land that starts as identity constructions may translate itself into courting, building homes, making investments and other forms of commitments (Smith 2006; Espiritu 2002; Kibria 2009).

The efforts of parents to have their children express pride in their roots may not always work in the face of discrimination and social exclusion. Often second-generation immigrants may respond to the weight of such experiences by distancing and disassociating themselves from their parents’ homeland. Studies of contemporary African immigrants illustrate this dynamic. D’Alisera’s (2009) study of second-generation Sierra Leoneans and Awokoya’s (2009) work on Nigerian youth reveal how, regardless of the parents’ country of origin, images of Africa in U.S. media and society haunt efforts to cultivate transnational involvement among children. In addition to the persistent prejudices that have accumulated about Africa for centuries, parents must help their children come to grips with an image of Africa that focuses on disease, corruption, and violence (Rwanda and Darfur are two haunting examples). These images make many second-generation immigrants ashamed of their roots. Most of them distance themselves from and sometimes even disown their ancestral land.

D'Alisera (2009) notes Sierra Leonean youth who confront negative popular images about Sierra Leone. Children of parents from Ethiopia encounter the pervasive image of their ancestral land as poor and "famine-ravaged." Unlike Sierra Leonean and Nigerian children, however, many young Ethiopians report that they nurse the image of an "injured home," fending off what one of my sources calls "biased Discovery Channel knowledge." In effect, they assume the role of *cultural ambassadors*, often emphasizing the positive aspects of their parents' country.

Scholarship on second-generation transnational activities needs to take note of what specifically motivates transnationalism. First, we need to look at the heterogeneity of the age cohort of the immigrant community of the second generation. Waters and Jimenez (2005: 121) wrote about "immigrant replenishment." Although most second-generation children were born here, many more young immigrants are arriving each day. Those born here are influenced by newcomers as much as they influence the newcomers. The result is that the second generation is shaped by both this youthful generation of new immigrants and by their parents' generation, so that their influences by the homeland are no longer simply a linear transmission of information from one generation to the next (Waters and Jimenez 2005; Levitt and Jaworsky 2007:134). Such heterogeneities doubtless contribute to transnational involvement (Smith 2006; Jones-Correa 2002). Waters (1999) reports that West Indian second generation migrants, particularly those who were born abroad and immigrated to the US at an early age seem to have strong ties with the sending country. She argues that the latter group are more transnational than those born into their new country. If we accept that supposition, evidence in this study of a transnational identity and transnational activities should be found largely among the foreign born. However, Haller and Landolt (2005) as well as Itzigsohn

(2009) did not see any correlation between place of birth and transnational connection. This finding raises questions that would be interesting to explore.

Second, we also need to look at how the sending country's civil organizations as well as the sending state target and pull second-generation immigrants into transnational spheres. Giorgas (2008) notes that when the prime minister of Greece visited Australia, he targeted the second generation. He specifically announced the Greek government's intention to forge social, economic and trade ties between Australia and Greece by securing links with its expatriates and their children. In the following sections I discuss how the second generation are part of transnational networks which includes traveling to Ethiopia to locate ones roots to participating in American politics in order to influence ancestral land political developments.

Finding and Locating "Second Home": "I almost overlooked poverty"

As part of symbolic transnationalism, or symbolizing a start of transnational connection, travel to the country of origin, particularly by the second generation, has come to be one of the best (and most objective) indicators of cross-border engagement. Much to my surprise, nineteen out of twenty two second-generation consultants had visited Ethiopia at least once. If I include Bersa, who visited Ethiopia twice (first at the early age of six and then again at age ten) but who feels in her own words "cheated" because she did not go there for "a real visit," the number of the members of the second generation who had *never* been to Ethiopia would drop to only two. In all cases initial trips were organized by their parents although subsequent visits were arranged by themselves. That being said I describe their first encounters, the social relations, and categories they use to describe relations to the people and nation state of Ethiopia that discern model of interaction and action.

Bersa: "I feel cheated"

Let me begin with the story of Bersa. She thinks a "real visit" is when you go there for a purpose—to see places, learn the language, and enjoy the stay. Speaking in fluent Amharic she explains,

It has been a long time since I have been to Ethiopia. When I was six and the last time, it is embarrassing, it was when I was 10 years old. It was 16 years ago. I feel cheated when I answer the question, "Hey, have you been to Ethiopia?" Yes, but it was not for fun and happiness. Because the two times I went there, it was because my maternal relatives died. It was a time of sadness and mourning. Obviously I do not remember everything. My older cousins took me out, and I remember walking around Piassa [the downtown of the capital city]. I have to go back. Now would have been a perfect opportunity for me, because I have no real job and I am not in school. The thing is, I need money to spend. [Laughs.] I have to get a real job first.

In terms of how many times my respondents had traveled to Ethiopia and for how long, two times seem very common. Many stayed there anywhere between two weeks and three months, the latter being the most frequent. One informant traveled more than six times within the past couple of years. Spending several summers in Ethiopia, as Neb did, would appear to be uncommon and exceptional. Quantitative-based researchers suggest that in order to call travel transnational, it should occur more than twice and that the duration of stay must be at least six months or more (Kasinitz et al. 2008:386, 259). This six-month cut-off point seems arbitrary to me. Evidently, a single visit that may last only two weeks might have a more profound impact than a yearlong stay. Indeed, despite (and perhaps because of) the fact that two of my consultants have never traveled to Ethiopia, they seem to be engaged in homebound activities as discussed below.

Teddy: "It is complicated"

The experience of Teddy, who never traveled to Ethiopia since he came to the United States, is conversant with what I have stated above. He came to the United States at the age of seven. He noted, "My life in Ethiopia was a movie because it happened a long time ago." He intends to travel but distrusts the political climate. He imagines actual travel or travels by imagination in this way:

I can imagine when I go out to Ethiopia. I think it is going to be such a culture shock because the Ethiopia of the 1980s is completely different from what it is now. I will see my neighborhood. I will visit my school and the house I was born in. The movie becomes a reality. It is going to be a big deal. It is exciting and scary at the same time. It is like living in a jail. I am not saying that living here is like a jail. When prisoner[s] live in prison they become hesitant to be a free people. They do not know how to adapt. Going to Ethiopia is like freedom for me. How do you connect with that? I do not know. It is complicated.

However, Teddy seems to be active in transnational spheres in terms of concrete practices. He promotes Ethiopian cultures and Ethiopian businesses to wider American consumers. He also works hard to recalibrate the historical relationship between Ethiopian Americans and African Americans. More importantly, as we see below, he organizes Ethiopians to be involved in United States political system.

With respondents who had traveled to Ethiopia, I discussed the reasons for their travel, how they were received in Ethiopia, to what degree they felt they belonged in their homeland, how their visits influenced their perception of Ethiopia, both negatively and positively and if travel influenced them to be engaged in concrete transnational actions. Each of them had unique experiences, yet in some ways their experiences overlapped. It is interesting to note that their perceptions, expectations, and evaluation of Ethiopia in some ways were reflective of and shaped by how well they have integrated in the United States. Indeed, being at home

or being well integrated in the U.S.A. and lack of cultural proficiency rarely decreased the need or value of Ethiopia as a second home.

I will begin by focusing on their overall impression during first visits to Ethiopia. Here the contrasts in terms of the impressions of and receptions were stark—from a “heavenly” feeling to feeling like being “squeezed”; from “I was forced to leave” to “I could not wait to leave.”

Impressions of and Receptions in Ethiopia

Selam: “I kind of overlooked poverty”

For Selam, being in Ethiopia felt like “heaven.” She emphasized the positive while she did not conceal the negative aspects. According to her, some people may only see the “negative part,” but she was not there for “balanced” reporting. She narrates,

When I went there I was able to enjoy my stay. I felt the unique breeze of air and I had a different taste for the food and water. I really felt when I got there the grass is greener and the sky really is more blue. It felt like something different. It felt like heaven—that is what it felt like. Even though it was, like, there were bad things happening around me. I tell you what. Poverty is very real. It is very strange to see poverty at that level—street kids roaming the city, homeless people, beggars, etc. In some ways Addis Ababa is no different from the ghettos of Atlanta. After I returned from Ethiopia, I was on a college hunt. I have been to several places in the U.S. The poverty level I saw in Atlanta was haunting. In Ethiopia even if I saw poverty all around me I kind of overlooked it. It was more like there’s got to be something we can do about this. You know what I mean? It was not the only thing that I saw. It did not control what I saw. It did not control my experience, and I did not let it control me.

Selam tend to point to poverty in the United States or specifically “ghettos of Atlanta,” as she called it to indicate that poverty is not uniquely an Ethiopian phenomenon. Seeing rampant poverty inspired her to take action than distance herself from her ancestral land. Others were not as impressed as Selam. Their levels of analysis and perception were

different. They pointed out how some of what they found and saw was “intolerable.” Beth liked the first time she went to Ethiopia. It “approximated” something her mother described to her growing up. Yet her personal experiences were less than idyllic. “When I walked down the street, I could not walk a block by myself, for God’s sake. Teens would point out and say things that were so irritating to me. *In my own country* I could not walk a block alone. That was very hurtful to me and needs to change.” I asked her, “Is it because you were a woman?” “Partly, I would say it was,” she responded. “They also know who is an outsider. Do not ask me how. I cannot wait to leave as much as I cannot wait to visit again.” In addition Beth humorously commented about how “the cars looked like toys to me, although I saw some good cars. Everything in Ethiopia is small—everything. The roads are very narrow and crowded. Maybe I am used to spacious and large things here. I really felt squeezed when I rode in city taxis.”

The squeeze that Beth talked about was not just in terms of space. At the level of interpersonal interactions the boundaries became clearer. Despite huge excitement and “heavenly feelings,” some were astonished that “going home” was not followed by a heroic welcome. It seems that they somehow expected praise for simply coming home, speaking the language, knowing some facts about Ethiopia, eating Ethiopian spicy food or displaying “bits and pieces” of Ethiopian cultures as Selam stated. In fact and ironically enough, the expectations and the degree of disenchantment were higher among second-generation Ethiopians who spoke and displayed some Ethiopian culture but did not “get a passing grade” for their linguistic competence. In several instances relatives questioned their Ethiopianness and treated them as “guests.” Few refrained from challenging their challengers by asking them “tough questions,” as Alex put it, about the history and cultures of Ethiopia.

For instance, Selam speaks Amharic very well and repeatedly calls Ethiopia a “home.” During her first visit to Ethiopia, however, it was not the homecoming she had imagined, at least for a few weeks. She was one of those second-generation Ethiopians who anticipated a heroic welcome. Instead, she was treated as “a stranger” and was even, in her own words, “scolded.” She found Ethiopians “very snobbish,” including her close relatives. “My cousins tipped me [off about] how to have fun, what to expect and what not to expect. But when I went to Ethiopia it was not fun. Some of my father’s relatives looked at me as if I am a stranger, for real. First, it is almost like I am a traitor or a sellout. I do not know what I lacked in their eyes. I am not delusional of my being American but I should have gotten at least a passing mark for my efforts to learn the language,” she said. Her family, who used to doubt her Ethiopanness in the United States, came to her aid when the outside pressure continued. “If anybody says, ‘Oh, this is your American daughter,’ and they somehow try to make fun of me—bad news for them. My father warned them not to question me. They took me in gradually. It is part of the reason why I feel Ethiopian—because I have my parents’ endorsement, you know what I mean. I am an Ethiopian because they said so.” During her three-month stay, “the snobbishness,” “the unfriendliness,” and all the negative initial responses evaporated. “They quickly got over it and I was happy they gradually welcomed me. They knew that I am not pretending and I genuinely wanted to belong,” as she put it.

Unlike most members of the second generation who rush to historic places in Ethiopia such as Axum (Ethiopia’s first-century AD capital city), Lalibela (the location of twelfth-century rock-hewn churches), Selam wanted to develop closeness and intimacy with her father’s relatives who, according to her, look like her. “I did not want to travel around. I wanted to feel like I was part of them, hang out with them and be part of them. I wanted to

know them. I stayed right there with my relatives in the same house all summer.” The desire to be part of her father’s family had an impact. It made her not want to leave Ethiopia and to begin to see herself working in Ethiopia. “I was literally forced to leave. I did not want to go. I begged my mother to stay. I was so angry when I left. I really felt at home there. It was very strange. I felt that that is where I belong, you know. When I came back to this country I cut my hair off and dyed it orange. I was pissed. I was 17 and that was my little rebellion, to cut my hair. I just felt like I was not American any more. I tell you, now if I would go back, I will be fine. If I just leave today and knock on their door tomorrow, it would be a big deal, because I stayed long enough for them to love me and for me to love them.”

In contrast, two of my respondents who have integrated in the United States and do not speak Amharic noted they did not understand the cultural nuances. They were surprised, however, at how they were received compared to how they were treated by Ethiopians in the United States. It was not because they were not seen as “foreigners.” They had had an easier time in Ethiopia than in Washington, D.C. They explained how they were more often tormented and scoffed at for being “too American” in D.C. than in Ethiopia. Tsion stated, “If I am rejected in D.C., I thought it would be unlikely that they [would] embrace me in Ethiopia. In fact, I was appreciated for trying to speak and the fact that I ate the traditional food. Maybe they already had less expectation of me.”

Asfaw: “I felt warm, connected . . .”

Asfaw too was amazed at the positive welcome. “I am a foreign[er] within [the] Ethiopian American community here. I knew I would be treated like a person from another planet in Ethiopia.” However, akin to Tsion he noted, “The further I go to the roots—small towns and rural areas, the more welcome and warm the feelings were.” The experience allows

h to call Ethiopia “home,” although he had imagined that going to Ethiopia would be the same as going to any other of the African countries he had visited.

I went to many places in Ethiopia. I took a bus and visited Tigrai, Dire Dawa, Gonder and other cities in between. I just did my own expedition north and south. I had very little friction with the locals. They said, “Where are you from?” I told them I am from America, but my dad is an Ethiopian. I do not speak Amharic and they do not speak English. We spoke in whatever Amharic I had. They took me in. Obviously, we got along. They are country people; they are not from D.C. or Addis Ababa. We went out and drank *teji* [local beer], and they told me lots of stories. I am not sure if I have understood all of it, but I really enjoyed my stay. I have traveled in other African countries. I *thought* it was just an extension of things I have done. Actually, I felt warm, connected and got the sense of being at home. I plan to spend two to three weeks in Ethiopia in the future. I would also like to help professionally. I would rather do it in Ethiopia than Malawi. Ethiopia is my other home, you know. For me the problems and the judgment start in Addis Ababa and gets rough in D.C. Ethiopians might be feeling discriminated against, somehow disadvantaged in the U.S. They are fighting to maintain their own culture, and they are protecting certain things about themselves. Here is a guy who is not fighting that war.

Like Asfaw and Tsion, who spoke little Amharic but felt accepted, even “appreciated,” Alem and Alex were also very “assimilated,” to use their own word. Both had an easy time but called their visits “anti-romantic,” to use Alex’s term. For him much of the frustration was because he was “over prepared” for the trip. Like Alex and Alem, most second-generation Ethiopians were surprised because people were asking them more about America than they could tell them about Ethiopia. Moreover, the cultures and people’s behavior were far from the “traditional culture” they had imagined.

Alex: “They told me the country is not for me”

For Alex, much of Ethiopia, particularly in the capital, resembled New York City.

“My visits were anti-romantic, to be honest with you. I went to these small towns and visited

centuries-old monasteries. Look, I am a history major and took a course in religious studies. Nothing surprised me. Much of what I saw was what I had read. People invited me into their homes and cooked me dinner. That was great.” Yet he also found that he was not easily accepted or trusted.

In the city, the degree of interpersonal interrelationships in my opinion is like New York City. You are equal people, but nine out of ten people see you based on what they see on the outside, and immediately make a move on those assumptions. They wanted to know who I am. I told them as much as they should know—that I am a half white and half Habasha person. I told them too that I have a plan to start a business in Ethiopia to help myself. People really annoyed me. I do not know why people did not buy what I was telling them. They did not understand why I was there. They told me the country is not for me and discouraged me. I regret when I tell you this—People do not appreciate the true worth of the country. They may not tell you basic information about Ethiopia as much as they like to talk about America. Snap.

Similarly, visiting many relatives and the intensity of the intimacy expressed by hosts created discomfort for some respondents. They explained that being “hugged and kissed” was a bit of inconvenient for them, although they were familiar with this aspect of Ethiopian culture in the United States. Alem stated that the intimacy was “too much.” The intimacy he experienced with his relatives was almost controlling. “I did not get the chance to explore as many places as I thought possible. They did not let me travel on my own because they thought something bad could happen to me. They wanted to oversee everything I do because I do not speak the language. They did not allow me to discover places by myself. They know it is intimate but it was too much. Next time I visit I will be on my own.” Furthermore, Alem saw how the tenderness that he received from people he did not “know” almost created culture clash. “My fifteen days visit was spent in procession. We were moving from one relative’s house to the other. I went with my older sister who is also fluent in Amharic. She got me

through. I just basically spent my time visiting people I did not even know. The people who welcomed us knew my parents, and they gave me hugs and kisses. They asked me too many questions about my dad and mom. I was like why do not they ask my sister who speaks Amharic.” In fact, kinship, love, and positive affect seem to provide the foundation of identity and provided endearing connection although the cultural differences were significant.

Most of my respondents explained that they went to Ethiopia because they just wanted to know what the country and the people looked like—the phenomenon now called roots tourism. Other than that, learning the cultures and language, doing business, and being part of development activities were also mentioned.

Importantly, at the end of their visits, most of my respondents said that they had located their identities, most of them felt that they had two homes and they will help Ethiopia in any way they can. However, they saw some contradictions between their perceptions of Ethiopia and how they were perceived there. For Elias, whose father is an African American and whose mother is an Ethiopian, going to Ethiopia helped him “discover” that Ethiopians were indeed blacks. He was able to see cultural similarities between Ethiopians and the rest of Africans and African Americans. “When I was in Ethiopia I saw this kid with chains on his belt and a cross on his chest. He played guitar with me and I rapped with this guy. The kid never left Ethiopia. Now if he was to be in America, folks may not identify him as an Ethiopian. How can you make a dude who has never left Ethiopia his entire life and call him non-Ethiopian. We also should stop thinking about this monolithic approach to what it means to be an Ethiopian.” He conflated and highlighted the cultural commonalities of Ethiopian, African and African American identities versus many other second generation Ethiopians who stressed the cultural uniqueness of Ethiopia. He elaborates,

Go to Africa this day. What is the actual hair style, dress style, etc? For better or worse, what is the average African kid from rural or urban area dressed like? What is his talk like? How is he dressed like and aspire to be? We should not necessarily say and deny someone because he is not this and he is not that. Look at African Americans here. Cornrows are still rampant. Why did they beat out of them that hard for 300 years and there is still something just left? What happens is that that something ends up becoming the most African thing possible in him. In a weird twist of fate, he ends up becoming the prototypical African.

For most of my respondents, going to Ethiopia gave them answers about how and why Ethiopians and even neighboring Eritreans think they are Habasha—culturally even interracially different from members of other African ethnic groups. Compared to Elias above it was as if they were looking at two images of Ethiopia. Neb stated, “I finally found people who really look like me.” Even Beza who felt inconvenienced and got angry because Ethiopians treated her as an “outsider,” relayed how going to Ethiopia helped her to find her roots. She said of Ethiopian identity, “You kind of clench it and seize it,” as if it is a fetish object or commodity.

Beza: “The Horn of Africa in general is similar”

Beza, had just returned from a semester-long stay in Rwanda as part of a study-abroad program, seemed to be drawing “a culture zone” that emphasizes the uniqueness of Ethiopians.

I have been to Ethiopia four times. I do feel why Ethiopians think they are different. I just returned from Rwanda. I realized how Kenyans, Ugandans and Rwandese are more similar. In that region, their culture seems more similar than *ours*. I am assuming Ethiopia, Eritrea and to a degree even Somalia—the horn of Africa in general is very similar. Eritrea and Ethiopia share a lot together. I am learning about the different parts and cultures of Africa. I am just sharing my understanding.

Generally, journeys to Ethiopia helped my respondents appreciate the culture, become attached, develop friends, understand their parents better, and, importantly, participate in helping the needy. In relation to this I asked them about the possibility of returning. I was curious about whether second-generation Ethiopians want to return to live permanently. Only one of my respondents has a plan to live in Ethiopia. Responses to the question of return usually ranged from, “I definitely do not plan living here throughout my life” to “This [the United States] is home for me. I do not want to think about a return. Return to where?” In fact, “I do not intend to return” was the most common response partly because they primarily consider themselves as American with Ethiopian roots. For those who do contemplate returning, Ethiopia is a place where they think about making a difference. Others plan to adopt the strategies their parents have already engaged in, which is “spending winter in Ethiopia.” Alex gave me his plan. “I would like to spend a long period of time there. Would I like to live there? To be brutally honest with you, the plan to work and live there is very primitive. I do not know at this point. I like the idea of going there every once in a while for a couple of months. But being permanent there—I do not think so. I am here.”

In relation to return even Bersa, who said that “Ethiopia runs through my blood” and who “really, really want my children to speak Amharic” has no plans to live there. She seemed unprepared for my question. “You asked me about return? No. Where do I return?” When I asked her, “Do you have a house in Ethiopia?” she responded, “I do not have a house; obviously my parents do. They encourage me to do something in Ethiopia. I need to have a house here before I have a home in *a foreign country*. Why do I need a house in Ethiopia? First, I should have my own home here.” (My emphasis.) Almost all of my respondents see their lives anchored in the United States while connecting themselves to their roots through

the actions I present below. Obviously, return was not part of their vocabularies but I explain below how most second generation Ethiopians took upon themselves the task of educating Americans about the good sides of Ethiopia—something they cherish.

Defending an Injured Home: “I fight off Discovery Channel”

In many ways, the second generation seems to be at the forefront in terms of having constant and frequent interaction with the American society. As such, they became the face of Ethiopia in America. In filling this role, they often deal with negative images about their ancestors’ country. The images of Africa in general and of specific countries like Ethiopia in particular are largely filtered into the consciousness of U.S. residents through movies, *Hotel Rwanda* being a prime example. In other words, media portrayals continue to create the image of a poverty-stricken and violence-ridden continent that is falling off the cliff of progress through its own doing. In, *Imagining Ethiopia: Struggles for History and Identity in the Horn of Africa* (1993), John Sorenson wrote how the former image of Ethiopia—an inspiration for independence from colonialism, civil rights movements, and anti-apartheid struggles and the center of Christian civilization to mention just a few was replaced by the image of a nation unable to feed itself. The grand image of Ethiopia, which provided “bond without blood” to New World blacks (Gebrekidan 2005), has taken a nosedive since the 1970s under the weight of famine, virulent violence, and communism. Media reports have planted the image of Ethiopia as the hungriest country in the world. Marxism and civil wars swept away the residues of being the “pride of all black people,” replacing that symbolic role with symbols of “savagery,” “incompetence” and a nation that is a dangerous threat to the West (Sorenson 1993:30).

Most second-generation Ethiopians, although many of them were born here and others came at tender age encounter such representations or misrepresentations. Each time they identify themselves, from their schoolyards as young children all the way to the places where they work as adults, the image that flashes through the minds of most people when they hear the word Ethiopia is what they have seen on TV—starving children. That is what people want to know and ask. In most cases their travels to Ethiopia help them dispel negative comments. Of course, not all people ask negative questions. Asfaw advises me to see two sides to questions about ethnic identity. When somebody meets or discovers someone from another country, according to him, they ask what he calls “the common set of questions:” “What does your country look like? Why and when did you come? Where do you live and how do you live? What are your houses like? You always have to explain the common set of questions over and over again. You have to kind of report.” Likewise, although many of my respondents appreciate the questions from Americans that give them opportunities to speak positively about Ethiopia, some find that the comments people make are “stinging,” as Sossena put it.

Beth, Sossena, and Eyo remarked that comments people often make indicate that Americans think that all African countries are the same. “Then people start assuming that you are from the forest, and they want you to talk about it,” Teddy explains. “I came here at the age of seven, and I am in my 30s but I still have to answer what is rough for me in Ethiopia?” Raising her voice, Sossena remarked that people just assume that you came from a refugee camp and that all of the things immigrants do are new to you. “Being driven by car is new for you, eating good food is new for you, and using a computer—that would be way over the head!” She irritably recalled how a comment a woman made at a place of worship was the most injurious. “Someone was introducing me to this religious woman. She said to me,

‘Darling, how do you say your name again?’ I told her my name. She said, ‘What an unusual name!’” You hope it ends there, but she continued, ‘Where is that name from?’ I told her that my parents were from Ethiopia. She was like, ‘That is exciting; that is excellent! Now that you are in America, and you eat good food. . . .’ This was at a church. It was painful.”

Bersa: “All you know is how America is saving the world”

Bersa is uncomfortable and hurt when the whole issue of Ethiopia’s being the “hungriest country” surfaces and she made it her business to dispel such a one-sided perception. She says, “I have had people say this: ‘Oh, Ethiopia, the country that is really hungry. I learned about you guys on Discovery Channel.’ Much more than this “rude” off-the-cuff comment, an experience during her freshman year at the University of Michigan almost made her lose her temper. It was an anecdote that, she said, “I will not forget until I die.” According to her, what made the incident doubly painful was that the comment was made by a Lebanese American. As if she still has a score to settle, she denies his Americanness. “He is an Arab. He is not even an American.” It is as if Americans are “excused” or “non-Americans” are somehow supposed to know or refrain from making irritating comments. Bersa narrates the story.

I have to set you up for the story. I was admitted at University of Michigan. The fact that my aunt’s daughter was going to Michigan probably influenced my choice. I decided to room with [my] cousin because her roommate was about to move and live with her boyfriend. Before she moves out she insisted that we should meet him, you know. She fell in love with him like crazy. One day we decided to go for a Sushi, you know the Japanese food. She already told us that her boyfriend is an Arab or something. I think he is a Lebanese American, born and raised in the US. When you talk to him he sounds like the whitest person ever. I think his mentality is more of a white American than a Lebanese American. You will understand why I say this in a second.

We were having our meal and talking. Our roommate said her boyfriend likes spicy foods. She suggested we should take him to an

Ethiopian restaurant. He was like, “Oh, Ethiopian restaurant?” I asked, “What do you mean? You’ve never had Ethiopian food?” He was like very confused. I said maybe he never had Habasha food and I started explaining to him heartily. I told him about *injera*, how we savor eating with our own hands, how the food is spicy and almost everything—as much as I could. The more and more I explained to him, you can see he is more and more confused. I was like, “Have you understood me? What is the thing that you do not understand?” He says, “I did not realize that you guys had your own food other than what we drop to you from the planes.” I was shocked. Even if it sounded like a joke, it was not a funny one. He was not even laughing to make it sound like a joke. I said to him, “Wow, you are an ignorant bastard. You currently have no contact of the outside world. All you know is America and how America is saving the world. I was about to leave, but kept my cool.”

Bersa found even remembering this incident painful. “I am having a flashback now. It is excruciating to me. For me, the fact that someone actually think[s] that, not only thinks, but says, such a thing loud and clear and does not realize there is so much wrong with what he is saying maddens me. It makes me think that you have to do something for your country. Mind you, it is not that everything is smooth in Ethiopia. It is not that famine did not happen. It is not that we are not poor. I am saying the partial truth dominated American mind. I am fighting off these bullshit things they watch on Discovery Channel.” In much the same way, many of my respondents mentioned how they had learned “depressing and sad parts of Ethiopia from Americans.” None of them seems disappointed with their parents for not preparing them by telling them the negative sides of Ethiopia. They clustered around the idea that no parent would teach their children how bad the countries they left behind are.

Far from distancing themselves from their parents, most of them acknowledge and credit their parents and grandparents for, in Neb’s words, “drilling in pride and confidence in them” and they are prepared to refute the negative comments that people often make. They sometimes feel as if the whole burden of changing and dispelling negative stories rests on

their shoulders. In order to “educate” Americans, what I call cultural ambassadorship, they express their identities and tell Americans what they need to know. Maraki calls herself “patriotic” and ready to reach out about Ethiopia. “I am very outspoken about my nationality. I am very patriotic. I wear my colors [of the Ethiopian flag] a lot. I talk to people about Ethiopia a lot. First, people get the sense of my pride. I am not shielding myself from discrimination by burying my head in the sand. Second, I just feel Ethiopia is the country that people should know about. Scores of people have a very wrong idea, and I have been undoing the wrong. For me it is more than giving money for causes.”

What my respondents call “educating” Americans or “fighting the Discovery Channel” involves invoking Ethiopian cultural and historical achievements. Most of them were expert at it. Chacko (2003b) noted that “*all* of the Ethiopian immigrants,” including the members of the second generation with whom she spoke, generally took great pride in their heritage. “Some invoked images of Ethiopia as the seat of one of Africa’s ancient civilizations; others, the purported descent of its monarchy from the legendary queen of Sheba and King Solomon of Israel, the country’s cultural legacy as an ancient Christian empire, and its artistic tradition” (Chacko 2003b:499). The directory of national pride also includes the fact that Ethiopia is the only country never colonized. The narrative that Ethiopia is the only country that defeated the Italian army could be broadened to the statement that it is the only country that defeated a “white army.” Sometimes these young people give the defeat of Italy a geographic significance—“the only country that defeated the European army.”

Several of my respondents indicated they were “the only black” or “the only Habasha” in their classrooms. Sometimes they speak on behalf of the entire continent. Beza stated, “I was the only black in my school; maybe there were few of us. People turn towards you

whenever something about Africa or black people comes up, and you got to say something. Fighting every little thing you hear in the news that are misrepresenting Ethiopia became my job. I felt personally responsible to restore the image and reputation of the country.” Bersa talked about the task of dispelling negative things but also wished she could remain “anonymous” like most other people.

I was the only Ethiopian in my class, sometimes the only black. Sometimes you are designated whether you choose to or not to represent all black people. I am used to having, throughout my life, [to] explain and teach about Ethiopia even about Africa. It is good in certain ways because you quarantine some of the biases. Before I developed a sense of duty doing it, I got into it involuntarily. People indirectly invite you to say something about Africa or something. It is one thing if I got up and teach; okay, it is required of me. It is my job. [But] some days you just want the anonymity. Just to be a normal person and not having to answer questions. For how long am I going to fight their bullshit?

Of course the process of struggling against and dismissing a mischaracterized and misrepresented home was not uniquely Ethiopian. Fouron and Glick Schiller (2002) discussed how Haitian youth struggle against the representation of their ancestral land as HIV-infested; instead, they emphasize the positive aspects of Haiti. Similarly, R. Smith (2002) noted how second-generation Mexican American youth constantly confront the image of “powerless undocumented immigrants.” In many cases, the effort to confront or “educate” U.S. residents, the cultural ambassadorship project, was spontaneous, although sometimes it is formally organized. For example, many of my respondents told me about the Ethiopian Student Unions in their schools or colleges and how they invited other students to cultural shows. At the University of Maryland, College Park, I attended cultural performances by the Ethiopian student association that were partly organized to raise funds for nongovernmental organizations operating in Ethiopia. However, much of the work of “fighting off the

Discovery Channel” is carried out individually and every day. In fact, many of my respondents described how to tell Americans the positive side of Ethiopia. Eyo noted, “When people make comments you disagree with, validate it before you disagree with it. Otherwise they become defensive. I use[d] to get angry when people make less sensitive comments.” The transnational aims and goals of members of the second generation were by no means limited to “educating” Americans about the good sides of Ethiopia. Many of them were deeply interested and involved in transnational politics.

From Symbolism to Action in Second Generation Transnationalism

Beyond traveling to Ethiopia and finding their kindred or speaking for and challenging Americans when they make disparaging comments about Ethiopia, the main question is whether or not the second generation are transnational in the tangible sense of the term. It is exactly here that even those scholars who argue and suggest that transnationalism will carry over to the second generation at a symbolic/emotional level express skepticism. Several researchers argued that second-generation people display many transnational practices and connections but the sending country bound political, economic and cultural transnational practices, compared to their parents, declines significantly. For example, most of the authors of the collection of chapters that focused wholly on second generation transnationalism seem to agree that while second generation transnationalism is well and alive, compared to the connections observed amongst first generation members transnational engagement declines (Levitt and Waters 2002; Lee 2008).

Indeed, the same could be said about second generation Ethiopians seen in the same league as their parents’ generation. Among 21 second generation Ethiopians interviewed only three of them have business establishments in Ethiopia, while Alex was scouting for similar

opportunities. Hymie has a “nicely built” building that she rents to an international company operating in Ethiopia. Emu has a computer training center that was partly an extension of a family business. Beth runs an online business that sells garments, particularly T-shirts and other traditional clothes. Her Web site states that the company originated in a desire to provide clothing that reflected “childhood memories of Africa” and that it pays homage to nostalgia and “our roots.”

Moreover, if we take a look at how few of the second generation Ethiopians send remittances, the notion of the decline of second generation transnationalism makes sense. Only two of the second-generation Ethiopians who participated in my study send money to relatives in Ethiopia on a steady basis. Others send money and token goods during the holidays. Many of my respondents repeatedly stated that they did not and were not interested in sending remittances. From the conversations we had, it is clear that there are fewer expectations placed on the second generation to remit. They do not get phone calls from relatives asking them to send money the way that members of the first generation do. It is unclear at this point if, or when, the social obligation of sending remittances might resume. Indeed, I noticed some discomfort about the notion of sending remittances; some of my respondents felt that it was a “burden” after seeing the experience of the first generation. One of my consultants was candid enough to talk about how sending remittances had an impact on the well-being of immigrant families and even on the health of her own father. She said that he always feels stressed, not only because he postpones his personal needs, but because he does not seem to be satisfied. There are so many people that need his help. She said,

Most of my father’s relatives are in Ethiopia. He gets phone calls every now and then. Why they call him is always clear. They want money. He loves helping out, and he did since he came here. Sometimes the stress of doing it literally takes a toll on his health. Not

because his families are not understanding. He himself never feels satisfied with what he can do for his family. You can never do enough. He always wants to do more. Sometimes you hit a brick wall when you finally meet your limitation. You want to send more, but you can only send 50 bucks. If you do more than that you say, “I am going to lose my house, my car, and cannot pay all the bills.” It is a burden. In my view, I think that is why people get political here—because it does not cost money, and they feel that they are doing something for their families.

In reality, if doing business in Ethiopia, sending remittances and direct engagement with homeland politics were the only avenue to be transnational, the story of the second generation transnationalism would be negligible. Yet, there are so many ways to be part of transnational connections. As Lee (2009: 17) argues, “If migrants or their children retain any involvement with members of their ethnic group in the host nation they are likely to be part of a web of transnational ties even without direct involvement with the home nation.” Thus, research into second generation transnationalism need to look into *how* transnational they are in their own terms instead of comparing and contrasting them with the first-generation immigrants (Lee 2009). Instead of raising the bar for them the questions I raised and answered are: If indeed the second-generation engage in *actual* transnational practices, how is their transnationalism the same as or different from that of their parents? Does the second generation experience different forms and levels of transnationalism to the first generation? What sort of activities are they engaged in? In other words how do these young people make a difference in the sending country? How did their life stages/cycle shape their transnationalism? What challenges did they experience?

In fact my research shows that the transnational aims and goals of members of the second generation Ethiopians were by no means limited to “educating” Americans about the good sides of Ethiopia and calling Ethiopia a second home. Many of them were deeply

interested and were involved in different transnational activities. In many ways their transnationalism is something they have inherited from their parents, but they bring their own sensibilities to these transnational activities. In the following section I discuss second generation transnational politics which include constructing an Ethiopian voting bloc in Virginia and being part of regular philanthropic activities particularly sponsoring impoverished children in Ethiopia. I show that the second generation Ethiopians clearly take a different route but in many ways they relate to the transnational activities of their parents as has been discussed in chapter four and five. A close examination of the transnational activities of the second generation indicates change and continuities in how transnationalism is done across generations.

Transnational Politics: Protest vs. participation

In chapter four I indicated that transnational politics is the staple of most Ethiopian immigrants particularly those who came to the U.S. after the communist government turned its sword against the revolutionaries who demanded civilian government. The revolutionary generation or what Lyons (2011) called the “conflict generated diaspora” not only involved themselves in transnational politics but they have certainly imparted it to their children. Second generation Ethiopians admire the first generation’s keen interest in politics. They do acknowledge how their parents fostered in them the desire to be politically engaged. In other words they repeatedly revealed how they are profoundly interested in politics because of the example and encouragement of their parents they share a deep desire to shape political developments in Ethiopia.

Teddy: "Dad was a Reagan Republican"

Teddy, a second-generation Ethiopian American, has political aspirations. He was a Democratic Party candidate for nomination as an at-large delegate for the 8th Congressional District in Virginia at the Democratic National Convention in August 2008. Although he was not nominated, it was a great start for him. Like most second-generation Ethiopians, he acknowledges how his late father, who was a political exile, used to groom him to be politically conscious.

My father was a registered Republican! Dad was a Reagan republican. We had different political views with my dad. Reagan was his favorite president. I used to hate Reagan, you know; I was 12 years old. I hated Reagan, he liked him. I do not know why. May be I should not say that. We used to always debate political issues, always. Then I used to admire Clinton, and by default I was a Democrat. Dad did not like him at all. We use[d] to always have civil discussions. Before we debate[d] he [would] set out terms. He was strict [about] how we should proceed. He wants me to read, get my facts right, and develop talking points. I get one thing wrong, I lose. He does not want people to dismiss me because of simple factual errors. He always wants me to make the most brilliant speech at the end. He used to always encourage me in [the things] I do; politics was one of them.

Just as importantly, they agree with their parents on the fundamental values of Ethiopian transnational politics, among which the democratization of Ethiopia is central. They understand, follow and closely monitor what transpires in Ethiopian politics. Most of my respondents express admiration for the enormous stamina and potential of the first generation. Yet their remarks were characterized by a mixture of genuine appreciation and disappointment. Thus, they clearly took a different route from that of their parents. In other words they fundamentally disagree with their parents about the way politics have been handled. They describe first-generation politics, right *and* left, as "too partisan," "raw," driven very much by the "unlimited horsepower of emotionalism." For the second-generation

respondents, it was like “watching a train wreck.” The following selected narratives may indicate the perspectives, critiques and departures of the second generation from first-generation transnational politics.

For instance Bersa dislikes its complexities and lack of bipartisanship although her narratives indicate that she follows transnational political developments.

Bersa: “Ethiopian politics is intricate”

All my life I grew up hearing Ethiopian politics. It was more about how the government does terrible things to innocent people. I know that it is one-sided. How can you have [a] “repressive” regime all the time? I do not participate in it; no, not really, no, no. Not necessarily that I have no interest but I feel like, I do not know; I feel like it is very intricate. It is not the easy American partisan or bipartisan system that we are used to. Arrgghh! So many interest groups and tied to so much personality cult; and political views are taken personally. It is not something that I pay attention to. It is not easy.

In many ways Asfaw’s narratives relate to that of Bersa in terms of emphasizing the antagonisms. Yet his experiences specifically indicate what those antagonisms are and how transnational politics is bogged down by inter-ethnic rivalries and accusations rather than seeking real solutions for the multitude of problems plaguing the country. Despite such a frustrating situation, however, he has the convictions that something should be done to better the political climate in Ethiopia.

Asfaw: “I guess they talk about dirty tribal stuff”

I do understand what is going on in Ethiopia. Dad “filters down” some of the things that I should know. Most of the time my parents talk about somebody jailed or something of that sort, you know. I have heard about their politics since I was a kid. I do not speak the language well and cannot be part of the intense conversation. At dinner parties, I will eat my food and after a while I have to fade away. I have to go watch TV and hang out with kids. I cannot really be the one person who does not speak Amharic and everybody has to speak English for me to be on board. As soon as I go away, they start talking loudly. I guess they talk about dirty tribal stuff. “Oh, he does this and he does that”; sometimes they argue. One way or another,

Ethiopia is a political mess. You can have a perfectly nice American life, but you feel something need[s] to be done.

Moreover, many of my respondents criticized how protests and rallies dominated and became the staple of Ethiopian politics. They felt that protests were spontaneous and poorly orchestrated. Eyo told me what happened during one of the demonstrations in which he participated. “Whenever there is a political crisis in Ethiopia, you have to expect a demo here. Ethiopians and Vietnamese are well-known protesters. Something funny happened to us once. We did demo in front of the White House. Folks were chanting, ‘Mr. President, can you hear me now? Can you hear me now, Mr. President?’ You know people were making fun of us. Guess what? The day we chanted until we got thirsty, ‘Mr. President can you hear me now?’ the president was not in his office. He was actually outside the country! I do not understand the purpose of such rallies.” Emu also told me about another demo that was “a lost opportunity.” “It was one of those rallies in front of the State Department. They actually caught Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice going in. She asked for two people from the crowd to come forward and talk to her briefly. Nobody stepped forward to talk to her; honest to God. Somebody actually called them, and there was not anybody to come forward to seize the opportunity. How pathetic!”

The admonitions above were preludes to how the second-generation Ethiopians want to change and transform how transnational politics is being done. As much as there are opportunities there are also challenges. They are caught between two ambiguous positions—sharing the political vision of their parents for a democratic Ethiopia, on the one hand, yet disagreeing with them about how that should be achieved, on the other. Of course, their politics are not all about political transformation in Ethiopia; they do want their voices to be heard in the United States. Their real motive and objective was to change the political protests

of the first generation to solid participation in the U.S. political arena. The desire to build a recognizable Ethiopian voting bloc was a recurring theme in our discussions. Teddy argues that “Ethiopians do not need a political handout from American lawmakers in the form of occasional legislation that simply dies before becoming a law. We need to engage politicians that work hard to earn Ethiopian immigrant votes by advancing Ethiopian causes here as well as in Ethiopia. We should be able to say, ‘We are [an] Ethiopian American constituency. We vote. We support your election or reelection if you advance our causes.’ That is how U.S. politics works. I believe there would be nothing wrong with it. For that to happen, we need a constituency that can speak in unison.”

Oftentimes during our interviews and meetings, young people used different immigrant experiences of members of the Jewish Diaspora, Cuban Americans, and Filipino Americans. Of course they understand the patience, persistence, and hard work it takes to attain the status of diasporas whose constituencies have become powerful, as the Jewish diaspora has done. Elias noted, “The Jewish community in the diaspora influences the Jewish agenda. You know, the state of Israel is governed by those principles. It is because the Jews have organized themselves. I propose to the Ethiopian community in diaspora, we may not be perceived as Ethiopian by some people, but we may be a catalyst for political change in Ethiopia at least in the future.” Others argue that Ethiopian Americans should pick a different diaspora group to emulate; because of numbers, Ethiopian Americans would not be able to attain the status and rank of the political arm of the Jewish diaspora.

Redi: “We are very young as a community”

It is wonderful that we are incredibly ambitious and urging our community to participate. It is wonderful that we are selecting or using models to emulate. Often the Israeli and the Puerto Rican communities are mentioned. We also have to remember that the Israeli

community has been exiled for the last two thousand years. They have two thousand years of experience living and organizing from the outside. The Puerto Rican community has been outside its proper island for generations. We also need to put things in perspective. We are very young as a community. Maybe the Cuban Americans in Florida would be a group we could learn from. Perhaps the Filipino communities may teach us something. They are a very strong community in Seattle and they work hand in hand.

As much as the task of organizing Ethiopians and reaching the status of Cuban Americans seemed insurmountable, there were reasons to be optimistic. The Ethiopian American community is in fact similar to the Cuban American community in several ways. Most Ethiopian immigrants, at least the early ones, were political dissidents (Eckstein 2009). Like Cuban Americans, Ethiopians live in a political swing state; in this case, Virginia. Teddy explained that “Barack Obama, two days ago, went to Florida. He spoke specifically to Cuban audiences. He understands how powerful they are. Because he knows they made a difference, not once, but twice. George Bush would not have won [the] presidency in 2000 and also in 2004 without Cuban voters. No U.S. president would think of Cuban Americans twenty years ago. People say the road to the White House passes through Ohio. Actually, it is through Florida now.” Similarly, Ethiopians have the potential to make or break political careers. First, there is a huge concentration of Ethiopians in the suburbs of northern Virginia. In fact, in the past two elections Virginia voters sent Democrats to Congress, and in those elections, northern Virginia voters were decisive. As Craig notes, “African Americans make up 20 percent of the population, and residents from increasingly Democratic Northern Virginia account for one-in-three registered voters (Craig 2008). Virginia has clearly shifted from being categorically Republican to being a swing state, a shift that politicians clearly understand.

As a vehicle for maturing into a strong voting bloc, second-generation Ethiopians have formed Ethiopian-Americans for Change (EAFC). Its major objective is to register Ethiopians to vote and to encourage them to participate in politics in the United States. The major barrier seems to be how to unite an extremely divided Ethiopian constituency. Some first-generation Ethiopians think that the current Ethiopian government is better than the previous one while most other Ethiopian Americans disagree. Positioning EAFC as anti-government or pro-government would get in the way of developing a stronger constituency. During one meeting in a hotel lobby the organizers of EAFC discussed the advantages and disadvantages of taking political sides. The three hours long meeting concluded with no apparent agreement. Some suggested that the EAFC should denounce the undemocratic Ethiopian government. They believed that that strategy would enable them to mobilize the majority of Ethiopians in the United States to register to vote and rally under the EAFC. One participant commented, “We are going to canvass and ask our people to vote and join us. Ethiopians would automatically want to know *what is in it for them*. We should not be afraid of taking [a] position. What percent of Ethiopians that live in the metro area support the Ethiopian government? Not a whole lot. Not letting people know where we stand would be an indirect admission that we are pro-government. Politics is not about appeasing all. It is about winning over as many people as possible.”

Not all participants were comfortable with this suggestion, and some questioned the wisdom of such a political move. First, they were of the opinion that the opposition parties in the United States are no different from the government in Ethiopia. For them, they were in fact part of the problem. One seemingly pro-government participant of the meeting called members of the opposition parties “machismo egomaniacs beating their chests to see who is

going to be a big dog. Kids who are born here are having kids. We live here and we are paying taxes. Why cannot we think like other people who are living here and care about our surroundings here? Why does it have to be all about Ethiopian politics and what is happening in Ethiopia? We do not have to make everything about Ethiopia. We are concerned about local issues, such as better schools for our kids and [how to] empower the community.” The major difficulty seems to be the Ethiopian media in DC, which automatically paints the EAFC as pro-government and thus makes registration of voters virtually impossible. In fact, radio stations were the most notorious for presenting the politics of the EAFC in this way. During one of the fund raisers organized for presidential candidate Barack Obama by Ethiopian Americans, the media cornered Yoni.

The media refused to let me go. They ask, “Do you think Obama will have a different agenda than Bush? What is Obama’s position on Africa?” This journalist questioned me from every direction to know where I stand and where EAFC stands in terms the government of Ethiopia. I was frustrated. He would not give up. I am not Obama’s spokesman. Let’s tell the whole media that America is our *home*, not our second home. We need to be part of it. I always say we care about Ethiopia. Why should it be always about Ethiopia?

Emu came up with a generic response to communicate to anyone who wants to know about the EAFC. “Let’s say, ‘We do not understand about Ethiopian politics. We are not going to talk about it. We are concerned about our lives in the U.S.’ Such statements should be adopted as an official response.” Her suggestion was immediately shot down as a declaration that the EAFC would not care about Ethiopians. Hirut stated, “People deeply care about home. Most people would automatically label you as pro-government. Who does not understand Ethiopian politics here? Who does not care about Ethiopia?”

Confused about the whole process and the need to register as many people as possible without getting into Ethiopian issues, Teddy inquired, “How can we talk about politics without talking about politics—of course Ethiopian politics?” During the entire meeting in the hotel lobby, which was held in “Little Ethiopia” (the northwest area of Washington, D.C.), the participants seemed to agree that they should maximize neutrality to create an undivided constituency. Yet neutrality would be hard to come by among Ethiopians. Ethiopian political culture, as Selam put it, is such that, “You cannot always have an opinion. If you have an opinion you might be isolating people. Not everybody would talk to you, because they disagree with you. That is not a good thing if you try to organize the community. You do not want people to be afraid to talk to you.”

Despite such constraints and what clearly look like generational differences over how to achieve the same political objectives, throughout the presidential election of 2008 the EAFC worked diligently to increase the political participation of Ethiopians (as it still does). Beyond Virginia, its members participated in voter drives in more than six states. In fact, they were able to make their presence and activities noticed by journalists and politicians. The *Washington Post* published an article on Ethiopians, while *The Hilltop* (whose banner identifies it as “The Student Voice of Howard University”) wrote about how Ethiopians in Virginia “go the extra miles for Obama” (Farmer 2008). Darryl Fears (2008), the *Washington Post* staff writer, has an EAFC group picture holding a picture of Obama. He wrote a lengthy article about how although new African immigrants are among the least recognized, they seek to improve their political clout both in the United States and abroad. Obama’s election may “help ease the turmoil and poverty in countries such as Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan,” he wrote. He particularly noted the strong support for Barack Obama among Ethiopian

Americans. He reported that they had raised more than \$30,000 for the Obama Campaign and posted an Ethiopian-language online promotion called “Vote for Obama” that had nearly 15,000 viewers on YouTube. As noteworthy and groundbreaking as the political enthusiasm of new African immigrants is, Fears (2008), worries that U.S. politicians might not take them seriously because they are few in number and are often lumped with other minorities, especially African Americans, whose votes are pre-determined.

Many of my respondents dismiss out of hand the issue of numbers. “The topic of how many Ethiopians live in Northern Virginia does not worry me as much,” Michael stated. Teddy noted that we need to think beyond the number. “I bet you there are as many Ethiopians living in Virginia as there are Cubans in Florida. The crucial issue is that Cuban Americans—there are enough of them to vote and make a difference. You know, how many Ethiopians live in Virginia? In Alexandria alone, there are over 2,400 registered Ethiopian voters.” As part of a voters’ drive during the presidential election of 2008, Michael presented “Can one vote make a difference?” to a meeting of Ethiopian Americans. He advised voters not to be discouraged by the issue of small numbers. In his colorful presentation, he presented the outcomes of major national and local elections, including the presidential election of 2000, where the winning margins were very slim. He gave me the following list of elections where “one vote” made a difference.

In 2004, out of a total 2,746,593 votes cast Christine Gregoire won the Washington Gubernatorial election, by only 129 votes. In 2006, Republican Tim Pawlenty beat out Democrat Mike Hatch in Minnesota. Out of a total of 2,202,987 votes cast, Pawlenty won by less than 1%. In 2005, Democrat Robert Deeds lost to Republican Bob McDonnell in a race for Attorney General of Virginia. Out of 1,941,449 votes cast, Deeds lost by 323 votes. In 2006, Democrat Jim Webb beat Republican George Allen in Virginia. Out of a total 2,370,455 votes cast, Webb won by less than 10,000 votes. In 2000,

Democrat Al Gore lost to Republican George Bush in the presidential race by 500 votes.

The general feeling among the second generation seems to be positive because its members believe that they will be another powerful immigrant group in a state that is becoming a swing state. “Our task should be to continuously register Ethiopians and make sure they vote. Once we become regular and decisive voters, politicians would take us seriously whether the issues are local or democratic governance in Ethiopia,” Michael says. Constantly checking his Blackberry to see if Obama had picked new delegates who endorsed his candidacy over that of Hillary Clinton, Michael commented, “If you want to be heard in Washington, there is an app for that and it is called ‘voting’.” During a day spent canvassing for the EAFC in Frederick and Alexandria counties in Virginia, Michael said, “It [will] not be long before we create the tradition of Cuban Americans in Florida and politicians ask [for] *our* endorsements.” These are the two counties in the state where most immigrants, not just Ethiopians, have concentrated. That same day, the group was expelled from a building for soliciting and someone called the police on us for entering an apartment complex.

Becoming a voting bloc is not a far-fetched aspiration. However, although most of my consultants were focused on adopting the strategies Cuban Americans have used, the Haitian and Greek American experiences have more relevance, and are, in fact, more instructive. Francois Pierre-Louis (2006) has discussed the deep involvement of Haitian first generation immigrants in transnational politics. Initially, during the 1970s and 1980s, these were “protest politics.” Demonstrations and rallies with the goal of isolating the regime in Haiti, which often meant relying on African American lawmakers for assistance, dominated the first generation political involvement. That tradition and trend has shifted remarkably. Most members of the second generation realized years of protests did not produce the intended

outcome. Instead of protesting, “Haitian leaders today are more likely to meet and quietly lobby elected officials on Haitian issues than to hold public protests to voice their concerns.” They arrived at this position by creating separate ethnic organizations, influencing election outcomes, and running for elected office (Pierre-Lousi 2006:119–120). Karpathakis (1999) also discussed how Greek Americans, particularly the second generation, integrated into American politics in part to protect the home society’s territorial sovereignty and interests.

The apparent problem for Ethiopians, as it was for Haitians, is that they are taken for granted by politicians who viewed them as part of a category they see as “minorities.” Such politicians often see “minorities” as blacks and lump the interests of that group together although some politicians have come to recognize the internal diversities of the so called “homogeneous” minorities. The Haitian constituency has been able to break out of this pack mentality by mustering an appeal to voters based on ethnicity. In this way, they have emerged out of the shadow of African Americans, politically speaking (Pierre-Lousi 2006). There is light at the end of the tunnel for the Ethiopians as well. Virginia politicians often release statements condemning the Ethiopian government, appear at community events, and make clear that they support the establishment of a democratic system in Ethiopia. It seems clear that by engaging in American politics, second-generation Ethiopians are carving a place for themselves and will soon make their voices heard. And they will possibly advance the political objective of their parents, converting existing political protest into participation. They will thus become agents of integrating the first generation into the American political system.

Making a Difference: Christmas Gifts for a Charity

As I have pointed out above, another area of transnational involvement for second generation Ethiopians—something they inherited from the first generation is involvement in philanthropic activities. Out of twenty one second-generation Ethiopian Americans eleven were directly involved in charitable activities (mainly sponsoring children), fund-raisers for NGOs operating in Ethiopia, or working themselves in Ethiopia to establish an NGO that recruits and sends skilled people to live and work in Ethiopia. I will briefly describe the specifics of these transnational activities. What is interesting is that there seems to be an organized effort by NGOs operating in Ethiopia and even by the government of Ethiopia to tap into the expertise and other resources of second-generation Ethiopians. The Ethiopian Diaspora Volunteer Program (established in 2004) recruits highly qualified professionals who can help scale up existing services and jump-start new projects in support of Ethiopia's national HIV/AIDS strategies. The Ethiopian Fistula Foundation, the Hiwot HIV/AIDS Prevention Care and Support Organization (HAPCSO), Ethiopia Reads, and numerous other 501(c) organizations specifically target the youth population mostly as volunteers but also as potential employees and donors.

On Saturday, August 16, 2008, I had to sprint from a book-signing ceremony to another Ethiopian meeting, which was called "Calling All Ethiopians, Ethiopian-Americans, Friends of Ethiopia: Dialogue on Brain Gain and the Role of the Ethiopian Diaspora and Friends of Ethiopia for Ethiopia's Capacity Building for Sustainable Development." The meeting was organized by Dr. Tewabech Bishaw, the founder of the Hibret Le-Limat Ma'ekel (Center for Co-operative Development) and a former UNICEF employee. Her group is an Ethiopian-based, nongovernmental organization with a partner organization in the United States. Here, of course, I am not interested in the history of the organization. What fascinated

me most was that the majority, if not all, of the participants in the meeting came from the second generation; they had been born or had lived in the United States since childhood. They seem to have a different vision for the country than that of their parents. An Ethiopian American professor at Howard University, Muhe, one of the few first-generation attendees, praised the youth for their attendance while he reserved criticism for the first generation.

Being heroic and political activism may not solve the mammoth problem we have in that country. The second-generation Ethiopians—they do not really know *their* country. They often say, including my kids, that there is a country in Africa called Ethiopia. We know its history. We know it is poor. How can we go and make a difference is their question. They are secure about their profession in the U.S. They may not need Ethiopia. American Peace Corps, when they are deployed to countries in the developing world, they ask their country what they would get in return. These young people are just saying let's help without a benefit. I salute them for that.

In a forum that lasted over three hours, Dr. Tewabech spoke softly and genuinely about the objectives of the meeting. She first talked about how she had relocated herself in Ethiopia. She is not a politician; she just wanted to help Ethiopia. She outlined the trend of brain drain that the country has been experiencing. She ended her speech with an all-too-familiar quote: “There are more Ethiopian medical doctors in the city of Washington, D.C., than in all of Ethiopia.” Although I have never seen the numbers to back up this quote, it captures eloquently a serious emergency in Ethiopia. She clearly stated how the country needs the expertise of trained professionals and encouraged audience members to consider moving there to work. She promised allowances and the possibility of working with mentors to help them gain experience. She emphasized that her organization does not require them to forsake the United States but seeks their contributions for a short time. Before Dr. Tewabech opened up the floor for questions and answers, she ended her speech by declaring how each

audience member could make a difference, citing an Ethiopian proverb: When spider webs unite, they can tie up a lion.

Despite the warm weather and the fact that the meeting had taken long hours, most members of the audience listened attentively. I saw noticeable enthusiasm. During the question-and-answer period, a forest of hands went up. Several of them belonged to confident and well-educated young people with degrees in engineering, business administration, public health, environmental studies, and a host of other fields. They expressed readiness to help. Based on the response at that meeting and on several conversations I have had with second-generation Ethiopians, I conclude that many of them are interested in making a difference in Ethiopia. Surprisingly, and perhaps ironically, some expressed doubts about whether the volunteer program would materialize because they had attended similar events without any outcome.

Emu: "When was the last time the country was in good shape?"

Beyond strong interest and organizations that pull them into transnational activities, several of my respondents were influenced by their visits to Ethiopia to become more active in civic organizations. Emu recalled that seeing street children broke her heart. She explains, "When I was in Ethiopia people were telling me that Ethiopia was in bad shape compared to the past. Good old days, you know." She continues,

I wanted to know when was the last time the country was in a good shape. I have been there twice. The two times I was there, I saw nothing new, just shining buildings. When you look at the country as a whole, millions of people earn below a dollar a day, and millions are still begging for food. The poverty just seems to be intractable. Sure it makes me ashamed. It is a shame that there is lack of progress. We talk about ourselves as the "never-colonized" and a lot of confidence about who we are. Excuse me, the entire population lives close to starvation, mostly living on the street and it is disgraceful that most of

us do little to change that. We need to change that. When was the last time the country was in good shape?

Teddy: "The sad truth"

In addition to intolerable poverty, some of my respondents were also frustrated by "talk only" community members, "fruitless" political transnationalism, and get-togethers that do not produce any results. Redi challenges some of the cultural values of Ethiopians and the lack of voluntarism as well as organized humanitarianism. He thinks that Eritreans are more organized in making a difference than Ethiopians have been. In fact, Teddy articulated the frustrations of most second generation in what he refers to as 'Habasha first aid'—the disapproving sound of '*mits*' (lit. "tsk, tsk") that Ethiopians make whenever they come across an unfortunate person but are unwilling to get involved. "For me," he argues, "the sound effect of '*mits*' displays a sense of hopelessness and withdrawnness and not [being] ready to step up to the plate. It is an expression of sorrow." He further describes what he calls "a sad truth."

The sad truth about our people is that for every person that does something in Ethiopia, there are a hundred who do nothing but make that sound. I am telling you most of the charities and support for Ethiopia comes from non-Ethiopians, while many Ethiopians wait for miracles to happen. Mind you, when I say this it is not to put all folks in the same boat. There are thousands of Ethiopians who sacrifice daily to make a difference in the lives of people in Ethiopia. Countless others send money to loved ones back home. One of Ethiopia's biggest sources of finance is money that is sent back to Ethiopia by Ethiopians living in America. We need to seize the moment and help fellow citizens.

Sossena: "It is simply self-exoticization"

In many ways, the way that Ethiopia is perceived seems to be the most compelling reason that some have decided to be part of making a difference. Sossena describes how she has become "fed up" with the Ethiopian community, which for the past several years has been

planning to help people back home but has never translated its talk into action. She thinks that “educating” Americans, shooting down the distorted view of Ethiopia, and showing them the better sides of Ethiopia would not be enough: “If we are bothered by how people perceive us, we need to change Ethiopia. Teaching Americans how ancient we are may not help much.” Sossena now is critical of what she characterizes as “cultural shows,” or the “self-exoticization” that she took part in when she was a student.

I was for cultural shows and telling others how Ethiopia is a great country. I became opponents of it now. It simply is self-exoticization. When I was working with the Ethiopian community in North Carolina, we organized several community events partly to have fun and partly to change people’s perceptions of Ethiopia. We used to get together, eat Ethiopian foods, do Ethiopian dances, talk about Ethiopia, and leave. The same thing happens next time. We chit-chat, hear music, show happy faces and exhibit a desire to do something “home.” I believe such social events should be a vehicle to do something. It should not encumber, “not doing productive things.” I think it did become a barrier. For sure, people admire your food and cultural performances. After the lights are off, people know that our people suffer under what the West considers our epidemic—poverty. It is a constant truth. Your cultural admirers know, and you know, that we are from a poor country. Instead of waiting for other people to get on board, my connection and concentration over the years—and my involvement—moved away from cultural and social celebrations to more action. I moved from getting together to making things happen and hands-on things.

As I have pointed out many of my respondents repeatedly stated that they did not and were not interested in sending remittances. Eleven of the second-generation Ethiopians I interviewed were involved in charitable activities (mainly sponsoring children), fund-raisers for NGOs operating in Ethiopia, or working themselves in Ethiopia to establish an NGO that recruits and sends skilled people to live and work in Ethiopia. I will briefly describe the specifics of these transnational activities.

The most common involvement in transnational activity among the members of today's second generation is in many ways an extension of first-generation transnational engagement: child sponsorship. This strategy was started and popularized by a number of international organizations such as World Vision and the Christian Children's Fund. For less than a dollar a day, many of these international organizations explain, one can participate in "saving a child." In most cases, a sponsor remits a minimum of \$20 per month to cover the child's basic needs. He or she receives a photo and information about a sponsored child and writes and receives letters and even e-mail from the child. In the words of World Vision, the child becomes "your child." One can be a sponsor anytime by going online or calling an NGO. After picking a continent and a country, one selects a child among the hundreds of children whose profiles are posted online. Ethiopian local nongovernmental organizations have already appropriated this approach. They specifically reach members of the second-generation Ethiopians through U.S.-based 501(c)(3) organizations. Four second-generation Ethiopians who participated in this study were directly involved in child sponsorship, which they had learned about through friends of nongovernmental organizations working in Ethiopia or through their parents.

Bersa described how her mother pulled her in. "My mom helps many orphans in Ethiopia. She brings together her friends every month to collect monthly contributions. The root reason why I am doing it is that it is my mom's desire. I started [doing this] to please my mom who is like a community ringleader." Beza, who seems to be surprised by how much a dollar a day could do, was "plugged in" because of a commercial she saw on TV, although she had always wanted to help. "I never had a real job to raise that money when I decided to sponsor a child. It costs only 80 cents a day. I can pick up a quarter on the basement floor. It

was less than 30 dollars a month. Who does not have a heart to do that? I helped the child for two years. Sometimes I used my Christmas gift money to pay for the sponsorship. My parents were also helping me when I ran out of cash.”

In order to pay for the child’s living expenses, they send money every six months. Emu stated, “If you are talking about sending remittances, I do it indirectly. I do not give my money because somebody is my relative. The way to do it is: I just check how much it takes to sponsor a child and check also if those kids are getting the money. You know the saying, teach them how to fish. . .” I asked, “How do you check if they get the money?” She responded, “I do not have a personal connection with the kids, but I talked with them over the phone. I trust the organization because they have an office here. Of course, I am not the only one doing it. I do not think they are taking advantage of us.” Weyni not only sponsors a child but also recruits others to do so. She pressures others through student associations to become involved in activities linked to Ethiopia. She and her group differed from other members of the second generation in that they had lived for a significant part of their childhoods in Ethiopia. According to her, HAPCSO, the organization she regularly helps, managed to “facilitate the sponsorship of over 300 orphans and vulnerable children of all ages and living conditions.” At one of the fund-raisers in Washington, D.C., that I participated in, HAPCSO used a photo of President Bill Clinton’s visit to an orphanage in Ethiopia.

Beza: “Ethiopia is the closest”

By no means the only one, the most determined humanitarian among my group of respondents was clearly Beza, who envisions herself working in Ethiopia someday. Her child sponsorship story was the most extensive of any of the respondents. During three of her four visits to Ethiopia she distributed school supplies. She told me, “We lined them by size and we

gave the school supplies. These are just random kids. When I first went there, all they ask[ed] [for] was a pen and a pencil. I said it is easy to do.” In addition to such random acts of benevolence, she has visited the child she has sponsored through World Vision for more than two years.

I always wanted to help, always. Because of a commercial I saw, I called World Vision to ask them how I can participate. The paperwork was very simple. They told me to pick a country. They gave me an option to either pick a country in Central America or Africa. I said, alright, never mind, Ethiopia would be fine with me. All humanities are interconnected; I wanted you to think like that. Since you cannot possibly serve all human beings, the initiatives should start where you are the closest. In my case Ethiopia is the closest. I was informed that my 30 dollars, I was told, is going to buy her school uniform every year and school supplies. My child gets proper education. World Vision sends me pictures and I receive letters from her. The child I sponsor lives in Durame, Southern Ethiopia. It was so nice.

When she traveled to Durame to visit “her child,” she bought her clothes and some gifts. She also saw how World Vision supplied clean water, a school, and a health post for the community. “I saw one health clinic which I was not impressed with. It was not something spectacular. Inside it was not as clean as it should be. I mean those were some of the developments I saw when they gave me a little tour around the village. I did not really ask any question.” She later found out that the money does not go directly to “her child.” “Mom found out that my 30 dollars was going towards the projects which I just told you. I wanted it to benefit the family. I wanted her to benefit specifically. Obviously, the World Vision does not do that. I stopped all together, because it was not going to do much for her. In the future, when I will be ready to sponsor, which I will soon start, it will be much more helpful if it is through a smaller organization. I just want my money to go directly towards wherever I

intentionally wanted it to go. Maybe supporting an NGO in Ethiopia by Ethiopians would do. It does not necessarily have to be Ethiopian though.”

In 2006, Selam and her friends founded a nonprofit organization called Ethiocorps, a U.S.-based 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. Ethiocorps generates funds and sends young people to work and settle permanently in Ethiopia, if possible. According to her, the aim of Ethiocorps is to meet the strong demand for a program that would allow students, recent graduates, and young professionals to engage in long-term public service opportunities. So far, they have raised money and sent six fellows to Ethiopia. “Two of them had enough time to create connections, establish themselves and find a real job. They now work and live there.”

Beyond sponsoring a child, raising funds, and sending others to work in Ethiopia, few of my respondents were working in Ethiopia. Sossena works in Ethiopia with the Clinton Foundation. She was based in Jimma, a small town in the southwestern part of Ethiopia. Sossena speaks forcefully against sending money, including giving money to charitable organizations. According to her, the best way to help is going there and applying knowledge and expertise acquired in the United States. She emphasized, “I believe in volunteering. I would rather be part of a group that does something than just send money.” For the past year, Sossena has worked in Ethiopia, where she helps in a hospital while teaching in a university. She explained,

I am a living proof that the transnationalism that you are talking about is not a myth. I have every right to say, you know what, working there; it is not something I am interested in. I am an American and I have got a terminal degree from a stuck-up university. I could get a job anywhere. I choose to be part of the solution. To just reverse the negative things people have about us and our country. I live in Jimma, Southwest Ethiopia. It is not the prettiest town around. The roads are awful; there is nothing in the name of a pastime; it is hot and muggy,

and there is nothing beautiful about Jimma. There is absolutely nothing! I will be honest with you. I live and work there. I am and will get used to it. Always remember, you are responsible for that which you have become aware of.

Sustainability of Second Generation Transnationalism

As can be seen above in Sossena's narratives and that of many other second generation Ethiopians, they share genuine dedication to make a difference in Ethiopia. They also encourage others to join them. Despite all the skepticism in the scholarly literature about whether second-generation transnationalism exists, the findings of my study suggest that it is alive and well. Yet the question is, will second-generation transnationalism last? I raise this question because of a couple of main reasons. The first one is the rejection and frustrations second generation members experienced visiting and working in Ethiopia. Despite their enthusiasm, many, including Sossena, are faced with numerous hindrances and challenges. Just like those who are directly involved with and work in Ethiopia she described the slowness of the bureaucracy.

In fact, much of the frustration starts in the United States, because people tend to politicize the things done in and for Ethiopia. Sossena argued that one should not have a political motive for working in Ethiopia. "There are tons of things to be done. Every time I visit Ethiopia there were little changes, while people squabble among themselves in the U.S." Helina, who invited me to a fund-raiser to build a nursing home for the elderly in Ethiopia, articulated her frustrating experiences and the need to go beyond what she called "suffocating pride."

We have this Ethiopian story: The world begins and ends with us. I was about to say it did not, but anthropology says it did. You know the luxury of being close to human ancestry: Lucy, the oldest primate discovered in Ethiopia. Talking about such [a] story is always a beautiful thing. You know, though, nothing further from the truth. We need to improve the lives of *our* people over there.

Sossena, who had hands-on experience working in remote parts of Ethiopia, spoke extensively on the points of engagement and disengagement in transnational activities. She said, “If you ask me, what makes me to dis-identify myself from Ethiopia, it would not be poverty. It would not be negative perceptions that outsiders have about us either. It is Ethiopia’s bureaucracy and culture. The fact that Ethiopia is hungry and poor does not. I know at a certain point in time many countries that we now see as model[s] were poor, even hungry, at one point. Culture that would play a negative role in our development does. That is what makes me ashamed of my country. Every time I call a meeting people upset me. They do not show up for meetings on time. They do not keep their words. It is a culture that shoots itself in the foot. People do not have a sense of time. In Ethiopia time does not pass. They pass through time.”

Beza: Let me ask you this question

Furthermore, part of the challenge of transnational work in Ethiopia emerges from not being able to speak the language and not understanding local cultures. Even Beza, who had planned her major in college with transnationalism in mind, seemed discouraged. She was unhappy with how Ethiopians treated her. She put me on the spot by asking questions of me.

Beza: Because I do not speak the language, people are not accepting me as an Ethiopian when I was there and here too. Let’s say there is someone who is of my age. He has not been there. He speaks the language fluently, never been there. Okay, let me back up, maybe he has been there, but he does not necessarily have that much of a devotion to his roots—not obsessed about being there and working there. And this other person does not know the language; has roots there, been there several times, loves it, and one day probably works there, and maybe done something already, but he does not know the language. Who is more Ethiopian? Who is more connected?

Me: I think it is obvious. It is the one who is “obsessed.” I mean . . .

Beza: I know. Ethiopians make language such a huge issue. I hear them say, “You think you are an Ethiopian—you do not know Amharic? Then you are not really Ethiopian. I want to help. More than charities. We make a difference if we go there in person and get involved. It is something I intend to do as a career. My reason to go into government and politics is a background for what I wanted to do in life. I wanted to be involved in international development, and I just want to minor in development. I just want to be into development, hopefully working in Ethiopia or somewhere in Africa. It is legit now because I got an internship in the Department of State. I will see how it goes and how things work out.

Importantly, I asked Sossena and several others if such problems compel them to reconsider their decision to work in Ethiopia. For most of them their response was an unequivocal no. “I have always known my life and work will be in Ethiopia. My life is inextricably intertwined with the future of Ethiopia. That I know, for sure. I hope things will get better. One thing I am afraid of is that, unless there are enough of us that are convinced—really—of the danger we are in, and the fact that unless we act, we are doomed to fail. And not only us, but subsequent generations. Unless there are enough people who will do that, my fear is I will burn out.”

The other significant point in terms of the sustainability of the second generation is the issue of life cycle. Most of the participants in transnational activities were not yet married and thus were not weighed down by family responsibilities. Robert C. Smith (2002) discussed how the “urgency of transnational life seems to peak during mid-to-late adolescence, particularly in the high school and college years, when the saliency of peer groups and ethnic identity increases.” Certainly, the majority of the transnationals were at an early stage in their lives. The average age was 25 years. Yet, there were married second generation Ethiopians who were transnational. I am not certain if the existence of transnational activism is clearly a function of life stage and if family life will interfere with

their transnational activities. It is a question that needs to be answered fully in the future. Yet the fact is that some of them foresee that they will take a transnational commitment after they get married and settled. They emphasize that their engagement would not be short-lived.

In a related context, I would like to conclude the chapter by presenting an interesting narrative about a second-generation transmigrant. The story makes clear how even the most seemingly remotely connected or disconnected member of the second generation can be pulled into transnationalism. It is a short life history that Asfaw told me about his younger sister. She had a law degree from a prestigious school, married an American, and ended up divorcing him. In many ways, she seemed different from most of the second generation whose lives I have described above. She did not speak any Ethiopian language. In fact, as Asfaw explained, she kept her distance from Ethiopians most of the time. He described what he called “contradictions” in her life.

If anything, I was better than her in terms of trying to be connected to Ethiopia. I travelled the Ethiopian countryside; at one point I *spoke* Amharic, and of course [I am] married to an Ethiopian. I did all the stuffs. She always had very strong reservations about going back home. Whenever we encounter Ethiopians here, we face the accusations of becoming an American. Ethiopians could not fathom how we were unable to speak Amharic language. From my perspective I had my guarded way of coming out of judgementality but she had more of that sensation of not belonging. She has [a] less strong connection to the Ethiopian community. The contradiction begins here. Through sort of a series of events she ended up being what you call more transnational than me. At some point she started working for an NGO in South Africa. She worked there for three or four years. She came back because she did not like the job or something. Although she worked in this country as a lawyer for over ten year[s] she could not find what she thought “a good job” here. Through family connections and networking, she found out there were opportunities in that same area she worked in South Africa—advocacy for gender rights and children’s rights. It is vaguely illegal but interesting to her.

She took this job, went from frying pan to the fire at the heart of Addis Ababa. A week after arriving, she wanted to leave, literally. She

has to deal with every day interrogation and cultural audition: “Why don’t you speak Amharic? Are you white (*ferenji*)? Who are you? Where are you from? Why are you here?” It was painful. Beyond that, she was tasked with doing some projects, but there was nothing—no office, there was no nobody to meet with her, no phone, and no budget! Things were totally disorganized and all the things you can imagine that could go wrong. I do not know how she changed her mind. She stuck it out and persevered. To my mind, I am over here, I think it was heroic and a commitment. Everyday having to deal with being in a foreign country is hard enough, because I know it. Every day being in a foreign country, which is technically yours, is harder. It is much easier for us to be in Kenya; you are just an expat and nobody bothers you. When you are an Ethiopian native they all want you to be like them. It is suffocating day in day out.

Now, this has been going on for a year. She took another job and she is still doing it. I talked to her and I know her mind. She is suffering, but she is fine. I am just amazed. She told me, “*It is not like this was not as bad as I thought. No! This is as bad as I have thought, yet I am doing it.*” She has achieved a lot. She has a place, she has a salary, and she has an apartment in Bole. My cousins have lived there and my sister-in-law who lives next door to us . . . says, “Oh, yeah, your sister, you should see her. She is speaking Amharic. She makes mistakes but she is doing great. She took us out to a restaurant and she knows where to go. She knew all the good places.” That is the latest report card. Let me be honest, It is inspiring at least in the sense to know that it can be done. I cannot say that inspires me to go emulate her. It is not like she is giving me this report, like, this is wonderful and you must come. I am not right now jumping out of my chair to go do something. I am doing my thing helping folks here. I am not looking for an excuse to go. At least she did it, but who knew and who knows.

From the above narratives and numerous conversations I had with the second generation Ethiopians it is likely that transnational involvements will last long. What it requires is an impetus from first generation transnational social field and family connections that pull the second generation into transnational commitments as Helen Lee (2009) consistently argues. However, it would be difficult to predict that transnationalism will go beyond the second generation.

At this point I can certainly argue that there are changes in how the second generation forms transnational connections with their ancestral land. The evidence of this chapter suggests that using the yardsticks that have been created to gauge the presence and extent of transnationalism in the first generation in order to detect that trait within the second generation will create flawed assumptions. For example, almost none of the second-generation Ethiopians I interviewed send remittances. Yet most of them see traveling to Ethiopia and finding their kindred as a transnational activity. So is speaking for and challenging Americans when they make disparaging comments about Ethiopia. However, in addition to such technically intangible forms of transnationalism, they are engaged in a variety of transnational activities that are making differences in the lives of people. These include constructing an Ethiopian voting bloc in Virginia and sponsoring impoverished children in Ethiopia. The last two are activities they have inherited from their parents, but they bring their own sensibilities to these transnational activities.

Chapter-8 Conclusion

One afternoon I sat with Marit for an extensive interview. Return to Ethiopia was our main topic. After spending years constructing a dream home in Ethiopia, Marit now dismisses the possibility that she will return there permanently. She regrets the time and money she spent building her home there, not because the property value of her mansion had declined and not because of any adjustment problems she was having. In the previous ten years, Marit had been to Ethiopia six times, and she has never felt out of place when she is visiting. She dresses traditionally, goes to the open market to shop, and attends a prolonged Ethiopian coffee ceremony with groups of women she supports economically. “There you go—I am an Ethiopian. It is as if I flip to the other side of my life. If you see me in Ethiopia you would not know me,” she told me. After she has been in Ethiopia for awhile, however, Marit begins to miss America. “I cannot wait to return,” she said. Marit feels that she is more independent in the United States, and she enjoys the privacy and freedom of choice she has here. “Here I go to a restaurant at 9 pm, and at 10pm I am at the movies,” she says.

For Tibebu, who won an activist of the year award in 2008 in Takoma Park, Maryland, migration to the United States was not his first intention. He fled the political turmoil that exploded around him in Ethiopia during the 1970s and landed in Kenya. After living there for two years and for several more in Holland, he settled in the United States. Like Marit, he travels to Ethiopia frequently despite the tyranny of distance. When he is not visiting, he stays in contact electronically. “You cannot live without your core,” he noted. Yet the smoke from old cars that make the capital a “chimney” disheartens him, as does his observation that some people in Ethiopia still think they are more important than the average Ethiopian. This is painful to him. “The poor do not have a voice,” he told me. “The rich are the only ones who

need to be served and they are the only ones who are important, and no one else is.” This is rarely seen in the United States, he feels. Despite his disappointments with his homeland, he has never given up on Ethiopia. He has been working tirelessly to promote fair trade between Ethiopia and the United States and is involved in a philanthropic project in Ethiopia that has planted millions of trees there. In between his community activism in the United States and his involvement in Ethiopian NGOs, Tibebu’s plate is full.

The life histories of Tibebu, Marit, and many other Ethiopians including the second generation that I presented in this dissertation illustrate the transnational experiences that have fascinated researchers since the 1990s. Although transnational experiences—the social fields the immigrants build and sustain with both sending and receiving countries—have always been with us, the number, intensity and impact of connections have increased. So many more immigrants are maintaining linkages with their sending countries that the connections and commitments are producing significant political, economic, and social changes in both sending and receiving countries. This development has challenged the conventional thinking about migration that saw immigrants as either assimilated individuals who forsook their home ties or as unassimilated people who never stopped longing for home.

As immigrant transnationalism attracted more scholarly attention, however, disagreements began to emerge among researchers (see Glick-Schiller and Levitt 2006). Some argued that transnationalism was nothing new and saw celebratory accounts as a scholarly fad that was destined to disappear. Others argued that only a small portion of immigrant groups were truly transnational. Although the issues of newness has been resolved—scholars now speak about change and continuity in transnational connections—the questions of how many immigrants become transnational, what the relationships are between transnationalism and

assimilation, and whether the second generation of an immigrant group will continue the transnationalism of their parents continue to engage researchers.

The findings of my research clearly indicate that transnationalism is “neither a thing nor a continuum of events that can be easily quantified” (Guarnizo and Smith 1998, 28). Based on my ethnographic data I argue that studies of transnationalism should go beyond positivist taxonomies to focus on the causes and effects of transnationalism and how it changes across generations. These are the issues that shaped this dissertation. Moreover, I departed from the path transnational research has taken in its focus on what immigrants do in the sending countries (Foner 2005; Vertovec 2009; Eckstein 2009). This focus leaves the impression that immigrants are here only temporarily and are not committed to the new place. It suggests that immigrants are takers rather than givers. The testimonials of those I consulted strongly contest this view. Instead, they demonstrated how an immigrant community shaped and left an indelible mark on the receiving country.

Generation and Pre-Immigration Experience

I looked at pre-immigration experiences as an important variable that shapes transnational connections. I argued against the view that those who have migrated from the same country will form a homogeneous group in the receiving country. The unquestioned use of metrological concepts that we often deploy to herald the arrival of new immigrants from a particular country such as “first wave,” “second wave,” etc., often neglects the fact that immigrants have distinct personal and social endowments (human capital and social capital) and that some have migrated under dissimilar circumstances (Eckstein 2009; Mahler 1998). In this dissertation I focused on the need to examine the pre-immigration experiences of migrants to understand how that history shapes the choices immigrants make. I also looked at

how social and economic conditions in the receiving country—in this case, the United States—changed over the half-century or so of this study. These changes also shaped the lives and choices of the immigrants in my study. For example, during this period the United States has moved from a racially segregated to a more tolerant society.

My study shows how intergenerational analysis (Eckstein 2009; cf. Mannheim 1952) provides a useful framework for understanding immigrants. Ethiopian immigrants are very diverse. They are also acutely divided. Competition, mistrust, and enormous rivalries characterize the first generation of Ethiopian immigrants. Such rivalries were shaped mostly along ethnic lines. However, I found that the previously mentioned differences among the first generation of immigrants were stronger than even ethnic differences. The generational approach may provide a fresh approach to the study of immigrant groups that takes us beyond analysis that focuses on ethnicity or tribe.

Each of the (at least) three generational groups of Ethiopian immigrants that came to the United States did so under circumstances that were almost completely different from those that shaped the other two groups. The earliest immigrants, elites who had worked for the imperial government, fled from socialist revolution in the 1970s and confronted raw racism in America. Another group fled the revolution they themselves had ignited and came to the United States during the 1980s. They exhibit strong nationalism. The most recent generation, many of whom arrived after the 1990s, are mostly economic immigrants. They are the victims of both the previous generation that failed to put the Ethiopian house in order and the neoliberal agenda that rolled back state support.

Of course such internal diversity is not uniquely Ethiopian. Immigrant groups from Cape Verde (Gibau 2005), Eritrea (Hepner 2009), Zimbabwe (Pasura, 2011), and Haiti

(Marcelin 2005) also are divided along generational lines and exhibit schisms. The point that Erdmans (1998) discussed about generational differences (see Chapter-2) based on her detailed study of Polish Americans, for example is extremely useful. Some Poles came to the United States during the nineteenth century, before Poland became an independent nation. Their Polishness was unified in America. Those who emigrated after World War II had been raised in an independent Poland and had been exiled by a communist government. They “remain fiercely nationalistic and highly politicized” (Erdmans 1998, 11). Those who came from Communist Poland in the late 1970s and 80s came to the United States because of economic and political reasons; both earlier immigrant groups looked down upon this group as carriers of the “evil stench of communism” (86). Studies of Cuban immigrants in Spain (Berg 2009a) and the United States (Eckstein 2009) also demonstrate differences in how generations shape adaptation, identities, and transnationalism.

My study demonstrates that it is important to challenge characterizations of any immigrant group as a unitary group. When, how, and why emigrants left their homeland are factors that shape how they view the world, how they relate to other emigrants, and what priority they assign to transnational connections. It is important to pay attention to pre-immigration experiences in studies of immigrant adaptation, identity building, and transnational engagement. Doing so helps us understand why some immigrants integrate more than others and why, for instance, some immigrants are passionate about transnational political activities while others steer clear of it all together.

Immigrant Imprints

Far from being torn between there and here, today's immigrants create transnational identities from which they engage with both societies. Immigrant communities are deeply engaged in nation building in their host societies as well as in their home countries. This understanding must certainly challenge the notion that immigrants are waiting to pack and leave. They are making "here" their home as they "develop several fluid, sometimes conflicting identities" (Levitt 2001a, 202). One of the contributions Ethiopian immigrants have made to U.S. nation building is the way they interrogate, challenge and complicate U.S. racial categorizations. Many Ethiopians refuse to accept a binary vision of race, black and white. The binary is not equal, for while a great deal of attention has been given to ethnic differences within the white race, U.S. residents often treat "black America as if they were both a racial and an ethnic group with no intra-racial differences" (Waters 1999, 45).

Ethiopians emphasize Habasha identity, a separate ethnic and racial category. They do not want to be lumped together with any racial group—whether that group be black or brown. This contesting of the tendency to categorize immigrants as a pre-existing and unitary group is eye-opening for some people in the United States. The story of African and specifically Ethiopians refusal to be categorized as African American often fascinates scholars (see Habecker 2011 and Swarns 2004) while it frustrates ideologues (see Mohammed 2006). Of course, not all Ethiopians call themselves Habasha. An individual's pre-immigration experiences and his or her location in transnational immigrant networks are what have made such identity-building possible. The first generation of Ethiopian immigrants, which arrived before and in the mid-1960s, tended to incorporate themselves into the African American community and have therefore remained "invisible" as Ethiopians. This is partly because they arrived before the civil rights movement, at a time when segregation was still legal.

Immigrants who have arrived within the last decade or so, however, emphasize their own racial distinctiveness and reject being lumped into already existing groups. They arrived in a United States that proclaims to value diversity, a great contrast from the deeply segregated society first-generation Ethiopians encountered.

Of course, Ethiopians are not the only ones to challenge racial classification as it currently exists in U.S. culture. Most contemporary African immigrants in the United States are engaged in the process of deconstructing and contesting racial and ethnic categories. These multiple processes are defining the politics of identity and how individuals and groups understand their place in the American mosaic. John Arthur (2008), Gibau (2005) and Kasinitz (1992) to mention just a few scholars who have worked on this topic, examined how Ghanaian, Cape Verdeans and Caribbean immigrants in the United States respectively emphasize home-country identities. However, Ethiopian immigrants and Cape Verdeans are singular in their strong affiliation with unique identity because that identity has historically emphasized a unique racial category that is also culturally distinctive. Those who identify as distinct may not singlehandedly dismantle the entrenched racial system of the United States, but “they are certainly part of incremental changes in how Americans perceive race and ethnicity” (Habecker 2011, 16).

Ethiopian immigrants are also making an imprint on U.S. culture through restaurants and cuisine and their construction of transnational spaces. As Solomon Addis Getahun (2007a: 8) has noted, “the Ethiopian cuisine is becoming part of the U.S. diet.” At the same time, they have systematically assembled something that could be called an Ethiopian national cuisine that did not exist before. Moreover, places of worship and vibrant neighborhoods contribute to the stability of emplacement in urban areas where Ethiopians settle. They (as are

other immigrants) are renewing or are contributing to renewing decaying urban neighborhoods in metropolitan America, bringing their own cultural meanings and symbols into public spaces. Both the work of the transnationalization of cuisine (Zelinsky 1985) and the process of establishing cultural identity through place making are deliberate endeavors. When immigrants construct their identities in multiple cultural domains, they do so with multiple interests. They are not forsaking their old homes, but they are not becoming completely lost in the new home either. They mix and blend identities as they challenge existing categories and create a new place for themselves. As Guarnizo and Smith (1998, 21) have stated, “Identity is contextual but not radically discontinuous. People seek to be situated, to have a stable mooring, an anchor amidst the tempest.”

Political Transnationalism and Its Limits

Ethiopians are engaged in various kinds of transnational activities that connect them with the sending and receiving countries simultaneously. The most common forms of transnationalism take place in the areas of politics, philanthropy, religious activities, music, and so forth. I focused on politics and philanthropy in this dissertation because they are the most pervasive within the Ethiopian immigrant community I studied and because the many Ethiopians who are involved in those areas are making significant differences both in the United States and in Ethiopia.

Political transnationalism is the lifeblood of many Ethiopian immigrants who fled state violence when they came to the United States. As I noted in Chapter 4, it is important to understand political transnationalism through the lens of history. Although there were few Ethiopians in the United States before the 1960s, Ethiopian migrants have been participating in transnational politics since the mid-1930s. During World War II, an Ethiopian migrant, Dr.

Beyan, mobilized thousands of African Americans to speak for and defend the Ethiopian nation-state against fascist Italy's colonization of his homeland. He also crusaded against racial discrimination and the marginalization of black Americans. His enthusiasm for transnational connections and racial equality made him a pariah in the eyes of the U.S government.

During the 1960s and 1970s, hundreds of student immigrants made transnational politics almost their vocation. These students were interested in transforming the sending nation-state. They embraced communist ideology, formed political parties, and smuggled clandestine publications into Ethiopia. Their movement gathered enough momentum to push the country into a revolution whose scars have yet to fully heal. The revolution ended an ancient regime in 1974. Decades-old ties between the United States and Ethiopia abruptly ended. However, the political ideology these students imported into Ethiopia created a quagmire. A military junta that was initially a partner in overthrowing the imperial government snatched the revolution from the hands of unsuspecting students. The military takeover represented a disconnect between the local and the transnational. The students who were steeped in the philosophy of socialism had little or no appeal to the majority of the people. The military that embraced populism murdered thousands of the revolutionaries, often labeling them as elitist. Thousands more were forced into exile, eventually ending up in the United States. Ethiopian transnational politics returned to its roots in the United States, where it remained virtually dormant for decades. The military regime of 1975–1991 shut out any external influence whatsoever.

As a demonstration of how enduring transitional connections were, after the communist rule was toppled in 1991, homeland politics revived considerably. For the past two

decades Ethiopians living in North America have been deeply involved in homeland politics, although some are more engaged than others. As an indication of the extent to which pre-immigration experiences matter, Ethiopians who survived the military government dominate much of the transnational political discourse in the United States. Terrence Lyons (2011) refers to them as a “conflict generated diaspora.” Because of survivors’ guilt and the trauma they experienced together, many first-generation immigrants cling to a romantic notion of a homeland that is frozen in time. The same can be said about Iranian and Cuban immigrants; political identity remains a defining variable among those who fled political violence (see Ghorashi and Boersma 2009; Eckstein 2009). In fact, there is a pervasive generational ideology among Ethiopians who came of age during the 1960s and 1970s, a belief that they were destined to perfect the nation-state. This belief drives their past and present-day commitments to transnational action, even though positive political change in Ethiopia remains elusive.

A close look at the transnational political experiences of Ethiopian immigrants sheds light on what diasporas can and cannot accomplish by engaging in homeland politics. Like the governments of most sending states, the Ethiopian government has become transnational only reluctantly. A large part of the welcoming attitude the government displays toward Ethiopians abroad is based on the notion of neoliberal citizenship in which the government makes a bargain with diaspora members: “In return for remittance we will give you some recognition but limit your access to real political power” (R. Smith 2008, 714). Although the Ethiopian government does not appear to be seriously interested in the political opinions of the transnational group, Ethiopians abroad continue to influence homeland politics. The 2005 parliamentary election in Ethiopia provided a rare and promising glimpse of what the diaspora

could achieve, where its limitations were, and, how a state jolted by transnational politics might react.

In that election, the Ethiopian diaspora largely financed opposition political parties and advised and supported candidates from those parties. The opposition was able to win many seats in the parliament. However, the opposition claimed that it had in fact won the election, and many who had won seats in parliament chose to boycott instead of taking seats in a government that did not acknowledge its defeat. The “militant and uncompromising leaders” within the diaspora political structure (Lyons 2007, 539) urged this strategy and ostracized those who wanted to negotiate with the government. The Ethiopian government was terrified and intimidated not only by the claim that the opposition parties had won the first democratically organized parliamentary election but also by the strong political showing of opposition groups directed by the diaspora. The government used the decision of opposition members to boycott parliament as an excuse to use physical force to ensure its grip on power. It sent opposition leaders to prison, murdered protesters, and criminalized transnational politics, the cause of much of its trouble. Such state action severely curtailed cross-border political engagement. However, even though for the past three years, stringent laws have restricted the role of civic organizations funded from abroad, political transnationalism remains alive and well within the Ethiopian diaspora. Ethiopians in North America keep the dialogue about democratization alive through regular meetings, publications, radio stations, and Internet sites.

The political involvement of immigrants should be defined broadly. Like most other immigrant groups, Ethiopians clearly participate in both homeland and host-country politics. Ethiopians living in the United States also participate in host-country politics to improve the

circumstances of their lives, as part of their civic duty, and as a way to influence U.S. actions in Ethiopia. The last point is very important. In their efforts to shape homeland politics, Ethiopian immigrants not only learn how the U.S. political system operates but also how frustrating and demanding democracy is. They appreciate the need to vote to be heard both in the United States and in Ethiopia. Such experience shows strong relationship between assimilation and transnationalism in general. Some analysts have argued that transnational connections are an outcome of assimilation, while others have seen transnationalism as ephemeral—perhaps part of a long route to assimilation. In my study I showed how it would be fruitful to look at how transnationalism serves as an incentive/motivation for integrating into the society of the host country. In the case of Ethiopian immigrants, it has even been a vehicle for such integration.

Transnational Giving

Immigrants construct selective connections with receiving countries. There is even some degree of exclusivity. Some Ethiopians work tirelessly to improve the political situation in both the receiving and sending countries but rarely participate in other transnational groups. They boycott, contest, and obstruct activities such as investments or any activity that would increase the financial and material capacities of the Ethiopian government. Others prefer to work exclusively in the areas of investment and philanthropy because they believe that politics is not the only way to help one's country. A large proportion of first-generation and second-generation immigrants are increasing their engagement in philanthropic projects. Although the phenomenon now called diaspora philanthropy (Johnson 2007) is currently underresearched, the intensity of the connections immigrants forge with people and

organizations in the homeland has increased, and the resources migrants transfer to their home countries have become very significant.

This relatively recent change has shaped the debate about the impact of immigration (Faist 2008). Instead of the classic assumption that migration is detrimental to the sending society because of the departure of skilled or semiskilled workers and is a burden to the receiving country, researchers have begun to analyze how migrants contribute to social and economic improvements in both sending and receiving countries. Over the past three decades, Ethiopians have sent home billions of dollars. According to a World Bank estimate, Ethiopians remitted an estimated \$3 billion dollars in 2009 (The World Bank 2010), surpassing almost all other sources of revenue, including revenue from Ethiopia's primary export of coffee. However, most immigrants decline to participate in government-sponsored investment projects. Instead, they choose to work through philanthropic organizations that are making differences in the lives of thousands of people. Many immigrants are engaged in projects that benefit women and children. Others are active in protecting the environment. The number of philanthropic projects is increasing, not only in Ethiopia but in other sending countries as well.

Sending governments have responded to the increased flow of human and material resources from diaspora members with policies that seek to capture some of this wealth. Several countries in Latin America, the Caribbean, and Asia are benefiting from the contributions of migrant populations. Mexico and Morocco are exceptional in negotiating with and tapping into diaspora resources (Iskander 2010). Other countries are just realizing the possibility of the benefits such resources can provide. In sub-Saharan Africa, Ghana and Ethiopia have taken the lead in inviting members of their respective diasporas to become

important resources for programs and projects that seek to overcome the economic and social crises created by neoliberal policies. Migrants are not a neutral group, however. Their willingness to give back to their home country and the size of their donation depends on a variety of factors, including how well they have integrated into the host society and what types of experiences they had in the home country before they emigrated. Some migrants were displaced, exiled, or purged by the government that is now courting them.

Thus, sending governments remain on guard. They want to tap into immigrant resources but they also want to tame the political potential of those who control such resources. The governments of Eritrea, Cuba, Ghana, and Vietnam, to name just a few, often make open pleas to their diaspora to invest. Yet the requests of immigrants for more leverage are met with stubborn responses (Hepner 2009). In the Ethiopian case, immigrants have responded to the government's appeal for migrants to become involved in rebuilding the country, but not in the way the government would have preferred. Government officials want to increase investment in Ethiopian businesses and projects and build up reserves of hard currency from expatriates, while most migrants have expressed reluctance to invest in such endeavors. Their mistrust of government policies is pervasive. Some want to see a democratic political system and hope to use their financial resources to help bring this about. Migrant investments in government projects and in Ethiopian businesses are in decline, while donations to nonprofit organizations are increasing. The Ethiopian government is noticeably unhappy with the trend. After the 2005 parliamentary election in particular, the government openly criticized civil organizations, including those that migrants favor, as opposition in camouflage, and in 2009 it passed legislation that restricted the activities of NGOs to the provision of services, and then only if such services are funded almost exclusively with local

funds. If they generate more than 10 percent of their funding from external sources, as such organizations commonly do, they are not allowed to advocate for children, women, the disabled, and other disadvantaged members of the society. This action reasserted the transnational power of the state and complicated the future of already-fragile nonprofit organizations.

Immigrants also give to the receiving countries. Giving back may take the form of cash donations to worthy philanthropic endeavors. However, giving back usually takes the form of nongovernmental organizations that are helping their fellow immigrants adjust to the new home and get on their feet. Many nongovernmental organizations that were created by Ethiopian immigrants in Washington, D.C., are just doing that—helping immigrants from all walks of life adjust to life in the United States and become independent. As one of my consultants emphasized, the purpose of such organizations is to “keep them from the alleys of ghettos and make them self-dependent.” All of this is taking place in the context of neoliberal states, both the sending and the receiving countries, that are experiencing a cash crunch. Because of this, they often farm out the role of providing social services to nongovernmental organizations.

Generally Ethiopians participate in different kinds of transnational activities. Their transnationalism is shaped by their experiences with the sending and receiving countries. Compared to most other immigrants to the United States they are recent arrivals. Yet their activities are leaving an indelible imprint on the new home as they are in the sending country. However, the role of the sending state in frustrating or facilitating transnational activities is very crucial. When the study of immigrant transnationalism began there were celebratory claims. Transnational identities were viewed as liberatory. It was as if neither the United States

nor the sending states had access or control over people who embraced transnational identities. Perhaps transnational migrants do enjoy a relative freedom compared to those left behind, particularly when the sending state is authoritarian. However, sending states are increasingly adapting and are reaching beyond the geographic boundary to intimidate and control transnational migrants. A useful approach to understanding transnational migrants should take into account how immigrants activities confront power relations, cultural constructions, economic interactions, and, more generally, social institutions in both the sending and receiving countries (Guarnizo and Smith 1998, 6).

Identity and Transnationalism among the Second Generations

The question of how transnational the second generation is and how transnationalism changes across generations is a fascinating topic that has barely been studied. In Chapters 6 and 7 I looked at these issues. In spite of less-than-adequate empirical sources, some publications have generated intense debate about the conditions of what some scholars call the new second generation, the children of immigrants who came to the United States after 1965. They contrast the experiences of this group with what they call the old second generation, the children of immigrants who came to the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Many members of the old second generation succeeded economically, while some of the new second generation are experiencing economic decline. These scholars argue that because of the limited opportunities for employment in the United States and the disappearance of many good-paying jobs, many parents are no longer able to invest in the future of their children. In addition, in the inner cities, where many immigrants settle to take advantage of low rents, education systems are underfunded and urban social problems abound. The children of immigrants are trapped, and they often cast their lot with groups who

have oppositional views about upward mobility, as the theory argues (Gans 1992; Jensen and Chitose 1994).

This overly pessimistic view did not convince many researchers. Using what is called the segmented assimilation framework, researchers showed remarkable variations between and within different migrant groups. This model takes into account socioeconomic differences among immigrants. For example, not all immigrants are unskilled and poorly educated. In addition, the civil right laws that have minimized discrimination, the determination of immigrants to see their children succeed, and the strong community support systems immigrants build makes “all-are-doomed” scenarios highly inaccurate. Some children of immigrants advance to the middle class in America, while others may stay within their parents’ social networks and obtain guidance to help them succeed economically. While some do experience downward mobility into low-income groups (Kasinitz et al. 2008; Waters 1999).

The segmented assimilation model dispels the unqualified and sweeping pathologization of the new second generation. It is, however, trapped by its assumption that “immigration as a step like irreversible process and one in which immigrants’ children [are] socialized solely by forces within the land of their birth” (Fouron and Glick-Schiller 2002, 176). Using ethnographic methodology and informed by the transnational perspective, I depart from models that persist in searching for how and where to place the children of immigrants in relation to prearranged racial and ethnic categories. As my research demonstrates, most of them grow up in a transnationalized environment. The country of birth is not the sole force that shapes their identities (Eckstein 2002). Oftentimes children of immigrants selectively choose among the ways of their parents, the customs of U.S. society,

and the values and mores of their peers. Sometimes they even create something altogether new and different (see Lee 2008). They draw upon their multiple identities in how they respond to events they experience at home, at school, at work, in the country of their birth, and in the country of their ancestry. Several ethnographically grounded researchers have come to support this perspective (Kasinitz et al 2008; Fourn and Glick Schiller 2002; Espiritu 2003).

The lives and life histories of the twenty-one second-generation Ethiopians I interacted with, interviewed, and even befriended indicate how their lives transcend the boundaries of a nation. In the context of the growing multiculturalism of the United States and the transnationalization of the social milieu in which children of immigrants grow up, they demonstrate cultural competencies that navigate different identity groups in the United States and beyond. Most second-generation Ethiopian immigrants (and, for that matter, other new African immigrants) challenge and resist the established, normative, and even determinative categorization of them as African Americans, although, to be sure, most had nothing against that group. Preexisting racial and ethnic categories do not seem to account for their realities, experiences, tribulations, and challenges.

Importantly, the participants in the study generally did not feel “fully” accepted by mainstream groups, whether that group was Ethiopians, African Americans, or Americans. Nor do they think the labels “American” or “Ethiopian” would be sufficient to describe their belonging and identities. However, they do not feel inadequate to the task of interacting, working, and living with different identity groups. They have the cultural competencies to blend and juggle identities. They accentuate different aspects of their identity, depending on the context. Many of them feel, in fact, that being transnational means being American. This

was not a rhetorical position. Their frequent visits to Ethiopia made clear to them that they might not belong there; they were different and “too freaking American,” as Alex put it. For a number of my respondents, transnational identity is an American trait because they define Americanness as “sharing other peoples cultures.”

This position may sound eccentric to the dominant thinking that still defines belonging as a tangible entity that one should make sacrifices to fit in. As I think about the lives of the second-generation Ethiopians I met during my research, the thought that resonates is how they cannot live without either Ethiopia or America. Batainah writes, “Indeed the exclusion of the voices of those who have an understanding of the challenges faced by transnationals can only delay the understanding of what will soon be regarded as ‘desirable’ in an increasingly globalized world” (Batainah 2008, 165). I couldn’t agree more. The second-generation young people I met are the face of the future.

The transnational engagement of the second generation is intertwined with their identities. Many of them may not send remittances, and many do not seem to be overly concerned about the political conditions in their ancestral land. Asking them if they do each and every thing their parents do as a measure of whether or not they are transnational may raise the bar too high. Questions of this type may even disguise a broader kind of transnationalism that includes visits to the homeland, phone calls, electronic communication, and many other forms of transnational involvement that are important to them (Lee 2009, 17). Their transnationalism could well be based on symbolic attachments through which they marshal the cultural and material resources of their ancestral land to help them build their identities in the racialized structure of the United States (Espiritu and Tran 2002, 369; see also Wolf 2002). Lee (2008, 10) has observed that “there is less explicit focus on” their

transnational connections beyond a sharp focus on their experiences in the host country. Much more work needs to be done to understand their kind of transnationalism, which in turn will help us understand the future course of transnational engagements.

To be sure second-generation Ethiopian immigrants are engaged in a variety of transnational activities that include defending the homeland here in the United States to dispel the potentially hurtful perceptions about Ethiopia in America, taking part in political action (especially the hard work of building a voting bloc), sponsoring children in the homeland, and working in Ethiopia. What I observe is an impressive range of transnationalism and transnational activities. Their effort to create an Ethiopian American voting bloc in order to be heard by lawmakers in the United States and to advance political causes seems particularly remarkable. They are departing from the protest-based transnational politics of their parents.

Sometimes even the most seemingly disconnected member of the second generation can be pulled into transnational orbit. A short life history that Asfaw told me about his younger sister illustrates this point. His sister earned a law degree from a prestigious school, married an American, and ended up divorcing him. In many ways, she seemed different from most members of the second generation whose lives I have described above. She did not speak any Ethiopian language. In fact, she kept her distance from Ethiopians most of the time. Yet she was the one who decided to go back to Ethiopia and participate in philanthropic activities there. The conversations I had with members of the second generation suggest that the most important predictor of transnational involvement seems to be the degree to which the second-generation person is exposed to the transnational social networks the first generation established. It is true that the second generation may not participate in transnationalism with the same frequency and intensity as their parents (Lee 2008). Yet many of the children who

have never gone back to their ancestral home were raised in households where people, values, goods, and claims from somewhere else were present on a daily basis. Undoubtedly the second generation has “the skills and social connections to become transnational activists if and when they choose to do so during a particular life-cycle stage” (Levitt and Jaworsky 2007, 134).

The topic of the second generation, identities and transnationalism needs further research. The points I make about transnational individuals not being willing to accept either/or identity are extremely important. This issue hints at what our future world may look like. In that sense, my study is significant. Before closing I raise the following questions that may help us understand the second generation: Will the new second generation of Ethiopian immigrants for that matter most other second generation build upon the experiences of their parents to combine increasingly large remittances with political pressure? Will the refusal of young Ethiopian Americans to accept established categories of racial identity create new openings in the ongoing dialogue about race in the United States? What cultural values from the homeland might they transmit to their own children? How will their experiences with homeland social problems and social issues in the United States shape the institutions they create? In an increasingly mobile global society, do the values and beliefs of this generation point toward a different understanding of nationalism? Each of these questions are certainly interesting and they require further inquiry beyond the scope of this dissertation.

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2010 *Contribution of the Ethiopian diaspora to peace-building: a case study of the Tigray Development Association.* University of Jyväskylä, Diaspace Project. Diaspace working Paper No. 8.

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2012 PhD (Distinction), Department of Anthropology, Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University.
 2001 MA in Social Anthropology, Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Addis Ababa University. Major Areas: Development Anthropology.
 1996 BA in Sociology, Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Addis Ababa University

Academic Employment and Positions

Spring 2011-
 Adjunct Instructor, Department of Anthropology, Syracuse University

Fall 2009-Spring 2010
 Teaching Assistant, Department of Anthropology, Syracuse University

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 Instructor, Department of Anthropology, Syracuse University, course title “African Cultures”

2004-2006
 Teaching Assistant, Department of Anthropology, Syracuse University

2002-present

Lecturer, Department of Anthropology and Sociology, Addis Ababa University, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

1997-2001

Instructor, Bishoftu Community College, Debre Zeit, Ethiopia

Select Courses Taught at Syracuse University

Global Encounters (ANT 185)

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Urban Sociology (SOC 301)

Select Courses Taught at Bishoftu Community College

Social Research Methods

Population Studies for Change Agents

Fieldwork and Research Experience

- 2008 Dissertation research on the transnational experiences of Ethiopian immigrants in the Washington metropolitan area
- 2002-2004 Ethnographic researcher for the BASIS Collaborative Research Support Programme and the Institute for Development Research, Addis Ababa University. Project on “Building Assets for Sustainable Recovery and Food Security” (funded by the United States Agency for International Development).
- 2004 Researcher for the Research Project “Inter-Ethnic Conflicts in Southwestern Ethiopia,” sponsored by OXFAM-America.
- 2003-2004 Researcher for the Research Group on Wellbeing in Developing Countries, Economic and Social Research Council, UK. Project on “Rural Well-Being and Poverty in Ethiopia (WED),” involving WED Ethiopia and the University of Bath.
- 2003 Researcher for the project “Institutional Capacity for Environmental Management in Ethiopia.” Supported by the World Bank.

- 2001-2002 Participatory Rural Appraisal researcher for the Institute of Development Studies, Sussex University
- Researcher for the project “Destitution in Northeastern Ethiopia.” Supported by Save the Children fund.
- 2001 Marketing Researcher for MOHA Soft Drink Company, a partner of Pepsi-Cola Company in Ethiopia.
- Researcher for the project “Impact of Population Migration in Addis Ababa City.” Supported by the Agency for Technical Cooperation
- 1997-1999 Sociologist employed by Oromia Regional State, Ministry of Rural Affairs, in southwestern Ethiopia. Dealt with community needs assessment, participation, and social mobilization.

Publications, Presentations and Research Reports

“Immigrant Divides: Pre-Immigration Experiences and Transnationalism among Ethiopian Immigrants in the Washington, D. C., Metropolitan Area,” submitted to *International Migration Review* (35pages).

“Double engagements: Host Country and Homeland Politics among Immigrants in the Washington, D.C., Metropolitan Area,” to be submitted to the *Journal of International Migration*.

2011 “Controversy Over Legacy: Ethiopian Americans Transnational Place-Making Project In Washington, DC,” presented at American Anthropological Association Annual Meeting, Montreal., November 20, 2011. 15 minutes. (Panel selected)

2010 “‘Stuck in the middle’: Transnational Identities of Second-Generation Ethiopian Immigrants in the Washington Metropolitan Area.” Paper presented at States of Belonging, an anthropology graduate students’ conference, University of Colorado-Boulder.

2009 “The Social Dimension of Development-Induced Resettlement: The Case of Gilgel Gibe Hydroelectric Dam in southwest Ethiopia.” In *Moving People in Ethiopia*, edited by Alula Pankhurst and FranÇois Piguet. Rochester, N.Y.: James Currey.

2008 “‘We are not compensating what is underwater’: Dam-Induced Population Relocation in Ethiopia and Its Impact on the Youth Population.” Paper presented at the annual conference of the Society for Applied Anthropology, Memphis, Tennessee.

2004 “The Social Dimension of Development-Induced Resettlement: The Case of Gilgel Gibe Hydroelectric Dam in Southwest Ethiopia.” In *People, Space and State: Migration, Resettlement and Displacement in Ethiopia*, edited by Alula Pankhurst and FranÇois Piguet. Addis Ababa: Ethiopian Society of Sociologists, Social Workers and Anthropologists.

Deadly Conflict and Delayed Intervention: Interethnic Conflict in Southwestern Ethiopia. A report submitted to Oxfam-America, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

2001 "Re-Relocation and Dislocation of Communities by Development Projects. The Case of Gilgel Gibe Hydroelectric Dam in Southwest Ethiopia." MA thesis, School of Graduate Studies, Addis Ababa University.

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- 2008 Society for Applied Anthropology: Del Jones Memorial Travel Award
- 2007 Wenner-Gren Foundation for Anthropological Research: Dissertation Research Grant
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Memberships in Professional Societies

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