IMAGINING ITYOPPIA:

ETHIOPIAN DIASPORA AND RASTAFARIANISM

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August 17, 2005
IMAGINING ITYOPPIA:
ETHIOPIAN DIASPORA AND RASTAFARIANISM

A
THESIS

Presented to the Faculty
of the University of Alaska Fairbanks
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

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Fairbanks, Alaska
August 2005
Abstract

On a very general level, this thesis explores why Ethiopians and Rastafarians – who share Ityoppia, as a general point of reference – have historically been at odds. More specifically, however, I am interested in whether the rather recent emergence of Ethiopian communities in the United States – which share experiences of diaspora and processes of “imagining from afar” with Rastafarians – has resulted in a change of Ethiopian Americans’ attitude toward adherents to Rastafarianism.

The main aim of this study is to give an accurate account of the Ethiopian perspective of Rastafari, which has not been articulated till the present time. To this end I first give a broad description of their arrival in the United States, and their particular diasporic experiences, which encompasses only thirty years. Finally, I explore the prevailing attitudes and perceptions of Ethiopians in the United States with respect to the Rastafarian movement.

This study utilizes primary source such as interviews and surveys conducted with first and second generation Ethiopians. It employs data collected via virtual communities along with other resources on the Internet and printed publications
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Acknowledgements

I would like to thank first my family, my husband and children, whose patience and constant support has sustained me during the challenging process of preparing my thesis. I wish also to extend my sincerest thanks to my advisers: Peter Schweitzer, Patty Gray, David Koester, and Roy Bird all of whom have willingly and unreservedly made many vital contributions to my research.

A very special thanks to Dr. Peter Schweitzer, the chair of my committee, whose vote of confidence and encouragement from the start and throughout this process has meant a great deal, but moreover whose scholarly expertise and guidance have been critical to the success of this study. I also extend my deepest gratitude to the Rastafarians who have been gracious to many members of my family past and present.

Finally, to my Tezeeta (memories), those Ethiopian memories filled with loved ones most of whom have passed on; they continue to inspire and enrich my imagination in my Diasporic journey.
Chapter 1  Introduction

On a very general level, this thesis explores why Ethiopians and Rastafarians—who share *Ityoppia,*¹ as a general point of reference—have historically been at odds. More specifically, however, I am interested in whether the rather recent emergence of Ethiopian communities in the United States—which share experiences of diaspora and processes of “imagining from afar” with Rastafarians—has resulted in a change of Ethiopian Americans’ attitude toward adherents to Rastafarianism.

The Ethiopian Diaspora, the history of Ethiopian mass immigration to the United States, is a relatively short one, spanning a mere thirty years. This movement can be described as three major waves. The first occurred in 1975-80 and mainly comprised individuals from the privileged class who were directly or indirectly associated with the monarchy and had to flee the Marxist regime. The second took place between 1980 and 1991 when the urban youth of Addis Ababa (the capital of Ethiopia), as well as other smaller cities, dodged bullets and evaded the wrath of the Red Terror (*Qye Sheber*) of 1978 (*Zemecha*) and the doomed literacy campaign. This wave also included citizens who resisted mandatory military service. Concurrent with this group was also a mass migration of families in rural areas, especially from the locations of the northern Ethiopian region of Tigre, the lowlands in Harerge, Bale, Sidamo, and Gamo Gofa; and the north-central region of Wello who were facing famine (Marcus 1994). At the height

¹ The name by which Ethiopians refer to their homeland. Amharic for Ethiopia.
of this crisis, a thousand refugees per day were walking into Somalia alone. It is estimated that by the end of 1984, over 2.5 million Ethiopians had abandoned their homes and sought asylum in the neighboring countries of Djibouti, Kenya, Somali, and Sudan. All were at risk and on the brink of starvation (Levine 2003, Nelson, Kaplan 1981).

The third wave was comprised of groups of people who left Ethiopia after the fall of the Marxist regime in May 1991, following the collapse of the Derg regime, also known as the Provisional Military Administrative Committee (PMAC). At this time a large number of Ethiopian refugees returned to their natal home; however, in 1993, Ethiopia still had the sixth highest number of the world's refugees. Depending on their circumstances, the largest portion headed to the United States, often following family members. Other destinations were England, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Sweden, as well as the Middle East (Levine 2003).

Ever since Ethiopians in the diaspora became aware of Rastafarians, their views of them have been tenuous at best and antagonistic at worst. The reasons for this general stance are many; the most significant has to do with their own vulnerability in their new situation as a minority ethnic group. It is evident that Ethiopians in the United States have made strides in assimilation; however, as a community they have maintained important allegiances and practical connections to their natal home, facilitated by the global advancement in technology, communication, travel and mass media. A high level of connection is possible that would have been unthinkable two decades ago (Levine 2003).
Clearly, the Ethiopia/Rastafarian connection has been very much partial; that is, there has never been reciprocity, nor have the two groups had much direct interaction. Until the mid-1970s, Ethiopians, a vast majority of whom were still back in the old country, were not aware that the rest of the black population in the western hemisphere held their ‘homeland’ in such esteem. The nature of this “new” relationship, if it can be called that, is focused on Ethiopia. Ethiopians identify with the land of their origin, their ancestral home, and share in key aspects of that past in concrete terms, history, language, customs, and religion. Rastafarians too have adopted this past, outside of its socio/political context, and have drawn from it selectively, making it an integral part of their identity (Mcfarlane 1998, Murrell 1998, Lewis 1998).

In this new framework, “Ethiopian” has become an extension of the Afro-Caribbean culture. From the point of view of Ethiopians, these dichotomous cultural manifestations that are familiar, when superimposed on Caribbean culture result in something entirely bizarre, rendering the Rastafarians, in the eyes of average Ethiopians, peculiarly alien. Furthermore, from the point of view of Ethiopians, the problem derives and is centered on the question of authenticity. It is as though the claim the Rastafarians make, with all its implications, coupled with the widespread influence the Rastafarians have gained globally, puts the Rastafarians in the very powerful position of articulating a version of “Ethiopian identity.” As this study attempts to show, from the Ethiopian point of view, this arrangement is flawed and threatens the very essence of what is Ethiopian.
Who are the Rastafarians? The terms Rastafari, Rastafarians, and Rastas are commonly used synonymously in most of the literature and will be used as such in this study; however, *Ras*\(^2\) (an Ethiopian royal title) Teferi (a given name; literally “one who is feared”) was the pre-coronation given name of Emperor Haile-Sellassie I of Ethiopia (1892-1975). This study will make the distinction between the person and the notion. Rastafari (one word and spelled differently) is a religious-cultural movement that emerged on the streets of Kingston, Jamaica, in the 1930s. Today, this movement, with its broad application, enjoys a following of over one million globally (Murrell 1998). It is estimated that, beyond the one million who are practicing Rastafarians, there are twice that number who are considered sympathizers, and even a greater number who are fans of reggae music. The movement’s longevity and broad appeal is described further by Nathaniel Murrell, who wrote:

Since the early 1970s, Rastafari has been recognized not only as one of the most popular Afro-Caribbean religions of the late twentieth century, gaining even more popularity than Voodoo, but also as one of the leading cultural trends in the world; as such, it demands attention from those who study the religions of people who live at the economic and political margins of Western society. (Murrell 1998:1)

\(^2\)Ras, a title given to Ethiopian royalty, designates a close proximity to the crown. Traditionally, those with the title *Ras* were either legitimate contenders for the crown, or were direct descendents (male heirs) to past *Atses* (Emperors). During the reign of *Atse* Haile-Sellassie, this title adopted a broader application. The monarch had given this title to persons with exemplary service to their country; for instance, the famed warrior Mesfin Seleshi was made a *Ras* after he distinguished himself during the Ethio-Italian war (1936-1941). The true meaning of the term seems to have been lost in translation. It is common for western scholars to brashly equate it to duke. Duke like *Ras* is a construct within a particular social/political context and cannot be utilized arbitrarily.
Rastafari’s major doctrinal tenets can be summarized as follows: affirmation of black people’s African heritage; belief that Ras Teferi/Haile-Sellassie I, Emperor of Ethiopia, is the living God and black Messiah, also referred to as Jah, or Jah Rastafari; belief in physical/spiritual repatriation to Ethiopia, the true home and redemption of black people; the view that “the ways of the white men are evil, especially for the black” race; and the belief in the apocalyptic fall of Jamaica as proponent of “Babylon,” the corrupt western dominion. When this system is destroyed, which will happen with the help of Jah, the prevailing white/slave order will be reversed. All Rasta, as well as other Blacks (the downtrodden), will be the rulers of this new kingdom. (Murrell 1998:2)

One major point that will be discussed fully in a later chapter is that beyond Rastafarianism “Ethiopia” has enjoyed a unique and privileged place in the minds and hearts of Africans in the Diaspora. This idea has been described by a number of scholars on the African Diaspora, including Robin Cohen, who wrote,

Guinea, Freetown and Liberia were all versions of “homeland” for the African Diaspora. But by far the most significant notions of the African homeland were imbricated in “Ethiopia”—the place, the symbol, the idea and the promise. Ethiopia was seen as the heartland of African civilization, indeed—a claim replicated in a number of self-images of different Diasporas— the heartland of all civilization. (Cohen 1997:37)

In Jamaica, where the Rastafari movement was conceived, this relationship was developed at a level and in a more direct way than anywhere else before or since. The Rastafari movement became the first to transform the age-old link to Africa as a place of
racial origin into a more specific and concrete ethnic connection. This transformation has been important throughout the development of the Rastafari and continues to have a profound influence in sustaining it in its present form.

Theoretical Approaches

1. Identity, Authenticity, and Culture

In the introduction to *The Predicament of Culture, “The Pure Products Go Crazy,”* James Clifford (1974) discusses the difficulty in dealing with the concepts of identity, authenticity, and culture. He states, “Contemporary identities can no longer presuppose continuous cultures or traditions, everywhere individuals and groups improvise local performances from (re)collected pasts, drawing on foreign media, symbols, and languages” (Clifford 1974:2). Given this setting and general flux, who has the authority to speak for a group’s identity or authenticity? What are the essential elements and boundaries of a culture? How do self and other clash and converse in the encounters of travel and modern interethnic relations? (Clifford 1974:3) All these are valid questions that need to be considered in this complex relationship between the Ethiopians and Rastafarians.

Some diaspora communities, such as the Armenians, are described as undergoing a period of public silence or “survivor syndrome” --an initial silence as a reflection of psychosocial trauma. In contrast, the first decade of the Ethiopian Diaspora in the United States was remarkably active. Important social and cultural organizations such as the
Ethiopian Refugee Center in Washington, D.C., the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Harlem and Los Angeles, and numerous Ethiopian (traditional) restaurants became a venue for community-gathering in the early 1980s. With the rapid growth of the Ethiopian population in the United States—now estimated at well above half a million— one saw the replication of those earlier models. Most Ethiopian communities today, which are numerous throughout the United States, have their own restaurants, churches, and some form of political organization (Levine 2003).

The first-generation immigrant Ethiopians were by and large chronically introverted; their willingness to interact with other people was dictated only by necessity. As much as it was possible, they ignored the society at large. As one member and observer of this generation of Ethiopians aptly put it,

There seems to be a curious situation among Ethiopians in America. The first generation does not seem to be “melting” well despite many years of residence in America. They show marked indifference or even calculated detachment from the cultural processes of American society. They seem to do well in the economic sphere but beyond that they seem to be immersed in their old-world culture and traditional practices.

Ethiopians do not seem to be Americanizing very well. Many first generation Ethiopians tend to have traditional outlooks. They tend to believe that American society lacks self-restraint and self-discipline. American culture is too relativistic for them. They appreciate the physical and intellectual freedom in America but they reject its results.
Ethiopian men have a hard time accepting American values that accord women to be equal and their children go unpunished.

You can take the boy/girl out of Ethiopia, but you can’t take Ethiopia out of the boy/girl. Perhaps because Ethiopia did not experience the cultural devastation of colonialism, Ethiopians generally find it harder to accept other cultures or values. They have too much pride in their own history and culture. They view non-Ethiopians with benign indifference or paternalistic pity. Often, they close their eyes and ears to things happening around them. (Solomon 1992:1)

Although the vast majority of Ethiopians left their country as immigrants, the movements of the “new immigrant” types such as Ethiopians are dictated by circumstances at home rather than a drive to establish a new life. Therefore, they do not necessarily identify with their adopted country in terms of political loyalty, nor do they have a cultural or linguistic affinity. As a result, there is very little bond with the host society. Such groups see themselves as Diasporas owing to the fact that there is a certain degree of social distance and a high degree of psychological alienation (Cohen 1997).
2. Diaspora

A contemporary study of any ethnic group such as the Ethiopians in a setting such as the United States is inevitably tied up with the notions of post-modernism, Diaspora, deterritorialization, cosmopolitanism, and transnationalism. In attempting to explore the particular experiences of Ethiopians in their diasporic journey, and in view of the changing meanings of the contemporary concept of diaspora as a way of understanding cultural differences and identity politics, one ought first to understand the classical origins and connotations of the term “diaspora.” Only after this term is assimilated and understood can it be transcended (Cohen 1997).

The word “diaspora” is derived from the Greek verb *speirô* (to sow) and the preposition *dia* (over). Its original use was intended to describe human migration and colonization. The word acquired a more sinister meaning and began to signify collective trauma and banishment modeled after the experiences of the Jews, Africans, Palestinians, and Armenians (Cohen 1997). Diaspora in contemporary usage has become one of the buzzwords of the postmodern age. The growing popularity of the term in academia has to do with “the rapidity of material and discursive change in the past three decades that has increased both the number of global Diasporas and the range and diversity of the new semantic domain that the term ‘diaspora’ inhabits” (Tololyan 1996). Over the past two decades, the term “Diaspora” has become a loose reference to wide categories such as immigrants, guest-workers, ethnic and racial minorities, refugees, expatriates, and travelers in general—in other words, any community whose numbers make it visible in the
host community. This over-use and under-theorization threatens the term's descriptive usefulness (Safran 1991, Cohen 1997, Vertovec 1999). The old notion of the three "classic Diasporas," the Jewish, Greek, and Armenian, has been greatly altered, both in terms of defining quality as well as sheer quantity. By the end of the millennium, there were multiple communities in the United States which have been identified or identify themselves as Diasporas (Vertovec 2000).

Currently, Diaspora discourse, according to Vertovec, has arisen as part of the postmodern project of resisting the nation-state, which is perceived as hegemonic, discriminatory and culturally homogenizing. The alternative agenda advocates the recognition of hybridity, multiple identities, and affiliations with people, causes, and traditions outside the nation-state of residence (Vertovec 2000:5). Diasporic identity embraces the notions of multiplicity and mobility or "traveling culture" (Clifford 1997).

In the last decade or so, the term 'Diaspora' has been the focus of debate. The classical definition has become obsolete largely due to the increasing numbers of mass immigration, global media, and transportation, all of which have contributed to the shifting nature of the "nation-state." This shift has had fundamental implications for the system of nation-states. By the end of the twentieth century, the membership of the United Nations comprised about 200 states. By contrast, the number of groups identified as "people hood," whose membership is based on adherence and affiliation to language custom, and religion, is estimated at 2,000, ten times the recognized number of nation-states (Cohen 1997). Furthermore, the new immigrants do not necessarily identify with
their adopted countries, contrary to the old immigrants. The new movements of groups include much broader types such as refugees, exiles, and guest-workers who have emerged in the host country, mostly due to circumstances at their natal home and not in pursuit of a new life. In addition and as a result of these attitudes, the citizens already assimilated often meet these groups of people with hostility and resentment.

The use of the term “Diaspora,” while of Greek origin has through the ages become increasingly modeled after the Jewish experience of trauma, victimization, alienation, and loss of identity. By inference the term lent these general connotations to later Diasporas such as the Armenian and African. Thus, what is generally known as ‘Classical Diasporas’ includes the experiences of these three main groups, also typologized as “Victim” Diasporas (Cohen 1997).

The Ethiopians can be defined as a “new diaspora.” This means it is comprised of a population which is considered “deterritorialised” or “transnational” (originating in a land other than that in which it currently resides) and whose social, economic and political networks cross the boundaries of nation-state or span the globe. Transnational bonds no longer have to be cemented by migration or by exclusive territorial claims (Vertovec 2000).

As Cohen notes, “In the age of cyberspace, a diaspora can, to some degree, be held together or re-created through the mind, through cultural artifacts and through shared imagination” (1997:26). The changing meaning of the contemporary concept of diaspora has necessitated a modification of “common features” found in all diasporas,
thereby developing a viable definition. Using such a revised list of “common features” as outlined by Robin Cohen, we may begin to identify these features with respect to the new Ethiopian immigration or mass mobility outside of their natal home. These features can be used to trace the Ethiopian experiences of dispersal and collective memory about the homeland, including its location, history, and achievement (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1
Robin Cohen’s Common Features of a Diaspora

1. Dispersal from an original homeland, often traumatically, to two or more foreign regions;
2. alternatively, the expansion from a homeland in search of work, in pursuit of trade or to further colonial ambitions;
3. a collective memory and myth about the homeland, including its location, history and achievements;
4. an idealization of the putative ancestral home and a collective commitment to its maintenance, restoration, safety and prosperity, even to its creation;
5. the development of a return movement that gains collective approbation;
6. a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time and based on a sense of distinctiveness, a common history and the belief in a common fate;
7. a troubled relationship with host societies, suggesting a lack of acceptance at the least or the possibility that another calamity might befall the group;
8. a sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members in other countries of settlement; and
9. the possibility of a distinctive creative, enriching life in host countries with a tolerance for pluralism.

(Cohen 1997)
According to Cohen (1997), in viewing any group in flight, one is faced with the difficulty of separating the compelling from the voluntary elements in the motivation to move. Cohen goes on to discuss that the events that compel migration, being sold into slavery -- the suddenness, scale and trauma in that experience (as in the case of the transatlantic African Diaspora) -- is a qualitatively different phenomenon from immigration provoked by famine, dictatorship, or war (as with the Ethiopians). Having made that distinction, those who left Ethiopia in a life and death situation can certainly and accurately be regarded as responding to an analogous trauma. Although they were willing to flee, they were victims of forces beyond their control, which caused, or forced, their dispersal. This may be the most important identifying characteristic of the Ethiopian Diaspora.

3. Reflexivity

In relation to the themes of my thesis research, recent changes in the methodological and theoretical agendas are worthy of note. The field of Cultural Anthropology continues to undergo critical evolution and reevaluation of its major tenets. The last two decades have seen a shift towards reflexivity and away from scientific forms of validation of knowledge. This new approach attempts to humanize rather than structure society, while also diminishing the authoritative voice of anthropologists.

The role of reflexive anthropology is to trace the parameters, the limits, and the possibilities of our located understandings as well as to have an “anthropological understanding” which is animated by openness to otherness, even if it exists in the self
It is within this framework that I aim to look at the Ethiopian Diaspora. As a first-generation Ethiopian American, I have first-hand experience of that journey. While I make this claim, I am very much aware that my view, which can be considered an “insider’s” view, is positional. I am reflecting on Ethiopia as a particular kind of an expatriate, writing and analyzing as an anthropologist, for an American audience. Ruth Behar, in “Writing in My Father’s Name” (1995), describes the daunting process of writing about the “other” who are her parents. In my case, the distinction is even finer or more blurred; I am the ‘other’ I am writing about.

I became interested in this subject for a number of reasons, primarily because I am a first-generation Ethiopian immigrant. I came to this country in 1977, which means my experience spans the entire Ethiopian Diasporic journey of thirty years. Second, while Rastafarianism has received a good deal of attention, particularly in the last two decades, the Ethiopian perspective on this matter has been conspicuously underrepresented.

Finally, for the better part of the thirty years since my arrival in the United States, the Rastafarian movement has been of major interest to me in a variety of ways. Aside from my own questions concerning the movement, I have been privy to information that points at Ethiopian frustrations and criticisms which customarily are expressed in personal encounters. This caused me to look further into the roots of these issues, which in turn revealed larger questions surrounding the experience of Diaspora. The nature of constructing imagined communities by borrowing and recreating one’s identity and the variables that determine those changes all were questions I found worth examining. This
was further reinforced by the realization that to my knowledge, there are very few scholarly publications on the subject of the Ethiopian Diaspora. In this way, I came to embrace the idea of studying this subject.

Another point I feel is relevant in this discussion is my own proximity to the subject. On the one hand I am an expatriate Ethiopian, and on that basis I can offer views that are close to the subject. On the other hand, I am also the great grand-daughter of the late Emperor Haile-Sellassie I. By virtue of this connection, I may be able to offer a particular and perhaps even unique perspective on this subject.

While I feel obliged to reveal this fact in this connection, it is done with the hope that too much will not be made of this information. My intent is to share with the reader my origin and point of departure; this I hope will enrich the work’s textural qualities, as well as depict the cultural values and memories from which my Ethiopian identity is constructed. I am also aware that there are areas in this study, such as the Rastafarians’ view of Atse Haile-Sellassie, which place me in a peculiar position. In the end, the reader must be the judge of how effectively I have attained my goal, which is to provide a compelling yet objective rendering of this subject.

Admittedly, my family background has had a profound effect on my own perspective towards Ethiopia and Ethiopians, but I will argue that this is no different than the situation of one who would have belonged to an entirely opposite stratum of Ethiopian society. In either case, there is a level of subjectivity and sensitivity one needs to acknowledge and attempt to overcome.
Furthermore, I am very much a product of my American education and, consequently, the larger American society from which I draw many meaningful cultural traits which also inform my identity. Finally, as an aspiring anthropologist, my purpose is to study the changing nature of identity and how culture, values, memories, and imagination are reevaluated and recreated and transmitted within the context of a diasporic journey. This thesis will employ various theoretical and analytical tools in order to render this study a modest yet valid contribution.

Other fundamental concepts such as “native,” “culture” and “the field” are under great scrutiny, as anthropologists attempt to underscore the dynamic nature of notions such as “identity,” “culture,” and “place” (Appadurai 1996, Narayan 1993, and Jacobs-Huey 2004). Anthropological researchers are increasingly employing the reflexive approach, thereby enabling them to critically consider their own cultural biases and negotiate various ways of seeing while investigating and “translating” cultures, thus becoming sensitive to the nature of knowledge production which is socially constructed (Jacobs-Huey 2004).

This development contributed to the emergence of the notion of “imagined communities,” which is tied to the view that culture is no longer territorial but unbounded. Such communities exemplify the awareness of multiple belonging; they adhere to traditions and beliefs of their natal land while simultaneously adapting to new environments. They develop distinctive concepts and strategies of survival, negotiating
the contradictions of local and the global. This idea further highlights the fact that
communities are fashioned subjectively and therefore selectively.

Another relevant concept, which has been under scrutiny, is the term “native”.
There is increasing effort by anthropologists today to move away from the term
“natives,” primarily because it connotes a “monolithic group of people confined to a
distant exotic space” (Jacobs-Huey 2004). In this climate of vast changes in the
discipline, it is prudent for researchers to account for how their positionality (ways of
asking, seeing/interpreting and speaking) has influenced the production of knowledge. It
has also become rather common for non-western anthropologists to do work in their
‘own’ homes, villages or their ethnic communities in the United States and elsewhere

For the majority of researchers the aim has been to “decolorize western
anthropology” through more reflexive modes of representation and critique (Jacobs-Huey
2002). On the other hand, “native anthropologists” (anthropologists studying their own
non-western people) caution against the tendency to celebrate the privileges associated
with being an insider and failing to expose the negotiation of identity and legitimacy that
is necessary of all anthropologists, including those working within their own cultural
communities (Narayan 1993).
Methodology

This study is comprised of four surveys that were posed on the Internet, plus one set of interviews conducted over the telephone. The survey/interview components of this study were conducted between May 2004 and January 2005. In addition to these sources, I was able to obtain more information from narrative, discussions, and critiques by Ethiopians on Ethiopian electronic publications written in the past five years on the Internet. Details of this portion of my research are summarized below.

Survey number 1, entitled *Ethiopians in the United States*, was posted on the site [http://www.angelfire.com/ak/sellassie/](http://www.angelfire.com/ak/sellassie/) and was designed with multiple purposes in mind, the first being to investigate the nature of the Ethiopia Diaspora using Robin Cohen’s identifying features of new diasporas. The questions on this survey were made up of A) structured “forced response” questions and predetermined categories, which were designed to cover demographic information. B) questions issues on such as Ethiopian identity, whether or not Ethiopians in the diaspora had a special connection with other ethnic groups; C) questions on how and to what extent Ethiopians in the United States maintained their link with the natal home; and D) questions on the attitudes of Ethiopians towards the Rastafarians and their movement. In connection with this, the survey participants were also asked if they were familiar with the notion of “Ethiopianism.” This survey yielded 25 responses. The results of survey number 1 and the precise wording of this survey as it appeared on the Internet are found in Appendix One, page 139. The
findings of this survey are also graphed and can be found in the discussion in Chapter three in the section entitled “Recreating Ityoppia” (pages 68-70).

Based on my impression that the Rastafarians have a high regard for the late Emperor of Ethiopia, Haile-Sellassie I, and my hypothesis that Ethiopians had a less than favorable opinion of the Emperor, I set out to explore this issue. I designed another survey identified as survey number 2 that would inquire specifically how Ethiopians in the Diaspora view the late monarch.

Survey number 2 was entitled 2004: Thirty Years Later. Emperor Haile-Sellassie Today. It consisted of one “forced response” question with ten multiple-choice answers. The survey also allowed the respondents to add commentaries. This survey yielded 1215 responses and 26 commentaries, of varying lengths. Although this survey was designed for Ethiopians, both Rastafarians and Ethiopians responded to the survey. Based on the commentaries it seems the largest number of those who added their comments were Rastafarians. Although most did not enter their names, one can determine the identity of the respondents by the use of language and way of speaking.\(^3\)

As already stated, the initial purpose of this survey was to find out how Ethiopians in the diaspora felt about the Emperor. With the participation of Rastafarians, this survey became the means to collect comparative data on this relevant aspect of the study. I was able to monitor the survey entries on a regular basis; I did this by setting up an automatic email message that would generate each time there was an entry. On one

\(^3\) Rastafarian lexicon -- use of recognizable terms such as I&I, Jah. While Ethiopians would say, for instance, “I am proud to be an Ethiopian like H.I.M.” etc.
such occasion, I noticed that in a matter of one day the numbers on the survey had jumped a total of 96 entries, a very unusual volume, given the predictable rate. As a result, my finding in this particular survey, I suspect, is somewhat skewed.

The results of Survey number 2 and the precise wording of this survey as it appeared on the Internet are found in Appendix Two page 150, as are the twenty-six commentaries entered. The findings of this survey are also graphed and can be found in the discussion in Chapter Four in the section entitled “Genesis of the Rastafarian Movement” (page 103).

Survey number 3 was posted on Ethiopian Students Association International Forum, http://www.esai.org/services/Forums/portal, a site that purports to serve Ethiopian students globally. I subscribed to this site with my research in mind, and can attest to the fact that most of its members are indeed Ethiopians and the subjects they discuss can be described as those that are focused on Ethiopian-related issues. Members, for the most part, use aliases when they initiate discussions; however, I can make a reasonable estimate and attest to their Ethiopian identity.

The most identifying feature of their written discussion is the manner with which they use dual language in their entries, one that reflects their cultural and linguistic hybridity. In my opinion, this new way of written communication is one prominent development of the Ethiopian diasporic experience. This particular manner of writing—using Amharic words or phrases inserted in the English text to mostly accentuate or
authenticate a certain idea with definitive cultural zest— is used, and as a result, non-Amharic speakers will not be able to fully comprehend the written text.

Furthermore, this new tendency or style has become very common, and is used extensively in various “formal” Ethiopian electronic publications. This survey was targeting young Ethiopian students and how they viewed the Rastafarians and their movements and yielded thirteen responses. Due to the alias names used, it is difficult to definitively identify respondents’ gender. This survey, which was open-ended, allowed for the respondents to explore their ideas at length. The survey asked the following dual-component question: What is the Ethiopian and Rastafarian relationship? Do the beliefs and general message of the Rastafarians resonate with Ethiopian students?

The results of Survey number 3 and the precise responses to this question are found in Chapter Four in the section entitled ‘Who Are the Rastafarians?’ (pages 107-14).

Survey number 4, entitled Rastafarians in Shashemene, was conducted in the following manner: The survey questions were posted on the web site http://www.angelfire.com/ak/sellassie/ and were designed exclusively for the Rastafarians in Shashemene, Ethiopia. This survey had ten multiple-choice questions. The purpose of this survey, too, was to find out individual length of residency in Ethiopia, overall regard for life in Ethiopia, and the Rastafarian relationship with the larger Ethiopian community.

In addition, I was able to obtain supplemental information from a member of the Shashamane Settlement Community Development Foundation, headquartered in
Washington, D.C. Survey 4 yielded 58 responses. The results of Survey number 4 and the precise wording of the survey can be found in Appendix 3 (page 153). The responses to the survey’s question are found in Chapter Four in the section entitled “Genesis of the Rastafarian Movement” (page 103).

I also conducted an interview with first and second-generation Ethiopians in the diaspora. I was able to solicit interviewees in several different ways. First, I posted a request to interview Ethiopians on my web site, which yielded three volunteers, two women and one man, all of whom were first-generation Ethiopians who had come to the United State between 1976 and 1980. This constitutes the first wave of immigrants. Second, I was able to conduct an additional nine interviews of my own acquaintances; these were also first-wave immigrants, consisting of five men and four women. Third, I then targeted and specifically solicited second-generation Ethiopians (who either came to the United States as infants or where born here). I was able to get three such respondents, two male and one female, who were young adults born between 1979 and 1984. Fourth, I interviewed three individuals who were first-generation Ethiopians who had come to this country between 1974 and 1980, constituting the first wave of Ethiopian immigration.

Since the interviews questioned only first-wave Ethiopian immigrants and representatives of the second and third waves were missing from this sample group, I decided to post another survey with these two as my target groups. This survey became Survey number 3. The responses to my interviews can be found in Chapter Four, in the
section entitled Attitudes and Perceptions (pages 120-25). The findings of these interviews are also graphed and can be found in Appendix Four (page 154).

Given the fact that there are neither ethnographic data nor scarcely any academic publication on the subject of the Ethiopian Diaspora, it became necessary to investigate the World Wide Web as a viable source of information. I was very pleased with the amount and variety of such information. In the process of conducting my research, I became acquainted with numerous electronic publications, among these Tadias [How is it going?] at http://www.tadias.com which began its first issue in 2003; Seleda [writing board] at http://www.seleda.com which claimed to have one million subscribers, though it no longer appears; and lastly, Ethiopian Review at http://ethiopianreview.homestead.com. All proved to be very insightful and invaluable to my research. In them I found thought-provoking essays, deliberations, testaments, critiques and a unique vantage point on the world of Ethiopians in the Diaspora. These writings thematically ranged from the obscure to very relevant topics.

The purpose of Survey number 3 and number 4 was to compare and contrast the diasporic identity with other new arrivals. I considered what and why these differences exist and what they tell us about the shift in Ethiopian identity in the Diaspora. Finally, I wanted to know whether there are differences in how these two groups view the Rastafarians. Survey number 3 was open-ended, providing respondents the chance to give lengthy responses that often included other related and relevant issues. For instance, in
answering the questions about the Rastafarians, ninety percent of the respondents went on to discuss Atse Haile-Sellassie.

Overall, I was very pleased with the results of both the surveys and the interviews. I felt I was moderately successful in including all three waves of Ethiopian immigrants, which was my purpose. The narratives and testaments I utilized and other supplemental information helped to give texture to the study. I would like to acknowledge that the findings of this study do not claim to embrace the views and ideas of all Ethiopians or Rastafarians.

This study is by no means exhaustive. It is at best a preliminary study and much work needs to be done to do justice to this fascinating subject. My purpose is to create awareness, and help increase interest in this otherwise overlooked subject. Furthermore, in my opinion, any dialogue (intellectual, social, or spiritual) between Ethiopian Americans and Rastafarians can only be beneficial. The experience of the diaspora should not be overlooked; it is the domain from which much insight and growth can be obtained in terms of deciphering the nature of one’s identity, from whence one can move forward into the future.
Overview

Chapter 1 of this thesis introduces the two related topics of the Ethiopian Diaspora and the Rastafarian movement. It highlights the points that unite these otherwise very different groups of people (East African and Caribbean). It investigates the concepts of identity, authenticity, and culture in the context of Diaspora. “Hybrid cultural phenomena” (Hall 1992) is an outcome of the fluidity of identity construction among diasporic people. I argue, in this condition, that “cultural authenticity” is a claim that is at best murky. “Cultural difference” refers no longer to a territorial, stable, exotic otherness; relations are a matter of power and rhetoric rather than essence. A whole structure of expectations about authenticity in culture is doubtful (Clifford 1997).

I analyze relevant issues in contemporary concepts of Diaspora, tracing defining features such as the origin, type and other relevant aspects of the Ethiopian Diaspora. This chapter describes and discusses the process of “diasporic consciousness,” which can be constituted positively by identification with a historical heritage or negatively by experiences of discrimination and exclusivity. This consciousness, described by Dubois as ‘double’ (Dubois1903,) can be viewed as the awareness of being simultaneously here and there, American and Ethiopian-- the empowering paradox of diaspora is the connection (elsewhere) that makes a different (here) (Clifford 1997). Diasporas, by definition, imply multiple attachments; they accommodate but also resist the norms and claims of nationalists.
The most customary diasporic condition does not translate longings and nostalgia or nationhood into real nation-states. Diasporas are positioned somewhere between nation-state, in a physical sense, and traveling, in a spiritual sense, that falls outside the nation-state space/time zone (Cohen 1997). Therefore, they are transnational or “imagined communities” based in one place but drawing in and sending out social networks that extend globally (Copland-Carson 2004). As the label may imply, “imagined communities” are not “unauthentic” but are “different” because all ethnocultural categories are essentially constructed within a given socio/political and historical context.

Chapter 2 focuses on “Ityoppia,” the land, the symbol, and the myth. I examine the idea of historical achievement from which Ethiopians draw their collective memory. Using Robin Cohen’s identifying features of “new Diasporas,” this chapter examines the overriding Ethiopian historical achievement. It outlines the various circumstances that caused Ethiopian mass migration, and why and how the dispersal from the natal home to the United States can be described as an experience of trauma.

This chapter also gives a general description of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the old country, in which for centuries it has occupied a central role. The number of Ethiopian Orthodox churches in the United States has increased at a remarkable rate; one explanation for its growth is that the church has remained closely connected with its community in part influenced by the experience of the Diaspora. The challenges facing the community have been shared with the church, which in turn has adopted effective
means of addressing the changing needs of the young community. For example, the church is not only a place of worship but it is a place that also provides language instructions, counseling, and other important services.

The issue of ethnicity in the context of Ethiopian history is a complex one. Inter-ethnic relations and the issue of race as a group or individual identity are described, based on my own perspective on this matter. There are various and conflicting perspectives on the issue of color and identity in the diaspora. In this connection, I present two major schools of thought regarding Ethiopian race and identity; both are founded on externalist theories, I also introduce a provocative article found in Seleda which tries to deal with this same issue.

Chapter 3 lays out the Ethiopian journey, “Becoming Ethiopian American.” I use my own “self-ethnography” (the act of writing in the present memories, dreams) (Clifford 1997), as opposed to biography. The former emphasizes the act of discovery, a process that is fluid and in motion as the past (memories) change and are dependent on one’s journey and where one is located in the present. The latter has a sense of fixity, retelling the past as something that is encapsulated as though frozen. Self-ethnography can be viewed as a case study in attempting to actualize, while painting a broad picture of the process of becoming.

Additionally, I will give an account of Rastafarians based on my own personal observations as well as the encounters of some Ethiopians in the United States. This chapter also examines Ethiopian “ethnic consciousness,” the “myth of election,” and
“symbolic identity,” which are important identifying features of “new Diasporas.” It also examines the ways such ideas are recalled and expressed in the Diaspora. Is the idea “myth of election”, which was very much part of Ethiopians’ history, recognized and represented among this group? If so, what does it look like? In what ways is Ityoppiya being imagined, remembered, and recreated? Finally, I will discuss the findings of survey number One, followed by a summary of second-generation Ethiopians in the United States.

Chapter 4 focuses on Ethiopianism and how this ideology, which had been the centerpiece for black Americans since their captivity and enslavement in colonial America, reached its peak during the intellectual movement in the early Twentieth Century known as the Harlem Renaissance. This African American intellectual and social movement began to decline after World War II. This period saw a move towards Marxist and anti-Ethiopiansist positions. Similarly, Ethiopianism in Africa has also had an enduring presence, which was influential in the creation of the All-African Churches in Sub-Saharan Africa beginning in the 1880s. These churches remain strong and their historical significance is celebrated today, particularly in South Africa. This chapter will briefly outline the genesis of the Rastafarian movement. Additionally, it will examine the prevailing perceptions and attitudes of Ethiopians in the U.S. in regards to Rastafarians.

The Rastafarians’ claim to be “adoptive children” of Ethiopia is contested by Ethiopians. Ethiopians contend that they are the “authentic” Ethiopians and categorically rebuke Rastafarians’ use of this signifier as flawed and as a cultural transgression. Since
the emergence of the Ethiopians in the West, this feud has become intensified, exemplifying the notion that the world is increasingly connected but not unified. Given that any one group or individual’s claim as an authentic ‘insider’ in the diaspora is questionable, who has the authority to speak for a group’s identity or authenticity? Who can make the claim predictably and in retrospect represent the essential elements and boundaries of Ethiopian culture? Are not the Ethiopians, like the Rastafarians, partial Ethiopians? Are not all diasporic identities, in a sense, approximations of the multiple influxes of borrowed cultures?

Chapter 5 attempts to bring together all the relevant arguments laid out in this study. This study uses Roben Cohen’s revised identifying features of “new Diasporas” as a theoretical tool to analyze the particular case of Ethiopian diasporic experience in the United States. Additionally, this chapter utilizes the data gathered through four surveys and one set of interviews, as well as written testimonials, critiques and discussions via electronic media by Ethiopians to make some preliminary findings and draw some conclusions with respect to Ethiopian Americans’ and Rastafarians’ troubled relationship in the Diaspora. The various concerns that have caused division between Ethiopian Americans and Rastafarians are centered on the contention of cultural authenticity. While both groups of people share Ityoppia as a general point of reference, they have historically been at odds, my finding shows that these divisions are associated with generational rather than social, ethnic or gender differences.
Furthermore, this chapter summarizes the relevant issues of identity, symbolic identity, the notion of collective memory and myth about the natal home, including location, history and achievement. Similarly, this concluding chapter gives a general description of adherents of the Rastafarian movement and how they have been engaged in the recovery of their past, their imagination. In the context of the diaspora, Rastafarians seem to exhibit more maturity; their identity construction is less confused and more enlightened than that of the inexperienced Ethiopians.

Finally, based on recent uncourageous events in Ethiopia which has seen the coming together of Rastafarians and Ethiopians, one hopes that this climate of cooperation can lead towards reconciliation in the future.
Chapter 2  Ityoppia

The names “Ethiopia” and “Abyssinia” have been used alternately throughout the centuries for designating the boundaries of the country of Ityoppia. “Ethiop” is the Greek name used by Homer, who wrote “the distant Ethiopians, the farthest outposts of mankind, half of whom live where the sun goes down and half where he rises.” This reference suggests that, at that time, the name “Ethiopians” referred to all peoples of dark skin from the countries south of Egypt, from Nubia to India (Ullendorff 1967). Others, such as Herodotus, have given a much more precise location: “Ethiopians inhabit the country immediately above Elephantine, and one-half of the island; the other half is inhabited by Egyptians . . . . a large city called Meroe: this city is said to be the capital of all Ethiopia” (Ullendorff 1967:2).

Biblical references also seem to corroborate this location and testify to the antiquity of this land and culture, which extends over two millennia. Genesis 2:13, says “the name of the second river is Gihon: the one that compasseth the whole land of Ethiopia [Cush].” This river is also known as the Abbay or the Blue Nile. Ethiopians still refer to it by its biblical name. Ethiopia’s geographical setting, with direct access to the Red Sea, has given it a commanding position, making it a crossroads of civilizations and a meeting point of many races and influences.

Ancient Ethiopians considered themselves the lawful successors of Israel, as chronicled in the Kebre-Negest [Glory of Kings] and also evidenced by the strong
Hebraic influence on linguistic custom and religious practices (Ulendorff 1966).

Connected with this idea is also the broad claim that Ethiopians are the “chosen people.” A Pre-Christian Greek historian, Diodorous Siculus, further elaborates on this point:

The Ethiopians conceived themselves to be of greater antiquity than any other nation, and it is probable that, born under the sun’s path, its warmth may have ripened them sooner than other men. They supposed themselves to be the inventors of worship, of festivals, of solemn assemblies, of sacrifices, and every religious practice. (Magubane 1987:163)

Ethiopian history is centered on the idea that Ethiopians chose isolation, having created in part their own ideal world, and there they paid no heed to the rest of the world. For Ethiopians, this was not by design but a matter of survival; they maintained their Christian identity while surrounded by a sea of Islam. This idea, which was conceived by Western scholars, was best articulated by the world-renowned eighteenth-century historian Edward Gibbon, who wrote, “Encompassed by the enemies of their religion, the Ethiopians slept for a thousand years, forgetful of the world by whom they were forgotten.”

This same idea has become the catchword or luring mechanism for tourism. A contemporary advertisement for a British tour company attempts to sell Ethiopia, evoking in the process a mythical “Shangrilaesque” tourist destination:

We invite you to step into a time and place long past to hear its secrets, interpret its legends, unveil its incredible beauty, and share the warmth of its renowned hospitality.
Immerse yourself in Ethiopia's varied culture. It is a timeless place, with its own colorful languages and ancient scripts, its own religions and beliefs, its own calendar, its own time of day. "In Ethiopia, you won't know what time it is, or what month it is."

Time is suspended for the duration of your stay. (Yumo Tours 2005)

**Collective Memory**

There is a strong collective memory and myth about the homeland which embraces its location, history and achievements. Most significant features of this past that help cement Ethiopians are connected with the notion of longevity and independence. This fervor for sovereignty and profound achievement was attained through centuries of valor and magnanimous sacrifices made by the Ethiopian people. Challenges to Ethiopian independence came intermittently and in the form of Islamic jihads, from across the Red Sea, threats from neighboring localities of Sudan and Egypt and intrusions by European powers that had already successfully infiltrated the expanse of the African continent. By early 1856, which represented the beginning of a new age in Ethiopian history, the ruler of Abyssinia was Atse Tewodros, who was the last prince of the Zemana Masafent (the era of the Princes). The French and the British had a vested interest in the region, and as such flexed their muscles when they deemed necessary. Nonetheless, they did not actually attempt to colonize Ethiopia. It was under such circumstances in 1868 that the
British became the first European power to threaten Ethiopia when they sent troops to pacify Ethiopia’s sovereign Atse Tewodros II, who refused to yield to their authority.

In the face of impending defeat, the Atse chose to kill himself rather than surrender. The historian Harold Marcus tells us of the battlefield which was located in Mekdela (northern Ethiopia), “the British successfully stormed up the slopes and quickly entered the amba (a flat-topped mountain, difficult to access, a natural fort) where they discovered that moments before, Tewodros had killed himself. The British thus completed their campaign that had cost London 9 million sterling (Marcus 1994:71-72).

After the death of Atse Tewodros, what followed was a period of unrest and internal crisis characterized by a scramble for power among the leading neguses (kings or region heads) of Ethiopia. In the north, Dejazmach (a title, literally “commander of the gate”) Kassa was crowned Yohannes IV on January 21, 1872, in the Church of St. Mary of Zion in the ancient city of Axum. This had a symbolic significance in that he intended to reclaim Ethiopia’s heritage of unity and to demonstrate his devotion to tradition and faith (Marcus 1994).

Atse Yohannes exercised a form of federalism in which rulers of various regions were required to pledge tribute; however, they could enjoy relative autonomy. During the course of five years, Yohannes’s rival, Menelik of Shewa (central Ethiopia), had secretly negotiated arms trade, like the expedition of the Italian Geographic Society of Rome in 1876. In 1875 the Egyptians had occupied Gallabat and all the ports of Mitsiwa (with access to the Red Sea), and later that year four expeditions were ordered to attempt to
take control of the horn of Africa, resulting in the capturing of Harer and the Somali coast. *Atse* Yohannes appealed to his people, presenting the issue as a holy war against Islam to which one hundred thousand men answered: “The emperor had successfully rallied most of the nation behind him in a way no sovereign had in centuries” (Marcus 1994:75).

In 1885, Italy received Mitsiwa from the British and by the following year began to occupy several Red Sea ports. During 1887-1888, as Atse Yohannes of Tigre engaged the Italian occupiers, another force, the Mahdists (Sudanese) sacked Gonder, burning most of the city’s churches and enslaving thousands of Christians. On March 2, 1889, during the Battle of Adowa (in the Tigre region), *Atse* Menelik II of Shewa defeated the joint Italian-Eritrean army, which retreated back into Eritrea. During the battle of Metema on March 9, 1889, *Atse* Yohannes was killed in battle. After learning about Yohannes’s demise, Menelik immediately proclaimed himself Negus Negest (King of Kings) and crowned on November 3, 1889. The line of succession did not pass to Yohannes’s son, Dejazmach Mengesha, which was Yohannes’s dying wish (Marcus 1994); instead, the ruling body shifted from the North to Shewa in the South, where it would remain for the last two emperors of the Solomonic dynasty.

A graver challenge came in October, 1889, when Italy unilaterally declared Ethiopia a protectorate, after having completely secured the region of Eritrea. And finally, in 1935, the Italians without a declaration of war, invaded Ethiopia. In May 1936,
Addis Ababa fell to the enemy, forcing Menelik’s successor, the sovereign Haile-Selassie I, to flee into exile in England (Marcus 1994).

Italy’s alliance with Nazi Germany, her declaration of war on the European Allied forces in June 1940, and its subsequent seizure of British Somaliland, paved the way for Allied military assistance to Ethiopia. In January 1941, the Ethiopians, joined by the British army and headed by Atse Haile-Selassie, entered Ethiopia and, on May 5, 1941, five years after the invasion, Addis Ababa was reclaimed, ending Italian occupation of Ethiopia. The tradition of autonomy is a magnificent legacy, one that Ethiopians collectively draw on almost innately (Marcus 1994).

This exemplary tradition continued on into the modern era. Indeed, Ethiopia was on her way to becoming an exemplary cohesive nation-state in post-colonial Africa, having played a formidable role in the conceptual formation of “collective security” and as a founding member of the United Nations (Levine 2003). As a symbol of African freedom, Ethiopia led the way in the struggle for African independence during the decade of the 1960s, playing a major role in the formation of the Organization for African Unity (OAU), even becoming its headquarters.
Dispersal and Trauma

Ethiopian immigration to the United States was virtually non-existent before the 1970s. The small number of Ethiopians who were in the West were students at universities and/or technical colleges, as well as members of the diplomatic community. The 1974 Socialist revolution was initially geared to overthrow the forty-five-year-old reign of Atse Haile-Sellassie I and also to sever the absolute monarchy, which had ruled Ethiopia throughout its two-thousand-year history.

The uprising of 1974 (which would in due course intensify as a full-fledged revolution) was carried out in the urban areas, including approximately three million out of the total population of thirty-two million people (Tiruneh 1993). It consisted of the civil workers from the state-owned Confederation of Ethiopian Trade unions, the Teachers Association, the armed forces (including the police force), and university and secondary students. Beginning in January of 1974 until June of that year the Ethiopian capital city, Addis Ababa, witnessed major strikes and demonstrations by teachers and students, along with taxi owners. It also witnessed a series of military uprisings, all of which led up to the final and official take-over of the military junta later known as Derg⁴ (committee). Also known as the Provisional Military Administration Council (PMAC), its mission was to end the old regime and act as a transitional government (Tiruneh 1993).

⁴ A term which means committee. Derg is exclusively used to identify the regime that governed Ethiopia from 1974-1991.
Despite the relatively small number of participants compared to the size of the population, the Derg managed to dismantle the ancient regime. One explanation points to the crisis of the autocracy itself. The monarch, Atse Haile-Sellassie, had become aged, and had simply underestimated the will and force behind the unrest. Secondly, in the absence of any provisions made to replace him, coupled with badly executed reforms in the system of government, mutinies and public protests became too deeply rooted. In short, the Emperor’s skills as a strong leader had waned, leaving a power vacuum (Tiruneh 1993, Marcus 1994).

What followed was the eradication of the upper crust of the social pyramid. By July, 1974, Atse Haile-Sellassie, his family, the nobility, and civil and military officials of the Imperial government were the first casualties of this revolution. Many old-state officials and their families and associates were imprisoned, and those who resisted were shot on the spot. Furthermore, the general disorientation and instability of the power structure was felt by the general public, as those “in” and “out” with the Derg changed as swiftly and unpredictably as the weather. Such was the case with the high-profile General Aman Mikael Andom (1924-1974), who had been named as the head of the Derg two short months earlier. He was shot to death on November 22, 1974, as he resisted arrest. The same day, the Derg took a drastic political decision. Without as much as a mock trial, in a tactic of shock and awe, it massacred sixty former state officials by firing squad. All these deaths were officially announced the following day on November 23, 1974. Harold Marcus notes that Mengestu Haile-Mariam (the mastermind of the Derg) argued that the
Ethiopian people sought revenge and that the revolution needed a bold statement of intent (Marcus 1994).

This move signaled the seriousness of the junta; the revolution had embarked on a course of no return. In the summer of 1974, students, heads of pan-Ethiopian movements, returned from abroad and joined up with the homegrown student organizations. Many of these organizations had their roots in the 1960 uprising and failed coup d’etat carried out by the senior military officers and the royal bodyguard. The collaboration of the two culminated in the formation of organized progressive revolutionaries, as exemplified by EPRP (Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party) and AESM (All Ethiopian Student Movement). The leaders of these foreign-trained groups were educated primarily in the United States. Within a year, they entrenched themselves in the already politicized corporate groups and movements and were in a position to challenge the monopoly of power of the Derg. (Tiruneh 1993, Marcus 1994)

The second casualty of this new regime was the segment of the population that had been active in its inception and in large measure responsible for its success. By the end of 1975, the Derg had decapitated the middle class through confiscation of businesses, and nationalization of urban and rural property, including land. It had systematically executed military and civil officers. In an attempt to further consolidate its power and legitimacy, the Derg turned towards the most vibrant revolutionary force, the students and other aspiring political organizations (Tiruneh 1993).
The Ethiopian Revolution, by all accounts, was marked with unspeakable brutality, a period also described as revolutionary violence, political repression, chronic civil war, and ethnic fragmentation (Tiruneh 1993, Levine 2003). Initially, the violence was directed and expressed by the newly adopted revolutionary language ‘enemy of the people’ or ‘the reactionary class’ against the ancient regime and sympathizers. This process of stigmatization was a useful tool for the new junta, as it manipulated the political fervor to its intended goal. As soon as it had erased the nobility in the cities, it went after the country gentry and rural officials (Tiruneh 1993).

By 1976 its focus had turned to advocates of change. The newly formed organizations like the EPRP (Ethiopian People Revolutionary Party) became the victims of mass arrests, tortures, and executions. An estimated thirty-two thousand members of the Ethiopian political organizations were killed. Under the slogan “Ethiopia first or death,” the Derg went after members of student association or political organization with a vengeance. Massacres of students in the streets became commonplace, and as the existing prisons and police centers became quickly filled, make-shift detention centers were created out of palaces, and military garrisons (Tiruneh 1993). The unexpected visit form the military at any point, night or day, created a mass hysteria, and a permanent orientation of fear and paranoia. During the period of the red terror (1977 and through the end of 1979), the Derg waged war on its youth. The causalities of this war are estimated to be in the hundreds of thousands. It was no longer a war of the haves and has nots; those gunned down on the streets of Addis were primarily from the middle and lower
social classes. According to Marcus (1994), the red terror was so traumatic that subsequently there was virtually no overt civilian opposition to the PMAC. Also during this process thousands of Ethiopia’s best-educated and idealistic young people were either killed or forced into exile.

The victims of the mass arrests were then subjected to the most inhuman forms of torture and cruelty, unprecedented in the history of Ethiopia (Tiruneh 1993). On another front, the raging separatist movement in Eritrea cost the Ethiopian army an estimated hundreds of thousands of lives. These were not trained soldiers. More than a third was made up of young men mostly rounded up from the rural areas (Tiruneh 1993).

The following decade would show yet another crisis, the famine that took the lives of millions of Ethiopians, mostly in the Wollo and Tigre (Northeast and Northern) provinces. It was during these very turbulent times that Ethiopians began to flee their homeland in a way never seen before. The massive immigration of Ethiopians had begun soon after 1974. Those who were in embassies abroad defected; similarly, a few hundred students abroad, except the ones already discussed, also remained in their respective host countries. Predictably, any members of the elite of the old regime who had escaped incarceration or death fled the country by any means possible. Most drove out, although there were many who also walked by means of assistance from the rural merchants. At the end of 1991, soon after the new government came into power, the flow of Ethiopian migration into Sudan and Kenya had reached an unprecedented rate (Levine 2003, see tables 2.1 and 2.2 on page 41).
Currently, according to information obtained from the Ethiopian Embassy website in the United States (2005), the population of Ethiopia is 65 million making it the third most populous country in Africa, following Nigeria and Egypt. This figure is a projection for the years 2000 – 2001. The fact that this is one estimate, among numerous other estimates, leads one to conjecture that there are no systematic census data available. The economy is still largely based on agriculture, accounting for eighty percent of the nation’s employment. Approximately forty-two percent of the adult population is literate. Many social ailments continue to plague the country. The AIDS epidemic in Ethiopia has claimed an estimated one million people. In 1999, an estimated seven hundred thousand children had been orphaned as a result of HIV/AIDS. This figure continues to grow; today, 44.7 percent of the population is under the age of fourteen (World Fact Book 2004).

According to the Center for Disease Control, with 1% of the world’s population, Ethiopia contains 9% of the world’s HIV/AIDS cases. As a direct result, most of the children of parents infected with AIDS migrate to the streets of Addis Ababa and other cities. Without the necessary resources, these cities have been struggling to keep up with the burden of providing for so many children. The ravages of famine, war and epidemics have depleted the economy, reducing Ethiopia to its position as the world’s eleventh poorest country. These are some of the reasons why so many Ethiopians continue to flock to the West. The Ethiopian population abroad, which was considered non-existent in 1974, went to its highest point within a mere five years later. In the initial years,
Ethiopian refugees were granted asylum based on multiple grounds, as victims of human rights violation, as well as economic and political persecution. The number one choice of country for Ethiopian immigration was the United States, followed by countries in Western Europe, Canada, Australia, and also more than 10,000 in the Middle East especially Saudi Arabia.

Table 2.1 Ethiopian Refugees in Seven Industrial Countries (Levine 2003)
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<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>Total immigrants</td>
<td>1341 (1991)</td>
<td>3544 (2001)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Europe</td>
<td>Refugees</td>
<td>2645 (1995)</td>
<td>1776 (2001)</td>
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1. Total immigrants = number of foreign born, including legal and illegal immigrants, naturalized immigrants, refugees, etc.
2. Refugees = number of refugees in each country as registered by UNHCR.
3. Because data reflect numbers of Ethiopians, any reductions in numbers are results of repatriation, lack of country registration, or death.
   Even if Ethiopians became citizens of a country, they are still counted in the data as foreign born (immigrants); their children are not included.
4. Data on citizens is not included because data were available only for numbers of citizens admitted that year, rather than numbers of citizens whose prior nationality was Ethiopia.
Cultural Diversity/Role of Christianity in Ethiopian Society

Ethiopian culture has been impacted by four major religious influences, Hebraic, Christian, pagan, and Muslim. While the Muslim population in Ethiopia has for centuries remained high; nevertheless, the role of Muslim culture has been peripheral. This is a direct result of centuries of monarchial rule, which successfully guarded Orthodox Christianity (the Ethiopian Tewahedo Church) as the major tenet of Ethiopian collective identity. Each coexisted of the thirty days of the month have corresponding saints assigned to them.

These saints make up the hierarchy of the Christian-based faith system. Based on this faith system, angels and saints can act on behalf of mortals; in times of difficulty, one appeals to these angels (usually the patron saint), who being in closer proximity to and in favor with God, will grant one’s prayer. It is customary to celebrate one’s patron saint by preparing a special meal according to one’s ability (baking bread, slaughtering a sheep) and sharing the offering with the poor. This practice is epitomized in the mass pilgrimage Ethiopians make to the ancient monastery Kulubi Gebriel that is esteemed as the holiest inside Ethiopia.

During national crises, priests intercede with the College of Angels and Saints on behalf of the community. During special holidays, the “tabot,” the symbolic body of the Ark of the Covenant, is paraded out in public, and is made to circle the Church. The tabot, which is carried by a senior priest, is taken out with a procession of the whole body of clergy. During this ritual the dance and chants are spectacular. On some occasions the
tabot halts and the one who is holding it fails to proceed. This is considered as the direct will of God, who is not pleased with the people. In such an event all prostrate themselves and offer prayer. And only after some struggle will the tabot enter the church. Church ritual includes women covering their head (women) when they enter church. Both men and women must enter with bare feet. Unclean persons such as women who have their menstrual cycle, women who have just given birth, or men and women who recently have engaged in intercourse may not enter the church at all (Archbishop Yeṣeḥaq 1989).

**Ethnicity**

Ethnicity in Ethiopian society is a complex proposition. There is not a single ethnic group that has not to some degree mixed with another group, hence, Ethiopians collectivity has come to be known as “the museum of ethnicity”; classification of the population along ethnic lines is difficult because of the variety of determinants of ethnicity. For instance, a certain group might for centuries be identified with the Amhara based on language, religion, and ancestry, but in all likelihood they may be inhabitants of the Oromo region. Similarly, a group may affiliate with the Oromo solely on the basis of language. Groups in existence in the twentieth century were biological and social amalgams of several preexisting entities. The ingredients often were discernible only by inference, particularly if the mixing took place long ago (Ofcansky 1993).

By the last quarter of the twentieth century members of all ‘ethnic’ groups were represented within the Ethiopian power structure. Among the nobility and prestigious
offices such as the Parliament there were Tigre and Oromo, although the Amhara representation had always outnumbered the rest. The ethnic make up of the Ethiopians as a whole and exemplified by Aste Haile-Sellassie was highly diverse and embraced most of the ethnic groups. This occurred because of deliberate marriage arrangements among succeeding generations, a move that was no doubt politically motivated, and one that intended to create a homogenous society. Therefore, ethnic distinctions in Ethiopian society were drawn along linguistic and psychological lines. Currently the head of the government of Ethiopia is a Tigrian, the first non-Amhara head of the central government in modern history.

Race and identity in Ethiopia is a subject that has been further complicated and distorted by a number of externalist theories. The two major schools of thought represent polar opposite perspectives which are briefly yet aptly discussed by Fikru Gebrekidan in his book *Bond without Blood (A History of Ethiopian and New World Black Relations 1896-1991)*. These two views, according to Gebrekidan, are on one hand the “Eurocentric Semiticist School” that characterizes Ethiopia’s esteemed origin, purporting that the non-African Semites who brought with them a written language, the use of the plough, and high culture were the critical force behind the founding of Axum civilization. This view further emphasized Ethiopia’s affinity with the Middle East, while denying its African connections. On the other hand, the Afro-centric viewpoint holds that Ethiopia, as “cradle
of humanity,” is testament to its antiquity and a symbol of Africa’s historical achievement.

The former view has been further developed to the point that Ethiopians are described as people who “do not think of themselves as Negro or Negroid,” while others have gone on to state that Ethiopians saw themselves as Caucasians, this despite the fact of their ethnic/racial diversity. Some are Negroid, while others are clearly of Semitic stock (Gebrekidan 2004). A more recent evolution of this idea is one that became a catalyst for the two major secessionist aspirations, the Eritrean and Oromo liberation movements. In this connection, Gebrekidan points out the prevailing ideologies during the post-1974 era portray Ethiopia and Amhara rule (one of the main ethnic groups associated with historic Abyssinia) as a distinct “colonial” class. This idea was further theorized and popularized by western ideologues such as the Canadian John Sorenson who asserted that “Just as Europeans felt themselves preordained to ‘bring civilization to savages,’ so did the Amhara feel themselves possessed with a ‘civilizing mission’ as they expanded their empire into areas occupied by other groups such as the Oromo” (Gebrekidan 2004:25).

Sorenson’s thesis is refuted by Gebrekidan, who states, first, that the Oromo are physically indistinguishable from the Amhara; there were countless political as well as cultural figures who were likely to be from other ethnic groups than Amhara. For instance, the number one cultural icon, during 1960s and later was Telahun Gessessess
(an Oromo), and following in second place was Mohammed Ahmed (a Gugragie and a Moslem). To this day, very few people if any one has paralleled their place in Ethiopian popular culture. Examples of political figures also abound.

Gebrekidan continues that since the sixteenth century the Oromo have been part of Abyssinia’s historical and cultural tradition. Gebrekidan further illustrates this point, stating that during the eighteenth century, the Oromo had dominated the royal court of Gonder, so much so that at one point “Oromifa had replaced Amharic as the palace language” (Gebrekidan 2004:25). According to Gebrekidan, the idea of “black colonialism” or “Amhara chauvinism” was deliberately exaggerated and perpetuated by colonial apologists who tried to minimize and deviate attention from European racial atrocities and instead create the “myth of intra-racial colonial practices in Africa,” exemplified by the Amhara over the Oromo, the Nguni-speaking Bantu over the khoisans and so on (Gebrekidan 2004:26).

Finally, Gebrekidan makes a strong charge against “western ethnographers” and the practice of participant observation which customarily creates a tendency by the ethnographers to adopt the “biases and stereotypes against adjacent groups as they seemingly become staunch advocates and defenders of ethno nationalism”. “They enflame ethnic tensions by injecting the polemics of race and racism into local histories, their incendiary literature questions the legitimacy of the polyglot state in Africa and in so doing makes Balkanization an ever more imminent threat” (Gebrekidan 2004:26).
The issue of race as a marker of group or individual identity in Ethiopia is even more complex from a historical point of view and must not be confused with the notion of skin color in Western terms; a nation without the experience of colonialism, “Ethiopia was one place in Africa where the colonial color bar did not exist” (Gebrekidan 2004:24). Still, the Amharic language is filled with color gradation; for instance, a child who is thought to be darker than a certain acceptable shade is often nicknamed ‘Shanko’ (from Shankila an ethnic group in western Ethiopia that are recognized for their dark skin). Such colloquial labeling has its implications. With respect to desirable traits, a look at how Ethiopian society perceives the idea of beauty can be quite revealing.

Among Ethiopians themselves, designation of color as a viable description and marker of beauty was commonly and collectively used. The general consensus of “desirable” skin colors was Qey (very light skinned), Qey dama (light brown) and Teyim (brown). One used these descriptive terms without necessarily implying a degree of hierarchy. Shanko, on the other hand, was a derogatory term one that was used to designate a color tone that was not within the confines of beautiful skin tone. Shanko and also gala (the former name for the Oromo) was an explicit marker of inferior social status, and derives from the out-dated barya (slave) class. Slavery was practiced throughout Ethiopia’s history, and long after it was abolished in 1931, members of the former barya class were, still recognized based on their physical attributes. As a child I recall distinctly one older woman whom we called Eteye Askale used to tell us children
that her former name was “Besew koriche” (my pride comes from another) This memory stands out and evokes an ugly feature of Ethiopian history.

Members of the barya class were clearly stigmatized long after the institution had been abolished; they were social outcasts within the Ethiopian urban society in which I grew up. There is a common belief among certain Ethiopian circles that the former head of state, Mengestu Haile-Mariam, was a member of the barya class. His particular passion to eradicate the nobility was thought to be fueled by strong resentment towards his apparent background.

Within the context of my own upbringing in Ethiopia, I was unaware that Qey, Qey dama and Teyim were used as a pecking order; on the contrary, the color makeup of my immediate and extended family was of all these three types. Certainly, there were no discriminatory implications because one was this color or that. Notice too that in Amharic Qey (literally red), as opposed to white, is the skin description which is considered as comprising “dem agebab” (roughly translated as “agreeable blood composition”). Within the context of the modern urban tradition of the 1970s, the desirable skin tone was a combination of Qey, and Teyim, or Qeydama. There is a certain Ethiopian mythology that tells us that God created man in his image and made us from clay. The first person was pulled out quickly, and consequently was white. The second person was kept in the kilt for too long, and was black. The third person was pulled out at the perfect time, and that person was a Qeydama/Teyim Ethiopian.
In a recent discussion of Ethiopian skin color and identity, I was struck by the degree of variation in how these color gradations were recalled and remembered by Ethiopians in the Diaspora. One such recollection was presented in Seleda in October in its 2001 *Colors and Identity* issue, which had an article called *Hues, Teyim to Qey-damma*. The author, identified as MT, in a witty and cynical manner points out that above all else the appearance that is "looking like an Ethiopian" was the key to ones Ethiopian identity in the old country. The author goes on to describe the particular meaning of the three color designations as follows:

*Ahhha! ItyoPiawinet! (Ethiopianness)*That attitude...a prominent theme known in *chewa* (genteel folks) circles as ET-tude (Ethiopian attitude) and firmly grounded in that particular school of thought that there's more to the "Ethiopian look" than mere aesthetics, as so clearly delineated in the *ETC*, the *Ethiopian Tri-Color*. If you were *qey* or *qey-dama*, you had that much-coveted *idenET* with ET-tude thrown in for good measure! . . If you were *Teyim*, you had plain old identity, and you were *yhungdyelem*-ed (let it) into limited ET-tude! . . "Anything" else on either side of the spectrum had, *at best*, the benefit of *nationalET*, which the *qey-qey-dama* folks already had by default!

More than sheer physical property, *idenET* was the *one* characteristic that guaranteed you a relatively respectable place in the social hierarchy, defined reality as only a *real ET* (born and bred) would appreciate, and expressed, *prima facie*, your intellectual eminence, your moral superiority, your beauty, and your religious
purity...ultimately, it declared your intentions to RULE as, over time, it merged with class-identity and power...political and otherwise.

The quintessential ItyoPiawi! (Ethiopian) He of yellowish hue and Semitic features...he of the House of David and keeper of the Ark, who brought civilizing Christianity to the Kunama...he of beautiful poetry, semina-worq and Kibre Negest, whose indomitable spirit preserved the sovereignty of a nation through the millennia!...He and he alone could be counted on to bring to bear, from his God-given place of authority, his God-given skills to embrace even those God-awful folks on the periphery, who ascended to national ET by virtue of geographical happenstance and/or the accident of birth to non-entET parents. Only he, who was readily identified as an ItyoPiawi before he was identified as an African...only he, who possessed the moral fortitude for evenhandedness towards those who were born with the obvious evolutionary disadvantage of being remote on the CHewa-ly color-bar, the ETC!...(MT 2001).

Based on this perspective and the highly divisive use of color designation, one can hardly imagine how such ethnically diverse people like the Ethiopians could ever have achieved cohesion and unity. In fact, this argument seems to contest this very premise. This intriguing argument contradicts my own memories and perspective on this subject. By way of illustrating my point, I can look at the physical traits of the last two monarchial rulers of Ethiopia and it becomes apparent the so-called “Semitic” component is not uniformly evident in Atse Haile-Sellassie and Atse Menelik. One can also find
more evidence in their predecessors. Based on these points one can refute the argument that one rises to prominence based on one’s skin color alone. It is exceedingly difficult to speak of “pure Semitic” make-up or breed in a historical and modern context because what one finds in Ethiopia is the result of centuries of amalgamation. As already discussed, one group is indistinguishable from another.

Similarly, a look at pre-1974 nobility and the higher social class would reveal highly diverse physical variations. The same could be said about family members, including my own. There were as many Teyems as there were Qey and QeyDammas among all ethnic groups, therefore, it is highly improbable to suggest that one group has a monopoly on the desirable skin color.

Another point that could be made in this connection is that one’s sensibilities to race in the host country are likely to preempt and influence one’s memory. One of the more difficult experiences in the United States was the idea of race/color and its use as an identifier of personhood. Personally, this was the most difficult aspect of American life to which I had to adjust. It is conceivable that Ethiopians’ experiences in the United States and particularly their place in the color bar have given them a new and heightened sense of division based on race, which in turn could influence their perspective and memories.
Chapter 3  Becoming Ethiopian American

The Journey

I left Ethiopia at two separate periods of my life. The first was at age eleven, together with my two older sisters, when I was sent off to boarding school, following in the footsteps of the previous generation of Ethiopian women in my family. My years in England would not prepare me for the diasporic life I was to lead. I now realize that my early experience in Clarendon School was an extension of my privileged life back home. Those years were instructive in that they gave me a glimpse of how a homogenous collective like an English boarding school creates distinctions and identities for those outside of it.

These differences were expressed with fascination, but not necessarily with derogatory connotations attached, which I was later to encounter in the United States. I became one of the “seven wooly heads” (comprising cousins), as the English students called us Ethiopians. The label was descriptive, and one we took as affectionate, as the one prominent feature that stood out about us collectively in their eyes was the carefully groomed afro hair-do (the fashion of the day), a sight unmistakable because as much as was possible we stuck together like an indestructible fort.

Although there were a handful other students (two Ghanaians and one Trinidadian) out of some two hundred English girls, no one was allowed in our somewhat sacred circle, which was fortified by our own language and reinforced by our cultural
airs. Yes, on occasion we snubbed even the British! Even so, our relationship to our English schoolmates was for the most part genuinely affectionate.

It was my distinct impression that in this context, as outsiders, we were given special consideration. The issue of color was there, and being different was sometimes painful, but there was a general naiveté, on the part of both us as the “others” and on the part of the larger student body, which created an ideal and healthy relationship.

My final departure from Ethiopia, by contrast, was under the most extreme circumstances. My five siblings and I, and four cousins escaped with the help of Mr. Dale Collins, an American missionary who remained behind (a few months earlier his wife and children had left Ethiopia) in order to facilitate our dangerous mission. We arrived at JFK Airport in New York on September 25, 1977, having escaped from our country two months earlier in mid July and having spent two months in hiding in Kenya, Sweden and Germany, until we were officially admitted to the United States as Ethiopian refugees (Rule 1977). I distinctly remember juggling feelings of guilt for leaving so many loved ones behind (father in prison, grandmother, aunt), along with disbelief and shock at the incredible turn of events that plucked us out of the horrors of the red terror. Beyond that, I felt inconsolable grief at having lost our mother leilt (princess) Edjigayehu Asfawossen six months prior to our escape. All of these emotions left me in a state of perpetual confusion.

Perhaps because this situation occurred at an impressionable age (I was seventeen), what I felt was complete disconnection with fellow Ethiopians, after
experiencing the loss of home, family, and consequently, country. This disorientation was
intensified by the realization that what happened to my family was brought on by the
“will of the people.” The demise of the royal family was seen as a victory for Ethiopia
and her people. I felt and lived this burden during the three years of the revolution that I
had witnessed, and this defining condition followed me into the diaspora.

It took many years for me to reevaluate my impressions and to realize that
thousands of other people had also experienced similar cruelties. Like me, many had
become orphaned; they had lost loved ones who had languished in prisons, or were
consumed by ravages of famine and war. Nonetheless, for those who experience such
events, they always are personal. This realization has provoked in me the desire to
explore those memories, and perhaps in time reclaim the past that for many years has
been denied attention.

Based on the fundamental idea that an individual’s identity consists largely in
one’s association with a group, a child is acculturated into multiple identities, yet within a
certain hierarchy (Hollinger 2004). My own childhood orientation to my identity
consisted of my name, which was tied to a particular person for whom I am named. I was
always made to be aware of the series of names and histories of people who came before
me. There was a family tradition, which was like a game, where one was taught to recite
ten generations of male ancestors in a nursery rhyme cadence.

These things were what I would describe as the defining features of my childhood
Ethiopian identity. Additionally, I was a Tigre and Gondare when I visited my maternal
great-grandmother’s house. Emehoe (nun) Debritu (1890-1974) or Emama Wetet,e as all children in the household called her (literally mother milk), who was my Great grandmother was from Gonder, having spent most of her youth there. She had later converted to a nun, with a particular affinity to the place. I remember her tattoos on her jaws and hands according to the custom and style distinct to the Gonder region. Many family members would periodically visit her. Others came with her and settled in her household.

My Grandmother, Leilt Wolte-Israel Seum (1912 – 1988), was a Tigre from Axum on her father’s side. She had also spent the better part of her life there. Another group of people who were also of her household had accompanied her to Addis Ababa. New groups would periodically join the very large commune-like household she maintained. After her divorce from Merid Azmach (Crown Prince) Asfa-Wossen in 1941, she had resumed a life of spiritual journey. She was one of the most devout Orthodox Christians I have known, and as such she was a patroness of the clergy. Soon after my parents’ incarceration, my siblings and I began to live with my Grandmother and as a permanent member of this household I became well acquainted with the intricacies of the Ethiopian Orthodox worship, including feast days, and fast days, which were daily occurrences.

This household, above all else was unique, far from the pomp and excess which were afforded by her title and hereditary position. My grandmother for the better part of her adult life had chosen a life that exemplified humility, and abstinence. Hers was a way
of life marked with spiritual mission. I have grown to appreciate my Grandmother, because I realize now as an adult, what I did not know as a child when I knew her, for me she is a role model one that represents the essence of true grace and nobility.

The two ethnic groups were predominantly represented and came with their particular language and moieties. The Gonderyes are historically an older culture and both linguistically and culturally consider themselves superior to the Shewan Amharas. While they speak Amharic, they do so with a distinct dialect; however, the Gonderye cannot make the same claim over the Tigreans, who are the descendents of Axum, the birthplace of the Ethiopian empire.

At my maternal grandfather’s house, on the other hand, and owning to the fact that he was closely allied to Wello province from where his mother Etege Menen was born and raised, his household were Welloye. Crown Prince Asfa-Wossen (1914-1997) frequently visited Wello and as a result there was an ongoing bond with that region. That household reflected a more homogenous group, and by all appearances regarded itself as such. It was always interesting to me why the Harer and Menz groups (which represented his father, Emperor Haile-Sellassie’s, blood line) was somehow unaccounted for in his household. There was a subtle distinction, even in the manner of how one spoke the language (Gonderye, Welloye and Shewaen all spoke Amarigna) and general behavior that distinguished the Welloye, Gondare, and Shewaen.

My paternal aunt’s household, on the other hand, was completely Oromo. My father Dejazemach Fikre-Sellassie (1927-1996), and his sister, Wezero Atsede Habte-
Mariam (1931-2004), were full Oromo from Nekemte, Wellega, although she and my father were educated in England and had spent their youth in the household of the Emperor Haile-Sellassie. Their father, Dejazmach Hapte-Mariam Kumsa (1910-1936), had died during the Italian war, while his children were still in their early childhood. They were deeply committed to their roots. They spoke Oromigna to each other and were insistent that we (their children) make annual visits so that we would experience that culture as it was practiced and valued in the region. In spite of this well-grounded and close link, I never learned how to speak Oromigna.

The household in which I was raised was much more multi-cultured, however. It included a wide ethnic variety of household members. There were Guragis (who were predominately Muslim) and certain provisions were made so that they could conduct their religious practices (i.e. visit the Mosque). Similarly, they adhered to the strict Muslim dietary precepts. According to these prohibitions, a Christian could not eat meat that was slaughtered and prepared by a Muslim and vice versa. Both Christian and Muslim alike did not eat pork. Aside from this difference, they spoke Amharic but also Arabic and Guragi. The Oromos, Shewans, Gojameyes, and Tigre members of the household coexisted harmoniously within the context of urban Shewan culture found in Addis Ababa. Perhaps the outlook of my parents, who were significantly westernized, was able to accommodate a truly Ethiopian household. The household of the Emperor also exemplified this same Ethiopian cohesion. In all the times I visited I was never aware of the ethnic divisions that existed. They all were in a sense generic Ethiopians. My
particular upbringing gave me the sense that I was an Ethiopian by virtue of partaking of all of these ethnicities. This stands in contrast to how new Ethiopian immigrants identify themselves today.

This strong family bond was engrained at a very early age and its loss was a detriment to my very identity. As a new immigrant to the United States, I found the group bond was not to be restored. For one thing, the core of the family, my parents, were missing. My five siblings were just as much at a loss and very much in the same boat as I was. Our Maternal Uncle, Dejazmach Zewdi Gebre-Sellassie, who acted as a guardian, undertook the magnanimous (financial, emotional, spiritual) burden of taking responsibility for us. Almost overnight, his family that had consisted of three children had suddenly swelled to eleven members. After one year with his family, my siblings and I were sent off to boarding schools in the East Coast. From there, some of us continued on to college. Other family members that were in this country (aunts, uncles, older cousins) somehow became too crippled with the assimilation process and used a strategy that can be described as “sink or swim.” No one seemed to be in a position to pull the family together.

The feeling of being isolated and ostracized which I essentially brought with me from back home was reinforced and further compounded during two years of all girls boarding school at Emma Willard Preparatory School in Troy, New York, followed by four years of college at New York University, including extended holidays with American families and, whenever possible, with each of my six siblings. This further
isolated me from any contact and relationship I may have developed with pockets of a new Ethiopian community.

Furthermore, my own choice, however subconscious, can be characterized as a move away from the group to which I was presumably and naturally allied. My choice to study the Russian language led to the fateful meeting with my Russian born husband. Still, the cultural forces that had shaped my sensibilities in my youth, in spite of everything, were more pronounced, as evidenced in the names I chose for my children. My daughter is Edjigayehu, named for my mother, who perished in the detention center in 1977, and my son, Teferi, I named for my great-grandfather, in both cases in an attempt to pay tribute to my memories.

Similarly, narratives and anecdotes are another crucial way one attempts to retain one’s “original” culture. These memories, which are created with their own moral codes, reveal a world which I once knew through my memories, my children also have become almost innately well acquainted with that world.

While some have noted that identity cannot exist apart from a group (Gans 1994), my experience has shown that it is possible to retain one’s cultural identity, in creative and resourceful ways, long after the loss of group membership. This cultural identity is deeply ingrained and transcends language, values and adherence to moieties. I have feelings of nostalgia, but I am resigned to the idea that those feelings cannot be fulfilled; they have been extinguished with the past.
Stuart Hall (2003) tells us that there are at least two ways of looking at cultural identity. The first defines it as the shared or collective one true sense inside many other superficial “selves” imposed. Shared cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and cultural codes which provide the group with stable, constant and continuous frames of reference beneath the shifting divisions of our actual history. This sense is paramount over the other superficial “selves” and makes up the essence of being of a particular group, in this case Ethiopian. Defining one’s identity in the Diaspora involves a process of rediscovery, excavation, and bringing to light that essence.

This process of rediscovery can also be seen as the production of identity, “not an identity grounded in the archeology, but in the retelling of the past” (Stuart Hall 2003:235). Furthermore, he stresses the importance of the act of imaginative rediscovery, for the rediscovered essential identity has played a critical role in the emergence of various minority social movements such as feminism, anti-colonialism, and also Rastafarianism.

The second way of looking at “cultural identity” recognizes that, as well as the points of similarity; there are critical points of significant differences, which constitute who we are, or what we have become. In this view, one’s sense of collective identity is realized by acknowledging “the ruptures and discontinuities” which render one’s identity its uniqueness. In this sense, cultural identity is a process of becoming as well as being. Hall further states,
Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, “cultural identities” are subject to the continuous “play” of history, culture, and power. Far from being grounded in mere recovery of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are the names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (Hall 2003:236)

Finally, Hall underlines what in my view is a critical point: he does this by emphasizing the danger of ignoring this inner expropriation of cultural identity. Individuals often do not engage in this type of exploration. If its silences are not resisted it produces individuals without an anchor, without horizon, colorless, stateless, rootless (Hall 2003:237). This is a condition that can be described as “self alienation,” also commonly known as “identity crisis.”

In 1995, my American family and I went to Ethiopia, their first visit and my return. During the visit, on a number of occasions I was mistaken for a Ferengi, a term that designates a foreigner. This realization confirmed how estranged I had become from my fellow Ethiopians in the old country. I will always identify with being Ethiopian, for reasons that go beyond language and physical attributes, in whatever context I find myself the inevitable “where are you from?” my instinctual answer is “Ethiopia”.

While I make this claim genuinely, my identity is not tied to my natal home and exists outside of any particular territorial location. America is as close to home as I will have; to me, to be American is to affirm a multitude of identities. Above all, I am
American because it is where all my loyalties lie, and it is where my children were born and where the next generation will be born. In the end, that seems to be the most important defining feature of all.

In a discussion on multiplex identities, Kirin Narayan (1993) describes the identities of persons with mixed backgrounds in which influences from multiple countries, regions, religions, and classes merge together. My own situation can be adequately described as one with numerous and sometimes contradictory forces. Taking religion as a case in point, let me try to elaborate. I am baptized as an Ethiopian Orthodox Christian; however, during my formative years I became exposed to protestant churches both in England and later in the United States. In the same manner that I identify with Ethiopia, I also claim Orthodox as my religion, but in the manner of worship and traditions I am more familiar with the protestant church. Certainly, in doctrine and ritual, the differences between these two types of churches are significant, yet these contradictory forces both inform my religious sensibilities. The same could be said about my orientation to English vs. Amharic and so on.

Similarly, and based on my experience in the Diaspora, it is not possible to determine where one influence ends and the other begins, nor to make definitive claims to cultural authenticity. To make a claim as a “native Ethiopian” would imply that I occupy a constant and static state of being, therefore, this proposition is implausible. It is with this in mind that Stuart Hall (1999) made this insightful statement that instead of asking what are people’s roots, we ought to be thinking about their routes, the different
points by which they have come to be now. They are in a sense, the sum of those differences.

Ethnic Consciousness/Myth of Election

In his work that examines the relationship between those ethnic communities which make claims as “Chosen People” and their survival, Anthony Smith states the following: ethnic communities who have survived over long periods usually are united and inspired by myths of common ancestry and memories of a golden age. What seem to be critical in this survival are the subjective elements such as ethnic memories, values, symbols, myths and traditions. Also indispensable for ethnic survival is the formulation and cultivation of a “myth of ethnic election” (the creation and dissemination of the belief that “we are a “chosen people””). It is common for ethnic communities in general to regard themselves as the center of the universe and view themselves relative to others with exclusivity, a phenomenon we know as ethnocentrism.

“Myth of ethnic election,” continues Smith, should not be confused with ethnocentrism; the former is a more demanding entity. Ancient Israelites, who exemplify this notion, believed they were chosen and sanctified and that their lifestyle was an expression of sacred values. Only by obeying these laws and ceremonies could the community and its members be saved. Ethiopians, by virtue of their past, have inherited such a legacy. The Ethiopian kingdom of Axum retained many Judaic features long before they adopted Monophysite Christianity in the fourth century (Smith 1996).
Successive Ethiopian kingdoms derived their legitimacy from the symbolism of the Lion of Judah and the claim to royal descent from legendary King Solomon and Negest Makeda (the Queen of Sheba), whom Ethiopians claim as their own.

In the epic chronicled in the Kebre Negest, Ethiopia is consistently referred to as a sovereign (inclusive polity). This Donald Levin, estimates as a remarkable state of affairs, given the highly ethnic diversity found in Ethiopia. In this connection, Levine outlines some crucial symbolic entities which he explains as having served as a mechanism to unify ancient Ethiopians. These symbols were communicated by the Churches and monasteries, which served the crucial role as nationwide system of communication (Levine 2003).

With respect to cognitive categories, the KN assumes the equivalence of land = people = nation = polity. Thus, it speaks of the rejoicing, which took place in bihere Ityoppiya, a phrase that connotes land, country, and people alike. And when David, the Ethiopian son of King Solomon, returns to Ethiopia with the Ark of Zion, he is welcomed joyously by the “seb’a Ityoppiya,” the people of Ethiopia, a phrase connoting the overarching nation. Among other older records that instantiate the equation of people with nation, hezba Ityoppiya is found in a document from the time of Na’od (ca. 1500). (Levine 2003)

This claim or “myth of election” was very much actualized and considered by the pre-1974 Ethiopians as a matter of historical fact. Article 2 of the revised Ethiopian Constitution of 1955 claimed that the ruling line had reached its 225th generation:
(Marcus 1994) The last bearer of Ethiopia’s sanctity was Emperor Haile-Sellassie I (1892-1975). It is crucial to examine the ways in which this belief in ethnic election is attached to the Ethiopian Diasporic community in the United States. Can a pattern of ethnic persistence and renewal be discerned among this group? What does it look like?

In the case of the Ethiopian myth of election, it was recognized and was inseparable from the dynastic rule, from which the community took its main symbols and culture. This history was decisively severed after the dissolution of the monarchial state. This occurred in such a violent way, and at the cost of the annihilation of memories, values, symbols, myths, and traditions associated with the past. The military dictatorship made it a matter of national policy to view the ruling elite and their past as a force opposed to nationalism. The new national slogan “Ethiopia First” was deliberately juxtaposed against “Imperial Ethiopia.” It is therefore difficult to determine whether a transfer of the past myth had occurred at all. The Ethiopian adult generation of the seventies was forced to forget their past through systematic purge, during a period of eighteen years of military dictatorship, to be replaced by a generation that had no memory of such a mythic past.

What remains under such circumstances is the recreation of memory, which produces new myths about the past. Ethiopians, particularly in academia, continue to echo the criticism that Ethiopian Imperial history overlooked the people; it is graced by the powerful leaders of different periods, “filled with longstanding myths that were largely a figment of creative folly or a ploy of legitimization” (Sereke-Brhan 2000).
These scholars caution against embracing such history with pride, as it gives Ethiopians a false sense of well-being and permanence. In this connection, Donald Levin discusses the growing tendency of both Western historians as well as post-modernist Ethiopians during the 1990s in particular had to slight the relevance and permanence of Ethiopia’s “precocious achievement of nationhood.” As Levine explains,

When the regime shift of 1991 catapulted into power an elite with a dim view of historic Ethiopia, apologists for the dismemberment of Africa’s oldest independent nation could wear the mantle of academic respectability for some patently counter-factual reconstructions (Levine 2003).

He illustrates this point by noting that the books that were to emerge during this time, *The Invention of Ethiopia* (Holcomb and Sisai 1990) and *Imagining Ethiopia* (Sorenson 1993) seemed to corroborate the new perspective and help reduce Ethiopian nationalism to a sheer invention of 19th century imperialism (Levine 2003).

Ethiopian identity in the Diaspora is addressed in two recent articles. One, entitled “Shared Symbols”, by Heruy Arefe-Aine, notes that Ethiopians are in search of a new cultural myth to signify their identity. The newfound political voices of many ethnic groups raise questions about the shared symbols that define the Ethiopian people. Questions of identity are ubiquitous. Which Ethiopia does one claim? Is it relics of Makeda and Solomon, the obelisks of Axum, the Orthodox churches, the nine monotheist
monasteries, the promised land of Rastafarians, the kingdom of Haile-Sellassie, the resting place of the Ark of the Covenant?

As Ethiopians look to their diversity (eighty ethnic groups and languages) their isolation, their mountains, what are our defining shared symbols, how can they come together when so many of them reject the official version of history and instead look to histories. Identity becomes fluid, Ethiopians metamorphoses into Ethio-Americans, part of both, not wholly either, split up, fractured (Arefe-Aine, 2005).

The second article, entitled “Currents of Change” by Geta Mekonnen, talks about the related world of Ethiopian art where there is a similar sentiment being expressed: the current period is described as “Confusion Art,” which is an attempt to move backwards, to recapture the magical “tradition,” to reclaim and redeem the image(s) of the country scarred by war and famine, and to face the challenges ahead.

I would like to turn to the writing of a contemporary Ethiopian author who is very much engaged in this type of creation. Nega Mezlekia the up and coming voice of the Ethiopian Diaspora, in his memoir, Notes from the Hyena’s Belly, perpetuates a certain image of the underlying mythical forces at play during his childhood in Ethiopia:

I was born in the year of the paradox, in the labyrinthine city of Jijiga. Queen Mennen far off in her palace sent for fortune-tellers and Devil-tamers--modern medicine was failing to cure her… Meanwhile, somewhere far away, the Devil-tamer pronounced his cure for Queen Mennen: the sacrifice of the young. Candidates must be free of any
form of body piercing; they must have no wounds or scars that would compromise the quality of the blood, he announced. Countless messengers were dispatched from the palace to scour the countryside looking for children who had neither bruises nor scars.

In 1958 the year of the paradox, I was born in Ethiopia, in a hot and dusty city called Jijiga, which destroyed its young. (Mezlekia 2000:8)

This piece of writing illustrates the nature of myth creation, a technique in writing intended to evoke a burly, hazy exotic world of a distant past. In this particular case the piece of work blurs two genres: creative writing and memoir. I take particular note of this entry because it portrays the common folk juxtaposed with the world of the king, queen and nobility, but Mezlekia goes further. He demonizes the distant world and those within it who are remote from his world. It also accurately depicts the contradictory nature of Ethiopian society: devout Christians drenched in the belief and worship of both benevolent and malevolent spirits. There is also another force at play: the force of the society to which one presents oneself. To create yet another version of the heathen African world, with demon worshipers and child sacrifices is like preaching to the choir in the West, yet Mezlekia must skew the picture to feed a particular appetite.

Etege (Empress) Menen died in 1962 when the author was four and not coincidentally and conveniently in the year of his birth. The image we have of her, based on this well-crafted writing is a devil worshipper and party to the destruction of Ethiopia’s youth. While this makes for tantalizing reading, from the perspective with which I and millions of others grew up Etege Menen was a matriarch, not only to her
large family but also to the nation, a role she fulfilled by looking out for women. She was, for instance, founder of the first girls’ school and women’s association. She is credited with countless achievements in an official capacity, but as a devout member of the Church she personally financed the building of numerous churches in Ethiopia, including the one that houses the national treasure, the “Ark of the Covenant.” By way of telling the other side of the story, I will share a personal story told to me by my mother. The memory left to me is that shortly before Empress Menen’s death, my siblings and I had come to visit her, and being the youngest at the time, I was put on her bedside. I proceeded to bow to her repeatedly, rather conspicuously, to which she said, “I wonder what this child sees, for God talks to the innocent.” This is the story I grew up with, and therefore has become my memory.

**Recreating Ityoppiya**

In the first two decades of Ethiopian immigration to the United States, as Ethiopians embarked on the process of assimilation, like so many newcomers to this country they took on minimum-skill and low paying jobs. This included work as taxi driving; parking attendants, hotel and restaurant doormen, bellboys, housekeepers, waiters, and bus boys. One of the defining features of Ethiopian society can be described as highly stratified societal structure based on class. This feature was the first to be discarded and transformed in the new world. One became “someone” based on their ability to work and their level of participation and upward mobility in the work force.
“Who is who” in the old country was redefined over-night, social stratification far from being transported, dissipated almost immediately. For the older generation, coming to terms with the new social order was more traumatic, in some people’s view, than the life and death situation they had escaped at home. The younger generation of the same class, however, quickly adapted, abandoned life as it was meant to be (signaled by the abrupt bankruptcy of lifestyle and lack of funds from home) and quickly settled for a short cut. There is a great deal of disorientation and psychological trauma associated with the process of assimilation and redefining one’s identity in a foreign land, as Glazer Moynihan notes in the following:

The significance of immigration to the American experience has changed considerably since the early days of Mayflowers and Ellis Islands even as it seems to retain its quality of embodying the entrenched dynamic of adversity. There is, as always, the same struggle to transplant oneself securely into alien soil; the same ardor and fundamental quandaries of community and identity are prevalent even 225 years following. (Glazer, Moynihan 1996:137)

The metropolitan area of Washington, D.C., was the first home to seventy-five percent of such immigrants. Four decades later, Ethiopians as a social entity have been transformed at an accelerated rate. Levine explains that “As refugees living across all the continents, and in response to the circumstances of their disbursement, the Ethiopians have established themselves in local communities, through the media and have created the basis for reconfiguring Ethiopia as one nation located in three domains: ye-bet hager
(in the homeland) ye-wutch hager (in other ‘foreign’ lands), and ye-cyber ager (the cyber land)” (Levine 2003).

At the community level, the first Ethiopian immigrant generation has been successful in constructing community organizations; of these, some are those that have survived into exile, namely, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, as well as some mosques and Protestant churches. Church, as an institution, has been extremely significant for Ethiopians. In 1974, at the time of the massive immigration, only two churches existed. The Ethiopian Tewahedo church in New York was the first to be established. The newly purchased building held its first service at the Holy Trinity Parish on December 25, 1969, at 140-42 West 176th Street, in the Bronx, New York. The second parish, dedicated to the Ethiopian national saint, Tekle Haimanot, was established in early 1973 in Los Angeles.

**Tewahedo Church**

Today, the number of Ethiopian Tewahedo Orthodox Churches is estimated at close to sixty. Every major city from coast to coast and in between has Tewahedo churches. The number and size of these churches is proportional to the size of the Ethiopian community. The enduring presence of religion in the lives of Ethiopians is evident no less in the Diaspora than it was in the homeland. What is particular about Ethiopian religion as it is reflected in their cultural values is the extent to which they have been able to maintain it in the United States. A simple greeting in Amharic, for example, goes as follows; “tena yestilign” (literally, “may you be given health”) and the response is
“Egziabeher yemesgen” (“may God be praised”) and so on. Even in a causal interaction, God is always present in times of sadness. The proper thing to say is “Egziabeher yatnah (sh)” (“God comfort you”), and in time of sickness, “Egziabeher yemarish” (“God forgive you”). However, in time of suspenseful events, one must say “Mariam tikelelish” (“May St. Mary, the symbol of motherhood and grace, shield you”) or in childbirth, “Marian Tatsnish” (“May St. Mary comfort you”). Similarly, given names have unusually high religious reference. Common male names include Berhane Mariam (light of St. Mary), Fikre-Sellassie, (love of Trinity) Gebre-kidan, (the word of the gospel) Gebregziabiher, (the word of God), and HaileGiorgis, (power of St. George). Female names include Wolete Israel (maiden of Israel), Meheret (Mercy), Kidest (holy), Mahaet (ecclesiastical song of praise), Mekedes (the holy of holies), Tigest (patience) and Fikrete Sellassie (Love of Trinity).

Restaurants

Among the newly created social entities are Ethiopian restaurants and socio-political organizations. Ethiopians have come a long way since the first of such eating establishments opened. “Emama Desta” in Washington, D.C., was a mom and pop operation, the first attempt to capture home away from home, with excessively traditional berchumas and Mesoh, tawdry wall decorations, kirar and masinko music with cheap incense, creating at best a third-rate eating experience. Ashley Fingarson, in an article “cooking up culture” wrote, “Washington D.C. houses nearly 300,000 of the estimated
750,000 Ethiopian immigrants living in the U.S., the Ethiopian immigrants have also brought their recipes to the area and created a 'feeding frenzy' for the native cuisines.” The article also points out that the East Coast is the largest Ethiopian population outside of Ethiopia (Fingarson 2004).

Today there are over a hundred restaurants in the U.S. patterned after the particular immigration trend of a given location. Ethiopian restaurants serve not only as a community base but also as a focal point of their socialization and cultural transmission. Furthermore they have become savvy, usually upscale and highly competitive in all aspects of catering to the American craving for fine dining.

In addition, Ethiopians have been particularly successful in the area of business. This in part can be explained and may be the result of skills they developed back home. The traditional form of rotating savings and credit associations known as *ekoub* is an age-old practice that enabled the individual/family to create new financial opportunity. The *ekoub* is like a savings account/lottery system, in that a family or community makes a regular monetary contribution. A drawing is made or a particular member is selected every year to take the yield and use it as they see fit.
Non-Governmental Organizations

One could trace the evolution of Ethiopian experience just by looking at the restaurants alone. Similarly, there are dozens of socio-political non-profit organizations some of which have been active since the early eighties, which serve the community in dealing with issues of immigrations health, and education in the initial years after immigration (Levine 2003).

As the immigrant community matured, such organizations began providing Amharic instruction to Ethiopian children born in the U.S., as well as English-language training to adults,' along with translation and interpretation services and assistance for new entrepreneurs. They regularly organize community events such as Ethiopian New Year (September 11) and the celebration of newly created events such as "Ethiopian day", which is customarily organized by the community center in Chicago. A more recent trend is the formation of Ethiopian ethnic regional centers such as the Oromo associations, a Gondare association, and restaurants specializing in specific ethnic cuisine (Levine 2003). Another means of communication in the Diaspora is the electronic magazines such as Ethiopian Review, Tadias, and Seleda geared to expounding on Ethiopian diasporic experiences and important issues. This exemplified by the mission statement of Seleda outlined rather wittingly as follows:

Longevity and distance have played havoc with our dreams of returning to live in Ethiopia. As the roots we set in America inevitably grow stronger, there are certain
nuances of being the first generation of immigrant Ethiopians that could make for compelling discourse.

Foremost for those of us on the verge of making major professional and personal commitments, find ourselves bouncing wildly between staunch loyalty to Ethiopian-ness and guilt for absorbing some ferenjie (non-Ethiopian) temperaments. Hopefully Seleda will be able to explore ways of finding a comfortable medium between these two worlds; share the joys and predicaments of being Ethiopians. (Seleda 1999)

Others can be described as organizations with translocal missions. Examples of these are the Ethiopian-American Constituency Foundation, and the Ethiopian-American Historical Society. The high-profile, North America Soccer Tournament is another effective means of bringing the community together (Levine 2003). These events are not only for lovers of the sport but, more importantly, an opportunity to embrace and maintain a strong sense of Ethiopia collectively.

On a national level, these social-political organizations have been instrumental in influencing politics in Ethiopia. According to Donald Levine (2003), "The most dramatic manifestation of Diaspora involvement with home events has been in the area of politics." One such example is the Ethiopian Community Association of Chicago (ECAC). These Ethiopian Americans were highly instrumental in getting the U.S. Congress to pass unanimously an amendment to the Foreign Aid Bill in 1995 tying future aid for the Ethiopian government to demonstrated improvements in its human rights record. Similarly, their actions were crucial in getting their Senator Dick Durbin, and six
other senators to prompt then Secretary of State Powell's statement of support in the
protest of the Ethiopian government's human rights violations. Diaspora communities
have participated vigorously in the organization of dissident political parties, several of
which work in tandem with homeland counterparts (Levine 2003). Additionally, in the
summer of 2003, representatives of fifteen parties attended the first Ethiopian All-Party
Conference. Parties in the Ethiopian Diaspora community developed through the
Ethiopian Community Association Networking and similar programs has also been
successful in sharing information about how they have solved or are working on social
problems in the United States.

In more recent times, the new trend, modeled after the mesmerizing Iraqi election,
has galvanized Ethiopian Americans among other ethnic groups to use their American
citizenship as political clout and urge the government of Ethiopia to hold an orderly,
peaceful and free national election, and also to launch a campaign to gain dual citizenship
for Ethiopians abroad. On the virtual plane, there are also notable developments, as
Levine states clearly:

Electronic media have created virtual neighborhoods, bounded no longer by
territory, but by access to requisite software and hardware. Due to the paucity of software
and hardware in Ethiopia, these networks based on are dominated by Diaspora
communities but include serious participants from the home country who provide
information for which the emigrants hunger (Levine 2003).
Electronic networks, also known as "coutrynets," include Ethio Forum Network, sponsored by CyberEthiopia or Warka, and the Ethiopian Email Distribution Network (EEDN). This has brought Ethiopians "virtually" closer to "home." In recent years it has also adopted a self-explanatory motto "One Country, One People, One Flag" (Levine 2003). This and other equally important networks facilitate in linking together the otherwise highly dispersed Global Ethiopian diasporic communities. According to Appadurai (1996), Levine (2003), the growth of electronic networks, and web sites and the efficient way they are being utilized among the Diaspora communities will have a significant impact in the creation of the future.

It seems that Ethiopians have been successful in building their base within American society. This in part is determined not only by what goes on among the ethnic communities themselves but also by developments in the larger society. In the last decade, ethnicity has become accepted, even desirable, in part owing to the growing tendency among American society, which perceives itself as undergoing cultural homogenization. "Being different" or looking for new ways to establish ones differences in cultural terms is not only the force behind developments in popular culture among the youth but also a driving force within the larger American society. According to Donald Levine, the new immigrant populations like the Ethiopians arrived during a time when the melting pot ideal had given way to a norm of celebrating diversity in identity and culture. Multiculturalism became in style, and ethnic Americans tended increasingly to celebrate cultural heritages long buried by assimilationist trends. It has also become more
Ethnicity provides a tangible set of common identifications-- in language, food, music, names, when other social roles become more abstract and impersonal; in the competition for the values of the society to be realized politically, ethnicity can become a means of claiming place or advantage. (Bell 1996:144)

**Ethiopians in the United States**

The discussion which follows is based on survey #1 which included 25 participants. As mentioned earlier, this survey asked questions about demographics, how Ethiopians in the Diaspora identify themselves, and about how and to what extent they keep in contact with their natal home. In addition, they were asked which ethnic group other than their own they identify with. I also collected comparative data on the desire to return to Ethiopia as opposed to the actually returning. The age groups in this sample survey can be divided between eighteen years old or younger, and over the age of twenty-five but not over fifty. The group that arrived after 1995 was the largest, with 48% of those surveyed, followed by those who came within the span 1979-1995, which made up fewer than 44%, and 8% came before 1974. Some assumptions can be made based on the

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Survey # 1 was conducted between May 2004 and January 2005. There were total of 25 respondents.
type of language a particular group spoke. The findings were surprising in that only 65% spoke Amharic (given that Amharic is the official language of Ethiopia and the language of instruction in all schools throughout Ethiopia and its use is mandatory), it highly improbable that they do not speak it), 23% spoke Tigrinya and 12% Oromigna. For the question “what is your nationality?” the choices given on the survey were Ethiopian or American. I did not offer the option of Ethiopian-American because I believe that would have been the preferred choice.

Based on survey #1, Ethiopians by and large came to join family members in the U.S. There is communication with the natal home 60% call home once in a while, 32% do so once a month, and 8% call once a week. However, the issue of return is less clear. While all the respondents desired to return, only 60% had actually done so. In addition to these returns, 90% were visits as opposed to permanent. On the other hand, immigrants keep in touch in other tangible ways. For instance, 32% make telephone calls to Ethiopia at least once a month, while 60% do so occasionally. They also make financial provisions for family members and friends back home. A full 62% send money regularly and the remaining 38% do so occasionally, probably based on special circumstances, including major holidays. When asked “what ethnic group do you identify with in the host country?” 34% identified with Afro-Americans while 51% gave no response and 15% chose “other” as a category. The results of this data suggest that Ethiopian Americans are more likely to identify with a generic minority ethnic group and do not have affiliations
with nor do they perceive themselves connected with any other group other than their own (see survey results graphed on pages 78-80).

Table 3.1 Survey #1: Nationality

![Graph showing nationality distribution]

Table 3.2 Survey #1: Age

![Graph showing age distribution]
Table 3.3 Survey #1: Language

What language do you speak?

- Amharigna: 16%
- Tigrigna: 28%
- Oromigna: 56%

Table 3.4 Survey #1: Length of Immigration

How long ago did you come to the United States?

- Before 1974
- 1979-1985
- 1986-1995
- After 1995
Table 3.5 Survey #1: Family Influence on Immigration

Did you join family members?

- 24% No
- 76% Yes

Table 3.6 Survey #1: Communication with Ethiopia

Do you keep contact with Ethiopia?

- Once a week
- Once a month
- Once in a while

0 5 10 15 20

Send Money
Call
Table 3.7 Survey # 1: Return

Type of return to Ethiopia

- 8% I plan to visit Ethiopia
- 92% I plan to return to Ethiopia for good

Table 3.8 Survey # 1: Ethnicity

Which ethnic group do you identify with here in the U.S.

- 40% Afro-American
- 32% Other
- 28% No response
As already discussed, there has been a marked shift away from the idea of Ethiopianism, which took place for various social and political reasons. One of these reasons is the changed image of Africa and Ethiopia among African Americans.

In recent times, as one sees the continent of Africa plagued with civil war, genocide, starvation and disease, the image of Africa continues to be dismal. Ethiopia, in particular, is no longer the mythical “homeland” for African Americans. Based on data from the 1991 UN HDI (Human Development Index) and the World Bank, 26.5 million people in the rural population were registered below the poverty line, and Ethiopia ranks as the eleventh poorest country in the world. In the ever-fluid age of technology, the starving face of Ethiopians, welcome or not, comes right in one’s living room. The world witnessed close up the misery and destitution of Ethiopia and its people during 1984 - 1985. And the world responded with the highly publicized fund-raising campaign in the U.S., “We Are the World,” and its European counterpart, “Live Aid.” In this and similar ways, Ethiopia fell from grace, and ceased to symbolize African pride.

On another front in the United States, the Ethiopian-Black relation was to embark on a new path. Since the post-independence period of the 1960s, and contrary to what one might have hoped and imagined, very few African states have enjoyed political stability, and the economic conditions have been less than desirable for millions of its citizens, which resulted in mass emigration to the West.
In the United States, the largest African immigrant populations are Nigerians, Ethiopians, Ghanaians, Sierra Leoneans, Liberians, South Africans, Somalis, Senegalese and Kenyans (Nyang 1990). For the first time in U.S. history, beginning in the late 1970s, Black Americans began to experience what it is like to live among an African population. They began to encounter Africans in all walks of life and, more importantly, saw them close up, as they had never encountered them before. They began to see first-hand what it means to be African and in that broad context they came to realize that the sense of "other" relative to them from the point of view of the Africans was no less pronounced. This new reality has first and foremost dispelled the age-old myth that all Africans are one and alike. An Ethiopian, far from being confused with a Nigerian, can be distinguished even from other Ethiopians. These distinctions are made on the basis of language, religion, ethnic and social make-up, and the picture gets more complex.

Secondly, the newly arrived Africans have an entirely different orientation to Western society and what it offers. They are not accustomed to the notion of entitlement, to the opportunities, rights, freedoms and pursuit of the American Dream that many "Americans" may take for granted.

Black Americans see that Ethiopians are no less foreign than Asian Indians or Aboriginal Australians. The idea that affinity is based on skin color alone is a myth that does not conform to reality. The experiences of Ethiopian immigrants and Black Americans are bringing to bear these vital realizations.
According to a New York Times article published in August 2004, the term "African American" is being contested among Black Americans and African-born immigrants (Swams 2004). Based on demographic statistics prepared by the State University of New York at Albany, the article states that, in the 1990s, the number of African immigrants tripled and the number of Blacks from the Caribbean grew by more than 60 percent. By 2000, African-born residents in New York constituted 30 percent of Blacks, and 28 percent of Blacks in Boston. The article goes on to say that in the relatively short period of one generation, the African immigrants and their children are showing a level of achievement higher than native-born Blacks.

This finding is based on the year 2000 census data as reviewed by John R. Logan and Glenn Deane at SUNY Albany; it shows that African immigrants typically have more education and higher median incomes than native Black Americans. Similar studies conducted by Harvard University also show that a majority of their "Black" students, approximately two-thirds, were African and Caribbean immigrants or their children. Some sociological studies also point out that African-born "Blacks" are less psychologically handicapped by the stigma of race (Swams 2004).

The article focuses on Mr. Abdulaziz Kamus (an Ethiopian immigrant), an activist, and his attempts to grapple with the new debate surrounding the issue of African identity in the United States. A full-blown conflict resulted soon after Mr. Kamus tried to attend a community meeting of Black professors, health experts and community leaders
who had assembled together to discuss how to educate Blacks about the dangers of prostate cancer. The community members informed the newcomer that the focus was strictly on African-American issues and that he was not welcome.

The bewildered Kamus states, “But I am African and I am an American citizen; am I not African-American?” He goes on to say, "They said 'No, no, no, not you.’” Mr. Kamus, who has lived in this country for 20 years, continues, “The census is claiming me as an African-American, if I walk down the streets, white people see me as an African-American. Yet African-Americans are saying ‘You are not one of us.’ So I ask myself, in this country, how do I define myself?” According to Swams, the demographic shifts, which gained strength in the 1960s after changes in federal immigration law led to increased migration from Africa and Latin America, have been accompanied in some places by fears that newcomers might eclipse native-born Blacks. “And they have touched off delicate musings about ethnic labels, identity and the often unspoken differences among people who share the same skin color” (Swams 2004).

Some African Americans like those in the community center make a distinction between themselves and the newcomers on the basis of their Black American heritage, a heritage which they base exclusively on the experience of slavery. Mr. Alan Keys, the Black Republican challenger for the Senate seat in Illinois, had the following to say about his challenger, Kenyan-born Mr. Barack Obama: “My opponent and I have the same race – that is, physical characteristics. We are not from the same heritage... “My ancestors
toiled in slavery in this country, my consciousness, who I am as a person, has been shaped by my struggle, deeply emotional and deeply painful, with the reality of that heritage” (Swams 2004). Keys’s views reflect others who will challenge Mr. Kamus, and Obama. In their opinion, the newcomers do not have the inherited legacy of bondage, segregation and legal discrimination. This issue has quickly gained public interest among the “Black” community in genera (Swams 2004).

The new dilemma with respect to this issue is further elaborated by Mr. Austin, who states that having suffered so much (by slavery) African Americans are weary. The issue of African immigration looks like one more hurdle to be overcome. It is not surprising, according to Austin, that some people are concerned about immigrants standing in the way of the Black dream, and in the way of future generations, too. Austin concludes that African immigrants are very aggressive; they are and will continue to be competitors with African Americans. This fact will be the cause of serious division (Swams 2004).

It is important to point out that not all Ethiopians feel as Mr. Abdulaziz Kamus (an Ethiopian immigrant), and his ideas do not reflect a cohesive Ethiopian perception of the issue. In fact, it is always difficult to decipher a collective voice on many of the issues facing the Diaspora. Mr. Kamus’s views became visible as part of the election debate between Keys and Obama and should not be mistaken as the one overriding and cohesive voice of all Ethiopians. There are many Ethiopians in the United States who do not
identify themselves as African American in a broad sense; instead, they prefer to cite American or the more precise Ethiopian American as their underlying identity.

Still, this debate underscores the nature of Afro-American/African discourse in the United States. Seeing African immigrants are singled out as a group and sole adversary to the Afro-Americans is a perplexing development. This argument makes the unfounded assumption that all persons from Africa by innate disposition will require special consideration and sharing the rights and freedom to pursue opportunities somehow threatens Black Americans. The fact that continental Africans, as opposed to all other new immigrants, should be viewed as a threat would have been stronger arguments. Such views reflect a prejudice, which the Black Americans seem to impose on the new Africans. Ironically it is a prejudice that they have been subjected to throughout the history of this country.
Symbolic Identity

“Symbolic identity,” according to Herbert Gans, can be defined as feelings of allegiance to the culture of the immigrant generation, or the old country, a love for and a pride in a tradition that can be felt without having to be incorporated into everyday behavior. These feelings can further be expressed in a number of different ways, such as the desire for the cohesive extended immigrant family or for the obedience of children to parental authority and adherence to immigrant religion.

There may even be a desire to “return” to these imagined pasts, but without the complexities that accompanied them in the real past. The disparities between the desire to go back and a group’s inability to do so creates a condition whereby the ethnic group may engage in recreating tradition, through church, schools, political organizations, etc: “All of the cultural patterns which are transformed into symbols are themselves guided by a common pragmatic imperative: they must be visible and clear in meaning to a large number of newer generation ethnics” (Herbert Gans 1994:146). Viewed this way, cultural artifacts such as the Ethiopian music industry, which is extremely lucrative, as well as ethnic consumer goods and Ethiopian cuisine, which has enjoyed wide-scale popularity, has resulted in the promotion and availability of numerous food stuffs (coffee, teff, Berbere), are all sources for “ethnic symbols.”

Among Ethiopians in the Diaspora, the notion of nostalgia, which is also a symbol, is expressed in a number of important ways. The traditional ballad known as Tezzeta (memory) is as popular now as it ever has been. With respect to these lyrics,
which continue to express the themes of love, patriotism, historical events, they have retained their original flavor; at the same time, they are undoubtedly influenced and in great degree are products of the American music trends, especially emulating hip hop and rap and, to a lesser degree, reggae. In this sense, they have become an extension of American popular culture with a different flair. The Ethiopian music industry is not only lucrative but also very much in a position to lead in setting trends back in the “old country.”

Decline of Storytelling

The age-old tradition of storytelling, on the other hand, seems to be on the decline, mainly because a majority of the new-generation Ethiopians do not speak, much less read, in the language of their parents. According to an old Ethiopian saying, when an old man dies in Ethiopia, it is as though a whole library has burned down. People carry their history and their fables with them. They move around, passing them on to the next generation in installments. The most unique feature of Ethiopian storytelling is the use of double meaning known as *kinäe*. The stories consist of *sem* (wax) which have a surface meaning and *worq* (gold) which contain the “real” however, hidden meaning. In Ethiopian traditional society, *kinäe* was used to communicate public concerns to the higher political powers.
Symbolic ethnicity can also be practiced politically and geographically. The diasporic Ethiopians' initiative to better the lot of Ethiopia and Ethiopians has not necessarily translated into an interest in going back. Such activities of ethnic communities can be understood as a means to serve their current and future well-being. Indeed, the “old country,” in this case “Ethiopia,” is a significant identity symbol in and of itself, one that cannot make heavy demands, nor require action in local issues, thought immigrants may remain connected by sending money home, or even by communicating frequently. However, immigrants are free to identify with their perception of the “old home” by transforming it into a symbol. In view of names as symbolic ethnicity, one can look at the names of the Ethiopian restaurants to perceive a pattern, as the names deviate rarely, almost as if by design. The majority of the names are Ethiopian land marks (Blue Nile, Awash, Massawa, Abyssinia) or historical/mythical personal names (Queen of Sheba, Ras Teferi, Melenik, Lalibela, Empress Taytu).

The way in which first-generation Ethiopian immigrants have maintained their identity has been discussed above. The new generation that replaces them are those who were either very young when they left Ethiopia or those who were born in the United States. How does the new generation identify itself? How does the ethnic community retain members in succeeding generations? Unlike their parents, the children do not necessarily choose to become members of Ethiopian organizations. Valuing community membership over the lures of the host society (such as the United States in the age of
information) is a major hurdle the community faces, one that it must overcome if it is to survive with traditional identity.

Second generation Ethiopian Americans

It has become painfully clear that second-generation Ethiopians, by and large, do not speak the languages of their parents; this obviously has social and psychological ramifications. In a study of diaspora and languages, Jacob Landau discusses the relevance of the "language factor" in determining the relations of a diaspora with its host country and its home country. Major determinant factors can be summed up as the degree of ties between the host and the home country, the type of language and degree of differences between the new and old language, the attitudes of the immigrant community to the home country and future perspectives, and the availability of opportunities to learn the old language outside the home.

In many cases, the immigrant language is lost, despite the tight-knit family and community make-up found among Ethiopian immigrants. Child rearing and the socialization process of Ethiopians in the United States have undergone dramatic changes that are likely to continue. The imperatives of the double income needed to sustain the family in an industrial society such as the United States have made it impossible for parents to take on prolonged child rearing. In some cases, again depending on financial ability, the family is made up of grandparents or extended family.
The child in this case, can receive prolonged care at home. Once at school, the assimilation process is accelerated. There is little incentive for the child to continue to speak the native language. Critical in this regard is the way the immigrant language is perceived, both by the children themselves and by others who are in a position of influence (Olmedo & Martinez 1978). Exceptions to this pattern are the Latino, Korean and a few other ethnic groups which have been very successful in transmitting their language to second and even third generations. In all those cases, the community has developed effective resources to maintain an environment that is conducive to such learning.

Ethiopian children enter pre-school and kindergarten at the same rate as their American counterparts. Amharic is the preferred language in the home; however, the level of fluency in Amharic is largely dependent on the household make-up. If grandparent(s) are living in the home (which is still customary) as caretakers of young children, on a daily basis the child will learn to speak partial Amharic, but will require additional instruction to be considered a “native” speaker. This is further strengthened if one lives within one’s ethnic community, if Church services are conducted in Amharic and if other social interactions reinforce not only the language but also other cultural values. As some studies show, Ethiopian immigrants to Western societies have made significant adjustments in their attitude towards learning and education. Judging by the history and nature of assimilation process in the United States, one can determine that
assimilation is the sole means of attaining economic independence and avoiding vulnerability to exploitation (Taylor & Hobbs 2005).

Among young Ethiopians there is a sense of obligation to gain as much education as possible. In spite of all the distractions of popular culture, this priority seems to have been transmitted to young Ethiopians very successfully. Among Ethiopian students of the first generation there is a prevailing attitude to make a contribution to the homeland, a trend which has been on the rise in recent years. These changes in attitudes regarding opportunities at home seem to have had effects here in the United States. More and more Ethiopians are visiting their natal home; one Ethiopian businessman who is making plans to return stated Ethiopia is experiencing a “brain gain”: "Even just five years ago, no one wanted to come back. Now everyone wants to come back and be a part of helping to build the country" (Wax 2005). Similarly and according to Wax, last year Ethiopians in the United States sent $6 million in remittance money, eclipsing coffee, the country's biggest export, which earned $4 million.

The article goes on to say that those who are returning are by and large small (mostly eateries and specialty food stores) business owners who want to do more than just send money. According to Ethiopian Government officials, 1,500 Ethiopians have already returned, in response to the Ethiopian Government’s aggressive campaign to woo emigrants to return. This campaign involved offering flexible land-ownership laws and tax breaks on importing belongings. According to Ethiopians living in Washington, D.C, embassy officials had been going door-to-door in Ethiopian-American neighborhoods,
urging patriotic entrepreneurs to move back. Interestingly enough, Ethiopian Americans apparently are bringing back a piece of their Americana; one sees all over Addis-Ababa eateries and office buildings bearing names such as “The Olive Garden,” “New York, New York,” and “The Boston Professional Building” (Seattle Times 2003).

In addition, there is a concerted effort to make their offspring bicultural/bilingual as increasing numbers of Ethiopians are sending their young for summers and extended vacations in Ethiopia. In the past five years, there has been a shift in attitude toward teaching the young their traditional language. Additionally, a good many churches are now giving after-service language instruction on Sundays and the larger cities also have some day care and after school programs which are geared to language acquisition.

In addition to the loss of language among Ethiopian second-generation, Ethiopian immigrants, this new generation has not adopted the cultural moieties necessary to claim full membership; there is a serious gap between the ideals of the first generation and the needs of the second.

According to an article in the Economist magazine in its May 11, 1996, issue, one out of four African-born residents in the U.S. has an advanced degree. And eighty-eight percent of adults who emigrated from Africa have a high school education or higher. These figures surpass the national average for native-born Americans, which is seventy-seven percent. Only seventy-six percent of Asian immigrants and forty-six percent of immigrants from Central America are high school graduates. African born immigrants
have one of the highest per capita incomes of any immigrant group, $20,100, higher than the $16,700 for Asian immigrants and $9,400 for Central Americans.

In a survey conducted by the Ethiopian Student Association International Forum, Ethiopian students were asked whether they would move back to Ethiopia. Seven out of ten respondents expressed a very strong desire to do so, but only after attaining a marked level of education and know-how. One respondent wrote,

I definitely want to go back, but not empty handed; America has more opportunity and I want to use as much as I possible can to better myself, my family and my bigger family the Ethiopian people.

Such remarks put into question the sense of loyalty and appreciation for the country that gives them such opportunities. Another respondent remarked rather brashly, If it were up to me all Ethiopians who never pay back to their people should have their citizenship (Ethiopian) automatically revoked. Any one that is no use to her/his people should keep them selves out.

The issue of forming identity for second-generation Ethiopians is a complex one. Many African immigrants, Ethiopians among them, are witnessing a phenomenon identified as a process of splinterization (Nyang 1997). This process can be viewed as clustering effects of cultures, and languages, and an increase in the number of “home-boys” and “home-girls,” also known as “islandization” (Nyang 1997). This process leads the youth to rediscover and recreate their ethnic and sub-ethnic identities, and tied to this process many ethnic organizations have been created as a result. They attempt to address
the issue of self-definition among African immigrants. This process, of discovery can take on a religious character; the Ethiopian Tewahedo Church plays a vital role in the adjustment of Ethiopian immigrants to American society (Sulayman 1998). This may also explain the significant growth both in adherents and influence of this church throughout the United States.
Chapter 4 Ethiopianism

‘Ethiopianism’ as a concept was born in North America as well as in the Caribbean and embraced by the social and spiritual movement of former slaves. The year 1808 marked the beginning of public protests against racial segregation; as former slaves began to withdraw their membership from white churches. One of the first such protests was against the First Baptist Church of New York, which was reorganized as an all black church and renamed “Abyssinian Baptist Church.” This same church would later become the meeting place for the Pan-African Movements of the 1920s and 1930s. Parallel movements were taking place in the Caribbean. The first such church was established in Jamaica as early as 1783, when the Ethiopian Baptist Church was founded. During the inception stage of Ethiopianism, there were at least three discernable and identifying features (Gebrekidan 2004).

The first upheld a messianic dimension. this was primarily expressed by early slave preachers such as Robert Alexander Young, who wrote the Ethiopian Manifesto in 1829. This and other publications correlated the experiences of American slavery to those of the ancient Israelites. They believed that, like their spiritual ancestors, the black slaves too would be delivered through divine intervention. Others, such as Phyllis Wheatly, as well as Fredrick Douglass, also made frequent reference to Ethiopia and in doing so evoked clear inspirational biblical message that spoke directly to the plight of slaves in colonial America.
Second, the millenarian visions were also duly expressed in slave uprisings in the United States such as the revolt in South Hampton, Virginia, headed by Nat Turner. Resistance movements in Jamaica, like the 1831 Christmas rebellion, led by Sam Sharpe, were likewise inspired by Biblical readings.

Finally, the migratory element in Ethiopianism became the means to actualize real connection with Africa, and as such the American Colonization Society (ACS) repatriated tens of thousands of American and Caribbean Blacks to West Africa during the first half of the nineteenth century.

Ethiopianism in Africa also has had an enduring presence. In sub-Sahara Africa it began in the 1880s with the attempt to create independent all-African churches. This was a direct result of South Africans who had been denied advancement in the hierarchy of the mission churches and the overall treatment of South African society dictated by a white supremacist view and discrimination against the African race. Native South Africans therefore began to adopt African Christianity as a means of restoring an authentically African way of life, one that embraced tribalism and political autonomy.

Like their African counterparts in North America, South Africans also focused on the portion of the Bible that glorified “Ethiopia,” together with the knowledge that the ancient kingdom of Ethiopia had defeated the Italians in 1896. Ethiopianism in Africa represented Africa’s dignity, past and present, and a means to aspire for a uniquely African model (spiritual/social/political) for Africans to follow in the future.
This movement was not restricted to South Africa. Parallel movements took place in other parts of Africa. In Nigeria this period saw the establishment of African churches in 1888. Similarly, in Cameroon, beginning in 1887, in Ghana, 1898, in Rhodesia, 1906: and Kenya, 1957, African churches that developed into associations replaced formerly Anglican churches. These organizations would eventually include tribal, nationalist, and Pan-African dimensions, which were affiliated and strengthened by association with independent U.S. Black churches and with “back to Africa” ideas and Ethiopianist ideology. These ideas were explicit and in keeping with African pioneers of this movement, E. W. Byden (1832-1912) and J. E. Casely-Hayford (1866-1903).

It is generally believed that Ethiopianism as an ideology played a role in both the Zulu and Nyasaland rebellions in 1906 and 1915, respectively. Some analysts, of Ethiopianism in Africa, the movement is believed to have declined after the 1920s. According to this view, it had narrowed to one section of African independent religious movements, also known as the Zionist church. However, there is yet another view of the evolution of the Ethiopianism ideology in Africa. In South Africa, among other nations, “African Churches” are as vibrant today as they were since their inception in the 1880s. On December 14, 1992, during the centenary celebration of the free Ethiopian Church of Southern Africa, the honorary speaker, President Nelson Mandela, offered the following:

The free Ethiopian Church of Southern Africa is the only surviving institution that is in the hands of the African People. Our people were not only dispossessed of their land
and cattle but also of their pride, their dignity, and their institutions. In celebrating this century, we have disproved the lie that the African people cannot run their own institutions.

The links between the Ethiopian Church and the ANC (African National Congress) and the struggle for national liberation in general go back to the 1870s. The process of founding African Independent Churches, though covering all parts of South Africa by the late 1880s, could be described as a movement until the Ethiopianist Movement came into being and increased the anxiety of the various colonial governments in South Africa. The Ethiopianist Movement was more than a religious movement. Though its fundamental basis was the African interpretation of the scriptures it went well beyond the churches it had helped produce.

Fundamental tenets of the Ethiopian Movement were self-worth, self-reliance and freedom. These tenets drew the advocates of Ethiopianism, like a magnet, to the growing political movement. That political movement was to culminate in the formation of the ANC in 1912. It is in this sense that the ANC we trace the seeds of the formation of our organization to the Ethiopian Movement of the 1890’s (Mandela 1992).

Another event that was critical in the development of Ethiopianism was Ethiopia’s victory over Italy in 1896. This came at a time when the Africa and African American struggle for racial equality was at its lowest; the Berlin conference of 1884 mandated the partitioning of Africa among European powers and in the United States,
1896 saw the Plessy v. Ferguson case, where the Supreme Court defended the ideology of white supremacy by upholding the "separate but equal" doctrine (Gebrekidan 2004).

After the Ethiopian victory in the Italian invasion at the Battle of Adwa, Blacks in America shared this victory with overwhelming support extended to Emperor Menelik II of Ethiopia.

By 1901 Henry Ellis, a Black American Wall Street broker, became instrumental in the signing of a trade treaty between Emperor Menelik II and U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt, followed by the creation of the intellectual movement of the Harlem Renaissance. Ethiopianism ideology, in a broad sense, was a motivational factor. The majority of the notable intellectuals during the Harlem Renaissance were strong proponents of Ethiopia as a symbol of African pride and future unity of the black race, as illustrated by the works of Paul Laurence Dunbar's poem *Ode to Ethiopia*, the painting of James Wells, *Ethiopia at the Bar of Justice*, and the Sculptor Meta Fuller's piece *Ethiopia Awakening*.

The highly popular poet Langston Hughes also wrote in *Opportunity Magazine* "Broadcast to Ethiopia". This remarkable outpouring of support from the Black diaspora necessitated the formation of the first official Ethiopian delegation, known as the Abyssinian Mission to the United States. Its first tour included New York City, Washington, D.C., and Chicago. The Mission was also the first to extend an official invitation to all Black Americans to repatriate to Ethiopia. Incidentally, Black Americans
were astonished at the reception and respect bestowed on this delegation, despite the fact that it was the “Jim Crow” era (Gebrekidan 2004).

In 1917, the Jamaican born activist Marcus Garvey emerged as one of the most charismatic leaders of UNA, the United Negro Improvement Association, founded in New York City. This movement, by some estimation, had a membership in the millions. Garvey began the idea of “back to Africa,” “back to our homeland.” Garvey’s message was inspirational to other organizations that were largely created as ideological machinery in support of Ethiopia during the second Italian invasion in 1935. Such Black American organizations included the Peace Movement of Ethiopia, Friends of Ethiopia, and American Aid for Ethiopia, Pioneers of Ethiopia, the Pan-African Reconstruction Association, and United Aid for Ethiopia.

In correspondence dated February 4, 1937, to Emperor Haile-Sellassie from the head of the Union of African Natives Association, P.M. H Savory, M.D., wrote, “We Black Americans express to Your Majesty our sympathy at the recent audacious massacre of the loyal people of Ethiopia and pray for your Majesty’s well-being and Ethiopia’s victory” (Haile-Sellassie 1994:27). A telegram dated the same day was also sent to President Roosevelt. In it the same Dr. Savory pleads, “As the president of 13 million black Americans, we request you to be involved in the matter in person” (Haile-Sellassie 1973:28). Another related letter was also sent to Prime Minister Churchill.
Savory also writes to the Archbishop of Canterbury, expressing his deepest regret over the silence of the Church of England at the time when the Italian fascists spilled the “blood of Ethiopian Christians,” while Ethiopians were fighting a just war for the independence of their country. In his response to this extraordinary loyalty and gracious support by Black Americans, Emperor Haile-Sellassie wrote the following in his biography:

The horrifying crimes done against our people by the fascist Italians, beyond surprising the world, motivated many of our friends to join us in our struggle; a genuine friend is tested in times of crises, and the heavy challenge we encountered has enabled us to distinguish between a friend and foe. We cannot afford passing without mentioning the substantial support and political agitation which millions of Americans, particularly black Americans, have made (Haile-Sellassie 1994:28).

Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia was seen as an affront to Africa’s collective struggle for freedom and equality. It was perceived by many as the definitive victory of whites over blacks; “consequently, unlike any event before it, the Italo-Ethiopian war sparked nationalistic outbursts or racial solidarity among the black masses the world over” (Gebrekidan 2004: 53). Continental Africans were no less affected by this climactic event. Kuame Nkrumah, the Ghanaian freedom fighter, and other members of the new African leadership expressed strong support for the Ethiopian cause. Nkrumah wrote furiously about how the news of the Italian invasion of Ethiopia had provoked the
feeling that the whole world had declared war on him personally. "My nationalism surged
to the fore, I was ready and willing to go through hell itself, if need be, in order to
achieve my object." (Gebrekidan 2004:87)

The Nigerian I.T.A. Wallace Johnson, very actively agitated against Italy's fascist
intentions, which caused Johnson's banishment from West Africa (Gebrekidan 2004).
Another African freedom fighter and much-revered Kenyan nationalist, Jomo Kenyatta,
published an essay in the Labor Monthly entitled "Hands off Abyssinia." Finally, Nelson
Mandela also recalled in his memoir how as a youth, visit to Ethiopia had fascinated him
and had meant much more to him than a visit to any European country. He wrote, "I felt I
would be visiting my own genesis, unearthing the roots of what made me an African." He
described this event as a turning point in his life (Gebrekidan 2004:88).

Perhaps the most remarkable and organized solidarity was expressed by thousands
of African Americans as they petitioned for enlistment to fight for Ethiopia. Their wishes
were denied, based on the U.S. Justice Department's determination that enlistment in a
foreign military would be a violation of American federal statutes. Still, not all Black
Americans were dissuaded by the Department of Justice decision. Hubert F. Julian,
nicknamed the "black Eagle," did enlist to the Ethiopian Air Force and fought
courageously. In the end, Julian did not repatriate to Ethiopia. However, in late 1974, the
seventy-seven-year-old war veteran set out once more to Ethiopia, this time to rescue
Emperor Haile-Sellassie soon after his dethronement. He was captured by the military
police in Ethiopia, and detained. It is presumed that Julian’s end, like Atse Haile-
Sellassie’s, came in obscurity while in detention.

The 1950s saw the decline of “Ethiopianism” and its gradual replacement by the 
New Negro Movement. According to John Cruesser, the author of *Black on Black* after 
the heightened sense of Ethiopiansist sentiment in response to the 1935 Italian invasion 
of Ethiopia, what replaced it was a period that moved towards Marxist and generally anti-
Ethiopiansist positions. The works of Shirly Graham’s opera, *Tom Tom*, Langston 
Hughes’s autobiography *The Big Sea*, George Schuyler’s novel, *Slaves Today* and *Black 
Empire*, all are described as hostile to Marcus Garvey and most manifestations of 
Ethiopianism. Gruesser also points to works of Melvin B. Tolson (1900-1966) and his 
long poem, *Libretto for the Republic of Liberia* (1953), which is seen as even farther 
away from Ethiopianism.

Gruesser goes on to identity a series of works produced in the late twentieth 
century that exemplify the progression away from Ethiopianism. Among these are 
Richard Wright’s travel book *Black Power* (1954), Lorraine Hansberry’s *Les Blancs* 
(1966), and *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker (1982). All, according to Gruesser, are 
evidence of the end of Ethiopianism in Black American Literature.

The postwar years among African Americans is characterized by a steady decline 
of a broad idealistic African political stance. Instead, the new political mode of the 1950s 
and onward focused on civil rights struggles and more internal’s oriented goals. This
decline became more pronounced during the decade of the 1960s, which saw the formation of newly independent African countries. In Africa and the Caribbean, however, the effects of Italo-Ethiopian conflict remained long after the war years and helped forge a resurgence of pan-Africanism and African nationalism. It must be appreciated that the Rastafarian movement, which is exemplary of “Ethiopianism,” did not emerge in a vacuum, seen in this broad context, it was the logical and effective response to the ongoing crisis of African identity in the Diaspora during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.
Genesis of Rastafarian Movement

Rastafarianism can be considered an African-centered ideology, whose followers are engaged in consciousness-raising with regard to African heritage and taking pride in that heritage. This consciousness draws attention to the distortions of African history and particularly its contribution to Western civilization (Murrell 1998). Nathaniel Murrell, in describing this movement wrote,

Long before the term Afro-centricity came into popular use in the United States, Jamaican Rastafarians had embraced their black heritage in the African diaspora. Furthermore, Rastafarians can be described as people who reserve the right to think, know, name, reinterpret, and define their essence and existence in nontraditional categories. Their consciousness of who they are determines their being relative to naming and being in the world. (This is, one defines and authenticates one’s existence as a matter of primary concern and then names oneself and one’s world in relation to that mode of consciousness.) (Murrell 1998:5)

In this connection, Chisholm asks the following crucial questions: Why did the Jamaican pioneers of the Rastafari movement, who were exposed to the teaching of a fellow Jamaican and black-advocate called Marcus Garvey (1887-1940), regard an Ethiopian Monarch as the ‘black man’s God’? What is unique about Haile-Sellassie that he should be raised to divine status, above all other Emperors of Ethiopia? Initially, the Pan-African message of Marcus Garvey was officially rejected in Jamaica. The few
admirers who took note of his teachings became vital agents in founding the Rastafarian movement later on.

Garvey is credited with the utterance—to some even call it a prophesy—to look to Africa for the crowning of a black king, which would be a sign to Blacks that the day of deliverance was near. The coronation of Emperor Haile-Sellassie on November 2, 1930, was front-page news in the leading Jamaican newspaper, *The Daily Gleaner*, and what struck the early preachers of the young Rastafari faith was the list of names and titles of the Emperor (which had been given to all Ethiopian Emperors who preceded him): King of Kings, Elect of God, and Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah.

As the president of the Universal Negro Improvement Association (UNIA)—the largest Black organization at the time)—Garvey stated: “Greetings from Ethiopians of the Western World. May your reign be peaceful, prosperous, and progressive. Long live your Majesty.” (Hill 1990) Garvey also published an article, “The Blackman,” soon after this event. In it he states,

> Several of the leading nations of Europe sent representatives to the coronation, hereby paying their respects to a rising Negro nation that is destined to play a great part in the future history of the world. Abyssinia is the land of the blacks and we are glad to learn that even though Europeans have been trying to impress the Abyssinians that they are not belonging to the Negro Race, they have learned the retort that they are, and they are proud to be so. (Garvey 1930)
Garvey saw in the new Emperor, the sole African head of state, someone who could play a major role in the Pan-African movement. Garvey’s initial success as a political leader and visionary was actually remarkably short-lived. Months before the outbreak Ethio-Italian war Garvey’s high profile political career had diminished as he was reduced to a minor figure (Gebrekidan 2004). His earlier aspirations, and commitment to the African cause, had waned, and he spent the last decade of his life in England, continuing to publish a monthly magazine, Black Man. In it, Garvey wrote regularly about the war, and on various occasions he unleashes bitter attacks on the recently exiled Emperor Haile-Sellassie. In one such issue, Garvey wrote about the Emperor’s ill-conceived decision to flee his country, thereby abandoning his God-given duty to protect his country and people. He also wrote critically against the practice of slavery, which he charged the Emperor had allowed to flourish (slavery was abolished in 1931, one year after the beginning of his reign), keeping his subjects in a “backward state of poverty and ignorance” (Gebrekidan 2004:72).

The Emperor and Garvey never met in person, and despite this remarkable shift in Garvey’s views, the pro-Ethiopian war sentiments was too powerful even for Garvey. Indeed, the Ethio-Italian war had become in essence the final battleground; a war between races. Garvey was unable to restore his earlier legendary position, nor to incite support for his new ideas. Instead, and in reaction to his denunciation of the Emperor, which was considered synonymous to Ethiopia, Garvey was regarded as a pro-fascist agitator and a “sellout to Mussolini’s propaganda machine” (Gebrekidan 2004:73). One
such reaction came from a group of Harlem notables who wrote to the *Amsterdam News* “We, a group of American Negro citizens... have read with surprise, and indignation, from Marcus Garvey of London, in which he advises American Negroes not to support the cause of Ethiopia because it is a lost cause” (Gebrekidan 2004: 73).

The Rastafarian interpretation of the Emperor saw him as a divine power. It seems that it was a serendipitous power that drew these two forces together. The conditions that gave birth to the Pan-African movements such as the UNIA and the crowning at that particular period of Emperor Haile-Sellassie were two symbolic forces that would be married, and their child is the Rastafari movement.

Unfortunately, Garvey died in January, 1940, still convinced that all was lost. Ironically, a short year later the Ethio-Italian war would end and the victory of that war was followed by a period of euphoria and resurgence of African nationalism, both in his native Jamaica and throughout the continent of Africa. As a postscript to this story, in 1966, while Emperor Hail-Sellassie was visiting Jamaica, the Emperor paid his respects to Marcus Garvey, despite Garvey’s notorious actions, which had unduly tainted his reputation and remarkable feat, becoming the first African head of state to do so. Perhaps this gesture by the Emperor goes to show that respect is not only bestowed on friends and allies. On the contrary, that which is given in recognition of a foe is one that is most profound.
Who Are the Rastafarians?

In 1982, during my second year of undergraduate studies at New York University, I had a chance to meet a group of Rastafarians. The meeting stands out because, unknown to me, a fellow Ethiopian student had alerted them to my background and they were visibly eager to make my acquaintance. My own impression was that they were very humble and showered me with attention the likes of which I had grown unaccustomed to. When they spoke with me, their eyes were lowered, and they listened attentively. Their general behavior reminded me of those protocol-associated events with our traditional code of behavior. I thought it very uncanny. This group of people left an indelible impression on me, and I became curious about their movement.

Similarly, eleven years later, in 1993, while I was visiting my grandfather, Crown Prince Asfa-Wossen Haile-Sellassie (also known as Amaha Sellassie), in Arlington, Virginia, I noticed the closest persons of those who attended to him were Rastafarians. This was in stark contrast to earlier days in the 1970s in London, where he was receiving medical treatment after a severe stroke. There were Ethiopian attendants of various levels, all of whom had accompanied him, faces and names that were familiar. It was an extension of his own household from Ethiopia. This change was a reflection of the times. After the fall of the monarchy in Ethiopia, not a single household member outside the family remained. The new associates were acculturated to the general manner and etiquette expected in an exiled Ethiopian royal household such as my grandfather’s. Their appearance (dreadlocks, and thick Jamaican accent) signaled their identity, yet in most
respects they blended in remarkably well. For instance, as is the custom in an Ethiopian house, members of one’s household do not always include just blood relatives but a much broader set of relations.

Members of my grandfather’s household seemed to have embraced this uniquely Ethiopian style and created the degree of closeness that such ties would traditionally afford. The only thing that struck me was that they were always formal in addressing family members. I recall how they asked my Ethiopian/Russian/American children, and me, who I was and what my relation to the Crown Prince was. I remember being annoyed thinking that they were the obvious outsiders and it was they who needed the introduction. Nonetheless, the family members, those who lived there, referred to the Rastafarian household members as brother so and so or sister so and so.

It is not entirely clear how this came about or why they were addressed as family members. The impression I had was that there was some fraternization, some kind of arrangement. I would later find out that most of them chose this service like missionaries, as a spiritual journey. That does explain the manner in which they would slip away in the evenings to meditate. Once or twice I watched them give thanks and worship in the simplest of surroundings in the quiet evening outside the house, chanting in unison, unobtrusively and with a marked reverence. I acknowledge with gratitude that the Rastafarians served my Grandfather throughout the last decade of his life until his death in February 1997.
They were the most visible group during the funeral ceremony later that month and also for the two other official events. On July 23, 1992, a date significant and remembered by the Rastafarians, was the one hundredth birthday anniversary of the late Emperor Haile-Sellassie: An elaborate week-long celebration was held in Kingston, Jamaica, with prominent reggae artists in attendance.

Similarly, on November 2, 2000, Rastafarians more than any other group, flocked to Ethiopia, this time to witness the burial of the Emperor, twenty-five years after his murder. As the BBC described the occasion, “Priests in lavish robes, elderly warriors with lions' manes on their heads and dread-locked Rastafarians joined the funeral procession for the man some believe to be a living god” (BBC 2000). In truth, the large majority of Ethiopians who had turned up on the street were not aware of what the fuss was about, as one eye witness told me that the youth in particular, did not know who Atse Haile-Sellassie was. The official date of death, August 27, 1975, is based on the day the military government announced his passing; however, given the obvious presence of foul play, which resulted in his death, the actual date of death remains uncertain.

The 2000 event was the culmination of decades of investigations of the whereabouts of his remains, which were discovered inside palace toilet pipes in 1992. I recently had a conversation with Karl Naphtali, a member of the group that was involved in taking care of my grandfather. When I asked if he had attended the burial

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6 For more information on the twelve tribes of Israel, please see Karl Phillipotts Naphtali’s book The Testimony of His Imperial Majesty Emperor Haile-Selassie I, Defender of the Faith.
ceremony, he stated that he and many Rastafarian followers do not believe he is dead. The mysterious circumstance of his death, including the fact that his body had disappeared, all seems to support this claim. In the same manner, Rastafarians categorically reject the forensic findings that confirmed the identity of Atse Haile-Sellassie based on his remains.

In recent years, the “Twelve Tribes of Israel,” a particular Rastafarian group (who took its name from the ancient Israelites); through an interview with the founder of this group, Prophet gad made the claim that Prince Zere Yacob (the only son of Crown Prince Asfa-Wossen), a grandson of Emperor Haile-Sellassie, is a member of their group. (Williams 1998). If this claim is accurate, it stands in stark contrast to the patriarchal role Atse Haile-Sellassie played. While he was eager to embrace the Rastafarians, he also was firm on the matters of his own faith and devotion to the Ethiopian Orthodox Christian Church. Furthermore, he categorically denied the claim that he is god. In an interview conducted by Bill McNeil, a CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Company), reporter in 1967, he was asked “There are millions of Christians throughout the world, your Imperial Majesty, who regard you as the reincarnation of Jesus Christ,” to which the Emperor replied, "I have heard of that idea. I also met certain Rastafarians. I told them clearly that I am a man, that I am mortal, and that I will be replaced by the oncoming generation, and that they should never make a mistake in assuming or pretending that a human being is emanated from a deity" (McNeil 1967).
The Ethiopians' experiences of the Rastafarians can be summed up this way: Rastafarians treat Ethiopians with appreciation and respect. Among the older first-generation members of the Ethiopian Diaspora, and based on my sample interviews of this group, they describe the Rastafarians as Jamaicans who believe that Haile-Sellassie is god. As one woman put it in an interview,

I think whatever they are smoking has got to their head. Rastafarians are people who love Ethiopia, they walk around with the Ethiopian Flag, with old pictures from Ethiopia, and think they are Ethiopians but they are not. We are the Ethiopians.

Yet another informant said the one thing she noticed about Rastafarians is their “disheveled hair and smelly smoke.” Another respondent, who felt positively about them, asserted that in the old days Ethiopians also treated Haile-Sellassie highly, almost as though they were worshipping him: “Now all that is forgotten and we think the Rastas are the first ones who worshipped him.”

Among the Ethiopian students represented in survey #3, the following is representative of their response to the question “Who are the Rastafarians?”

When I am in the company of Rastafarians I feel like no one wants to get to know me for who I am. They have a preconceived idea that all Ethiopians must be great. When labels are grafted onto a person, there is no room for individuality, and that person becomes burdened. Another respondent stated,
I feel there is misinformation. I truly don’t think we Ethiopians are above any other nationality. True, we have reasons to be proud of our rich black history…. that is it. All Rastafarians do not smoke weed and don’t grow it in their backyard, and just because they grow their hair, don’t mean they have lice. When I meet Rastafarians I try to tell them of my view of Haile-Sellassie. Some of them start giving me all these compliments that embarrass me and I am unsure how to act.

Another respondent had a different take, but the underlying message was the same: I do not think Haile-Sellassie has any supernatural powers or he should be worshiped. When I meet a Rasta man/woman talking highly about Haile-Sellassie, I try to tell them what I know of other great kings and leaders in Ethiopia, who have done more than him. Not just Ethiopians. I tell them also about other African Kings and Queens that deserve the same love and respect.

I really admire the love Rastafarians have for Ethiopia and our flag and Haile-Sellassie. We should not act funny, confused or arrogant. We should return the favor, learn and appreciate their history, and return the love as much as they are offering. At this moment no one markets our colors and our “Etyopiawinet” (Ethiopianess) as much as they do. They are better presenting our “Etyopiawinet” and love for Ethiopia to the world with their art, particularly Reggae. Even for Ethiopians in the Diaspora that are suffering with identity crisis, Rastafarians have been a source of identity, with the clothing, music, and our flag and Ethiopian flavor. We should promote our country more
than they do, we should be part of it, not necessarily believe in what they believe in, but we need to share the brotherhood and sisterhood relationship with them and all other African and African Americans that are all victims of oppressors and greedy beings. Yet another had this to offer:

I once saw a video from the old BBC news recorded in 1950 when Haile-Selassie visited London. The whole British royalty welcomed him, they had red carpet for him everywhere . . . The royal navy welcomed him, shooting 40 medf (canon) into the sky . . . The army welcomed him, even did a little show for him. The ministers, the royal family, everyone bowed down when they shook his hand. even the queen, Mind you, the Brits were considered world leaders. And their royal family was their gods. This was also a time when Africa was colonized; black people around the world were considered 2nd class citizens. So, if you see the same racist white people who were calling you 2nd class citizen bowing down to this man – calling him “your majesty” minamin (so and so) you’d also think he was a god.

Even the Derg were afraid to arrest him. In Mengistu Haile-Mariam’s memoir, Mengistu says that they were afraid to arrest Haile-Sellassie because people saw him as a god. Some of the derg even suggested leaving him in “power” just as a symbol while they ran the country. It took them something like six months after they were in control of the government before they finally agreed to remove him and arrest him. Another respondent spoke about the idea behind the image:
When we look at Rastafarianism we shouldn’t just look at Haile-Sellassie the man. What he symbolizes for the black liberation movement and for black spirituality goes way beyond the man himself. The idea itself is what is powerful and you can bet on it staying around way after our generation.

Yet another respondent, who coincidentally had written a senior thesis on Rastas as linked to the diaspora and repatriation, and had conducted fieldwork in Shashemene Ethiopia in 2000, offered the following insightful entry:

Rasta is much more than just Reggae, weed, dreadlocks and the random fixation on Haile-Sellassie. At the same time, stereotypes often arise from truth, so I would encourage you to talk to those that have the “dreadlocks are dirty” and “all they do is smoke weed” mentality. Ideologically, I think few Ethiopians understand the religion beyond “Haile-Sellassie is God.” I think many Ethiopians do not understand that to the rastas, “Ethiopia” is a symbol for black empowerment and not necessarily a place where they aim to assimilate into the culture. This has inevitably caused some misunderstanding and conflict.

Most Ethiopians reduce Rasta to a “made up” religion, but in fact it is very far from that. The Rastas see Ethiopia as a symbol that stands against the history of enslavement. Few Ethiopians have a racial view of the world. While Rastas’ have been hostile to whites (given their history), few Ethiopians have reason to share this strong distaste. Rastas have spread knowledge about Ethiopia, most Ethiopians make an effort to
distinguish the Rasta flag (with the lion of Judah) and the Ethiopian flag (with the star). I mean, how many people hang the Rasta flag on their wall and think of Ethiopia before Bob Marley, Jamaica and ganja. You know, funny story – most of my friends thought that the Rasta flag was the Jamaican flag! There is a lot of confusion out there about Rasta and its link to Ethiopia.
Imagined Identity

How is this African heritage embraced and imagined in the Rastafarian identity? Rastas are not a homogenous group; they are made up of numerous groups and differ in some of their beliefs. However, the single idea that unifies them all is the nature of life in the African Diaspora. This they define as Babylon, a symbolic designation of the forces that constitute those western values and institutions that historically have exercised control over the mass of the African Diaspora.

Rastas have developed a way of recalling important events of the past. They do this by reciting. Among the most painful of such memories is the “middle passage.” They speak of it in a manner that reveals that they still bear the psychic scars of those experiences. Evoking the pain and indignity of their forebears, they speak in the first person. This type of reciting is a major identifying cultural marker among the Rastafarians (Murrell 1998).

There were socio-political undercurrents specific to Jamaica that helped nourish this movement during its inception. Jamaican folk culture, was considered by one of Jamaica’s leading intellectuals of the 1920s and 1930s as “the mud.” The mud was contrasted with “the gold.” The former represented the savage superstitions of African tradition. By extension, the Afro-Jamaican religion was the work of the Devil, while “the

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7 The “middle passage” was the journey of slave trading ships from the west coast of Africa, where the slaves were obtained across the Atlantic. This voyage has come to be remembered for much more than simply the transport and sale of slaves. The middle passage was the longest, hardest, and most dangerous and also most horrific part of the journey, with tightly packed loads of human cargo that stank and carried both infectious disease and death on a voyage that lasted from five weeks to three months. The middle passage has come to represent the ultimate in human misery and suffering.
gold” was real religion, European-defined Christianity, of which the preachers and the missionaries were the children of God (Chisholm 1998). This idea was expanded to language. “Good” was English which the local elite spoke and “bad” English was the marker of the uneducated masses. Similarly, “culture” was also divided using this basic model and as a tool to perpetuate the idea of White racial superiority.

In its first two decades, the movement was engaged in defining the identity of God. In this phase, Garvey and his proclamations proved to be opportune. While he was not the first Black Afro-centric ideologist, his appearance at that particular time, coupled with his natural talent to fire the imagination of the masses, were critical in this development (Chisholm 1998).

During the first phase of the movement, the making of a divinity of the new Emperor seemed inevitable. In this new development, Ethiopian history and particularly the claims of “ethnic election” provided the necessary support for the two major Rastafarian beliefs: the prestigious lineage and the importance of Ethiopia as the New Zion (Chisholm 1998).

In studying Ethiopia, the Rastafarians found that the myth perpetuated by their European missionaries -- that Christianity was the white man’s religion -- could be disputed and disproved, for the Ethiopians were practicing Christianity centuries before pagan England. This powerful discovery, which inspired the founders of Rastafarians, is still the driving force behind the movement in the age of technology. Rastafarians, more
than Ethiopians, are engaged in the study of Geez,8 as well as active in the study of history and literature. Many have also traveled thousands of miles to the place they call their promised land, in the tradition of Garvey, who coined the term “Back to Africa” Rastafarians continue on with this dream of reclaiming their ancestral land from which they were stolen into slavery.

Rastafarians in Shashemene

Gladstone Robinson was among the first Jamaicans and other West Indians who accepted the invitation to resettle in Shashemene. Robinson’s encounter with Ethiopians came during the Korean War, in which he served as an army medic. He recalls how impressed he became serving alongside Ethiopian soldiers and was struck by their pride and history (Maharaj 2003).

The Rastafarian community became residents of Shashemene as a result of a 1948 land grant that was given by Atse Haile-Sellassie to the Black people of the world wishing to return to Ethiopia. The original land grant was 500-hectares of land located in the town of Shashemene, about 220 kilometers south of Addis Ababa. The oldest settlers have been there since the early 1970s. Most are from Jamaica and other Caribbean islands. Soon after the overthrow of monarchical rule, a large portion of the land grant was confiscated, leaving the inhabitants only eleven hectares, a fraction of the original grant.

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8 Geez is the ancient Ethiopian language from which Tigrigna, and Amharic were derived.
This has caused the Rastafarians a great deal of frustration. As they are experiencing population growth, their community has outgrown the space available. The colony now has reached its third generation, and there is a steady increase in the number of new repatriates:

Forty years later, Robinson and others who stayed are still chasing their dreams, battling insecurity, grinding poverty and reluctant hosts who don't quite understand why they came in the first place. "This is my birthright, to move back to Africa," said Robinson, 73 "Other people have their Mecca, their Jerusalem. This is ours." (Maharaj 2003)

Robinson also noted that there is a marked difference in the community size. In its heyday in the early 1970s the Shashemene Rastafarian community had 2,500 inhabitants. This has shrunk to 250. Ras Mweya Massimba, a 39-year-old Jamaican who lived most of his life in London, and who now has made Ethiopia his home, remarked that one explanation for this decrease is because "most people in the western world think of Africa as a place of war, famine and disease and see Shashemene as part of that . . . . we have to work to prove them wrong" (Maharaj 2003).

Based on the survey conducted for this study some interesting comparisons can be made with the larger Ethiopian community within which the Rastafarians in Shashemene reside. Over the last twenty years, the flow of immigration to Shashemene has been
steady. This community has a much smaller segment of members 18 years and younger as compared to the Ethiopian population in general. Persons under age 18 make up 44.7% of the Ethiopian population. Based on the 2005 CIA World Fact Book the estimated life expectancy of the total population in Ethiopia is 40.88 years. People over the age of 50 make up 2.8% of the population. The Rastafarians of Shashemene over 50 years of age comprise 7% of the total residents. Another observation based on these figures is that only 29% of the sample group speaks Amharic, the national language of Ethiopia. This number indicates the level of interaction and lack of assimilation of the Rastas within the local community.

**Borrowed Culture - Ethiopian History**

**Myths, and Symbols Used by Rastafarians**

Among the many Rastafarian symbols, the most prominent is the Ethiopian tricolored flag with the Lion of Judah in the center. The flag symbolizes their religion and their loyalty to "Jah" Ethiopia, and Africa. This loyalty is paramount, greater than any other loyalties, including to the state in which they happen to live. The colors of the flag are frequently seen on clothing and other decorations. Red stands for the blood of martyrs, green stands for the vegetation of Africa, and gold stands for the wealth and prosperity Africa has to offer. According to an Ethiopian tradition, the colors originate from an old saying that the Virgin Mary's belt is the rainbow, and that the red, gold, and green are an representation of this. Among second-generation Ethiopian immigrants,
many do not realize the origin of this flag. Additionally, the lion, which is depicted more frequently than other images, is also important and symbolizes the Ethiopian monarchic dynasty, which goes all the way back to Solomon.

Dreadlocks are the most prominent physical marker of Rastafarian identity. Many claim that they come from Leviticus 21:15: “They shall not make baldness upon their head, neither shall they shave off the corner of their dread nor make any cutting in the flesh.” Another relevant reference occurs in Numbers 6. It is taught that patience is the key to growing dreadlocks, which is a journey of the mind, soul and spirit. Another version states that the growing of dreadlocks originated from the unkempt hair of the maroons (eighteenth century resistance fighters in Jamaica), whom the pioneers of the movement began to emulate to signify the black man’s resistance. In Ethiopian tradition, the bahitas mystics kept their hair long unkempt, a consequence brought on by rejection of the world and all things worldly as they lived in the wilderness, electing a life of solitude.

In the United States, the wearing of dreadlocks does not necessarily signify membership in the Rastafarian movement. In recent years, dreadlocks have become a statement of Afro-centricity, worn by many Black men and women. Interestingly enough, they also sometimes are worn by non-Blacks and may carry other ideological/spiritual significance. The banning of wearing dreadlocks in public schools and the workplace has resulted in various lawsuits. The unsightly look of dreadlocks has caused the Rastafarians
to be targeted by law enforcement agents. Dreadlocks are generally frowned on by society at large.

For many Rastas, smoking marijuana (known as *ganja* or *herb*) is a spiritual act; they consider it a sacrament which facilitates consciousness and peacefulness, bringing them closer to God. While there is a clear belief in the beneficial qualities of cannabis, it is not compulsory to use it, and there are Rastafarians who do not do so.

The use of the term Ras by all followers of the faith is yet another point of contention among some Ethiopians. According to the Rastas, they use the title Ras in order to identity themselves as royal sons and daughters of Jah. In the words of one Rastafarian, “We are named Ras because Ras is the head of the Father and is based upon his skin tone” (Chisholm 1998:171).

**Attitudes and Perceptions of Rastafarians**

There is a wide range of attitudes and perceptions expressed by Ethiopian Americans in regard to the Rastafarians. These perceptions are mostly drawn along generational lines. As discussed earlier, the Ethiopian Diaspora is relatively young and first-generation Ethiopian immigrants by and large are still living. Still, a decisive break in historical/cultural terms with the old country is atypical. This has had a psychological effect on “memory recall” of the vast majority in the Diaspora. It has also been noted that Ethiopians traditionally were a very diverse collective within their own boundaries;
however, this has not necessarily prepared them for the type of pluralistic and racially polarized social composition they were to encounter when they arrived in the United States. The challenge of carving out their distinct place has been difficult due to their inexperience.

In the process of constructing their new identities in the U.S., Ethiopians continue to reevaluate and recreate their memories, values and those elements they perceive as identifying markers. In this connection, the Rastafarians, at least on the surface, seem to be drawn to them the most as a group with whom they have a predestined relationship.

Even before Ethiopians emerged on the western scene, Rastafarians were acting as a sort of emissary of Ethiopian culture. This particularly was the case during and after the 1980s when Reggae became a global phenomenon. Rastafarianism, which is a movement born in the Diaspora, is much more in a position to act as a source or center of cultural dissemination than traditional Ethiopian culture; while many outside of the movement are not aware of the Ethiopia/Rastafari connection, society at large, for the better part of two decades, unwittingly has become familiar with Rastafarian symbols (which are deeply rooted in Ethiopian tradition). For Ethiopians, on the other hand, these symbols and messages are perplexing.

The number one point of contention among the older first generation Ethiopians, based on the interviews conducted for this study, is best described by a woman respondent: 'Ethiopia,' the motherland certainly has much more prestige than Atse Haile-Sellassie. Ethiopia symbolizes everything, our ancestors, our history, our culture. How
can one person be bigger than that? Among the same group, the second core reservation about Rastafarians can be described as an inclination to adopt the past blindly without scrutiny. Such feelings were expressed as follows: There were many injustices in Ethiopia’s past; there were discrimination, the system of slavery, poverty, and so on. I don’t understand why the Rastafarians only paint rosy pictures.

Ethiopians’ approach to their history can be described accurately as revisionist/apologist; as a result they seem to be struggling with the ownership of their past, which places them in a paradoxical position. What Rastafarians have found in Ethiopian cultural heritage is the result of generations of diasporic existence. The answer to the search for truth, according to Rastas, is one that is designed to counter the lies perpetuated against the Black race. They are equally undeterred as the Ethiopians when they seem to be saying, “Embrace your own history, be proud of it, and learn from our experience that your place in Western history is one of shame and degradation.”

Another point made by first generation Ethiopian-Americans focuses on the distortion of Ethiopian cultural relics; one such remark was made by a man and as follows: Rastas distort fact, symbols, and events in order to push their ideology. Why do they use Ras for everybody? People don’t realize that Ras designated a certain blood line, heritage; it is a title loaded with cultural meaning. All they know is Ras is this trivial meaningless label Rastas use. It’s not right.

During the coronation of Atse Haile-Sellassie I in 1930, there were a dozen or so Rases (a hereditary title). Today, there is only one legitimate Ras. He is leul Ras
Mengesha Seum, great grandson of *Atse* Yohannes of Tigre. The *Ras* title will be gone once he passes on, just like the many relics that have perished already.

The debate over *Ras* illustrates clearly the notion of imagined cultural traits. The modification of what was in the original shifts in meaning according to the changing need of a group. The legitimate *Ras* is on the verge of extinction, and cannot survive without the socio/cultural context that produced it. The Rastafarians adopted this title for entirely different reasons. One of these, which has already been mentioned, is tied to the idea that the title gives them a tangible connection and continuity with *Atse* Haile-Sellassie, who was also Ras in his youth. Through him they can idealize themselves, at least in a spiritual sense, as his Royal children.

In addition, the Rastafarians, by means of this and other adoptions and absorption of Ethiopian culture, are more likely to be the inheritors of that past. These cultural artifacts, however modified and imagined, will be retained for generations long after Ethiopians have forgotten them.

The idea of a chosen people is also something Ethiopian immigrants have trouble with. Among the young Ethiopian immigrants, this feeling was strongly felt and articulated in survey number 3.

I truly don't think we Ethiopians are above any other nationality. True, we have reasons to be proud of our rich black history... that is it. We are no more, no less, than anybody else.
Similarly, an Ethiopian linguist or Geezeologist (one who studies Geez) and author of *Ethiopic: An African Writing System*, Ayele Bekerie, in an interview in 2001, stated: “The danger of the notion ‘chosen’ is that it isolates us. It makes us feel superior and in the process, forces us to simplisticly see others, reject others or look down upon others. It perpetuates ignorance and false pride” (Bekerie 2001).

This view is most illuminating with respect to Ethiopian/Rasta discourse: The former, lacking experience of subjugation, relinquishes the notion of being a chosen race, while the latter, the victim of such a notion, claims it as a course of redemption.

Finally, there is the criticism concerning the use of Ganja, also known as the holy herb, as a special ritual of worship. A number of respondents pointed out that the Rastafarians think that ‘Ganja’ is like the *Qurban* (Eucharist, the symbolic body of Christ) and that is sacrilegious.

Similarly, the use of Ganja by Rastafarians in Shashemene has caused that community to be stigmatized. The local Ethiopian community has been very outspoken about this activity, which the Ethiopians find corruptive. In a recent interview with that community, one local Ethiopian, a certain Berhane Mebratu, stated, “They teach our young to smoke, it is a bad thing, we don’t know what it is and we don’t want to know. The only thing we like and understand about them is their reggae, they’re not real Ethiopians and, as hard as they try, they never will be” (Maharaj 2003).

On the other hand, some recent events have been very conducive to a positive Ethiopian/Rastafarian relationship. During the month of February 2005, a celebration of
the sixtieth anniversary of the birth of the late Reggae star Bob Marley was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. Nothing similar had ever taken place there. Ethiopians were the beneficiaries of this unusual event. Western media, by and large, mostly through ignorance, were misleading with headlines that read such things as “Ethiopia Threw a Birthday Bash for Bob Marley.” In truth, Ethiopians were beneficiaries. Most of them could not fathom what the fuss was about. Thousands of ordinary Ethiopians showed up for the free concert, which was called “Africa Unite.” They joined in the celebratory mood by waving the old Imperial flag. The Ethiopian Orthodox Church blessed the event, even while the Ethiopian evangelical churches protested, claiming the former Emperor was not a god (Matheson 2005).

During the celebration, Rastafarians in Shashemene spoke of hope and future prospects of Rasta in Ethiopia. The Ethiopian government was gleeful and welcomed this opportunity for free high profile public relations, and even went along with the proposal by Marley’s widow and followers to build a museum in honor of the late Emperor, forgetful that a short while ago, the government had blasted the monarch as a despot and traitor to his people.

Things seem to have changed. Could this mean that we will see the move to Ethiopia as a new diasporic destination for the Rastafarians? It’s hard to tell, but for now the two groups of people, despite their differences, are coming together in the spirit of a better future.
Chapter 5 Conclusions

The Rastafarian movement continues to grow and endure many changes seventy years after its inception. I was drawn to the subject personally, ever since I was introduced to a group of Rastafarians during my youth in 1982. What made it irresistible in my mind was the awareness of the deep void between the Ethiopians and the Rastas, in spite of the fact that the Rastafarian movement is rooted in Ethiopian historical and cultural traditions. Based on my own experience of these issues, I began this research with the basic hypothesis that at the core of the great divide between the Rastafarian ideology and the Ethiopians in the Diaspora is the contention of cultural authenticity. What was interesting for me to see during this project clear distinctions that exist within the Ethiopian community in the United States. These divisions are associated with generational, rather than with social, ethnic or gender differences.

The older generation of Ethiopians who had memories of the pre-1974 historical/cultural/social make-up expressed stronger objection and criticism towards the Rastafarians. These objections included the deifying of Emperor Haile-Sellassie I, the general misrepresentation of Ethiopian historical and cultural relics and criticism of religious practices, the smoking of Ganja in particular. The new immigrants, as well as second-generation Ethiopians, by and large expressed bafflement at being showered with what they considered undeserved attention and respect by the Rastas, while they acknowledged the affection and appreciation they have for the sincerity and the deep-
rooted love Rastafarians possess for Ethiopia. However, they also criticized the Rastas for being too naïve, in believing everything Ethiopian is good. The few voices from academia, along with the younger first generation and second generation were critical of Ethiopian historical accounts. They were critical of Ethiopia’s past and of the bias that exemplified the elite social class to which average Ethiopians could not relate nor embrace as their own.

It can be accurately stated, based on my own experience, as well as my impression of school friends during childhood who did not have the same social status, that there was a one common thread in our Ethiopian upbringing: family practices was a highly protective and insulating experience. One is made to be aware from a very early age that the family bond is vital, as is the awareness of the past, which is personalized and very much connected with those who came before. This was done, not through formal instruction, but as part of the everyday ritual, through games and anecdotes. Inherited memories and values, customs and the like were casually instilled. One raised in such an environment was cemented in a very real way to one’s past. The loss of one’s immediate family, without the replacement of a group that can act as a surrogate, can be a detriment to one’s identity, particularly when it takes place within the context of a Diaspora. Based on my own experience, such a situation is likely to arise as a result of the traumatic dispersal, as seen in the case of Ethiopian immigration to the United States.

Similarly, one’s identity is established based on one’s particular ethnic make-up, which is individual; however, it is also established by society in a given time and place.
In my youth in Ethiopia, I felt and identified myself as an Ethiopian, which encompassed all the ethnicities. The experience of the new young immigrants, it seems, has been affected by the separatist movements during the eighties and nineties in Ethiopia and in the Diaspora. This in part can help explain the division and distinctions new Ethiopians are making in terms of their identities.

The Rastafarians are devout followers of their movement and exhibit a strong sense of spirituality, dedication and conviction, both as a social and religious group. In the larger scheme of things, one can state that they have taken their destiny in their own hands, are clear about where they would like to go and how they will be doing it. In this sense they inhabit a very different place than the inexperienced Ethiopians. Their identity construction is less confused and more enlightened, perhaps because they have matured as a collectivity and are able to maneuver themselves more effectively within the flux of global identities. They have been engaged in the recovery of their past, their imagination, and seem to be undeterred by the opposition and criticism they face from Ethiopians. It is not within the scope of this study to examine Rastafarians’ response to numerous contentions. However, my own impression is that the Rastas do not reciprocate with their own list of grievances.

The gap between the first and second generation of Ethiopians in the Diaspora can be explained and reflects the changing needs of this group. It is increasingly difficult to choose ethnic affiliation; the loss of language also impacts this outcome. In view of all these developments, it is more likely than not that the following generations of Ethiopian
immigrants will face new challenges in maintaining their Ethiopian identity. The alleged membership in Rastafarianism of one member of the Ethiopian Royal family creates an interesting picture and has many implications for the future.

Based on the identifying features of diaspora as outlined by Robin Cohen, we can examine the experiences of Ethiopians, that is, how they came to be a diaspora. We can also look at the process of the often-traumatic dispersal from an original homeland, as well as the notion of a collective memory and myth about the homeland, including location, history and achievement, in what manner it is re-created in the diaspora and sometimes wholly discarded to be reinvented anew.

We can also scrutinize the idea of symbolic identity and its expressions. How can we determine the collective sentiment with regard to the natal home, the sentiments of love, etc. In the case of Ethiopians, such sentiments continue to be expressed through music which employs traditional themes with a stylistic twist that is clearly influenced by American popular music and culture. Similarly, the Ethiopians in the United States are active in political and social agitation, demanding the U.S. government to insure the fairness of the up-coming election. They make regular contributions to friends and family back home. However, this inclination has not yet become translated into a return movement. Ethiopians do not seem to have a special affiliation with any particular group other than their own, however, they have succeeded in building a "distinctive creative, enriching life in the host country" and are perhaps on their way to developing tolerance for pluralism as well as and in particular, tolerance for the Rastafarians.
While one sees a definite gap between the first and second generation of Ethiopian immigrants, particularly evident in the loss of language and other cultural values, the value of education has been successfully transmitted. For second generation-Ethiopian immigrants, it is possible to be educated given the opportunities available, which far exceed those of their parents. Ethiopian youth are ambitious and have concrete goals to obtain higher education and professional careers.

The forces that brought the African Diaspora to the remote land of Ethiopia are multiple and define one of the most intriguing phenomena in modern times. While Ethiopia has been idealized as the spiritual home for Blacks in the Western Hemisphere, no group has expressed or developed as much connection as have the Rastafarians. Rastafarianism grew directly out of the 1930s, a period that saw many energetic intellectual and social developments within the Black Diaspora. Among them and important to the Rasta was Ethiopianism.

Ethiopianism had a broad appeal and was not restricted to Blacks in the Western Hemisphere. Its ideas were manifested in the establishment of new African Churches that grew throughout the sub-Saharan Africa, beginning in the 1880s, and were vital during the era of African independence. The Rastafarian movement, as those like it, was born in response to the crisis of African identity in the Diaspora during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The new immigrants to the United States and the second generation of Ethiopians of similar ages stand in marked contrast in how they view the natal home. The new
immigrants all express strong loyalties to Ethiopia and a sense of obligation to helping both the country and fellow citizens. However, those who were born abroad have no memories that would bind them. While they acknowledge their parents’ home as part of their identity, they are highly unattached and have more in common with their diasporic affinities. There is a new trend among Ethiopian Americans to connect with the old country; in order to meet these new demands, Ethiopian churches and associations are developing Amharic instruction. Similarly, there is an increase in the frequency and volume of those visiting Ethiopia.

In order to understand the Ethiopian community in the United States, one needs to look at the nature of ethnic composition and relation to the homeland. Historical and contemporary Ethiopian ethnic makeup can be described as highly diverse and drawn on a variety of factors such as language, religion and ancestry. Ethnic distinctions can be made up of one of these factors; each region does contain a variety of these factors and identifying the group based on one factor does not accurately identify its ethnicity. For instance, a group may reside in Shewa (Amhara region), yet, based on religion, may identify with the Oromo ethnic group; similarly, a group may reside in Tigre but, based on language and ancestry, may affiliate with the Amhara ethnic group. The use of race as identity marker exists; however, it must be considered differently from western practice.

Despite these diverse social compositions in the natal home, one sees the difficulty Ethiopians face in adjusting to the racially polarized and ethnic plurality that overrides American society. The difficulty they face in large measure has to do with their
historical isolation. Based on Survey #1 conducted for this study, Ethiopians in the process of assimilating to the United States continue to maintain their ethnic identity in the Diaspora, and they do this in a number of practical ways. Their inclination to remain connected culturally is one of the defining features of this Diaspora. While they do not have a special relationship with other ethnic groups, the relationship with Afro-Americans can be considered as an important one, even if at times it has been antagonistic, as seen in the recent debate between Afro-Americans and continental Africans.

The Ethiopian relationship with Rastafarians can be described as complex. The Rastafarian cultural identity, which is founded on Ethiopian roots, is a subject this study tries to unravel. Among the wide range of Ethiopian attitudes and perceptions of Rastafarians, this study uses interviews of Ethiopians to discuss the most prevalent points of contention. In summary, these disagreements are based on Rastafarians’ use of Ethiopian historical symbols and cultural relics. For Rastafarians, these symbols serve as means of constructing an ideal worldview within which the black race can reinvent a proud heritage and spiritual connection. Ethiopians express concern and even disdain that this activity is harmful and distorts and denigrates their past, while at the same time they are ambivalent about embracing their past and are in the process of reinventing or creating their imagined community.

Recent events in Ethiopia demonstrate the new agenda set predominantly by high profile Rastafarians such as the widow of the reggae superstar Bob Marley, and his
followers, focused on African Unity. The events that took place in Ethiopia (spiritual home of Rastafarians) have had positive outcomes for Ethiopians, who were direct beneficiaries. It would not be unreasonable to assume that, given this climate of cooperation, the two groups may have a good chance to resolve some of their differences as they work towards reconciliation in the future.
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Appendix 1

Glossary
Amharic Terms

Abyssinia Old name for Ethiopia
Atse Emperor
Ba’hita Hermit
Berbere Red pepper blended with spices a must in preparing most Ethiopian food
Berchuma A traditional three-legged stool.
Ekoub A lottery system/savings account set up among family members or neighborhood, clans. Each member contributes an equal amount each month, at the end of the year one person is elected to take the yield and spend it as he or she wishes.
Emahoy A nun
Emeye Mariam St. Mary
Egziabeher yemarish God forgive you
Egziabeher yemesgen Thanks be to God
Egzriabeher ytnah (sh), God comfort you
Etege Empress
Derg Literally, committee it has become exclusively associated with the 1974 – 1991 military regime
Ge’ez An ancient Ethiopian language from which Tigrigna, and to a lesser degree Amharic were derived (see list of Ethiopian languages)
Ityoppia The name by which Ethiopians refer to their homeland, Amharic for Ethiopia.
Kebre-Negest Literally Glory of Kings, a grand epic depicting the meeting of the Queen of Sheba and King Solomon and the birth of their son, Menilek I
Also how the Ark of the Covenant was brought to Ethiopia. This work was compiled by Ethiopian monks and written in Ge’ez.
Kirar A traditional musical instrument with six strings resembling the ancient lyre
Kinae A traditional oratory technique whereby the speaker uses caution and subtlety to send his message. The speech, or anecdote has double meaning, the surface and the hidden. The shrewdest among the listeners will grasp both meaning. It is a tool used to express public criticism.
Kulubi Gebriel The most sacred Ethiopian monetary, the destination of pilgrims every year.
Leilt Princess
Makeda The name Ethiopians use to refer to Sheba (Queen of)
Marian tatnash May St. Mary comfort you
Mariam tikelelish May St. Mary shield (protect) you
Masinko A traditional musical instrument with one string and a bow.
Mesob A large circular basket on which food is served. Traditionally family would be seated around the mesob and eat their meals together.

Negest Queen

Qey Literally, red. Ethiopians use the color to describe a light skinned tone. It also connotes an agreeable blood composition. The color white is not used in this sense.

Qey dama Light skinned with a definite dark tone, used to describe skin tone.

Qey shiber Red Terror

Qurban Eucarest

Ras Literaly, head but also traditionally a royal title

Sem Literary, wax, also used in connection with Kinae. The sem is the surface meaning in Kinae.

Shanqila A group of people found in Western Ethiopia, they have the darkest complexion. One is referred to a shanqo from shanqila, when one emphasizes darkness of skin.

Shanqo Dark one (from shanqila)

Tabot Believed to be a derivative from Hebrew tebah it is a replica of the ark of the Covenant. In the Ethiopian belief system the Tabot and not the church sanctifies the place of worship.

Teff A word thought to have derived from the Amharic word teffa, which means "lost," due to the small size of the grain and how easily it is lost if dropped. It is the smallest grain in the world, measuring only about 1/32 of an inch in diameter and taking 150 grains to weigh as much as one grain of wheat. Teff is grown primarily as a cereal crop in Ethiopia, where it is ground into flour, fermented for three days, then made into enjera, a sourdough-type flat bread.

Tena Yestilign Literally, may you be given heath, a common farewell

Teyim Brown skin tone

Tezzita Literally, memory but also a ballad with sentiments of love, patriotism, and adulation, a type of music that has endured centuries of social and political change, Tezzita is still popular in the Diaspora.

Wezero Mrs.

Worq Literally, gold, but the word also describes the part of speech that has a deeper meaning or is disguised in Ethiopian oratory tradition.

Ye-bet hager In the homeland

Ye-cyber ager The cyber land

Ye-wutch hager In other ‘foreign’ lands

Zemecha Traditionally the word was used to mean military campaign. During the military regieme of 1974, the term was used to describe the youth literacy campaign.
Appendix 2

Survey # 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>25 reply</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>What is your nationality?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethiopian</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>80</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How old are you?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18-25</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26-35</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36-50</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>How long ago did you come to the U.S.?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Before 1974</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1979-1985</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1985-1995</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>After 1995</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Did you come to the U.S. to join</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sibling(s)</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aunt(s)/Uncle(s)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cousins</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I came on my own</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Are you still living close to them?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are you still living close to them?</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>72</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do you see them once a week?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you see them once a week?</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Do you keep contact with Ethiopia?</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you keep contact with Ethiopia?</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Event</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I call/write to Ethiopia</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a week</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once in a while</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
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<td>I send money</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Once a week</td>
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<td>56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Once a month</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td></td>
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**Do you wish to return to Ethiopia for good?**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Option</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I plan to visit Ethiopia</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I plan to return permanently</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel positively about Rastafarians</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel negatively</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>I have no opinion</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Which ethnic group do you identify with here in the U.S.?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnic Group</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Afro-American</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(No response)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**What language do you speak?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amharigna</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tigrigna</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oromigna</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3

Survey #2

2004: 30 years later

Haile Sellassie Today

I think positively of him 1095 (89%)

I think negatively 13 (1%)

I don't care 2 (0%)

He doesn't represent Ethiopia 8 (0%)

Not all Ethiopians 3 (0%)

Was Ethiopia better off then? 7 (0%)

Better now 2 (0%)

He means a lot for me 65 (5%)

I know little about him 14 (1%)

I don't know who he is 11 (0%)

1220 Total votes
Reactions to survey # 2

1. The Word is God.
2. All you ignorant people, Haile Sellassie was the great Ras Tafari, why you lose your history!! Wake up!!!!!!!!
3. HIS TRUE KING OF KINGS LORD OF LORD LINE OF JODA
4. He was an instrument used by da western powers
5. InI GIVE THANX AND PRAISES TO THE MOST HIGH YAH RASTAFARI GOD FATHER,OF THE 13TRIBE OF YUDAH.
6. The message that was brought to the world by the life of Salassie I will not be forgotten. The truth was revealed in his lifetime for the time that is to come. God has Blessed us with that Man's life. The victory is for the glory of the Lord and savior Jesus Christ.
7. he's the almighty in flesh
8. INI HAVE TO SAY I LOVE KING SELASSIE I. INI HAVE READ MANY WONDERFUL THINGS ABOUT THE MAN.INI SAY JAH BLESS KING SELASSIE AND ALL HIS SOULJAHS.
9. what ever mistake happened at his rigme was acceptable, because the world economic and political situation
10. I love him and respect him. And of course, I am proud of being Ethiopian like him. He have done a wonderful work in Ethiopia, Africa nad all over the world. Ethiopia is poor not because of H.I.M. it is because we are not working harder. Thankyou. Please also check www.ethiopiancommunity.com
11. Emperor Haile Sellassie earned Ethiopia and her people great respect around the world. We've not only lost the pride in our country, but we've succumbed to exile.
12. The Knowledge of H.I.M. is the Wisdom and Understanding of GOD! Selah.
13. haile sellassie is the only man come and seal up the prophesy of our forefather. jah is love. rasta is the generation of H.I.M
14. IS THE CROWN COUNCIL PERMITTED IN ETHIOPIA
15. Haile sillasie was the father of not just ethiopia but all of Africa
16. H.I.M
17. Haile Sellassie is The Son of the Trinity
18. haile selassie i is great influence in my life
19. Hailie Salasie was ordained by God to give Africans all around the world a sense of hope,courageand strenght that the lord had bless all of us with.
20. He was more than what he has been said about him .he was real ethiopian and African. had no words to express his dids and dreams for Ethiopia and Africa. He was indeed dynamic and excellent world figure.
21. I am grateful for the opportunities that the distribution of the words and works of the Emperor Haile Sellasie through which I was able to appropriately entertain
Western ideas and activities with a clear conscience even being born in the nation of Trinidad and Tobago and enduring through a mostly St. Vincentian upbringing. I have come to understand Emperor Haile Sellassie I the First through the life of Jesus Christ where maybe it will take the world another two thousand years or so to recognize him for who he is. Ige Kehinde Charles Belleville, NJ
harare_gojjam@msn.com

22. hailei sellassie is the comforter
23. He was A great man.
24. Hallilujah Glory to our King
25. give thanks to the emperor for all that he as done jah lives
26. i belive in love and equal rights..so if sellassie youth will big up positive vibes jah will bless them! But remember until (for rasta people) the colour of man skin means no more than the colour of his eyes thy soul shall burn in fire.
### Ethioipans & Rastafari

**Rastafari in Ethiopia: How long have you lived in Shashemene?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Duration</th>
<th>Votes</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 5 years (7)</td>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 10 years (7)</td>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than 20 years (7)</td>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I speak Amharic (25)</td>
<td></td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I do not speak Amharic (11)</td>
<td></td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am under 18 years old (7)</td>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am 18-25 (8)</td>
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<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25-35 (11)</td>
<td></td>
<td>12%</td>
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<tr>
<td>35-50 (3)</td>
<td></td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over 50 (7)</td>
<td></td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
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</table>

Total Votes: 93
Appendix 5

Reactions among Ethiopians about Rastafarians

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>(FGEOF)</th>
<th>(FGEUT)</th>
<th>(SGE)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- (FGEOF) First generation over forty
- (FGEUT) First generation under Thirty
- (SGE) Second generation Ethiopians
Appendix 6

Regions, Languages and Religious Affiliation Found in Ethiopia, (Ofcansky 1993).

1. Afro-Asiatic super-language family

a) Semitic group North Ethiopic
Ge'ez, Tigre, and Tigrinya

b) South Ethiopic
Amharic, Argobba, Gafat, Gurage, and Hareri.

c) Cushitic-Lowland East Cushitic
Oromo, Somali, Afar, and Saho

d) Highland East Cushitic
Sidama, Hadya-Libido, Kembata, Timbaro-Alaba, Deresa

e) Central Cushitic
Agew, Bilen,

f) Northern Cushitic
Beja,

g) Omotic
Welamo, (also Wolayta) Gemu-Gofa, Kefa-Mocha,

\[11,\text{Hyphenated names appear when; two or more autonomous groups speaking dialects of}\]
\[\text{the same language have been grouped together.}\]
2. Nilo-Saharan super-language family

a) East Sudanic

Nuer and Anuak,

b) Koman

Berta, Nara

Summary of the Semitic languages

**NORTH ETHIOPIAN**

**Ge’ez** The oldest of the Semitic languages, Ge’ez was the official language until the twelfth century A.D. as the political power shifted to the south, Amharic, which is a derivative, took its place. The oldest inscriptions in Geez date from the fourth century, among these are works translated from Coptic, Greek, Syria and Arabic. Today Ge’ez is used for liturgical purposes only.

**Tigrinya** The oldest writings in Tigrinya were also religious ones. This language is spoken in Tigre and in parts of bordering Country of Eritrea. These parts are Hamasics, and Serae, Akkele, Guzay, Keren, Agordat and the highlands of the portal city of Massawa. Speakers of Tigrinya are Ethiopian Christians.

**Tigre** The oldest writings in Tigre consist of religious texts and traditional law. Tigre is now the official language of Eritrea. The Tigre, (also an ethnic term), of Eritrea are mostly Muslim.

**SOUTH ETHIOPIAN**

**Amharic** The national language of Ethiopia, Amharic is relatively new language, the oldest written document date fro the fourteenth century as exemplified by “Neguse Zema” (Songs of the Kings). Amharic is spoken in most regions in the country.
Argobba There are no known written documents in Argoba. This language was spoken in the region of Ankober, in the Muslim villages of Aliyu Amba, Kano, and others. Presently Amharic in the Ankober region is replacing Argobba. Similarly in the region south of Harar Oromigna has replaced special villages that had been speaking Argobba.

Gurage Written Gurage documents exist only in Chaha. East Gurage includes Selti, Wolane, Ulbarag, Inneqor, and at least five dialects found in the five islands of Lake Zway. This group is mostly Muslims. West Gurage includes Chaha, Gyeto, Endegen, Muher, Masqan and Gogot. This group consists of pockets of Ethiopian Christians, Pagans, Muslims and Catholics. North Gurage includes Aymellel and Soddo and they are Ethiopian Christians. Gurage language, which is divided in regions, is sufficiently varied and distinct. The differences far exceed their similarities and as a result a speaker from one region cannot understand one from other (Ofcansky 1993).

GROUPING BY RELIGIOUS AFFILIATION

Ethiopian Tewahedo (Orthodox)
Christianity Amhara and Tigray 40 percent of the total population

Islam
Somali, Afar, Argobba, Harare, and Saho, Oromo Sidama, and Gurage 50 percent of the total population.

Indigenous
Mostly the Oromo, Omotic, and Nilo-Saharan speaking groups practice a variety of indigenous religions. They make up 5 – 10 percent of the total population.

Catholic and protestant Christianity There are Pockets in the Shewa and Wellega group, these are converts by missionaries, and they are too few to register as a sizable number.

GROUPING BY REGIONS
Estimates of ethnic groups are at best uncertain. There are difficulties in specifying the boundaries and nature of any given ethnic group.
Most speakers of Ethio-Semitic languages live in the highlands of the center and north. Speakers of East Cushitic languages are found in the highlands and lowlands of the center and south, and other Cushitic speakers in the center and north; Omotic speakers live in the south; and Nilo-Saharan speakers in the southwest and west along the border with Sudan. Of the four main ethno-linguistic groups of Ethiopia, three--the Amhara, Tigray, and Oromo--generally live in the highlands; the fourth--the Somali--live in the lowlands to the southeast