

The Narratives of the Ethiopian-American Community

A Rendition of America's Favorite Spice



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Thanks to:

*Deborah Jakubs
Heldana and Nadi,
Family and Friends,*

Without your dedication, your support, and your stories this wouldn't have been possible.

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Immigrant

one that immigrates as

a : *a person who comes to a country to take up permanent residence*

b : *a plant or animal that becomes established in an area where it was previously unknown*

An Introduction

This thesis is a product of the years, months, weeks, and days of a search to find my niche in this complex world. Having moved from one place, job, family, and school to another, I've been an immigrant all my life. I have been called American and I have been called black. African, Ethiopian, Indian, mixed, different... Ethiopian-American. And for so long I've struggled to find my voice and solidify my identity. Growing up in a society inundated by media that glamorizes lifestyles, ethnicities, cultures, and traditions that are not my own I gained a desire to find out what it really means to be a young woman born to the family of Ethiopian immigrants in America.

For three years, I have attempted to tell this story, and there is still much to be written. Because despite our concept of history, the story of a group of people cannot be limited to a one hundred or even a thousand page memoir; there are volumes that will never be uncovered. No book can capture the intricacies of one man's life let alone that of four generations, but I will do my best to give the reader a taste of bittersweet life of an Ethiopian immigrant in America. Through the stories of those who lived through hunger, separation, triumph, and pain, I have, and I hope that you will also, come to recognize their stories are my own. I did not merely conclude this based on similar life experiences, languages, or traditions but because I have come to recognize that each of us is connected in this broken world. It simply takes time and knowledge to recognize it.

Myth

1 a : a usually traditional story of ostensibly historical events that serves to unfold part of the world view of a people or explain a practice, belief, or natural phenomenon

b : PARABLE, ALLEGORY

2 a : a popular belief or tradition that has grown up around something or someone; especially : one embodying the ideals and institutions of a society or segment of society

b : an unfounded or false notion¹

Chapter 1

Myths and Realities

Over 65,000 Ethiopian people have traveled to America and over 65,000 Ethiopian people in America have been changed by that journey. As people continue to become global citizens, our worlds and our stories, our cultures and our foods become related as well. The United States is a country that has built its national identity on this immigrant story.

Stories are powerful tools, and Arthur Schlesinger Jr. points this out in his book The Disuniting of America: Reflections on a Multicultural Society. They have the power to shape the minds and perception of a country's national character.² Historian Maulana Karenga describes it as “the substance and mirror of a people's humanity in others' eyes as well as in their own eyes... not only what they have done, but also a reflection of who they are, what they can do, and equally important what they can become.”³

This thesis will look at the ways in which the historical narratives of both the U.S. and Ethiopia have shaped the Ethiopian community narrative in America. Their immigration story can be separated into four time periods: the first group, 1953-1974; the second, 1975-1985; the

¹ Dictionary.com, Dictionary.com: “myth” [Internet]; available from <http://www.dictionary.reference.com/browse/myth>; accessed 1 November 2006.

² Arthur M. Schlesinger, *The Disuniting of America* (New York: Norton, 1992), 65.

³ Ibid., 66.

third, 1986-1995; and the fourth, 1996- the present. In each period, the immigrants were exposed to different historic events that inevitably changed their views toward both America and their home country while also shaping their views regarding their own identities. The increase in access to knowledge, the growing presence of Ethiopians in the U.S., and the ever-changing dynamics of international affairs have all intertwined to shape the experiences of the Ethiopian-American population in the U.S.. Through the examination of surveys distributed to the Ethiopian community in several U.S. cities resulting in 401 respondents, personal interviews, historical events, immigration policies, and political actions, this thesis investigates the way in which myths and realities have created a unique Ethiopian-American identity within the larger American society.

Myths and hegemonic beliefs instilled by social and political constructs such as religion, national holidays, education, and social stratification, shape the character of a nation's people. Although it is only natural for groups to create a set of standards or stories to instill a sense of connection, unless these are based on inclusive and unbiased stories, which none are, there will be discrepancies that are voiced in the lives of members communities that live according to those cultural standards. In shaping the country's character, consequently, certain groups within the country are categorized by both stereotypic and non-stereotypic categories, politically, socially, and economically thus propagating further bias and inconsistent stories.

This article will explore whether myths or realities play a stronger role in determining a small subset of the American community. In looking at the historic events that surrounded Ethiopian immigrants' experience in the United States, I will examine the myths surrounding both the United States and Ethiopia and, to some extent, Israel in its connection to Ethiopia, to

see the ways in which reality and belief have shaped the experiences and circumstances of Ethiopian immigrants. If a myth is far reaching, it will secure its presence not only in differences that are apparent in a country's ideology and story-telling, but in other aspects as well.

America's myths and perceptions as expressed in education, political campaigns, media and entertainment have also been expressed in the policies of immigration. America's position as a first-world country composed of diverse communities has lured many immigrants to its shores. From as early as the 16th century immigrants have entered the U.S. fleeing governments that have withheld from them their rights and basic needs, in search of better economic and religious opportunities. This country has, as Emma Lazarus put it, essentially declared to foreign governments "give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me."⁴ Countries have continued to accept the offer for over two hundred years.

Historian Gerald Wilson, has marked five myths that have shaped the American self-perception, the myths of *Success*, *Frontier*, *Agrarian*, *Foreign Devil*, and *City on a Hill*. In an attempt to understand the ways in which myths have affected the experiences of the Ethiopian immigrants who came to the U.S. from 1953- 2006, I will consider three of the five American myths Wilson proposes, the *Success*, *Foreign Devil*, and *City on a Hill Myth* and I will compare and contrast their influences on the Ethiopian-American population with three Ethiopian myths: the *Abyssinian*, *Solomonic*, and *Village Myths*. In the chapters that follow I will explain the impact these myths have had on the realities of Ethiopians and other members of the American society. Political, religious, and ideological connections to Israel and Jewish culture are also

⁴ Emma Lazarus, "The New Colossus" [Internet]; available from <http://www.libertystatepark.com/emma.htm>; accessed 2 January 2007.

important factors that will help tie the national characters and citizens of America and Ethiopia together since⁵ the Judeo-Christian majority in American society has affected both the U.S.'s view of itself and of Ethiopia.

Based on the Puritan work ethic, the *Success Myth* foundationally incorporated a sense of morality, virtues, and belief systems based on the European Christian view of the value of hard-work and piety and has begun to evolve into one merged with the idea of material success. Rooted in the conception of the “self-made man,” the *Success Myth* supports the belief that an individual is able to rise from nothing to something. “If an individual should fail,” explains Wilson, “it was not because society did not allow him to succeed, but rather because he did not follow the formula.”⁶ Historical figures in American history a few of which include Abraham Lincoln, Andrew Carnegie and even Bill Gates, have been honored and revered for their ability to achieve success with nothing more than determination, self-reliance, discipline, and diligence. As a nation, we have come to look to the “rags to riches” stories and take them on as our own.

Used to define the national character by defining who the nation is not, the *Foreign Devil Myth* has played an important role in shaping America's perception of others. This myth creates a self-perception of a nation that is separate and distinct from those who attempt to “invade” this unified civilization. Beginning with the depiction of Native Americans as savages, and the dehumanization of African slaves, the country was founded upon separation and division. Ideologies attributed to foreign countries such as Communism and Terrorism were also evils to be suppressed in the U.S. By mobilizing against a common enemy or “other,” whether it be

⁵ Noah Feldman, *Divided by God: America's Church-State Problem-- and What We Should Do About It*. (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005), 232.

⁶ Ibid,

slaves or terrorists, a subset of Americans come together to proclaim a national identity based on the designation of the enemies' "otherness." Though some "foreign" groups have gradually become accepted into mainstream culture, there is still, at times, an underlying rejection of minorities in various ways.

The *City On a Hill Myth*, lastly, focuses on one of the ways the U.S. has created a self-image that allows it to challenge the foreign devils of the world by serving as a "beacon of hope". The pushes for many of these immigrants were religious persecution and lack of economic opportunity, and the pull was the hope of a land free from the direct economic and religious confines of the British government. Upon arrival, European immigrants in the 17th century found their hill and created their city upon it and soon were confronted by the different ideologies and lifestyle of those who came before them, the Native-Americans. These invaders, in order to protect their communities as well as serve as a religious beacon, used the city on a hill myth to justify the looting, pillaging and land-grab that occurred. The era of immigration from the late 19th to 21st century, including the Cold War and the current War on Terror, are all ways in which America has continued to assert itself as a beacon of hope to the international community.

Though both Ethiopia and the U.S. have come to mark their unique religious and moral positions in the world, the latter has been able to assert that standing in both militaristic, political, and ideological ways while the former has had its strongest effect on members of the world through its image rather than its assertion of power. Though composed of different ethnic groups, histories, and economies (the U.S. is one of the world's leading economies and Ethiopia is one of the world's poorest) they have both used these assertions of myth and reality to create a position for themselves in the world's eye.

The complexities of Ethiopia's history have caused many to be fascinated by and interested in the story it tells. "Ethiopia's rich cultural heritage, and the vibrant country that it is today, is one of the best kept secrets in the world"⁷ said Joel Bartsch upon the arrival of the earliest immigrant from Ethiopia to the U.S., *Dirkenesh*, otherwise known as Lucy, one of the world's oldest fossils. This mummy symbolized not only the country's ancient past but its mystery.

A country whose history and traditions have been shaped by its location on the eastern border of Africa near the Red Sea, Ethiopia's past has been colored by an assortment of Judaic, Arabic, and African people groups, cultures, and religions. Though many people hold to indigenous belief systems, a majority of Ethiopians ascribe to either the Christian or the Islamic faith combining some aspects of native religious practices.

Similar to the way in which the church was used to validate Roman emperors as God-ordained rulers, Ethiopian kings and monarchs used Christianity to their advantage. With the exception of the period in the 15th and 16th centuries when Christian and Islamic rulers struggled to maintain rule over northern Islamic areas, the country maintained an identity based on Orthodox Christian rule until the Communist revolution of 1974. The foundational connection of Ethiopian culture with the Biblical heritage was solidified further in the Christian ruled Zagwe Dynasty.⁸ According to the *Kibra Negast*, an ancient Ethiopian text that dates at least to the 14th century, Queen Sheba was the Ethiopian Queen Makeda⁹ who, before returning to her kingdom,

⁷ Associated Press, "Famed 'Lucy' Fossil to Tour U.S. for 6 Years," Washington Post, 25 Oct. 2006. available from <http://www.washingtonpost.com>. accessed 1 November 2006.

⁸ Ibid., 103.

⁹ Sorenson, 23.

conceived a child by King Solomon and gave birth to the royal son, Menelik I, who would take over the Christian Ethiopian throne. The belief that Menelik, the country's first emperor after the fall of the Axumite Kingdom, traveled from his father King Solomon in Jerusalem back to his mother Queen Makeda of Ethiopia, created a national belief system.

Emperor Haile Selassie, monarch from 1930 to 1974, markedly defined and created his role in the Coptic Church more intensely than any emperor before him. He used the Orthodox Church to enforce his rule by granting it land and power in return for support and influence.¹⁰ He also referred to himself as the "Lion of Judah," the name given to the Messiah of Judaic and Christian texts. Furthermore, in a successful attempt to establish himself in the *Solomonic Myth*, he declared, in the 1955 Constitution of Ethiopia, that the Amhara tribe to which he belonged was directly descended from the line of Solomon.¹¹ This proclamation added to the long-standing inequities among ethnic groups and forced many to assimilate to the Amhara tradition and culture.¹²

Ethiopia is home to many ethnic groups, among which the Amhara, Tigray, Oromo, and Guragays are the most prominent. Ethiopian historian George Lipsky explains in *Ethiopia: Its People, Its Society, Its Culture*, that the Amhara and Tigray people consider themselves to be superior to other ethnic groups, likely due to the historical ascension of power of that group, whereas the Oromo and other groups, usually of darker complexion with less Arabic features,

¹⁰ Marcus, 18.

¹¹ Ibid., 17.

¹² Ibid., 19-20

have historically been considered “impure” and “primitive.”¹³ The Constitution’s declaration solidified the social hierarchy which some have attributed to a caste system beginning with the enslavement of “Negroid” ethnic groups centuries earlier.¹⁴

The languages of Ethiopia are as diverse as the ethnic groups that reside there. Since the country was founded by a mixture of ethnic groups, it is estimated that over seventy languages and two hundred dialects are spoken.¹⁵ Ethiopia is split into nine different regions called *kebele*, and in each there is a certain ethnic group majority.¹⁶ The two largest groups in Ethiopia are the Gallas or Oromos (40%) and Amhara and Tigrays (32%). Other groups include the Somalis (6 percent); Sidamos (9%); Danakil or Afar (4.5%); Shankella, former slaves and the only group with a Negroid ancestry (6%); and finally, the Guragays (2.5%).¹⁷ The ethnic division within the Ethiopian culture is further complicated by the Italian colonization of the northern part of Ethiopia in 1882. Mainly consisting of the Tigray population, the north was ceded to Italy in the Treaty of Addis Ababa . After a century of border conflicts this region declared its independence as the country of Eritrea in 1991. The differences in religion, culture, and identity that have arisen due to the separation of the two regions can be seen in the Ethiopia today.

Though western countries had colonized a majority of African countries, Ethiopia remained a symbolic pillar of strength for the continent and people of African origin globally. Ethiopia’s defeat of the Italian military in 1882 was recognized on a larger scale by the Western

¹³ Ibid, 39.

¹⁴ Lipsky, 36.

¹⁵ Ibid., 34.

¹⁶ Marcus, 276.

¹⁷ Lipsky, 36.

world and by African nations as both a momentous and shameful event. Nearly a century later, however, during the Second Italo-Ethiopia War of 1935, Italian troops combated Ethiopian militia with advanced chemical warfare, resulting in a five-year Italian occupation of the capital of Ethiopia.¹⁸ The relationship between the United States and Ethiopia began in earnest in the 1940's after the British military removed Italian troops from the country after World War II.¹⁹ Soon after, however, the British ended economic relations with Ethiopia due to the government's misappropriation of funds. America then became Ethiopia's main foreign ally offering the U.S. proximity to the Middle East due to its location near the Gulf of Aden.²⁰

In light of the complexities of Ethiopia's religious, ethnic, and political past, Ethiopian historians present various views of the national identity. In Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society Richard Levine states that Ethiopia's mythic past does not allow a full interpretation of the diversity and of Ethiopian history. He explains that "although it continues to be useful for certain limited purposes, the Semitic outpost image suffers two serious limitations...it neglects the crucial role of non-Semitic elements in Ethiopian culture...and ... it shares the difficulties of all views which consider cultures with written traditions and world religions to be *generally* superior to non-literate cultures."²¹ Though Levine acknowledges the mythic past of Ethiopia, he explains that a investigation into the diverse realities rather than the

¹⁸ Marcus, 280.

²⁰ Harold G. Marcus, *Ethiopia, Great Britain, and the United States, 1941-1974: The Politics of Empire*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 79.

²¹ Donald N. Levine, *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society*, (Chicago, Ill: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 19.

mythological beliefs of the country's history will enable a greater understanding of the complexities of the culture.

Historian John Sorenson, on the other hand, defends the belief that Ethiopia has played various political and mythological roles that have shaped the international community's view of the country and the country's view of itself. He points out the ways in which the governments of the U.S., Ethiopia, Eritrea, Israel, and the Soviet Union have come together to use certain myths concerning race, politics and religion for international gain. His premise builds upon the power of media to perpetuate a constructed Ethiopian national character, while comparing Africanist, Orientalist, and Western discourses on Africa.²² In this created view of the past, he explains that though some referenced the Ethiopian culture as ancient and unique, others viewed Ethiopians as a nation that strived to associate with Western ideologies and lifestyles in some ways dismissing their connection Africa.²³ The country's ideological and political relationship with Western and Middle Eastern nations, discriminating attitudes towards the Shankella people, or Christianization of surrounding Islamic groups could explain some West Africans, Haitians, and Europeans view of Ethiopians as traitors to the African people.²⁴

Examining the developed myths and realities that have defined Ethiopians will enable an understanding of their role in the international community, as well as the reactions they have had to their role in the U.S. as immigrants, refugees, professionals, Africans, and Americans. It is important to look at both the realities and myths in which any country is established to

²² Sorenson, 1-17.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

understand its people. The *Abyssinian*, *Solomonic*, and the *Village Myth* are three myths that began at the root of the country's origin 3,000 years ago and have consequently shaped Ethiopians' cultural identity globally.

The *Abyssinian Myth* continues to resonate in the country's identity up until modern times. Based on the belief that Ethiopia was a distant yet revered country, alluded to by Biblical texts, Roman historians, and Greek writers, this myth has surrounded the country in the mysteriousness, which in turn created somewhat of an awe of the country from the outside world and a sense of security and isolation amongst the Ethiopian people. In current day Ethiopia, for instance, the term *firenge* is used to describe those who are considered foreigners of the land. Returning to the throne in 1135, the Zagwe Dynasty ruled in Aksumite Kingdom in Axum, a city located in northern Ethiopia, for 135 years. During the 12th century this mystery was coupled with the arrival of the legendary Portuguese Prester John priest, who visited Ethiopia in hopes of finding the lost pilgrims from the Holy Land. Looking to establish Ethiopia's alliance with other European countries in the Christian crusades, upon arrival in the 16th century, the alliance suffered a major set back "when representatives of the Ethiopian Coptic Church refused to bow to the authority of the pope at a ecumenical conference in Florence."²⁵ It was further jeopardized upon the Portuguese monks' arrival to Ethiopia in the 16th century and the disappointment that followed. Though the *Abyssinian Myth* may have diminished in the Western perspective, the historic context and foundational effects have not been lost.

The Solomonic Dynasty, which began in 1270, created an interwoven yet distinct myth upon the *Abyssinian Myth*. The *Solomonic Myth* is based on the legend of King Solomon and

²⁵ George M. Fredrickson, *Racism: A Short History*. (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2002), 28.

Queen Sheba and illustrates the Ethiopian belief in a national identity founded upon ethnic uniformity. In step with its national character, Ethiopia has taken on a unique role as defender of some of the ancient tenets of the Christian faith. Monks in Church of St. Mary of Sion where only the “guardian” can see the arc in the Holy of Holies now guard the Arc of the Covenant, believed to have been carried to the city of Aksum by Menelik I.²⁶ Based on the belief that the common ancestry for the elite of Ethiopia was the highly honored King Solomon, this myth has created a dichotomous relationship between ethnic groups and their view of the national character. In some respects, the establishments of Amharic as the national language, as well as the declaration of Solomonic ancestry in the Constitution of 1955, were ways in which this myth has perpetuated uniformity in the country. However, this uniformity, as Levine explains, has created groups of suppressed cultures and ethnic groups.

In spite of the cultural and religious division among the Ethiopian people, the *Village Myth* explains how citizens seem to possess a mutual respect in the similarities rather than differences presented by their national identity. On a day-to-day basis, for centuries the people of Ethiopia have mainly lived in peace. In addition to defending the Christian faith as seen in the *Solomonic Myth*, the Ethiopian culture places a strong emphasis on the role of community and defending the family honor. The Ethiopian proverb “when spider webs unite they can tie up a lion” is a perfect example of the dichotomies involved in the *Village Myth*.²⁷ On the one hand the myth is based on Christian beliefs of piety, servitude, and humility that can be seen in the

²⁶ Lara Santoro. “Legend of the Lost Ark Lives on in Africa” The Christian Science Monitor. 14 May 1998 [Internet]; available from <http://csmonitor.com>; accessed 3 May 2006.

²⁷ Dr. M. Worku. “Ethiopian Proverbs”, Ethiopian Proverbs[Internet] available from <http://www.unicorn.ncat.edu/~michael/vses/eth4000/know/proverb1.html>; accessed 6 June 2006.

generosity and communal lifestyle of many people in Ethiopia. On the other, it is expressed in a focus on defense and warrior-like attitudes that has been established in Ethiopia that is a common way of life in many villages and family traditions. The Ethiopian proverbs' advocacy to "dine with a stranger, but save your love for your family" embodies many Ethiopians' will to protect, provide, and even kill for their kin. ²⁸ Though a country of considerable poverty, even the poorest of Ethiopians have had no desire or inclination to steal from village stores or neighbors until recently. A commonly held belief is that an individual must have pride and self-dignity while relying on community to provide for members. Though a sense of obligation can be considered important, individuals also have a sense of distrust for those who live among them.²⁹ As seen in the leadership of various Ethiopian monarchs, dictators, and presidents a sense of distrust was not limited to one tribe but extended throughout the nation's identity.

Now that we have discussed 3 American myths that have shaped Ethiopian immigrants in America, and three Ethiopian myths that were instilled in them while in their birthplace, a brief explanation of the convergence is necessary. One major factor linking Ethiopians and Americans is their connections to Israel and the Jewish culture. All three countries are politically, religiously, and ideologically connected in a way that has shaped their respective histories. A country that was created in large part due to religious beliefs and immigration, Israel can be seen as one of the many threads between the myths and realities that have affected both Ethiopia and Americans and consequently the immigrants who have traveled between the two countries.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Lipsky, 39.

The rich history of Ethiopia has shaped the way in which Ethiopians have related to groups in America. Though members of the Ethiopian immigrant group have many similarities to other immigrant groups in the U.S. they differ in that Ethiopians are grouped with the African-American population through both a mythical and racial connection. As mentioned earlier, Ethiopia's history played an important role in the lives of Africans and people of African origin all over the world. Though they may have shared a mythological ideal, however, Ethiopians and African-Americans have historic and cultural differences. Despite this fact, Ethiopians and African-Americans were socially, racially and even politically tied together.

The relationship between African-Americans and Ethiopian-Americans, is a result not only of Ethiopia's position as a uniquely independent African country but of the globalized combat against the reality of anti-blackness. Beginning in the early 1920's, black leaders looked to the African continent, specifically Ethiopia, as a symbol of freedom and black strength.³⁰ Some emigrated to Ethiopia for religious and political reasons, viewing it as a sort of Zion for the African-American population.³¹ Other African-Americans, during this time, simply used the name and history of the country as a symbolic representation of their movement in America.³² African freedom movements and the Italian five-year occupation of Ethiopia eventually further stirred agitation for the early starts of the Civil Rights Movement. Ethiopian immigrants, and other immigrants of African origin, to the United States entered a culture in which the official racial divide was still fresh. Legally ended in 1954, segregation had been embedded in the

³⁰ Robin D. G. Kelley *Freedom Dreams The Black Radical Imagination*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 19.

³¹ William A. Schack "Ethiopia and Afro-Americans: Some Historical Notes, 1920-1970." *Phylon* 35, no. 2 (2nd Quarter, 1974): 142-16

³² Kelley, 19.

culture of America. Thus, upon arrival, Ethiopians were not initially perceived as Ethiopian but as African-American.

In this thesis, I will attempt to look at the waves of Ethiopian immigrants in the context of surrounding myths and realities, and compare and contrast the threads of history and personal testimonies that have come together to make up the Ethiopian immigrant experience in the United States. The different ways in which Ethiopian-Americans' views themselves as Ethiopian, African, black, or other has played a somewhat significant role in shaping their community in America. In some cases, not only have members of this group been discriminated against as African-Americans, but they are doubly discriminated against, both as "blacks and black foreigners."³³ Though social construction of racial categorization is one part of the Ethiopian-American experience, it is only one way in which the realities of Ethiopian-Americans and the myths of their country collide. The connection and discrepancies between myths and realities can be further used to understand the familial, educational, and cultural aspects of the immigration process as well.

The circumstances and historical narratives in which they have lived have uniquely shaped the identities and experiences of the Ethiopians who immigrated to America from 1953-2006. Living in two worlds, they ultimately had to decide which aspects of each country would define their realities and perspectives of themselves and which would not. Many immigrant groups who came to the United States have had to invent a new realities for themselves in order to assimilate. Ethiopian-Americans, either due to force or choice, eventually

³³Roy Simon Bryce-Laporte. "Black Immigrants: The Experience of Invisibility and Inequality" *Journal of Black Studies* 3, no. 1: 31

formed an identity that incorporated both their Ethiopian and American roles. The surveys that I conducted provide a window through which we can understand their perceptions of their circumstances and how they managed to form a community in the midst of those circumstances.

Sojourner

1. *One who sojourns; a temporary resident.*³⁴

Chapter 2**The Educated Elite: 1953-1974**

Ethiopia in the 1960's had the soundtrack of Simon and Garfunkel's "Mrs. Robinson," and James Brown's "I'm Black and I'm Proud" alongside songs of Ethiopia's legendary singer Kiflu Gessese played on Talaq radio.³⁵ American culture had a significant impact on the lives of the youth. Children ran to theatres after school to watch the English, Indian, and Italian movies that played weekly, but were still confined to traditional roles such as helping parents cook in the home or work on the farms.³⁶ Though Western culture did not penetrate all aspects of Ethiopian society, the isolation that many First-World countries attributed to Ethiopia was slowly being eroded by the far-reaching influences of the United States. And by 1960, the capital city, Addis Ababa, began to show the traces of the political, cultural, and economic leaps that the world had been awaiting.³⁷

After the second Ethiopian-Italian war, the United States assisted Ethiopia in reestablishing rule in Eritrea by supplying weaponry for the Ethiopian military,³⁸ which was

³⁴ Word Net. "Sojourner" [Internet]; available from <http://wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn>; accessed 2 November 2006.

³⁵ Rakebe Kebede, interviewed by Aeden Keffelew 13 January 2004. Digital Recording. Duke University, North Carolina.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ William A. Shack "Ethiopia and Afro-Americans: Some Historical Notes, 1920-1970." *Phylon*, 35 (2nd Quarter, 1974):154.

³⁸ Marcus, *Ethiopia, Great Britain, and the United States*, 78, 92.

45,000 to 50,000 men strong at that time.³⁹ Today considered one of the strongest military forces in Africa, the Ethiopian Armed Forces received “almost all weapons, education, and communication equipment” from the U.S.⁴⁰ And from 1953 to 1968, more than 2,500 Ethiopians had been given military training in the United States.⁴¹ The 1955 “Time Man of the Year,” Haile Selassie’s popularity was recognized not only in countries abroad but in his own, as well.⁴² Despite his class-based policies, Selassie used foreign investment and aid to Ethiopia to improve the country on many fronts. When the United States government learned of the emperor’s decision, it temporarily suspended further aid. Though the U.S. had granted millions of dollars in aid, the Ethiopian government responded that the amount was “only a ‘few drops’ of water from ‘the ocean’ of its enormous resources.”⁴³ In response to the U.S. policies, Selassie looked to the Soviet Union for more funding.⁴⁴

In 1959, Ethiopia had approximately 170 doctors in the entire country, about five of whom were Ethiopian, and until 1951 no higher learning institutions existed.⁴⁵ Thus the immigrants who left during this period left a country which had over 26 million, 90% of whom

³⁹ Ibid., 176.

⁴⁰ Solomon A. Getahun, “Brain Drain and Its Effects on Ethiopia’s Institutions of Higher Learning, 1970s-1990s” *African Issues* 30 (2002): 52

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Sorenson, 30.

⁴³ Ibid., 112.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Shira Levinson Luft, *Ethiopians' Adjustment to Life in the United States: A Qualitative, Exploratory Study: a Project Based on an Independent Investigation*. (Thesis (M.S.W.)--Smith College School for Social Work, 2004),

lived in rural areas⁴⁶ and 95% of whom were illiterate, to go to a country over ten times Ethiopia's size with a population of over 200 million people.⁴⁷ Prior to the creation of Addis Ababa University, many students were sent to the United States and Europe on government scholarships.⁴⁸ When the university was created however, a majority of those who attended were from the upper class. In 1965, Amhara represented 55% of the secondary and higher education students in the country, as compared to Tigray with 22%, Oromo with 15%, and Guragay with 4%. All other ethnic groups combined for the remaining 4%.⁴⁹ Consequently, as students left the country to receive an education, over 1,000 entering the U.S. in the 1970's, many came from the upper to middle classes.⁵⁰ The majority of those who did leave were members of the elite Amhara class, while few came from other groups.

Senait Daniyachew, born in Addis Ababa to the family of an Ethiopian diplomat and an upper class woman, became very familiar with American holidays, politics, customs and foods of the 1960's. She attended St. Mary's, an all-girls Catholic boarding school located in the capital of Ethiopia, which reinforced her knowledge of American culture.⁵¹ "All our teachers were Americans or Indians," she recalled, looking back at her childhood. "I didn't see it any different [from American education today]. Everything was in English [even though] ourselves we never

⁴⁶ Ibid.,

⁴⁷ Census Scope, Census Scope: Population Growth 2000 [Internet]; available from http://www.censuscope.org/us/chart_popl.html; accessed 7 January 2007

⁴⁸ Lipsky, 94.

⁴⁹ Shira Levinson Luft, *Ethiopians' Adjustment to Life in the United States: A Qualitative, Exploratory Study: a Project Based on an Independent Investigation*, (Thesis (M.S.W.)--Smith College School for Social Work, 2004), 63.

⁵⁰ Solomon A. Getahun, "Brain Drain and Its Effects on Ethiopia's Institutions of Higher Learning, 1970s-1990s" *African Issues* 30 (2002): 4.

⁵¹ Senait Daniyachew, interview by author, digital recording, Durham, NC., 12 October 2004.

spoke English or French, it was just the classroom.” Her family moved to Mexico for her father’s career, and a few months later she and her older sister, Worke, were sent to boarding school in the U.S.⁵² It was then, in 1972, that Senait was exposed to the real American culture after years of being educated about the United States in Ethiopia.⁵³ Though she was familiar with certain aspects of American culture in Ethiopia, many things were yet to be learned. Forced to leave Cornell University in the late 1970’s after her first semester, due to her father’s incarceration under a new Ethiopian government, she began working in hotel maintenance in Boston to support herself.⁵⁴ She currently manages a hotel in the Bay Area of Northern California.

A majority of those who responded to my surveys from this group came to the U.S. between 1965 - 1974 from the capital city Addis Ababa. About 42% came from the upper-class in Ethiopia and 58% from the middle-class. Since a majority of those who were in the upper-class came from privileged circumstances in Ethiopia, they were more likely to have traveled abroad for education and leisure. During the reign of Haile Selassie, Western culture was becoming an interwoven part of Ethiopian upper-class society and the monarch and his royal party became increasingly familiar with American culture after WWII. With soldiers trained in the U.S. and American forces using the territory to further their military goals in the Middle East, the two countries loosely had become connected.

Of the 26 people who responded to the survey, 100% came to the U.S. for educational reasons. French, British, and English private high schools in the capital were filled with upper-

⁵² Ibid

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

class and middle-class students waiting to be sent off by their parents, and a number of schools had English as the primary language of education. This education encouraged elite Ethiopians to incorporate American forms of entertainment, food, and holidays into all classes of the Ethiopian societies. Despite these advances, many Ethiopians outside the capital faced extreme poverty, and while wealthier students in Ethiopia were prepared to go to the United States, children in rural Ethiopia finished up to eighth grade and continued to work in Ethiopia. Many of the elite did not come into contact with this type of poverty on a day-to-day basis. Addis Ababa had grown into a relatively modern city with the establishment of luxury businesses, such as the four star Sheraton Hotel, hospitals, paved streets and boulevards, factories and hundreds of restaurants, clubs, and bars.⁵⁵

The immigrants of the educated elite left everything they were comfortable with to come to a new world in which they would have to sacrifice the positions they once attained in society to achieve a distant, long sought success in America. I interviewed and surveyed 30 people who came prior to the change of government in 1974. Of the survey respondents, 42% said they came from upper-class backgrounds and 58% percent from middle-class. In America, however, many experienced a considerable class decline with only 8% responding as being upper-class, 88% middle-class, and 4% lower class. Although the members of this Educated Elite came with a desire to return home and maintain their Ethiopian culture the realities and belief systems in America kept them from doing so.

Since class systems differ in Ethiopia and the United States, it is likely that the some of the respondents' perspectives on Ethiopia have been altered by their living situations in the U.S.

⁵⁵ Marcus, *Ethiopia, Great Britain, and the United States*, 164.

In Ethiopia, for instance, the middle class was virtually non-existent during Haile Selassie's rule but in America it is the prevailing social status. Ethiopian society was based on a highly stratified structure of land ownership and farm workers. The owners of land and businesses usually belonged to the Amhara and Tigray tribes, who, combined, only made up about 30% of the country. In part due to their historic claim to the throne of Solomon, they were able to create a higher social standing for themselves.⁵⁶ Consequently, members of these groups were able to travel outside of the country to be educated.

Though Ethiopian society, under emperor Haile Selassie, had been inundated with American culture before the military coup of 1974, immigrants in America had a difficult time adjusting to American culture. Minute culture shocks, such as the weight of the people as well as the different styles of clothing of both the young and the old were startling aspects of the new arrivals' experiences. While professors and students were celebrated in the Los Angeles Times for receiving awards from Haile Selassie to travel to Ethiopia for research or teaching, Ethiopian immigrants attempted to re-learn a culture that they assumed they were familiar with. In the same way Ethiopian immigrants were receiving a new perspective of America, American press and institutions were creating a new view of Ethiopia and its culture.

One of the earliest Ethiopian immigrants to the United States who remained in the country was Ingida Asfaw. Having traveled two weeks on a ship at the age of 16 in 1958 in order to fulfill his desire to be a doctor, he made America his home. Over the past 50 years he has worked as a surgeon living his dream to alleviate the poverty and illnesses faced by many of his countrymen. Awarded the Volvo for Life Award for his work in Ethiopia and the U.S., among

⁵⁶ Lipsky, 36.

well-known celebrities, astronauts, actors and activists such as Val Kilmer, Paul Newman, and Caroline Kennedy, he was honored thus: “Dr. Ingida Asfaw not only embodies the American dream — of the impoverished immigrant achieving extraordinary success and skill in his or her adopted land — but also the meaning of American citizenship at its most profound.”⁵⁷

Asfaw is one of hundreds that entered the U.S. prior to 1974 who was able to achieve such academic success. Though many immigrants who came to the U.S. desired to use the education they would receive to better the lives of those left behind, foreboding circumstances in Ethiopia and certain realities in the U.S. affected their ability to do so. Ethiopians, during 1969-1974, entered a country that was on the tail end of major civil and political change. The Civil Rights Movement had reached a high point with the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 deeming discrimination based on race, gender, religion, creed and ‘natural origin’ illegal. The Vietnam War also created an atmosphere of political and social tension. During the 1960’s and 1970’s pockets of the American people began to organize and struggle both politically and socially for their rights. And this blazing movement affected black immigrants in many parts of the world, especially those of Western Europe. According to Vilna Bashi’s analysis in Globalized Anti-blackness: Transnationalizing Western Immigration Law, Policy and Practice”, the Civil Rights Movement created “a fear in white politicians that admitting blacks invites social unrest,” which gradually limited the number of black immigrants allowed onto British and foreign soil.⁵⁸ This trend was evident in the U.S. as well. Immigration statistics from the mid-sixties to early

⁵⁷ Volvo For Life, Volvo For Life: Ingida Asfaw, M.D. Volvo for Life Award Hero [Internet]; available from <http://www.volvoforlifeawards.com/cgi-bin/iowa/english/heros/hero2004/10101.html> ; accessed 7 October 2007.

⁵⁸ Vilna Bashi Globalized Anti-Blackness: Transnationalizing Western Immigration Law, Policy, and Practice; *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, (July 2004) 596.

seventies show an extremely low number of people of African descent accepted into those countries where European immigrants were taken in vast amounts.⁵⁹

Prior to 1965, the Naturalization Act of 1924 was the main law of immigration in the U.S. This law set the quota of immigrants based on the birthplace or origin of those who entered the country during the 1920's. Though it proved to be an effective way of limiting the overwhelming influx of immigrants after many years of a relatively open policy of immigration, it limited the future immigrants to Western Europeans in order to create a quota based on the majority of immigrants already in the country while rejecting immigrants of Eastern European, Asian, African, or "American aborigenes" descent.⁶⁰ African slaves were considered "involuntary immigrants" resulting in only token immigration from Northern parts of Africa but no policies for the continent as a whole.⁶¹ Though some Americans considered the 1924 Act to be blatantly discriminatory and "nativist" its affects can be seen until this day.

During the Cold War, the U.S. government became aware of the importance of the support of countries outside of the Western world and the government's decisions on immigration laws mirrored this realization. The 1965 Act, set into motion by President Johnson and his administration after Kennedy's assassination, created a larger net for a diverse group of immigrants. Though a poll in 1965 showed that many Americans were not in favor of creating a less stringent immigration policy,⁶² both Congress and the Executive branch realized the greater

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Roger Daniels, and Graham, O. *Debating American Immigration, 1882--Present*. (Lanham, Md: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2001), 148.

⁶¹ Steven Shulman, *The Impact of Immigration on African Americans*. (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2004), 9.

⁶² Daniels, *Debating*, 146.

importance of creating a non-discriminatory reputation for the United States. Due to the relationship between the two countries, furthermore, the United States maintained an open immigration policy toward Ethiopians coming for educational purposes. Many entered the United States believing they would stay for a short period only to receive an education and return home. Consequently, Ethiopian students were faced with an unexpected prejudice socially though they were legally accepted into the American system.

Following the media's exposure of the country's inherent discriminatory laws brought to light by the marches and sit-ins in the South, the government felt more pressure to change its immigration law. During this period, Ethiopian immigrants came on student visas that were issued to them by the government under the conditions that they return to the country after completion of their education. In order to receive the I-20 form, students in Ethiopia had to contact either universities in the U.S. directly, or an immigration service that would establish an American family's sponsorship of them. After establishing a host family or being accepted to a university, students were able to stay in the country as long as they were in an academic institution. Most immigrants were placed with American host families through churches and immigration programs such as the Catholic Church Services, while others stayed in dormitories, with friends, or alone. With tuition higher for international students, it became difficult for some to support themselves. Only 8% of the Educated Elite lived with an Ethiopian family upon arrival and about 54% knew no one in America.

Ethiopians from this group dispersed to various cities in the U.S. to be nearer to family members, American family sponsors, and universities. Since 60% of the Educated Elite had no family in the U.S. prior to their arrival, about 12% moved to different cities for education. Some

traveled to large cities such as Boston or Los Angeles to live with friends who immigrated earlier while others traveled to, among other states, Nebraska, Ohio, and Chicago, to complete their college education in dormitories.⁶³ Coming from another country and living in such diverse parts of the United States was a rude awakening. When asked to indicate the racial groups that they lived with in the U.S. upon their arrival, 50% of this group said they lived among black Americans, 50% indicated they lived among white Americans, while 23% lived among Africans, and 4% among Hispanics. As specified in some of the surveys, students either lived in dormitories as well as with host families.

Eshetu Teffera came to the U.S. in 1973, from the country of “13 months of Sunshine” to study in the snowy Mid-Western plains of Nebraska. The second oldest son of ten children, two of whom joined him a couple years after his arrival, he was sent by his mother at the age of 18 to complete his higher education in the States. With a father who was a famous military general and governor and a mother from the royal line, Eshetu soon realized that life in America would be a greater challenge than the upper-class life he once knew. “We didn’t even go out to get our hair cut [in Ethiopia], somebody would come to our house... The first year in Nebraska, my hair grew and I didn’t know what to do with it... and the [white barber in Nebraska] said ‘I can’t cut your kind of hair.’ So I wrote my mom and told her ‘What am I going to do with my hair?’... as if she’s gonna come and give me a hair cut.”⁶⁴ After moving to three different schools of higher education, driving as far as Los Angeles to Nebraska for summer jobs in glass factories, fast food restaurants, and temporary farm work, Eshetu learned the value of hard work in America. “I had

⁶⁴ Eshetu Teffera, interview by author, digital recording, Durham, NC., 12 November 2006.

never worked in my life prior to that. It was a big shock... because everything was catered when I was back [in Ethiopia].”⁶⁵ Though the journey was long and the drives across country even longer, he began to view the struggles he traversed in adjusting to the American lifestyle as blessings in disguise. “It changed my outlook in life...when people do something like that you took it for granted, some of the stuff people did for you over there. Now you’re doing it yourself...it was a big, big humbling experience... It creates character.”⁶⁶ Viewing these jobs as “stepping stones to a better thing” it was easier for him to accept the menial positions knowing that he was going to finish school. He currently works a tax agent for the California State government.

Though many of the Ethiopians who came during this time were not likely to have been subject to discrimination in their home country, they were faced with an unexpected shock in the United States. The Ethiopian immigrants from the Educated Elite did not initially associate themselves with the working class society of America. Their frame of reference consisted of diverse views on ethnicity, social class, history and identity in a country where many of them were privileged. Their exposure to the American culture through entertainment such as popular music, shows, and movies most likely affected their expectations of their future positions in America, as well as their understanding of the sacrifices they would have to make in order to succeed.

Language, one of the most important ways of connecting to and understanding a culture, was and continues to be a challenge for some Ethiopians who came. Familiar with the phrases

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

and mannerisms of Amharic, this group had to relearn phrases, jokes, and cultural concepts in order to communicate in their new environment. The pronunciation of their names is an important way in which this language barrier was and continues to be expressed. Restaurant hosts are constant reminders of the “not-quite” American feeling that many immigrants feel when waiting to be called. Contrary to the idea of America’s role as a melting pot of cultures, realities such as changing the names Girma to “George” or Abebe to “Alex” became a constant reminder that some aspects of culture were not as easily integrated as others. Ethiopians quickly learned to assimilate to their surrounding culture creating “orphans of history” whose names, in extreme cases, have been lost in the process of assimilation.⁶⁷

The movies during the time were a way a major medium through which the American myths, culture, and language were translated to Ethiopians. Though close to 90% of the immigrant group had knowledge of the English language prior to coming to the U.S., through movies and popular music, the initial struggle to assimilate linguistically was a challenge. About 81% percent of the immigrants claimed they gained knowledge about United States by means of movies, not surprising, since an easily accessible way of learning about a foreign country is media. Movies, music, and television shows coupled with the government’s push for English education, gave some Ethiopians an insight, stereotypical as it may have been, into the American society. This means of education probably influenced the ways in which many immigrants viewed specific groups in the American population as well. During the late 1960’s and 1970’s

⁶⁷ Ram Mahalingam. *Cultural Psychology of Immigrants*. (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2006), 42.

minorities, especially African, Asian, and Latinos were given limited and many times stereotypical roles in the film and television industries.⁶⁸

Rakebe Kebede moved to the city of Los Angeles in 1974. She was born in the rural town of Zewai, to a mother who ran the family business and a father who was a retired soldier. One thing that was instilled in her from a young age was self-respect and dignity in her position as an Ethiopian *Munzay* (a part of the Amhara group that lives in the mountainous region of Munz). When she arrived in the U.S. in 1974 she worked as a fast food server, hostess, waitress, and nurse at an elderly home facing different forms of challenges and discrimination. Despite hardships, she continued to hold onto her pride as an Ethiopian. It was additionally difficult for her to adjust to both her role and others' roles in the community around her. From having to clean her host-family's house to not understanding the process of applying for and leaving jobs, Rakebe faced different major and minute struggles. She explained that in Ethiopia elders played an extremely religious and revered role in shaping the community and taking care of the youth. "But here this ladies they go out" "...[they] took me in Hollywood, I look at them putting their lipstick after eating... and I said 'at this age, what's wrong with them?'" Though she was exposed to and shaped by the subtleties of American lifestyle, she continued to hold on to some aspects of her Ethiopian culture through foods, visits to Ethiopia, the Amharic language, and her daily doses of Starbucks Sidamo coffee. She currently is a missionary for an American Pentecostal church in Norwalk, California.

The relationship between the African-American and the Ethiopian population is an interesting and complex one. Though Ethiopians came from a country in which a majority were

⁶⁸ Ibid. 52.

members of the ruling class, as Rakebe's experience illustrated, they entered a country in which people of African origin were subject to a history of discrimination and marginalization. "When I came there, there were only white people living in Norwalk at the time," Rakebe recounted. "One of the neighbors...complained that they would move out because they don't want any black person living in there... I used to look at them stupid people... because since I didn't grow up with this inferior complex I look at them, what a stupid kind of thinking this people are thinking, you know?"

The decision to move to the United States for educational purposes only to return to work in Ethiopia was normal for many elite families before Ethiopia's change in government in 1974. The jobs they attempted to work at, however, made it difficult to support themselves and get schooling simultaneously. Those whom I have interviewed described the process to be demeaning and challenging. Not only did some face discrimination in the work place, but they faced it in their neighborhoods as well. Many used their connection to the *Abyssinian* and *Solomonic Myths* to combat the racism they experienced in America. This sense of isolation did not generally apply only to African-Americans but to foreigners, in general. A common belief held by many Ethiopians both in America and in Ethiopia is one that considers anyone that is "other", no better, and at times subordinate to themselves. And though culture and tradition of hospitality and courtesy are important, the *firenge*, or foreigner, is someone of whom to be cautious.⁶⁹

Though some members of the Educated Elite based their cultural difference on their connection to the *Solomonic Myth*, and indirectly to the Jewish culture, their relationship with the

⁶⁹ Lipsky, 78.

African-American community was more salient. When asked whether or not their culture was similar to that of the Jewish culture, a combined 63% of the 24 who responded said either yes or somewhat, while 37% said no. On the other hand, of the 25 that responded 92% said they had many or some similarities to the African-American community while 8% said they had no similarities. Among those who believed there to be many similarities between the two communities, one person wrote, in explanation of the response, “we face the same hardships.” Another respondent explained that Ethiopians have “the same ethnic origin and family responsibilities” as the African-American community. There were indeed ways in which the two communities came together. Music was one of them. Some respondents who were connected to the African-American population when they arrived to the United States enjoyed being part of the night-life. Rakebe described instances when her Ethiopian friends would go to nightclubs simply to watch black Americans dance while, she explained, “they’ll laugh at us.”⁷⁰

According to Girma Teffera, Eshetu’s younger brother, “black is an experience”. Referring to African-Americans as his “brothas” and “sistas”, his experiences in America, as well as living in neighborhoods that were a majority African-American, helped him connect to the larger community. Coming from Ethiopia with a different culture and belief system was not enough to negate the struggles he faced in the U.S. due to his skin color. As an immigrant, moreover, he faced difficulties finding steady paying jobs. After completing high school while living with a host family in Nebraska, he and his brothers Eshetu and Abebe moved to Los Angeles. In order to be hired for a day job, he and his brothers waited on the sides of the Los Angeles streets, along with mainly other Hispanic immigrants, day in and day out. Girma was

⁷⁰ Rakebe Kebede, interview by author, digital recording, Durham, NC., 22 October 2007.

able to work as a chauffeur and gas station attendant, among other occupations during his first years of living in Los Angeles. He currently works for the U.S. State Department as a communications specialist.

In a study done on black immigrants to the United States, Tormala and Deaux explained that though foreign-born black immigrants only constitute about 7% of the foreign-born population and 6% of the Black population, their presence creates discrepancies within the black community.⁷¹ According to a general consensus among sociologists, “race is a social rather than a biological category.”⁷² This can be seen in the history of assimilation amongst various immigrant groups in America. Though various “non-white” groups were discriminated against initially, Italians, Irish, Jewish, and Asian groups became included in the “white” or “almost-white” categories by distinguishing themselves from the black community.⁷³ In the Ethiopian immigrant group’s identification with the African-American population, it can be concluded that biological aspects of an individual also play a major role in the social acceptance of that individual in American society.

Though only 34% of the Educated Elite went to Ethiopian gatherings once a week, by 1974 Ethiopian communities in major cities had grown large enough to include restaurants, churches, and some community centers. The Abyssinia Baptist Church, founded in the early 19th century by Ethiopian merchants and African-Americans in New York, was simply the beginning

⁷¹ Mahalingam, 131.

⁷² Shulman, 31.

⁷³ Mahalingam, 32.

of a long line of religious centers Ethiopians in America used to gather in.⁷⁴ Washington D.C. and Los Angeles had, and continue to have, the largest Ethiopian population in America. In 1970, the Ethiopian Coptic Church in Southern California had over 700 members and was steadily growing.⁷⁵ Following in the historic footsteps of the Ethiopian and African-Americans both in New York and Los Angeles, Rakebe, along with six other members of the growing Ethiopian community, started what would become the first and largest Ethiopian Pentecostal church in Los Angeles. Out of the small Bible study meetings in her apartment in 1977 came the Ethiopian Christian Fellowship Church where church-goers can be heard singing the *illilta*⁷⁶ with hands raised and shoulders bent in the Amharic services.

Despite cultural reminders and assimilation, the Ethiopian immigrant experience was mainly a difficult one. The emotional and mental stresses of a different culture were compounded in many different aspects that caused some to either never return to the country or, in extreme cases, to deny their Ethiopian culture. For this immigrant group especially, it must have been significantly difficult to come to terms with the political change in Ethiopia while coping with oft overlooked differences as weather. Not only did they leave the country in a time of peace and modernization, but many left as the elite. It probably would have been less disheveling if they were able to live in America for a certain amount of time, experience, study and leave but to their shock and dismay they found themselves not only displaced in a foreign country but displaced in

⁷⁴ Tseday Alehegn, "African American and Ethiopian Relations," Tadias Magazine Archives [Internet]; available from <http://tadias.com/?cat=10>; accessed 12 April 2007.

⁷⁵ "Coptic Congregation Hopes to Buy Building." *Los Angeles Times*, 17 January 1970, p.19. Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times.

⁷⁶ A high pitched sound made with a reverberation of the tongue in both the Ethiopian and aspects of Jewish and some Middle Eastern cultures used to celebrate at worship services, weddings, or cultural events.

their home country as well. Haile Selassie, the emperor revered and honored by his countrymen, who personally handed out the diplomas to graduates from top secondary schools in the capital city, Addis Ababa, fled the country.⁷⁷

During the first five years of immigration, the amount of time respondents spent with other Ethiopians varied greatly. Only 34% of the Ethiopians in Los Angeles, Washington D.C. and other cities that a majority of this group immigrated to met weekly with the Ethiopian community. 15% said they met monthly with Ethiopians and 12% respectively said they met twice a year, once a year, or don't recall. There simply were not many Ethiopians located in the cities they occupied at the time. They were forerunners of a group of immigrants who would end up changing their identity, as they would in so many other ways, to an immigrant rather than a sojourner. As Eshetu explained in his interview, once the Ethiopian immigrants became well-adjusted to the American culture, it was easier for them to remain in the States. While 46% of this group expressed a desire to go back to live and 50% expressed they may want to return, half of the group has either never gone back or has only returned once. Given the circumstances that many Ethiopians during this time faced, the unexpected and unforeseen struggles that they had to survive through, naturally created a desire to stay in America.

⁷⁷ "Haile Selassie Kin Flee Secretly to U.S." *Los Angeles Times*, 26 September 1977, Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times.

Refugee

1. *an individual seeking refuge or asylum; especially : an individual who has left his or her native country and is unwilling or unable to return to it because of persecution or fear of persecution (as because of race, religion, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion)*⁷⁸

Chapter 3

The Tireless Fleet: 1975-1985

In the 1970's and 1980's Bob Marley blared in the background of the Ethiopian restaurants, cafes, and nightclubs all over the U.S. as young Ethiopians bopped their heads to the words "No Woman No Cry" and "Africa Unite." Vaguely reminiscent of their connection to the memory of Haile Selassie and the Solomonic line whether based on a myth or reality, reggae music during this period played an important role in shaping the Ethiopian community's identity. Though the musician would pass away on May 11, 1981, the same year Rakebe would have her first son in America, the legend and *Solomonic Myth* lived on. The Ethiopian community in America expanded exponentially at the end of 1974 and would continue to expand quickly for the next two decades. By the end of 1985, flags of the Lion of Judah and photos of Haile Selassie would adorn the Ethiopian restaurants from Houston to Boston and the strong connection to the Ethiopian culture that seemed to have died with the coup would live on.

The military coup of 1974 in Ethiopia, bringing to power the Derg, a group of military men educated abroad in Socialist and Communist ideology⁷⁹, caused a paradigm shift to occur for the Ethiopians in the country and those who arrived in the United States prior to the coup. Coming from upper to middle-class families with no understanding of what it meant to work for

⁷⁸ Dictionary.com, *Merriam-Webster's Dictionary of Law* "refugee." [Internet]; available from, <http://www.dictionar.y.reference.com/browse/refugee>; accessed 5 October 2006.

⁷⁹ Marcus, *Ethiopia, Great Britain, and the United States*, 164.

a living, many members of the Educated Elite were faced with the harsh reality that their land, wealth, and family members had been taken and they could do nothing to change it. Since family members had be imprisoned or killed due to their status, political stances, or mere existence, many Ethiopian students abroad lost much contact, support, and financial assistance during what would become one of the most significant Ethiopian revolutions in the country's history. Forced to deal with the circumstances on their own, many visas expired, causing the students to apply as political asylees or marry into the country. The hope to return home to help family now faded; their new responsibility was to fend for themselves in a country that was not their own and did not see them as its own.

From 1981-1991 the largest number of Ethiopians were admitted into the U.S. under the Refugee Acts. Unlike the Educated Elite, who did not leave as a result of aggression, or well-founded fear of persecution, most of this group did not choose to migrate. Since immigration outside the country under the Socialist regime was stifled for years, many Ethiopians from various parts of the country were forced to flee to refugee camps in Sudan and Kenya to escape the actions of the Ethiopian government.

It is estimated that over 20,000 Ethiopians came to the United States between 1975 and 1985. Taken in under the ever-widening immigration laws of the United States, Ethiopians were not only accepted as international students, but were now a fleet of immigrants escaping their home country due to political persecution. Many of their experiences as refugees differ from those who came as immigrants. I was able to secure survey responses from 62 Ethiopians in the U.S. from this group. The lives of these people demonstrate the ways that members of the

Tireless Fleet had to challenge their views of the *Solomonic* and *Success Myths* in a challenging and unexpected reality.

After over fifty years of Selassie's rule, citizens of Ethiopia had grown tired of the injustices and class-based inequalities that came with the "modernization" of Haile Selassie's monarchy and they hoped for change. In 1973 teachers, students, civil servants and members of the military protested the monarch on the streets of Addis Ababa, in hopes of seeing an adjustment in their internationally acclaimed emperor's actions. The solution was a military coup. On February 23, 1974 while Haile Selassie and officials waited in the royal palace students, teachers and civilians protesting outside the palace gates, brought the demise of the 53 year-long rule of Haile Selassie and the Solomonic monarchy came to an end.

In February 1974, a group of army officials who had been educated abroad in Marxist and socialist ideology came back to a country of despair and inequality and decided it could no longer persist. Mengistu Haile Mariam, the Derg's strong man, in coordination with his brother who served as the governor of a province in northern Ethiopia, worked to create a social structure that would secure rights for the lower class, peasants, and workers. Derg made it clear that the hierarchical system of the monarchy had to be demolished and Haile Selassie and his men were the first to be removed. In 1977, 60 officials of the ruling majority Amhara government were murdered in the Ethiopian palace. Under the political slogan "One Ethiopia," Mengistu claimed that Ethiopia needed "land reform, national unity and revolution."⁸⁰

Though Ethiopian history and accounts portray the events of 1974 and the Communist regime in a negative light, the Derg's rule was not initially viewed as harmful; in fact, it was

⁸⁰ Marcus, 189.

openly welcomed by the people of Ethiopia. Mengistu attempted to instill a sense of Ethiopian unity to secure his rule by imposing policies resulting in and caused by fear and paranoia in tandem with the *Solomonic Myth*. Ironically, the belief that Ethiopia was a unified nation under Derg's rule was, in some respects, made a reality. Though photos of the new leader had replaced those of Haile Selassie all over the country and family members of Haile Selassie secretly fled to the U.S., the myth lived on.⁸¹ The new Communist regime in Ethiopia worked to remove all those who were loyal to Haile Selassie's monarchy in an attempt to end the unfair rule.⁸² Under the new government, small neighborhood organizations called *kebeles* were established throughout the country sides and major cities to educate the larger population and remove landowners from positions of authority and give civilians the right to govern their own land and property.⁸³

Democratic countries, however, as well as Ethiopians abroad mourned the loss of the historic and richly imperial Ethiopia. Ethiopia's commitment to Communist countries during the Cold War was a signal that America had lost one of their most valuable "African allies."⁸⁴ Ethiopia's induction into the "Soviet-led boycott" of Los Angeles 1984 Olympics publicly displayed its allegiance to its new-found political group.⁸⁵ Though initially the citizens of Ethiopia and the world believed that it was a peaceful coup, the military regime's actions in 1977

⁸¹ "Haile Selassie Kin Flee Secretly to U.S." *Los Angeles Times*, 26 September 1977, Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times.

⁸² John Markakis and Nega Ayele, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia* (Trenton, N.J.: Red Sea Press, 1986), 89.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 228.

⁸⁴ David Lamb, "Ethiopia's Mengistu Claims Unique Role." *Los Angeles Times*, 16 May 1979, sec. D, p. 1. Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times.

⁸⁵ Eric Malnic, "Ethiopia Joins Boycott of L.A. Olympic Games." *Los Angeles Times*, 2 June 1984, sec. C, p. 16. Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times.

proved otherwise. During what would be remembered as the Red Terror of 1974-1978, according to Amnesty International, over 30,000 people were executed for political reasons in Ethiopia and 300-400 arrests were made every week.⁸⁶

Backed by weaponry and military support from Cuba, Russia, and Israel, to the surprise and disappointment of the United States government, the Ethiopian government arrested and threw young and old men and women in jail for their socio-economic status, political and religious affiliation, and educational background. The government joined Somalia, Libya, and south Yemen as a part of an international Communist and Socialist bloc.⁸⁷ Many ideological and political agreements that the U.S. made with other countries were beginning to seem less binding in the midst of the Cold War. The prime location of Ethiopia, with access to the waterways that carried fuel from the Middle East bolstered the country's power and influence in the Horn of Africa. Where as only five years earlier Ethiopia was a nation strongly tied to the U.S. under Haile Selassie's rule, Mengistu shifted the country's perspective to a different ideological leader: the Soviet Union.

By this time political factions had branched off from the ruling military regime and political groups began to struggle for an opportunity to rule.⁸⁸ When members of the Ethiopian Oppressed People's Party, a political faction made up of the well-educated and economically, secure, along with students, stood to oppose and criticize the government, terror broke out.⁸⁹ The

⁸⁶ Lee May, "Ethiopians in U.S. Afraid to Go Back Home." *Los Angeles Times*, 20 June 1982, p. 1, 24, 25. Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times.

⁸⁷ Peter Schwab, "Cold War on the Horn of Africa." *African Affairs* 77, no. 306 (January, 1978): 13.

⁸⁸ Marcus, 196.

⁸⁹ John Markakis and N. Ayele, *Class and Revolution in Ethiopia* (Trenton, N.J.: Red Sea Press, 1986), 123.

kebele leaders in the cities and rural areas, who initially worked to build the country's literacy and agricultural programs through socialism and equality became terror inducers who pillaged cities and towns and forced people to flee the country out of fear of death. People of middle to upper-class backgrounds were singled out and detained because of their knowledge of and influence in society and the threat they posed to the regime's power. The Red Scare and mass executions affected families both in the rural towns and urban cities.

Salem Adema, grew up in Harar, a small town outside the capital. Her father's death led her, her mother, and her brother and sister to live with her grandfather and the extended family, numbering at least 16 children in all. Though each family had its own home, they all "eat and sleep at grandpa's house." Like many other children, they enjoyed going out to movies and parties during the day, but Salem knew that in her family she wouldn't be allowed to if her grandfather knew about it. "He doesn't think we go to the movies...we tell to the grandma and she always says 'Be careful... if your grandfather heard this you'll be in trouble.'"⁹⁰ A member of a privileged family, however, she was able to travel outside the country with no qualms. After high school, she traveled to Europe to visit family, and when she returned to Ethiopia everything she knew had changed.⁹¹ Her family's privilege and wealth had become more of a burden than she could have imagined. In the middle of the night she recalled hearing soldiers at her front door and seeing her uncle being dragged out into the night. The family did not know where he was

⁹⁰ Selam Adema, interview by author, digital recording, Durham, NC., 12 October 2004.

⁹¹ Ibid.

taken nor did they know why. For months after the incident, her family left each day never knowing if they would come back alive.⁹² She arrived in America in 1980.

Ethiopians who came to the United States during 1975-1985, were largely considered to be refugees due to the circumstances in their home country. Under the 1951 UN Refugee Convention a refugee is defined as a member of a group of people who are “unable to return to [their country] because they have a ‘well-founded fear of persecution.’”⁹³ This definition, however was not the prevailing definition used in developing countries and thus altered the number of people who could – leave the country under the conditions of the regime. Based on the Organization of African Unity Refugee Convention and Cartagena Declaration, the term is much more specific and thus difficult to attain. The Cartagena Declaration defines it as a group of “people who have sought refuge in other countries as a result of aggression, occupation, generalized violence and events seriously disturbing public order.”⁹⁴

From 1981-1990, of the one million refugees who entered the U.S. under the Refugee Acts, 22,000 were admitted from Africa as permanent residents and 17,000 of them came from Ethiopia.⁹⁵ Though millions of people left the country, 46% of the Tireless Fleet responded that they came for political reasons while 55% still said they came for educational reasons, 3% for economic reasons and 1% for other reasons. They fled a country recently affected by war and terror to reach a land that was considered one of the most liberated.

⁹²Ibid.

⁹³ Jeff Crisp, “Who Has Counted the Refugee?” UNHCR and the Politics of Numbers June 1999.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Richard Lapchick, et al. eds., “Racial Implications of U.S. Immigration Policy.” *A Journal of Opinion* 12, no. ½ (Spring-Summer, 1982):14.

Since the government kept a constraint on immigration, Ethiopians who desired to flee the country did so in various ways. Some came to work as maids for American citizens, others as students, while some traveled to refugee camps in surrounding countries. According to the UN High Commissioner for Refugees, 2.5 million of Ethiopia's 30 million people fled Ethiopia after the change in government.⁹⁶ About 430,000 fled to refugee camps in Somalia, 677,000 to Sudan, 50,000 to Egypt, 13,500 to Djibouti and 30,000 to European countries.⁹⁷ Though countries such as Sudan, Somalia, and Kenya did serve as convenient open countries of relief for Ethiopians, the thousands of Ethiopians entering the underdeveloped African countries began to take a toll on the governments' resources.

The various countries' immigration policies began to mirror their inability to provide for the Ethiopian refugees. In 1985, for instance, the Sudanese government suspended all processing of Ethiopian refugees in the country.⁹⁸ America allowed 18,000 refugees in that year. Though the struggle went on, Ethiopians continued to look to surrounding African and European countries as well as America. After the tedious process of applying, and waiting months, sometimes years, to be granted political refugee status, very few Ethiopians were accepted into the United States.

When the United States became one of the "first asylum" countries in the late 1970's, making it a country that refugees could apply to directly, discriminatory refugee policies became a political debate within the country. Politicians and immigrants alike were a part of a national conversation on the equality among the refugees represented in America. Although, at the time,

⁹⁶ Williams, Winston. "Ethiopians in U.S. Fear Deportation." *New York Times*, 27 January 1982, sec. A, p. 3. Database on-line. Available from LexisNexis.

⁹⁷ Shira Levinson Luft, *Ethiopians' Adjustment to Life in the United States: A Qualitative, Exploratory Study: a Project Based on an Independent Investigation* (Thesis (M.S.W.)--Smith College School for Social Work, 2004), 66.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

over 25% of the world's refugees came from Africa, the quota for African refugees remained at 3,000 people per year, 2,800 of which were Ethiopians.⁹⁹

Senator Shirley Chisholm, from New York, in a symposium entitled "African and Caribbean Refugees" in 1982, pointed out the ways in which American policies were inherently failing African and Caribbean refugees by decreasing their numbers while allowing Eastern European and Southeast Asian refugees, who made up 95% of those refugees to be accepted by the U.S. government.¹⁰⁰ In fact, over 72,000 refugees were taken in from the Soviet Union during 1981-1990, but only about 18,000 of the 60,000 Ethiopian refugees who fled to Sudan, Kenya, and Somalia were admitted.¹⁰¹ Though racial claims were denied by the director of the INS, an African-American, compared to other refugee groups, Africans were largely underrepresented.

According to Chisholm in "U.S. Policy and the Black Refugee," the U.S. government defended the quotas with three points: "1. Africa takes care of its own and there is no need for permanent resettlement in the U.S.; 2. Africans are largely rural people and would not adjust well to American society; and 3. The U.S. compensates for these small numbers by giving economic assistance to refugees in Africa."¹⁰² These claims were not enough to force Ethiopians to return to the communist-led country, however. After the outcries created around the new policy and

⁹⁹ Shirley Chisholm, "U.S. Policy and Black Refugees." *A Journal of Opinion* 12, no. ½ (Spring-Summer, 1982): 22.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Bureau of Census. U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. *Statistical Yearbook*. (December, 2002), 1.

¹⁰² Ibid.

earlier court cases focused on the unequal laws that bound Haitian refugee groups, the policy was repealed due to the work of Senators and lobbyists.

“Talk of going underground to avoid deportation is common wherever Ethiopians congregate,” read a New York Times article written in January 1982.¹⁰³ Ethiopians who congregated in Chicago, Los Angeles, Washington D.C., New York, Philadelphia and other major cities in the U.S. continued to struggle to live and survive further due to the circumstances they found themselves in. Their forced departure under the State Department’s policy of “voluntary departure status” created an outcry of racism against the U.S. government policies in 1982. The U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service deemed the situation in Ethiopia safe enough for refugees to return explaining that the special visa program for the refugees was “no longer appropriate.”¹⁰⁴ For ten months, the policy loomed over the heads of both the immigrants of the Educated Elite who came to the U.S. with student visas and those of the Tireless Fleet who had more recently come over under the Refugee Act. Though State Department official Richard Baker eloquently pointed out that “bodies aren’t turning up in neighborhoods anymore. Random violence is no longer occurring”¹⁰⁵ in Ethiopia, his perception of reality was far from the truth.

In a sense, the refugee numbers both support and deny the *City on a Hill Myth*. The *City on a Hill Myth*, which boasted the U.S.’s desire to take in the world’s hungry and needy, seemed to apply to certain refugees more than others, just as the immigration laws of 1924 did. Though some countries strongly affected by Communist regimes received a higher quota, others,

¹⁰³ Winston Williams, “Ethiopians in U.S. Fear Deportation.” *New York Times*, 27 January 1982, sec. A, p. 3. Database on-line. Available from LexisNexis

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

specifically those countries who were not given a high quota under the earlier immigration laws, were given a significantly smaller amount of assistance. Whereas political ideology and persecution were not sufficient reasons to guarantee entrance into the U.S., racial differences seemed to play a major role in the refugee' countries of origin. In a 1982 newspaper report on the refugees' circumstances, Randall Robinson, executive of a group that lobbies for African and Caribbean countries, said that the new policy was "the only situation we can identify where people from Communist countries have been denied asylum. That can only be because they are black."¹⁰⁶

The reality of the circumstances in Ethiopia, regardless of the U.S. government's perspective, impacted the views of some Americans, particularly African-Americans,' view of Ethiopia and the *Abyssinian Myth* associated with it. Where as the country had been used in the past by writers, activists and composers such as W.E.B. Du Bois, Robert Alexander and Benjamin E. Burrell and Arnold Josiah Ford, to symbolize hope for the black American community, it now reflected a tragic reality that some felt they had a responsibility to fix.¹⁰⁷ As mentioned earlier, many African-Americans in the American government began to lobby for the rights of Ethiopians in America after the Reagan administration created the "voluntary departure" policy. Others, however, worked to educate the African-American community about the ways the U.S. added to the oppressive circumstance of Ethiopians abroad through military aid. In an article criticizing the black Americans' knowledge of the Ethiopian government, Edmond J. Keller, a professor of Political Science, explains that the discrepancies between the myth black

¹⁰⁶ Lee May, "Ethiopians in U.S. Afraid to Go Back Home." *Los Angeles Times*, 20 June 1982, p. 1, 24, 25. Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times.

¹⁰⁷ Robin D. G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2002), 19, 29.

Americans hold towards Ethiopia and knowledge of the harsh realities of circumstances in Ethiopia are far removed.¹⁰⁸ Referring not only to Ethiopian leaders but also African leaders such as Idi Amin, Steve Biko, and Nelson Mandela, he asserts that “the tendency has been for most black Americans not to grasp much beyond the public image projected by African leaders in the media.”¹⁰⁹ He urged black Americans to “pressure their government to halt its misguided efforts.”¹¹⁰

Though some African-American congressmen and politicians attributed the possible mass deportation to racial discrimination, thus placing Ethiopians in the national narrative of racism and black and white prejudice, the Ethiopians surveyed in this group did not particularly feel connected to the African-American community. While 30% lived among African-Americans within their first years here, only 7% of this group expressed that they had many things in common with the African-American community. Fifty-five percent said they had somewhat of a connection to the black community, and 38% said they had no connection at all.

As social psychologist Thomas Pettigrew concluded in his research on anti-immigrant prejudice and discrimination that the views toward immigrants expressed in policy and those expressed in smaller groups can be inconsistent. He explains that, based on the immigrant population and normative views of individuals in Great Britain, the U.S., Germany and other countries, it is important to look at discrepancies between “macro-level” views of immigration

¹⁰⁸ Edmond J. Keller, “Black Americans and U.S. Policy Toward the Horn of Africa.” *Transafrica Forum* 2, no. 3 (1984): 16.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 23.

and “micro-level.”¹¹¹ The differences in acceptance of the Ethiopian immigrant population can be viewed in this light as well. Whereas select members of Congress and political groups lobbied for the Ethiopian refugee population to remain in the country, other citizens were not necessarily as willing to open their community’s doors to the group.

The differences within and among various Ethiopian, African, and African-American communities during this time period is a testament to the dichotomies Pettigrew explains. According to the surveys, 49% of the Tireless Fleet lived among white Americans while 30% lived among either African-Americans or Africans. These communities were not devoid of tension, however, and were less fixed than one would expect. Ethiopian immigrants and refugees found themselves to be a part of various communities, all of which were fragmented and connected by myths and realities that kept some Ethiopians from being accepted in any American community.

Yisehak Tsegaye could be considered one of the floaters who found his niche in the Ethiopian community. At the age of 7, his family moved to Djibouti from Ethiopia due to his father’s position in the Ethiopian Foreign Service. He knew nothing of the Ethiopian ethnic diversity, geography, or legends, having grown up out of the country; he only knew what he saw on the government compound. Educated in a French elementary school, he gained most of his views of Ethiopian history and culture from the small community of eight families through soccer games and holiday celebrations. When he and his mother and two brothers arrived in Los Angeles in 1984, he was confronted with the realities of both the Ethiopian and American ways of life. When his uncle, Girma Teffera, told him to help put the luggage in the car, something he

¹¹¹ Mahalingam, 139.

had done for first time in his life, he realized that he wasn't in Djibouti anymore. He experienced the joy of having an extended Ethiopian-American community for the first time, as well. "There was something very natural being around them. Jokes, just you know the camaraderie, everything was just so natural you didn't have to try to be there. So I think that was probably one of our reasons for dropping out of college because we just started rediscovering ourselves and improving our Amharic."¹¹² Though he faced discrimination during his years of school and work from African, black Americans and white Americans based on his race and ethnicity, he credits much of his success to his understanding of the Ethiopian culture he gained in America. He officially became an American citizen in February 2007 and is currently working as a telecommunications manager in the Research Triangle, North Carolina.

Fifty-four percent of the immigrants who responded in this group had family in the U.S. before arriving in the States while 46% had none. Since many people fled Ethiopia without preparation or desire, some of those who were able to reach America knew no one, while others had family that would be able to support them. 41% of those who responded said that they lived with an Ethiopian family in America, in comparison to the 18% who said they lived with an American family upon arrival. Though a higher percentage of immigrants and refugees in this group were able to find people in the pre-existing Ethiopian community to take them in, 25% of lived without friends, family or a host.

¹¹² Yisehak Tsegaye, interview by author, digital recording, Durham, NC., 22 February 2007.

By 1985 Washington D.C. boasted the largest Ethiopian community in the United States numbering about 15,000 people.¹¹³ The Ethiopians who immigrated during this decade represented a more diverse picture of the Ethiopian people. Like the Educated Elite, a majority of the immigrants came from the Amhara tribe, constituting about 22% of the ethnic groups represented. Twenty-six percent of the respondents were multi-ethnic such as Amhara-Guragaye or Oromo-Tigray. And though the question specifically asked for the respondent's tribal they either did not answer the question (only 47 of the 62 responded) or, as 15% of the answers show, they did not want to identify with an ethnic group and viewed themselves as "Ethiopian." Due to the group's diverse ethnicity, however, some Ethiopians did not feel accepted within the forming Ethiopian community. The new immigrants were accepted into the homes of family members in cities such as Los Angeles, Washington D.C., New York, and many others.

In Los Angeles, as in many other growing Ethiopian communities in the U.S., Ethiopians rallied a common identity, through restaurants, community centers, and cultural gatherings. Reggae music was an additional way for Ethiopians to find their strength of culture in the U.S. Rastafarianism and the popularity of Bob Marley and Africa Unite tours strengthened the Ethiopian sense of community and the *Solomonic* and *Abyssinian Myths* in America. 41% of the Tireless Fleet identified entertainment as a way that they maintained their Ethiopian culture. Since some Reggae music is greatly influenced by the myths of Ethiopian history and the god-like view of Haile Selassie, the music brought a certain type of validity to the two Ethiopian

¹¹³ "Thousands of Ethiopians Form a Diverse Community." *New York Times*, 5 July, 1985, sec A, p 8. Database online. Available from LexisNexis.

myths in a culture that, in some ways, denied Ethiopians their right to express their culture on a day to day basis.

About 29% of the Tireless Fleet participated in Ethiopian gatherings on a weekly and monthly basis during the first five years of their arrival in America. Eleven percent participated two times a year and 11% participated in Ethiopian activities once a year. Weddings, sports organizations, and church attendance all tied the community together. One Ethiopian organization that brought all Ethiopians from all over the nation together was the Ethiopian Sports Federation in North America, which was started during this time period as well.¹¹⁴ The organization consisted of Ethiopians from Houston, Texas who decided to create a national soccer league with teams representing the largest Ethiopian communities in the nation. The first tournament was held in the city of Houston with the participation of four clubs: Washington DC, Dallas, Houston, and Atlanta on April 20, 1984.”¹¹⁵

Ethiopians came together to form lasting traditions within the communities all over the nation that gave room to the American culture that they slowly adapted. In September each year in the U.S. (the first month of the year in Ethiopia according to the Greek calendar) a community in Oakland celebrates one of Ethiopia’s largest holidays, *Timkat*. The Christian celebration, also known as Epiphany, is one that is celebrated in very few Christian countries and dates back a thousand years in Ethiopia’s history. In a procession that begins on the eve of *Timkat*, elaborately dressed *keteras* (priests) and *debteras* (deacons) along with the congregation, all dressed in

¹¹⁴ ESFNA, ESFNA: Ethiopian Sports Federation in Northern America [Internet]; available from <http://www.esfna.org/>; accessed 17 October 2006.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

white, carry a *tabot* symbolizing the Arc of the Covenant to a nearby river.¹¹⁶ This symbolic representation of Christ's baptism is celebrated in the United States by a gathering of Ethiopians in the area who play soccer games, eat typical food and celebrate their Ethiopian culture.

Weddings are another tradition that have become mixtures of American and Ethiopian cultures. Whereas ceremonies lasted for over a week in Ethiopia, with members of the community involved, the traditions for weddings in America differed greatly due to political, social and cultural complications. Since many Ethiopians were not able to receive citizenship, some paid American citizens to marry and divorce them in order to secure their status in America. Some Ethiopian-American weddings simply occurred in a court due to lack of finances and family members. Others, who were able to fund them, had elaborate traditional weddings or, in some cases, enjoyed the privilege of having part of the wedding in the U.S. and part in Ethiopia for their family back home.

Belu Kiflu, who met Simay Tadessa in the mid 1980's, at the Pentecostal of Los Angeles, had both a traditional American wedding as well as a traditional *melz*, or wedding reception, with her family members in Addis Ababa. Eight other Ethiopians came on the plane with Belu to Los Angeles in June 1981. Upon her arrival her cousin, Rakebe supported and guided her in assimilating to American culture and the educational system while she lived in an apartment with her cousins. "I didn't even know I had a guidance counselor," she explained when looking back on her initial college years. "Once I started the instructor would talk talk talk and I didn't understand...I was good at math, everything else I got F's."¹¹⁷ The process was difficult for her

¹¹⁶ Travel Max, Travel Max: Timkat Festival [Internet]; available from http://www.istc.org/sisp/index.htm?fx=event&event_id=19336; accessed 10 January 2006.

¹¹⁷ Belu Tadessa, interview by author, digital recording, Durham, NC., 10 January 2007.

initially, but soon she excelled in all of her courses in community college and later in nursing school. Though she was “willing to unlearn quickly what [she] came in with...to live like an American here” she was still connected to the Ethiopian community through the church she attended. The church “kept her in the loop” and she hopes that her two daughters will balance the values of the two countries and get “the best out of the two countries.”¹¹⁸ She currently works as a nurse in Signal Hill, California.

After leaving the war torn country they called home, many started their lives from scratch. The difficulties of their acculturation, in some respects, were eased by their host families. Whereas 55% had family in America when they first arrived and 45% did not, 16% lived with an American host family and 36% lived with an Ethiopian family. Due to the short time most immigrants lived in America prior to the Tireless Fleet’s arrival, both the host families and the new immigrants faced social, financial and educational struggles during their acclimation period. Whether they had family or not, members of this group came to a country in which they truly did not plan to live permanently, making it more difficult to assimilate and acclimate their lives to fit their host country.¹¹⁹

Shira Luft, in her study of the adjustment of Ethiopian refugees in the U.S., found that adjustment to low income and menial jobs was particularly difficult.¹²⁰ Comparing themselves to other refugee groups, especially the Asian population, some members of the Ethiopian immigrant group felt unsuccessful in regards to achieving the American Dream and *Success Myth*. Without

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Luft, *Ethiopians' Adjustment*, 92.

¹²⁰ Ibid.

true understanding of the struggles both communities faced, many Ethiopians went through a period of depression and self-pity resulting in lower achievements in school and a loss of hope in the dreams America once offered them. In each community, there are those who are considered successful in education or entrepreneurship and others who serve in other positions in society. It is the latter group, however, that some, including the host families, deemed to have fallen short of the American Dream.

This dream, though built on the idea of work ethic in its induction into American national character, was built on the idea of manual labor. As modernization continued, however, it has become one focused on the acquisition of degrees in higher education. Ethiopian refugees, along with other groups of immigrants, continued to strive to fulfill the ideal that they created for themselves. Luft explains that Levine attributes this lack of initiative to the Ethiopian immigrants' distaste for manual labor and their desire for economic self-sufficiency as well as a tendency towards severe depression.¹²¹ It seems, however, that there was more than simply a distaste for labor that caused Ethiopians to feel as though they were unable to succeed in America. Ethiopian refugees who entered the fledgling Ethiopian communities came from different tribal groups and socio-economic backgrounds. They were forced to decide which groups they would associate with and which they wouldn't while attempting to come to terms with the situation they fled in Ethiopia, a country many did not want to leave.

Though members of the Ethiopian community did feel stifled by their position in America, others attempted to use their status and educational opportunities to address the situation in Ethiopia. Clubs were organized on college campuses in order to discuss issues about

¹²¹ Ibid.

the Ethiopian situation. While going to school, students worked to support themselves as waitresses, janitors and parking attendants. Some had earned college degrees from Ethiopia but were forced to work in menial jobs or go to community colleges in America due to their refugee status and lack of knowledge of the American culture and language. Naturally, this unexpected reality caused some to become disillusioned by their position in America. In response, some decided to continue to work in manual labor jobs, while some finished their undergraduate studies.

Racial prejudice continued to play a larger role in Ethiopian and other non-American black immigrant communities as well. After creating a video project on the identity of African immigrants, Mary Ann Watson found that the issues surrounding African immigrant acculturation are based on the groups that the immigrant identifies with more than the individual's socio-economic status.¹²² She explains that ethnic identity "has been shown to be positively related to the ethnic density of a neighborhood and negatively related to the occupational and residential mobility of the subjects." Thus, though this can be applied to the Asian community as well, depending on which group the Ethiopian immigrant felt more connected to, black American, white American, African, Asian etc., a correlation between success in acculturation and, most likely, a rise in socio-economic status would be expected.¹²³

While 49% of this group of Ethiopians lived among white-Americans when they first entered the country, 30% lived among black-Americans, 30% among Africans, 10% amongst Asians, 7% among Hispanic. Of these 54% said they felt somewhat of a connection to the

¹²² Watson, Mary Ann. "Africans to America: The Unfolding of Identity", 3.

¹²³ Ibid.

African-American community, 17% felt strongly connected, and 25% said they felt no connection at all. In terms of mobility in jobs some mentioned a job ceiling, while others explained that they decided from an early point in their immigration experience to associate with certain Ethiopians instead of others in order to succeed. This is not to say that those who have succeeded, as Yisehak and Salem have, did not feel discrimination but it does show that, even in the Ethiopian community many times the neighborhood and group Ethiopians associated with determined their level of success in America. Providing for themselves and creating a positive support network required many hours of work. Despite the struggles, however Tormala and Deaux point out that African immigrants were likely to be hired for a job over an African-American applicant due to the employers' belief that immigrants were more competent and hard-working.¹²⁴ And though there was discrimination for their group, both ethnically and racially, in comparison to the black community, some non-African-American groups were given preference.

While refugees were still fleeing the socialist rule of Mengistu, a different calamity struck Ethiopia that caused thousands more Ethiopians to flee from northern areas in the Tigray region. The worst famine in the history of Ethiopia occurred in 1984, taking the lives of thousands and displacing many others. The photographs of the Ethiopian famine of 1984-1985 led to a major shift in the world's view of Africa and famine both ideologically and artistically. As the Holocaust caused many people to face the horrendous acts occurring in Western and Eastern Europe, the Ethiopian famine brought to people's attention the reality of human suffering en masse in Africa. Though many countries in Africa suffered from famines, people around the world had not been exposed to the realities of famine so graphically until Ethiopia's famine of

¹²⁴ Mahalingam, 137.

1984. In these photos, children, mothers, and masses of Ethiopians surrounded by a barb-wired fence in a refugee camp were portrayed as hopeless victims and perishing bodies.¹²⁵ In Makelle, an area in the northern Tigray region, and in surrounding areas, close to a million people, mostly children, died due to starvation.¹²⁶

In a desperate response to the famine, organizations all over the world moved in to help. Amnesty International and UNICEF worked tirelessly promoting awareness in newspapers and television ads. In D.C. by 1985, the community raised over \$50,000 to ease the suffering from the famine in Ethiopia.¹²⁷ Months after images such as these were placed in newspapers and magazines, concerts such as Live Aid in Europe and We Are the World in the U.S. created financial support and awareness of the famine in Ethiopia. The brochure for the Live Aid concert, which is now remembered as the “Day Rock and Roll Changed the Roll,” used these images to create awareness as well.¹²⁸ A picture of a guitar that has the continent of Africa as its body is located in the center of the brochure and an Ethiopia child with its back turned to the audience is in the bottom right hand corner.

Though many desired to help after being exposed to the atrocities that occurred in Ethiopia, they realized that there was only so much they could do. Of the 62 survey respondents, though 46% said they would want to return home an equal 46% said maybe they would and

¹²⁵ “Ethiopia 1984-1985” CBC News [Internet]; available from <http://www.cbc.ca/news/background/ethiopia/>; accessed 26 January 2007

¹²⁶ Marcus, *A History*, 207.

¹²⁷ “Thousands of Ethiopians Form a Diverse Community.” *New York Times*, 5 July, 1985, sec A, p 8. Database on-line. Available from LexisNexis.

¹²⁸ “Live Aid 1985: How it All Happened,” BBC [Internet]; available from <http://www.bbc.co.uk/music/thelive8event/liveaid/history.shtml>; accessed 12 February 2007.

maybe they would not. Looking back to a country that seemed to be falling to the influences of the Communist regime and losing the identity and dignity it once held, Ethiopian immigrants seemed to be less sure of returning to the land they once called home after experiencing the democracy and financial support America offered.¹²⁹ Although some Ethiopian refugees were able to come to America to fulfill their drive for education and political freedom, these few Ethiopians in America were able to change the dire circumstances of Ethiopians back home. Though many felt connected to Ethiopia through family ties, tradition, and history, after the famine and revolution, they were not capable, even with an education, of changing the circumstances that were portrayed on the news. Just as Americans' views of Ethiopia were changed by the situation portrayed in the media, Ethiopians' view of their country would continue to shift as well.

¹²⁹ Merera Gudina. *Ethiopia: Competing Ethnic Nationalisms and the Quest for Democracy, 1960-2000*, ([Addis Ababa?]: Shaker Pub, 2003), 103.

Ethnicity

1. *Identity with or membership in a particular racial, national, or cultural group and observance of that group's customs, beliefs, and language.*¹³⁰

Chapter 4

A Group Within A Group: 1986-1995

While the American media portrayed the Ethiopian political situation as devastated and hopeless, an intriguing aspect of Ethiopian culture was being highlighted on newspapers all over the country. The long-lasting relationship between the United States, Israel, and Ethiopia was becoming tangible in a mysterious way during the year 1984. While thousands of Ethiopians fled to Sudan and other countries to escape the famine in Ethiopia, one group amongst the masses, was singled out. The Israeli government conducted a top-secret airlift of the Ethiopian Jews, most of whom migrated from the northwestern region of Gondar, from a Sudanese refugee camp without the Ethiopian government's, or the world's, knowledge.

Alula Tzadik's songs, "The President" and "Sentahehu" were not merely an expression of anti-Derg sentiment during the 1980's nor were they renditions of his Ethiopian Jewish heritage, but they were interweavings of the "disparate strands of his life."¹³¹ Political activist and pop star musician, Alula Tzadik immigrated to the U.S. in 1991 after being imprisoned by

¹³⁰ Dictionary.com, The American Heritage New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy "ethnicity" [Internet]; available from <http://www.dictionary.reference.com/browse/ethnicity>; accessed 12 November 2006.

A note on the New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, Third Edition reads: Many minority groups in the United States maintain strong ethnic identity; especially in cities, immigrants are often attracted to ethnic communities established by people from their own country, communities in which many traditional cultural features are maintained. (See melting pot.)

¹³¹ Dragan, Oksana. "Ethiopian Jew Shares Music and Heritage in America." Voices of America. [Internet]; available from http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2004-11/2004-11-05_voa69.cfm?CFID=76888882&CFTOKEN=46578581; accessed Nov 5, 2004.

Mengistu's regime for his song "The President."¹³² His artistic style expresses his political, religious, and national heritage in a blend of hip-hop, reggae, and traditional Ethiopian music. It tells a story of a people marginalized by the larger Ethiopian population, by combining his Ethiopian heritage with the hardships he faced both in Ethiopia and in the U.S.

The group that was exported from Sudan and taken to Israel represented one of the many facets of Ethiopian culture that had been overlooked by the Ethiopian population. Many more existed. This group within a group and the political circumstances that surrounded them shed a new light on the way the *Solomonic* and *Foreign Devil Myths* played out in this immigrant group. Though Ethiopians had knowledge of the of the Falasha tribe, the lack of media and political attention given to the small minority group separated the myth from their reality. The circumstances surrounding both Ethiopian-Americans and Ethiopians illustrated the fact that both the U.S. and Ethiopian governments and members of the international community did not see all members of this group of people as equals.

As Ethiopians fled to neighboring countries in search of refuge from the famine and war, members of the Falasha tribe, who referred to themselves as *Beta Israel* (House of Israel) were secretly air-lifted from Sudan by the Israeli government.¹³³ Supported by Jewish groups in America, who pushed for the return of Jews to the Promised Land, the government decided that if the lift was uncovered by the international community it would not succeed.¹³⁴ Thus when the

¹³² Nashuva Band, Nashuva Band [Internet]; available from http://www.nashuva.com/band_07.html; accessed 23 February 2007.

¹³³ Doyle McManus, "U.S., Israel Put Secrecy Lid on Falasha Airlift." *Los Angeles Times*, 24 March 1985, sec. A, p. 1. Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times.

¹³⁴ "News in Brief" *Los Angeles Times*, 28 April 1978, sec. OC, no. 2. Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times.

media uncovered the secret operation, in which over 7,000 Falasha Jews had been transported from Sudan via 35 flights conducted under Belgian airlines, the operation came to an abrupt halt.¹³⁵ As a result, about 12,000 Falasha Jews, 4,000 of whom were reportedly in the “pipeline” of being transported, were left in the Sudanese refugee camps separated from their families and the larger Ethiopian Jewish community.¹³⁶

While this group of Ethiopians was transported to Israel with the help of the American and Israeli governments, the flow of Ethiopians to America began to wane. As the “black Jews” were largely transported to Israel by the government for both political and religious reasons, many other Ethiopians went through the rigorous immigration process individually and in families to make their way to the U.S. Between 1981 and 1991 over 18,000 Ethiopians came to the U.S. as permanent residents under the Refugee Acts and between 1991-1998, another 17,000 came.¹³⁷ Of the 96 people who responded to my survey in this group, about 38% came to the U.S. for political reasons whereas a majority, 46%, still came for educational reasons. Additionally, this group is the first to have a significant number, 13%, who came for economic reasons. This group, like the Tireless Fleet before them, included a much more diverse representation of the Ethiopian population than had the Educated Elite. Refugees from upper, middle and lower classes came to the U.S. due to the dire circumstances in Ethiopia.

¹³⁵ “Ethiopian Jews’ Airlift to Israel Told.” *Los Angeles Times*, 12 December, 1984, sec. B, p. 20. Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times.

¹³⁶ Powers, Charles T. “U.S. Evacuates Ethiopian Jews.” *Los Angeles Times*, 23 March 1985, sec. A, p. 1. Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times.

¹³⁷ Bureau of Census. U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. *Statistical Yearbook*. (December, 2002), pg. 1.

The international community's views of the airlifts were divided, just as they were concerning the refugee status of Ethiopians in the U.S. two years prior. While some attributed "Operation Moses" to the Israelis protection of Ethiopian Jews suffering from famine, editorials to the Los Angeles Times showed that some believed it should have remained a covert operation that protected "a persecuted people, prohibited from practicing their religion and barred from emigrating to a land where they would be free."¹³⁸ The reality was, however, that all religions, Christianity, Judaism and Islam as well as the pagan religions, were jeopardized under the Socialist regime. In some ways the Israeli government's actions and Mengistu's eventual acquiescence confirmed the reality of the *Solomonic Myth* by working to unite the *Beta Israel* with the Israeli community from which they had long been removed in Ethiopia.¹³⁹ Initially, however, the Ethiopian government along with leaders of Arab countries such as Libya and Iran protested the operation and deemed it "a gross interference" in Ethiopia's internal affairs.¹⁴⁰

The relationship between the Ethiopian and U.S. government was complex. Though U.S. relations with Ethiopia seem to have disintegrated after Mengistu's acceptance of funds from the Soviet Union, the U.S. government was not out of the international debate. When Soviet dollars waned, Mengistu hired a New York public relations firm, of which the CIA was also a client, in order to better Israeli and U.S. relations.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, along with Jewish-American

¹³⁸ Matthew Ross. "Letters to the Times." *Los Angeles Times*, 16 January 1985, sec. C, p. 4. Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times.

¹³⁹ The Ethiopian Jews were formally recognized as Jews under Israeli on April 10, 1975 after many years of rabbinical dispute and debate.

¹⁴⁰ Fisher, Dan. "Rescue of Ethiopian Jews Halted by Airline." *Los Angeles Times*, 7 January 1985, sec. A, p. 4. Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times.

¹⁴¹ Sorenson, 93.

organizations, the Reagan administration secretly supported the airlift financially and ideologically.¹⁴² In March 1985, when the national media exposed the CIA's assistance to the Israeli government the Reagan administration justified their secrecy by saying they wanted to protect the Sudanese and Ethiopian governments from being ridiculed internationally.¹⁴³

Though America's political and ideological support of the Israeli government in this instance cannot be attributed to one factor, there are a number that may have affected its decision to step in. One reason may have been, in accordance with the *City on a Hill Myth*, that it wanted to assist in the relief of as many refugees as possible and the Israeli operations gave them a means to do so. That reason, however, does not sound as plausible when viewed in light of the numbers of refugees that were allowed into the U.S. in comparison to other ethnic groups. Ideology may have been a reason as well. Officials declared that the situation in Ethiopia represented "the most savage spirit of man,"¹⁴⁴ consequently allowing them, under a moral mandate, to intervene against Mengistu's wishes. The U.S. government may have been attempting to save the Ethiopian Jews, who despite Mengistu's association with the Communist party, were a part of a country that once connected to the U.S. in ideology and religious values. Regardless of the reasons, the covert operations brought Ethiopian immigrants to the forefront of an international conversation.

The two groups of Ethiopian refugees, one traveling to Israel and the other to America, faced similar experiences. Despite dreams of reconciliation and unification with Israel, the *Beta*

¹⁴² Doyle McManus, "U.S., Israel Put Secrecy Lid on Falasha Airlift." *Los Angeles Times*, 24 March 1985, sec. A, p. 1. Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ David Lamb, "Military Partners: Russ, Cubans out in Open in Ethiopia." *Los Angeles Times*, 5 February 1978, p.1. Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times.

Israel were faced with unexpected realities of racism and poverty in a land that had deep symbolic and religious roots to their identity. Like the 18,000 refugees who traveled to America between 1981-1990, the 12,000 black Jews who immigrated to Israel entered a country in which they were strangers: an unknown group within a group. With the help of the U.S. government and international Jewish and Christian organizations ¹⁴⁵ many members of this “lost tribe” were able to come to the United States, as well. As Tzadik portrays in his music, the immigrants to both the United States and Israel were forced to reinvent their identity in order to assimilate in a country that claimed to open its arms wide to their arrival. A group that was “facing serious problems,” including financial upset and racial discrimination, the *Beta Israel* immigrants continued to overcome obstacles as did their Ethiopian counterparts in the United States.

Genet Kebede, the second youngest sister of the eight siblings in the Kebede family, walked 15 days at the age of 19 to the Sudanese border of northwestern Ethiopia in 1988. She left her nursing school in Jima and her unsuspecting family not out of fear of persecution but in search of an adventure and to get to America easy, by saying she was a refugee. “We were sleeping outside with the animals, and we were scared... I thought I was going to die.”¹⁴⁶ Many young people in the country walked to Sudan and many would die along the way due to starvation, dehydration, or political association. “We wanted to come to America, that’s why we escaped...we don’t know nothing about no politics... There were a lot [of military men who opposed Mengistu] in the bush and they said ‘Are you coming for America or you escape to help

¹⁴⁵ Debra Cohen, “Rabbi Pledges Christian funds to aid Ethiopian Jews” *Jewish News of Greater Phoenix*, 12 February 1999.

¹⁴⁶ Genet Kebede, interview by author, digital recording, Durham, NC., 2 March 2007.

us? I said ‘No, I’m coming for America...and we came to Sudan and I love Sudan.’¹⁴⁷ In the midst of the Sudanese and Ethiopian population Genet felt free to be who she was while taking on the customs of the country. Since the Iraq-Iran war ensued until 1988 she stayed there for four years and formed strong bonds to the other Ethiopians in the city as well as the Sudanese.

By the time she was able to come America, she cried all the way to Los Angeles. “When here I was crying, I said I wanted to go back to Sudan. There is nothing to worry about. You just eat and drink and party...When I came here I was like sit home. I was like this is all? I want to go back.” Her first job in America was at her sister’s Italian café. After working as a visiting home nurse she became a hairdresser-assistant. “I washed Schwarzenegger’s hair” she recalled “He only tipped me \$10.” Eventually she moved to Las Vegas, Nevada and in 2003 moved back to Los Angeles to live with her sister.

Mengistu’s creation of the 1987 constitution of Ethiopia resulted in a shift in political agenda regarding the various ethnic groups. In an attempt to reinvent his party and ruling style, Mengistu relinquished his role as the socialist dictator of the Derg and took on the roles of Commander-in-Chief of the Revolutionary Armed Forces, First General Secretary of the Workers Party, and the first President of the People’s Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (PDRE), the first republic Ethiopia had ever known.¹⁴⁸ In an attempt to subvert all activity that could be considered “counter-revolutionary” Eritrean, Tigrayan, Oromo and Western Somalia ethnic liberation movements were faced with military action.¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, the PDRE divided the

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Gudina, 81.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid., 83.

country into 29 regions only granting autonomous status to Eritrea, Tigray, Asab, and Dire-Dawa and in an attempt to hold elections, military officials of the party were appointed to offices while civilians were “told to vote for party officials residing in Addis Ababa whom they never heard of.”¹⁵⁰

The reformed political direction of Ethiopia affected this immigrant group’s view of the ethnic differences as well. In an attempt to renounce what some referred to as a political means to divide the country, 15% of this group by-passed the tribe question by claiming to be Ethiopian. Though by this period in the formation of the Ethiopian-American community thousands of Ethiopians lived in cities all across the nation, each had a larger majority of certain tribes. In Las Vegas, for example, Genet explained that a large majority of Ethiopians came from the Gojam region, a largely Amhara based region, where as those in Los Angeles were likely to come from the cities. 50% of this group came from the Amhara tribe, 20% came from a multi-ethnic background and 15% only responded they came from Ethiopia. Many ethnic groups were represented in this group, while 50% of the group claimed to be of Amhara descent, 5% from the Oromo group, 4% from Gurage, 3% Tigrinya, 2% Gojam, while 20% of the respondents claimed to be of mixed ethnicity.

This decade’s groups of immigrants, including the Ethiopian Jews in Israel, were a group within a group that identified with distinct cultures and ethnic backgrounds. Many had to form a community with other tribes in America in order to create a place like their home. Though it was common for Ethiopians back home to live in small communities that were dominated by certain ethnic groups, the reality of living so close to different groups was something they did not expect

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

to face in America. When host families set them up with schools and independent living arrangements, some found it difficult to live among members of different Ethiopian tribes.¹⁵¹ The differences between ethnic groups that had been apparent in Ethiopia did not make it easier to assimilate in the U.S. but it created another way in which some individuals felt isolated and alone during their first years. Though some did live among groups that had similar backgrounds in Ethiopia, others had qualms about the ethnic relationships and tensions that existed in Ethiopia.

In spite of ethnic differences, the country's collective larger history and commonalities of culture worked to unite new immigrants and refugees with the growing diverse population. A full 82% of this group said that it was very important for them to maintain their Ethiopian culture while 17% said it was somewhat important. Despite the fact that people from this group mentioned an affinity for their culture, their responses to their perspective on the Ethiopian-American culture indicated the diversity in opinion of what this growing community was beginning to represent. Faced with the reality of being Africans in a culture of multi-faceted communities, many were additionally included in the long-standing tensions between black and white Americans. In these instances, the myths of their culture seemed to continue to help them remain connected to their Ethiopian identity.

Operations Moses and Joshua of 1984 and 1985 and the later Operation Solomon of 1991 were obvious indications that both Israel and America were involved in Ethiopia.¹⁵² Three out of

¹⁵¹ Luft, *Ethiopians' Adjustment*, 98.

¹⁵² Charles T. Powers, "U.S. Evacuates Ethiopian Jews." *Los Angeles Times*, 23 March 1985, sec. A, p. 1. Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times.

four newspapers in Ethiopia are in English,¹⁵³ and therefore accessible to the educated, with a population with a 42% literacy rate and a largely agricultural economy, it is not surprising how little the respondents knew about the connection.¹⁵⁴ Since the Falashas were one of the most widely isolated groups in Ethiopian society, despite the news coverage of the Ethiopian Jews' airlift and their community in the Gondar region, Ethiopian-Americans from this period believed they had no connection to the Jewish culture. The more abstract connection to the Jewish culture was through the historical ties to the Solomonic throne than to the actual community.

This group challenged the belief that the Ethiopian culture was solely based on a Jewish ancestry. Only 15% of this group indicated that Ethiopian culture is strongly connected to the Jewish culture; 35% believe it is somewhat connected. Fifty percent, on the other hand, responded that there is no connection at all. As mentioned earlier, the *Solomonic Myth* is heavily based on the belief that Ethiopia comes from a rich culture of war and isolation mainly due to their ties to Christianity and their historic connection to Israel. The Ethiopian-American group's reality, however, seems to be less based on the realities of their country's history or master narrative, and more on their experiences as Ethiopians in the United States.

Though differences in both ethnic and religious identity existed, churches, synagogues, and mosques in America served to help build the Ethiopian-American community. Though no Ethiopian Jews were represented in the surveys, a small number did immigrate to the U.S. Although the Beta Israel population in America was small compared to the number of Christian

¹⁵³ "Country Profile: Ethiopia," BBC [Internet]; available from http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country_profiles/1072164.stm; accessed 3 November 2006.

¹⁵⁴ "Ethiopia" The World Factbook [Internet]; available from <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/et.html>; accessed 3 November 2006.

Ethiopians, Ethiopian synagogues as well as churches flourished in America by the arrival of the third wave of immigrants. Dozens of churches filled the cities inhabited by Ethiopian immigrants. About 98% of the respondents indicated that they ascribed to Christianity, while 3% to the Islamic faith and 8 % to either another form of religion or none at all. In multiple surveys, the term Christian rather than Christian-Orthodox was circled in order to clarify the difference between two faiths; churches in America demonstrated those differences as well. St. Mary's Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Los Angeles, Washington D.C., and Phoenix, as well as the Ethiopian Evangelical in Washington D.C. all mirror the diversity and growth of the Ethiopian community.

Churches as well as U.S. government-funded Ethiopian organizations and private businesses served to strengthen the Ethiopian community. The religious institutions created a net for Ethiopian immigrants in the major Ethiopian communities from Chicago to Houston, Minneapolis to Washington D.C., and Los Angeles to Philadelphia. In addition, churches provided both English-language classes for those who recently immigrated and Amharic classes for second-generation immigrants.¹⁵⁵ Other organizations, such as the Ethiopian Community Association in Los Angeles, helped the immigration process in America while working to help the Ethiopian community abroad.¹⁵⁶

Families were a vital part of the Ethiopian-American assimilation process of this group. They provided a strong social support and financial network for those who recently entered the

¹⁵⁵ Elizabeth Chacko, "Identity and Assimilation Among Young Ethiopian Immigrants In Metropolitan Washington." *Geographical Review* 93, no. 4 (October 2003): 497

¹⁵⁶ Ethiopian Community Association [Internet]; available from <http://www.geocities.com/ecala2000/>; accessed 3 March 2007.

country. 63% of this group had family who lived in America already and 37% did not. The places they stayed during their years adjusting mirrored this fact, since 60% stayed with an Ethiopian family and 38% said they moved to the city they currently lived in because of their family. Only 4% of this group lived with an American family. 9% lived with friends and 25% said they didn't stay with a host family.

Tsadique Woldemariam, born to a family of four siblings, went to a military school for two and a half years after his primary school in Nazret elementary. After working as a soldier under Haile Selassie's military he decided to go to Russia for five years to earn a degree in journalism. Upon his return to Ethiopia, the government forbade him to work in that field. Prior to coming to America, he traveled to other countries. In 1994, he stayed with his niece, Rakebe, in Los Angeles, CA for a year prior to his wife and his three sons' arrival from Ethiopia. He worked as a taxi cab driver in Las Vegas, and now owns a liquor store in Denver, Colorado where he works six days a week, 16 hours a day. "The difference is the lifestyle. You know America is a great country...It's different than Ethiopia. You have all the freedom and all the right... If you respect the law and the rules you can live here freely. My children, now, they go to school and they grown up... Ethiopia is a poor country, it's really hard to go to college."¹⁵⁷

Depending on where they moved and the socio-economic status of their families, some Ethiopians were able to find success in the American middle-class while others had a more difficult time. Tsadique and his family had a slight decline in socio-economic status. Due to his connection with family, which had already risen to the middle class, and the communities in which he chose to live, he was able to succeed in America. In this group 15% were upper class

¹⁵⁷ Tsadique Woldemariam, interview by author, digital recording, Durham, NC., 22 February 2007.

citizens in Ethiopia while only 4% were upper class in America. The middle class declined only a bit with 72% in Ethiopia and 63% in America. The lower-class, however, had the largest shift with 11% of the respondents in that category in Ethiopia and 32% in America. Some worked against this by creating a borrowing and lending system amongst family members, friends, and social groups called *iqob*. Monthly each member puts an equal amount into the money pot and one member is chosen each month to get the lump sum, depending on need.

Many in this group viewed themselves as a separate group from the African-Americans as well. As in findings of Tormala and Deaux, the first-generation Ethiopian immigrants felt more related to their cultures in Ethiopia than to the racial role many were placed into in their new home.¹⁵⁸ One of those surveyed in this Group within a Group responded that he felt the members of the Ethiopian community were “passionate like African-Americans [and] principled like Caucasians.”¹⁵⁹ Only 7% of this wave of immigrants believed that they had anything in common with the African-American community. Fifty-five percent said they believed they had some things in common, “stating skin color.” While 36% believed they had nothing at all in common with the African-American community: “We came from different culture and community.”¹⁶⁰

Most of this group’s belief that they had some things in common with the African-American community could be seen on a larger social scale as well. By the mid 1980’s thousands of illegal immigrants entered and appropriated jobs in menial services. In The Impact of

¹⁵⁸ Mahalingam, 137.

¹⁵⁹ Sey., Sol. 1986-1995 surveys

¹⁶⁰ Getahun, Germew. 1986-1995 surveys.

Immigration on African-Americans, Steven Shulman compiles various articles and statistics showing the ways in which immigration has affected the social and economic status of African-Americans. Public sentiment shown in newspapers also mirrored this perspective. In a Los Angeles Times article in 1980, Labor of Secretary F. Ray Marshall described the influx of illegal immigrants to the U.S. as something that was “sowing the seeds of a serious future civil-rights struggle.”¹⁶¹ African-Americans making up a majority of the lower class at that point in history were affected greatly by the influx of African immigrants.

Their connection with the African-American community depended on their location, too. In April 29, 1992 Los Angeles, had a major uprising caused by the tensions between the L.A. Police Department and members of the African-American population, that affected both Ethiopian and African-American owned businesses. In the L.A. riots, businesses, gas stations, and shops were burned, looted, and vandalized while the world watched the racial tensions of the community unfold.¹⁶² Fairfax, a street that holds the most Ethiopian shops and restaurants in the Los Angeles areas, was one of the streets that was largely hit by this riot. Though it was part of the city’s largest racial riot, it now bears the street sign “Little Ethiopia”.¹⁶³ As Tzadik pointed out, his race was more prevalent in the U.S. than his faith had been in Ethiopia. “As a Jew, [I had no trouble fitting in], because you know nobody could see my faith, but everybody could see my

¹⁶¹ Raspberry, William. “Illegal Aliens Compete with Blacks for Jobs.” *Los Angeles Times*, 18 August 1980, sec. C, no. 9. Database on-line. Available from ProQuest Historical Newspapers Los Angeles Times.

¹⁶² Gayle Pollard-Terry, “To Fairfax and on to Ethiopia,” *Los Angeles Times* [Internet] available from www.latimes.com, accessed 3 March 2007.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

face. So you know, sure, in America there's this black and white thing, you have to accept that, there's a differentiation."¹⁶⁴

Though Ethiopians tended to live in ethnically diverse neighborhoods and not in solely Ethiopian communities, members of both the younger and older Ethiopian immigrant population held fast to their relationship to their countrymen within these communities by having conversations at home in both Amharic and English, maintaining the closest friendships with Ethiopian individuals, and greeting other Ethiopians with a traditional kiss on the cheek when passing on the street.¹⁶⁵ Another way in which they maintained their Ethiopian culture was through visiting the country. Of the respondents, 27% had already visited Ethiopia one time, 38% had visited two to five times, and 8% had visited more than five times. Though many were becoming socially assimilated to the U.S. culture, however, a majority was not ready to move back to Ethiopia. Forty-seven percent of this group said they wanted to return to Ethiopia, 46% said they may want to, and only 7% of this group said they would not want to return.

In 1991 the tides of Ethiopia's political and social structure changed once more upon the overthrow of Mengistu's regime by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). Meles Zenawi was given political power over the EPRDF and in an attempt to establish democratic customs was officially elected Prime Minister of Ethiopia in 1995. Within the new order, the government desired to create "a federal multi-party system of government based on ethnicity according to language" in which each group would be represented. Under the

¹⁶⁴ Oksana Dragan, "Ethiopian Jew Shares Music and Heritage in America." *Voices of America*. [Internet]; available from http://www.voanews.com/english/archive/2004-11/2004-11-05_voa69.cfm?CFID=76888882&CFTOKEN=46578581; accessed Nov 5, 2004.

¹⁶⁵ Elizabeth Chacko, "Identity and Assimilation Among Young Ethiopian Immigrants In Metropolitan Washington." *Geographical Review* 93, no. 4 (October 2003): 498.

new constitution, created in 1994, Ethiopia proclaimed itself to be a “nation of nations” which would be broken up into nine states based on “the settlement patterns, identity, language and consent of the people concerned.” Two members of each of the nine ethnic-based states would be represented in the newly formed parliament.¹⁶⁶

Though the Ethiopian flag under Meles Zenawi was changed to symbolize the hopeful unity of ethnic groups in Ethiopia, he was unable to keep the literal and metaphorical skeletons of the past from reemerging during his rule. In 1992, a year after EPRDF regained power, the bones of the slain Haile Selassie were found buried in the imperial palace.¹⁶⁷ They would not be reburied ceremonially until five years later. His ironic re-emergence seemed to symbolize a break from the long-standing belief that the Ethiopian national identity and the Amhara tribe was connected to the ancient *Solomonic Myth*.

¹⁶⁶ Marcus, *A History*, 242.

¹⁶⁷ “Country Profile: Ethiopia,” BBC, 2 March 2007, available from http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country_profiles/1072164.stm, Internet: accessed 3 November 2006.

Globalization

1. *to extend to other or all parts of the globe; make worldwide.*¹⁶⁸

Chapter 5**The Dreamers: 1996-present**

Every time Bill Murray entered his car in the 2005 comedy drama Broken Flowers, the version in a minor key of “Song for My Father” played on the radio. This song, recorded by the Ethiopiques, was part of a compilation of well-known Ethiopian and Eritrean singers and musicians recorded in different periods of Ethiopia’s musical history featuring popular Ethiopian musicians from Kiflu Gessese to Alemayehu Eshete. By the late 1990’s Ethiopia’s exports were readily available in the world market. Asian and European countries took the lead in establishing businesses in Ethiopia to provide imported goods and in turn, Ethiopia exported coffee beans and flowers abroad, especially to the US. With globalization, Ethiopian-American communities have access to many more aspects of the Ethiopian culture than when the first immigrants arrived in the United States over four decades ago.

By 2000, the legalized Ethiopian-American immigrant population had grown to over 65,000.¹⁶⁹ Just as the globalization of cultures, foods, technology and media was increasing, a diverse group of Ethiopians was entering the U.S. under new immigration laws. Ethiopians who came to the U.S. during this period viewed both Ethiopia and America differently than those who had preceded them. Though many dreamed of the opportunity that awaited them, looking to family members and other Ethiopian-Americans who lived in the States, the reality that they

¹⁶⁸ Dictionary.com, “globalization.” [Internet]; available from <http://www.dictionary.reference.com/browse/globalization>; accessed 13 November 2006.

¹⁶⁹ Bureau of Census. U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service. *Statistical Yearbook*. (December, 2002), pg. 1

faced was not quite what they expected. It was during this time period, conversely, that Ethiopians in America began to look back to help create a better world for those who lived in their home country while making concrete strides to fulfill their dreams in America. The Dreamers who came to America represented a group that reminded the Ethiopian-American community of the changes that had occurred in Ethiopia, while pointing out the discrepancies in the dreams and realities of the Ethiopian experience in America.

Meles Zenawi's ascent to power brought up ethnic tensions with Eritrea that had not been resolved since Selassie's reoccupation of the country in the 1960's. The war in 1998-1999 led to land and boundary clashes though Ethiopia and Eritrea's disputed control had been settled in a 1978 agreement.¹⁷⁰ The Eritrean war of 1998-1999 had a relatively unannounced beginning. After Eritrea's declaration of independence from Ethiopian rule in 1991, the country attempted to rebuild its economy and solidify its territorial borders by creating its own currency, the *nakfa*, to replace the Ethiopian *birr*, demanding a Joint Border Commission to be created between the two countries.¹⁷¹

Eritrean president Isayas Afeworki and Meles Zenawi worked together to keep the Commission until May 1998, when battles developed into a full-blown war.¹⁷² Farm disputes ensued over the border of farmland in the Afar region, which had, and continues to have, members of the same tribe on different sides of the "de facto international frontier."¹⁷³ The

¹⁷⁰ "Country Profile: Ethiopia," BBC [Internet] available from http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country_profiles/1072164.stm; accessed 3 November 2006.

¹⁷¹ Marcus, *A History*, 251.

¹⁷² Ibid, 252.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 250.

relations between Ethiopians and Eritreans became even more tense and resulted in thousands of Ethiopian migrant laborers in Asmera, Jibuti and Eritrea being displaced.¹⁷⁴ Eritrean bombs fell in the northern regions of Ethiopia, killing 154 people, and making a strong political statement to the Ethiopian government.¹⁷⁵ The war ended in 1999, and the land dispute was settled with the OAU summit in Algiers in 1999.¹⁷⁶ A year later, Haile Selassie was buried in Addis Ababa's Trinity Cathedral, laying to rest the unresolved death of the country's most widely acclaimed emperor and the idea of a return to monarchical rule.¹⁷⁷

The Dreamers had a long time before let go of the hope of the return of the monarchy. Some of them had grown up in cities and towns during the time of Mengistu, and did not have the same attachment to the "old" Ethiopia as some Ethiopian-Americans did. With the Eritrean war being a major focus of the new government and the presence of family members all around the world, this group had different incentives to leave the country. Some 21% of the 115 Ethiopian immigrants who came during this period said they came for political reasons, while 32% said they came for educational opportunities and 10% for economic reasons. Another 40%, said they came for other reasons, which included reuniting with family and the new U.S. immigration program, the Diversity Visa Program (DV).

The immigration policies of the U.S. both opened and tightened the immigration flow of Dreamers within this decade. From 1999 to 2000 a little over 400 Ethiopians were allowed into

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., 255.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 258.

¹⁷⁷ "Country Profile: Ethiopia," BBC [Internet] available from http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country_profiles/1072164.stm; accessed 3 November 2006.

the country as refugees under the Refugee Acts.¹⁷⁸ The DV program allotted quotas of immigrants from different countries. Prior to the War on Terror, the Diversity Visa program was introduced to allow people from foreign countries to enter the U.S. by a randomized draw rather than by the long process of immigration paperwork. After the war, however, immigration policies grew more restrictive.

After the U.S. declared a national War on Terror in September 2001, the government created a heightened sense of national security in airports, public transportation, and public spaces all over the nation. This sense of security affected not only the citizens of the United States, but non-U.S. citizens as well. In an attempt to deter foreign attacks, in secret American detention camps injustices ensued that put to question the reality of America's *City on a Hill Myth* and its dedication to democracy. After September 11, 2001 the country's national character concerning views on democracy, terror, and foreigners was changed dramatically.

The treatment of foreigners in illegal prisons was a testimony to the fact that Americans had jeopardized their stance on democracy, as well. According to political scientist Anthony Lewis, "the Framers of the Constitution intended to clothe the President with the war powers of a king, conflicts with the near universal understanding of the constitutional text, with its careful balancing of executive, legislative and judicial power."¹⁷⁹ The results of American detainment camps proved that the hard law limiting the power of the executive branch of the U.S. was becoming soft in the face of war. Though a Combatant tribunal was created to oversee detainment cases and their legality, there was and continues to be a break between the reality and

¹⁷⁸ "Immigrants Admitted as Permanent Residents Under Refugee Acts by Country of Birth: 1981 to 2000," U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Services, Statistical Yearbook, annual. Database on-line. Available from LexisNexis.

¹⁷⁹ Anthony Lewis, "The Torture Administration," *The Nation* 26 December 2005 Issue

the myths, as they were, created by the law. A report about the Guantanamo Bay prisons released November 16, 2006 analyzed 393 out of 558 hearings.¹⁸⁰ Discrepancies between the rights guaranteed war prisoners and the reality of the prisons were evident. Though the Defense Department established a lawful procedure in the tribunals, many of the proceedings proved to be unlawful according to the law set by the U.S. government.¹⁸¹ In 96% of the cases the government did not produce any documentary evidence to the detainee prior to the hearing. Though men from Iraq, Iran and other Middle Eastern countries were tried under the American law, they were denied rights under these same laws. Similar to the Cold War era, America's stance created an ideological schism internationally between countries in support of Democracy and those "in support of" Terrorism.

Despite the unstable conditions yet improving political situations of the country, Ethiopia remained an important player in the Horn of Africa and became a model for democracy in Africa. U.S. relations with Ethiopia improved substantially after Meles Zenawi, desiring to declare his stance against terror, chose to reestablish the country's alliance with America. This attempt did not go unnoticed by Great Britain and the United States. Recent Ethiopian politics has seen a gradual shift towards adaptation of Western beliefs and customs while still remaining rooted in the diverse and rich culture of the ancient land.

Ironically, though the intentions of the leaders were initially to protect the nation, Zenawi's stance on democracy, like President Bush's, proved to be lacking in some areas. After

¹⁸⁰ Mark Denbeaux and J.W. Denbeaux, "NO-HEARING HEARINGS - CSRT: The Modern Habeas Corpus?" (December 2006). Seton Hall Public Law Research Paper No. 951245 Available from <http://ssrn.com/abstract=951245>.

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

10 years of Zenawi and EPRDF ruling the Ethiopian parliament, a democratic election was held in the summer of 2005 to establish democracy in Ethiopia. As people came out to vote and watch the first democratic elections in the center of Addis Ababa, terror arose behind the scenes. Reports soon claimed that election was staged and the citizens of Ethiopia began to protest.¹⁸² Members of opposing political parties, journalists, and some Ethiopian-Americans who posed a threat to Zenawi's rules of democracy were detained in concentration camps or murdered.¹⁸³ A country report on Ethiopia done by the State Department stated that "serious human rights abuses occurred" after the May elections, though the elections themselves were democratic. Citing abuses such as "limitation on citizens' right to change their government, unlawful killings, including alleged political killings, and beating...[and] detention of thousands without charge, and lengthy pretrial detention" the State Department made a clear public stance against the newly elected Ethiopian parliament.¹⁸⁴

Although State Department correspondents shunned the Ethiopian government for its acts of violence they were quick to use camps in Ethiopia as locations for illegal torture. According to the International Herald Tribune report released in April 2007, the U.S. government has locations for detainment camps to fight the War on Terror in Ethiopia, as well.¹⁸⁵ John Sifton, a Human Rights Watch expert on counter-terrorism, went further. He said in an e-mail that the

¹⁸² "Country Profile: Ethiopia," BBC [Internet] available from http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country_profiles/1072164.stm; accessed 3 November 2006.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ "Swedish Teenager Held in Ethiopia says she was Detained in U.S. -led Operation," International Herald Tribune: Europe [Internet]; available from <http://www.ihf.com/articles/ap/2007/04/13/europe/EU-GEN-Sweden-Ethiopia-Terrorism.php>; accessed 13 April 2007.

United States has acted as "ringleader" in what he labeled a "decentralized, outsourced Guantanamo."¹⁸⁶ Though the EPRDF still had signs of civil unrest it did not demonstrate the signs of terror and persecution of the previous regime in the international eye. The country, however, still suffered from extreme poverty. In 2006, in a morbid symbolic foreshadowing of the decline of the *Solomonic Myth* and the regal Lion of Judah that symbolized it, workers in the Ethiopian Lion Zoo in Addis Ababa, started by Haile Selassie fifty-seven years ago, were forced to poison and sale the rare Abyssinian lions due to the rise of poverty in the country.¹⁸⁷

Marta came to the United States from Germany in 2003. She entered with a 3 months visa and came to live with her family in Los Angeles, CA. Having enjoyed a life of gradual upward mobility in Germany, living in an apartment and creating a stable life for herself, she decided to come to America for "a better life... for education its easier over here but then I found out its not true. Because everything I found didn't come to pass."¹⁸⁸ Due to her status in both Germany and the U.S. she was unable to receive a public education. On a bus trip to D.C. to get her one-week expired visa renewed, the American immigration services in Texas confiscated her passport, arrested her, and eventually sent her back to California by plane. Upon her return to L.A., she was hard pressed to find help within the Ethiopian community. "First when I called...

¹⁸⁶ Anthony Mitchell, "Post details: Ethiopia – U.S. Agents Visit Ethiopian Secret Jails." [Internet]; available from http://nazret.com/blog/index.php?title=u_s_agents_visit_ethiopian_secret_jails&more=1&c=1&tb=1&pb=1; accessed 4 April 2007.

¹⁸⁷ Amber Henshaw, "Rare Zoo Lion Cubs Poisoned," BBC [Internet]; available from <http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/6169742.stm>; accessed 13 April 2007.

¹⁸⁸ Marta Sebele, interview by author, digital recording, Durham, NC., 22 March 2007.

the Ethiopian community center in L.A...they did nothing.”¹⁸⁹ She currently works as a nanny for an Ethiopian family in Los Angeles, California.

Many Ethiopian immigrants in America had to come to terms with the reality that the tireless effort to succeed was the American way. The lives of those who became illegal refugees and immigrants who did not have citizenship or a green card placed a different kind of glass ceiling above them concerning their success in America. Despite their hope to gain a better life in the States, those who were hindered by their illegal status from going to school had to work in menial jobs to make a living. Eighteen percent of the Dreamers said they came from the upper class in Ethiopia, 73% from the middle and 9% from the lower class. Upon their arrival in America, the downward socio-economic spiral affected the lives of many Ethiopians in America. In America this groups responded that 4% remained in the upper class, 68% in the middle class, and 29% in the lower class. Two years later the United States faced a war of its own.

Though Marta’s complaints about the Ethiopian community’s interest in her social life rather than her immigrant status may have been well-founded, social life and church functions were not the only things the Ethiopian community did once they entered the U.S. Compared to the Ethiopian culture of a slower-paced lifestyle filled with vast open fields of rural land, roasting coffee beans in the home, and greetings of *Egsabier Mesken* and *Getayibarchish* on the streets and in the cafes of Addis Ababa, the American lifestyle was hectic and demanding. Though some aspects of Ethiopia were reproduced in Ethiopian-American communities, the Dreamers, like each wave of immigrants, did not cease to look back to the old lifestyle of Ethiopia for encouragement and hope. Now Ethiopians drank their Sidamo coffee drinks from

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

Starbucks's coffee while filling out applications for jobs all over the community. Twenty-eight percent of the Dreamers said they maintained their Ethiopian culture through entertainment while 52% did it by maintaining the language, 68% through church, and 18% through sports.

In more ways than one, however, America seemed to be merging the countries' cultures together. When one picks up a drink, however, not many think back to the Ethiopian government or the farm workers in the southern part of Ethiopia, but it is no coincidence that the word *kaffa* comes from the Kaffir region of Ethiopia. Coffee has received its name from Ethiopia, the birthplace of the coffee bean, in the Kaffir region of Ethiopia.¹⁹⁰ The Ethiopian government supported by Oxfam International, has demanded the copyright of Starbucks trademark coffees such as Sidamo and Harar that were made famous by the franchise. Both the government and Oxfam claim that Starbucks is denying the 78,000 farm workers of the Oromia region fair compensation, which may bolster Ethiopia's coffee revenues to about \$88 million.¹⁹¹ In defense of the chain's block of Ethiopia's trademark rights within the National Coffee Association,¹⁹² Starbucks' representative Jo Sorenson said in an ABC news article that "the trademark application is not based upon sound economic advice and the proposal as it stands would hurt Ethiopian coffee farmers economically." With the full page spread with "All Coffee is Local" in large green text in the NY Times that clarifies that "...in Africa, Starbucks has a long history of

¹⁹⁰ J. A Rogers, *100 Amazing Facts About the Negro: With Complete Proof: a Short Cut to the World History of the Negro*, (St. Petersburg, FL: H.M. Rogers, 1995), 11.

¹⁹¹ Martin Seemungal, "Starbucks and Ethiopia Make bad Blend" ABC News [Internet]; available from, <http://abcnews.go.com/International/story?id=2608013&page=1>; accessed 1 February 2007.

¹⁹² "Country Profile: Ethiopia," BBC [Internet] available from http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/country_profiles/1072164.stm; accessed 3 November 2006.

paying premium prices for the coffee” they buy, it seems that the chain has understood the new trend of fair trade and global awareness.

Though the government and international organizations vouched for the rights of Ethiopian farm workers, some Ethiopians desired to tell “the real story behind the Ethiopian regime vs. Starbucks brawl.”¹⁹³ In The Ethiopian Review, one of the dozens of Ethiopian newspapers and blogspots online, one writer accuses not Starbucks, but “the brutal dictatorship of Meles Zenawi” to be the real threat to Ethiopians. From 1996 to the present Meles Zenawi has held the prime ministerial position in the Ethiopian parliament. Some Ethiopians, however, view him and the Parliament he leads as “one of the most corrupt and murderous governments in the world.”¹⁹⁴

Just as the wave of immigrants before them, the Dreamers had to decide which part of the Ethiopian community they would associate with. In this decade, though, the newcomers had a much larger and diverse community to choose from. 7% of the Dreamers lived with an American host family while 54% lived with Ethiopian families. And though there existed a large Ethiopian community all across the nation, 27% lived alone. Their reasons for moving to the cities they currently lived in were diverse. While 24% moved because of family, 21% because of a job, and 22% because of education, only 7% said they moved to be closer to the Ethiopian community.

Respondents from this group arrived in cities such as Oakland, Dallas, Philadelphia, San Diego, San Jose, and Las Vegas and 67% of them had family in the States upon their arrival. By 1996, the Ethiopian community had grown to include taxi drivers, lawyers, restaurant owners,

¹⁹³ “The Real Story Behind the Ethiopian Regime vs. Starbucks brawl” Ethiopian Review [Internet]; available from http://www.ethrev.com/2006/nov/11212006_oxfam_vs_starbucks.html; accessed 4 January 2007.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

entrepreneurs, nurses, doctors, government officials and a plethora of other professions, offering the Dreamers resources in many fields. While 81% of this group said it was very important to maintain their Ethiopian culture, 14% said it was somewhat important and 5% said it wasn't important. The complexities of a community are expressed in the reality of different layers in its structure, Each member of the Ethiopian-community was not and will not be able to fit in all aspects of the community; each individual plays a unique role. Some will advocate a political cause, while others network, work as public servants or educate.

The internet plays a very large role in connecting the different niches of the Ethiopian-American community. In addition to voicing opinions on the current events of their country, the Ethiopian websites were used to create a cyber community that crossed cultural and physical barriers, uniting Ethiopians in America, to Ethiopians nation and worldwide. Ethiopian Yellow Pages.com, established in 2005, which includes Ethiopian communities in Europe, the U.S. and Ethiopia, posts listings of businesses, restaurants, professionals, and churches to keep the larger community in touch. Thousands of Ethiopian-American youth use blogspots community networks such as Habesha.net, or Facebook groups such as I Rep Ethiopia and Students against Ethiopian to express their identity and relationship to Ethiopia.¹⁹⁵

Entertainment and media also played an important role in merging the different aspects of Ethiopian culture together. Magazines such as Tadias, the first made strictly for Ethiopian-Americans, DVDs of popular Ethiopian movies, and famous music artists became easily accessible ways for Ethiopian-Americans to stay connected to and involved in the social scenes

¹⁹⁵ Facebook [Internet]; available from www.facebook.com; accessed 12 December 2006 and Habesha.net [Internet]; available from <http://www.habesha.net/list.asp?did=65>; accessed 12 December 2006.

of Ethiopia.¹⁹⁶ Restaurants, churches, and Ethiopian markets are all venues for products to be sold. The largest event of the Ethiopian community, the annual Ethiopian Soccer Games, gives entrepreneurs, musicians, and clothing and food vendors of each community the opportunity to market their items and businesses.

In 2006's soccer game in Los Angeles, CA, the fusion of American and Ethiopian cultures were clearly present. While the older generation sat in the stadium's bleachers after the LA Stars defeated D.C.'s All-Stars watching a well-known Ethiopian music artist perform, the second-generation gathered around the emcee hosting the first annual "Habesha-Idol" hosted by the youth of Los Angeles Pentecostal Church in which young performers stood in the middle of the large circle of hip-hop savvy youth and showcased their talent by singing R&B songs and rapping popular American tunes. The connection of the Ethiopian culture and American culture, though somewhat humorous in the midst of gatherings and cultural events, is a difficult thing for some immigrants to come to terms with on a day-to-day basis. Appearing to be handled well on a superficial level, the emotional, psychological and social struggles that plagued the Ethiopian refugees were still present in recent immigrant groups.

In a study of the immigrant family life in America, Nancy Foner explains that "the cultures of immigrant groups differ both from the culture left behind in the sending country and from American mainstream culture."¹⁹⁷ Immigrants, especially those who come at a younger age, have a hard time coping with the process of assimilating into a culture that isn't their own. Though rap music videos made by Ethiopians back home expressed the ways in which African-

¹⁹⁶ Tadias Online, available from www.tadias.com/v1n5/index.html, Internet; accessed 12 March 2007.

¹⁹⁷ Nancy Foner, "The Immigrant Family: Cultural Legacies and Cultural Changes." *International Migration Review* 31, no. 4 (Winter, 1997): 966.

American dominated culture reached Ethiopia, some Ethiopians looked back to Ethiopia to escape from the pressures of American culture.

In many cases, the family structure of those Ethiopians who came as a family-unit changed. In what is referred to as “international commuter marriages” or “multilocal binational families” parents in the Ethiopian community lived separately either taking care of children in different countries or working in different areas to support the family.¹⁹⁸ Conversely, similar to the family dynamics Foner points out in the Jamaican community, women from the Ethiopian community “gained a greater financial independence... and did not have female relatives available to provide assistance” in America.¹⁹⁹ Though 63% of the Dreamers answered that they maintained their Ethiopian culture through family customs and traditions and 63% said that they wanted the second-generation to maintain those family traditions, it proved to be a hard challenge to instill those qualities when maintaining a family in America with little support from parents and older generations.

Five members of the Hailu family were united in the States in 1996. Etugay Hailu came to be reunited with her eldest son in America in 1995, leaving her husband and three children in Ethiopia. With the help and support of her husband’s brother, Girma and his wife Rakebe, she found work as a nanny in L.A. Soon all three of her children were able to come to America, but her husband, who worked for the Ethiopian Foreign Service stayed in his posting in France and visited once a year. Though she was able to succeed it was difficult for her to raise her children in the American way, because it was not the same way she was brought up. “Whether you go

¹⁹⁸ Ibid., 968.

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 967.

there... I don't know what God's plan in our life is. Some people are successful, some people are confused...I don't know, it is very confusing. We want [our children] to behave like the way we raise them over there, but it is totally different. It is totally different...over there is respect... here there is a lot of freedom, freedom of expression. When I grew up it was not like that."²⁰⁰ Just recently her second eldest son was sent to Ethiopia to spend time with his father. Though it was difficult for Etugay and the family to separate she believed that God had a purpose. She currently works as a nanny for an African-American family in Beverly Hills, California.

Depending on a family or individual's location and neighborhood in the States, certain American cultures may have been assimilated to more than others. In regards to this group 22% lived amongst white Americans, 37% lived amongst African-Americans, 16% amongst Hispanics, 43% amongst African and 8% amongst Asian. While that was the case, 7 % of this group felt strongly connected to the African-American community, while 48% said they had some connections and 45 % said they felt no connection at all. In a somewhat similar trend, while 13% said they had a connection to Jewish culture, 35% had somewhat of a connection and a majority of 52% said that the Ethiopian culture had no connection to the Jewish culture and identity.

While some members of the community attempt to understand the complexities of their relationship to American culture, other members of the Ethiopian community tried to reach back to the country they left. Organizations like the Ethiopian National Congress, established in 1997 in Washington D.C. "to build a strong civic movement and institutions that promote and

²⁰⁰ Etugay Hailu, interview by author, digital recording, Durham, NC., 27 March 2007.

advocate democratic rights of Ethiopians”²⁰¹ is one of dozens of organizations that individuals have created to further stand for the voices of Ethiopians both in the U.S. and in Ethiopia. Online blog-spots such as Ethio-Politics, Nazret, have also been formed as a way for members of the community to voice their opinions and views on Ethiopian culture, politics, businesses and news stories.

In addition to the political groups formed by Ethiopian-Americans, certain individuals in America have made efforts to return to Ethiopia and use the success they have in fulfilling the “American Dream” to help those who are less fortunate in their home country. Liya Kebede, an Ethiopian model and the first black woman to be chosen as a face for Estee Lauder, has used her fame to create an organization to “reduce maternal newborn and child mortality and to improve the health and well being of mothers and children around the world.”²⁰² Her organization has worked with various non-profit companies in Ethiopia to create a change in the country.

During this decade, non-Ethiopians began to look to Ethiopia, as well as other third-world nations to help build up the economic, agricultural, and social systems as well. Though Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie’s adoption of Zahara, an Ethiopian infant, brought Ethiopia to the forefront of popular culture, others such as Bill and Melinda Gates’ Foundation and Jeffrey Sach’s Millennium Project have worked to create sustainable communities in some of the poorest areas in Ethiopia. ²⁰³ Former U.S. president Jimmy Carter’s work in Third World countries,

²⁰¹ Ethiopian National Congress [Internet]; available from <http://www.ethiopiannationalcongress.org/>; accessed 22 March 2007.

²⁰² The Liya Kebede Foundation [Internet]; available from <http://www.liyakebede.org>; accessed 2 March 2007.

²⁰³ Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation [Internet]; available from <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/default.htm>; accessed 2 March 2007 and UN Millenium Project [Internet]; available from <http://www.unmillenniumproject.org/>; accessed 2 March 2007.

including Ethiopia is noteworthy as well. In February 2007, he visited a community in Ethiopia where river blindness is rampant and he spoke on humanitarian rights and poignantly expressed some of the most simple similarities, despite socio-economic disparities, between the American and Ethiopian cultures. “In America if you ask somebody on the street what do you mean by human rights they’ll say freedom of speech, freedom of worship.... But I think it’s a human right to live a decent life...some hope that the future will be better than the past has been. One of the most important things to realize is that these people are just as ambitious, just as hard-working.”²⁰⁴

Some families hope to return to Ethiopia in order to fulfill the ultimate dream that many have brought to America to achieve. In a desire to help the country that they left, some individuals in the Ethiopian community have entered Ethiopian and U.S. politics, created international services, and worked to support the family members back home. For some individuals, political action has made it risky for them to return home and for others, finances and time are the only things holding them back. Etugay, for instance hopes to build a school in the region she grew up in, while Rakebe hopes to return to her home and start an orphanage. Others, such as Eshetu are working to build a home that they can rent out and visit on occasion. Of the Dreamers, 55% said they want to return, while 37% said they may want to return and 10% said they wouldn’t. “[I feel most comfortable] in Ethiopia.” Marta explained when asked about returning “It’s my own country, my language, and my people, I know everything.” And though a majority of this group feels the same way Marta does, it is not easy to return. Since some have

²⁰⁴ Nicholas D. Kristof “Carter v. the Worms” New York Times [Internet]; available from http://video.on.nytimes.com/?fr_story=3b8984bd9cb95b599a6c6bfebfbe7c0f8309198e&rf=sitemap; accessed 12 February 2007/

yet to fulfill the dreams and purposes they hoped to achieve in America, and others have come to remain with family members, they are a group caught in between two dreams and two countries; not quite a part of either, and hoping to be a part of both.

History

1: *tale; story*

a: *a chronological record of significant events (as affecting a nation or institution) often including an explanation of their causes*

b: *a treatise presenting systematically related natural phenomena*

c: *an account of a sick person's medical background*²⁰⁵

Chapter 6

Conclusion and Analysis

For the final chapter let's turn our noses back to the restaurants and smells of Ethiopian culture. The history of foods and spices is important, as seen in the numerous ethnic restaurants in both highly and sparsely immigrant-populated communities. And though the foods are prepared in America with such precise and dedication, using spices from the home country, even

²⁰⁵ "history," *Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1)* available from <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/history>. Internet; accessed 1 November 2007.

the food of immigrant communities are mixed into the diverse food culture of American society. One food, or condiment if you will, that can be found in almost all American and some immigrant restaurants is this country's beloved, ketchup. In Pure Ketchup: A History of America's National Condiment, with Recipes, Andrew F. Smith gives the first detailed history of what could be debated as America's national spice. Spices in themselves are usually considered a bit tangy, fiery even, but based on his findings and the presence of ketchup in restaurants nationwide, I concur that this tomato-based condiment has become the favorite spice of America. Though the etymological origin of the food is debated, as well as the ingredients (peach, liver, and oyster-based ketchups are few of the many types), the reality of an acceptance of ketchup into the American culture is evident.

Now, what, might you ask, does ketchup have to do with the Ethiopian culture? Well, nothing, in fact. Ethiopians tend to stick to a pepper-based sauce called *burberay* to flavor their breakfasts, lunches, and dinners. But the idea that something exists, some flavor, that both cultures can hold onto, mirrors the Ethiopian-American's community. Much like the many versions and uses of ketchup in American culture, Ethiopians have entered a society in which they, like millions of immigrants who came before them, must blend their spices, cultures, traditions, and histories to join what has come to be the variety of foods in the United States. As Richard Slotkin explains "The mythology of a nation is the intelligible mask of that enigma called the national character."²⁰⁶ And these enigmas are expressed not only in belief and ideology but in tangible ways such as ketchup or *burberay* on scrambled eggs.

²⁰⁶ Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600-1800*. (Middletown, Conn: Wesleyan University Press, 1973), 3.

In the same way ketchup can be made up of various ingredients, the Ethiopian-American community has various renditions. Consequently, out of the 65,000 Ethiopian-Americans in the United States, the 401 responses I received cannot represent all points of view. I can only represent those that I have been able to contact mainly in the L.A., D.C., San Francisco, and Las Vegas areas, and in that representation, only certain aspects of the community. The Ethiopian community spreads over various parts of the country. From airport terminals in Minneapolis, to taxi cabs of Los Angeles, to the streets and shops of Little Ethiopia in Washington D.C., the face of Ethiopians in America has become fairly commonplace. And in every commonality there is much complexity. Thus in the surveys I have conducted in December 2006 and January 2007, I have attempted to examine different perspectives and experiences of those who compose Ethiopian community.

Certain conclusions can be drawn from the history, surveys, and myths that have combined to make the Ethiopian experience in America so unique. Each city has grown substantially as more Ethiopians entered the country. Each group, furthermore, experienced various circumstances in Ethiopia that pushed them to the United States. Upon conducting the surveys, I hypothesized that different views of Ethiopia and Ethiopian culture would arise based on the experiences each group had. The circumstances under which each group came to America and the reasons for coming, however, showed the complexity of each of the immigrant's lives and almost certainly their view of Ethiopian and American myths and realities. For purposes of analysis, from this point on, I will refer to the Educated Elite as Group A, The Tireless Fleet as Group B, The Group within a Group as Group C, and The Dreamers as Group D.

In analyzing the surveys, we are looking for correlations between the experiences in Ethiopia and those in America that may have affected the respondents' view of themselves in terms of their Ethiopian history and culture; the Ethiopian community; and the American communities in which they live or have lived. The survey can be split into three separate sections as well: basics of immigrant story; the relation to the Ethiopian community; and view of identity and place in the American culture. These categories, however, are not the sole focus of the surveys, for in history there is both recorded information and interpretation of events.

The ways in which these interpretations have been made can be based on the myths and national belief of Ethiopia and the ways certain trends and history have affected the lives of certain groups in the Ethiopian community. In light of the surveys and the historical accounts of Ethiopian-American relations, the national characters can be used to analyze the survey data as well. Whereas the concrete questions in the first section of the surveys, as well as the historical background for each time period, serve as a basis for the realities of the immigrant experience the latter questions concerning culture and identity serve as an indication of the myths or beliefs held by the immigrants surveyed. The trends of the *Success*, *Foreign Devil*, *City on A Hill Myths* as well as the Ethiopia-based *Solomonic*, *Abyssinian*, and *Village Myths* were shown through the historical events that shaped the Ethiopian immigrant, the American, and the international communities. In this chapter, I will look at the way in which the surveys support and deny the Ethiopian-American community's view of these, the myths and their realities. Various consistent threads can be seen throughout each time period.

Due to the controlling factors of the political or social situation of Ethiopia and the immigration policies in the U.S., each group had a different reason for coming, and for

eventually staying in the U.S. The varying historic events in Ethiopia during each decade affected the reasons people came to America. Though 100% of Group A came to America for educational opportunities, 55% of Group B and 46% of C came for education while only 32% of D did so. Group D had the largest variation in their reasons for coming to the U.S. Whether due to the existing Ethiopian community, including family and friends, or to financial gain, 40% of Group D marked “other” as their reason for immigrating to the U.S.

The knowledge each group had about their host country may have shaped the myths they created and thus the initial experiences they expected to have upon entering America. Group A had a significantly larger number of respondents who knew more about the country than the other groups. Language, however, was the aspect of American culture that all groups were most familiar with. 89% in Group A, 72% in Group B, 68% in Group C, and 63% in Group D claimed to have some understanding of English before coming to the U.S. The aspect of the American culture that all with which all groups had the least familiarity was food. Movies and popular music came in at close second. Over 81% of Group A were familiar with American movies while about 69% were familiar with popular music. Though many were familiar with American culture through media and education, many did not understand the realities and hardships they would face when forced to use the limited knowledge they had in a country that was foreign to them.

A major common belief was that receiving an education in America would bring success, whether they eventually stayed in the States or returned to Ethiopia. The reality many confronted, however, was that their educational experiences, due to lack of fluency in English and of familiarity with American customs, would be much more difficult than expected. One woman who entered the country with Group A explains this initial shock. “Before coming to

America, I hadn't planned on staying after completing my undergraduate studies, however while I was in school the government underwent a revolution and my parents advised I did not return. The first time I went home again wasn't for over 20 years. I never wanted to stay in America but my family was hit especially hard by the communist regime."²⁰⁷ Those in Group B, C, or D were more likely to foresee themselves remaining in the U.S. for a longer period of time due to the circumstances under which they came.

Just as the reasons for coming varied among the groups, the socio-economic status varied, as well. The groups' view of success and the American Dream, as a whole, was challenged by their substantial decline in socio-economic status. Over the course of the 50-year period of immigration, many Ethiopian immigrants found themselves to be represented in a lower bracket than they viewed themselves to be in when living in Ethiopia. Though America's and Ethiopia's standards of living and economic development differ greatly, a majority of the respondents surveyed in all groups saw themselves as living in the middle classes in both countries. In fact, some would argue that the middle-class is non-existent in Ethiopia and encompasses most Americans. While 58% of Group A claimed to come from the middle class in Ethiopia, 64% of Group B, 72% of Group C, and 73% of Group D placed themselves in this category. Conversely, whereas none of Group A's respondents claimed to be in the lower class in Ethiopia, 9% claimed to be so in Group B, 11% in Group C, and 9% in Group D. This changed, however, upon their arrival in America, when a shift in social status occurred. The group that had the largest variation was Group C with 32% who considered themselves to be in the lower class

²⁰⁷ Aeden Keffelew, Online survey, 16 January 2007.

in America. These responses do not comment so much on the actual income of the individuals but on the perception they had of their status in both countries.

When analyzing the make up of the Ethiopian community that emerged, the family structure played an important role in maintaining the culture and creating a support network for Ethiopians who would continue to come. In some ways, the *Success Myth* of individualism and hard work converged with the *Village Myth* to create a community strengthened by each other's accomplishments and thus compelled to reach out and help others in the community. One immigrant responding to the survey on-line explained what some Ethiopian-American's view on the community's success:

“We were somewhat poor immigrants who have nothing before arriving to the US. Now 13 years later, I will say we are all educated African immigrants living in America even though we're now citizens. We're all attended college for higher education and at least we all have bachelor degrees and some of us are working toward masters and doctorate programs. I do not think we would have enough education if we're still in Ethiopia because of the political matter and the way we lived. There're times we sleep without food and there're times we spend days without enough food. In general, it's true when they say 'America, the land of opportunity'”

Though the definition of success is a subjective one, according to America's *Success Myth* it has become one mainly based on socio-economic and occupational status. In some ways, however, the belief that many Ethiopian-Americans were successful, either a result of the experiences one had or the groups with one associated, caused some to have an unrealistic view of the community. Some groups had an easier time attending college and finding a job while others did not. Members of Groups A and B attended an average of around 2.5 schools during their time in America while Group C had an average of .98 and Group D, 1.4.

It is true nonetheless that many Ethiopian-Americans came to America for education and were able to fulfill their goal thanks in part to both host families and relatives. Whereas 54% of Group A lived alone upon entering the U.S., only around 25% of the other three groups lived alone. A majority of the recent immigrants stayed with Ethiopian host-families, 34% in Group B, 60% in Group C and 54% in Group D. It was in these families that many were given the tools and support needed to find jobs, register in high schools or colleges, and become familiarized with the American system before living on their own.

As Elizabeth Chacko pointed out in her research on the Ethiopian immigrant population in Washington D.C., a majority of Ethiopian families live in multi-ethnic neighborhoods in cities with high immigrant populations. As more Ethiopians came, a trend in diversity within the different racial groups in neighborhoods can be seen in these surveys, as well. Whereas 50% of Group A claimed to live among white Americans, by Group D's arrival, only 22% lived among that group. Their exposure to Asian and Hispanic Americans gradually increased as well. The shift in living amongst the African-American population was less extreme with 50% in Group A, 30% in Group B, and 37% in Groups C and D.

An interesting subject that I wanted to examine concerning the myths and realities of the Ethiopian-American population was their relationship to African-Americans and the ways in which their realities shaped their views of themselves. As explained, the *Solomonic* and *Abyssinian Myths* have played important roles in shaping the Ethiopians self-identity. Their connection to a larger history has given many of them pride in both their country and their culture. In this pride, however, some would say a hint of arrogance has emerged in certain relations with other American communities.

According to Chacko, “Non-native blacks in the United States resisted identifying with American Blacks for a number of reasons, including prejudices against native Blacks, general aversion to an undistinguished black identity, and pride in national identity.”²⁰⁸ The experiences of the Ethiopian immigrant in America, though intermingled with the African-American population cannot, as Foner points out, be one and the same. Regardless of the similarities, the history and Ethiopian culture created by the experiences of being a recent immigrant into a well-established societal and cultural framework created an entirely new dynamic for the people of this group.

In light of the *Solomonic Myth*, I was surprised to see the number of Ethiopian-Americans who did not feel connected to the Jewish culture and identity. Aside from the religious and historical ties, cultural ties such as the Greek calendar, the *alilita*, a form of expression shared by many Middle Eastern cultures, the presence of Beta Israel and the Amharic language are all ways in which the countries are closely connected. While 63% of Group A, 68% of Group B, 50% of Group C, and 48% of Group D agreed that the two cultures were either somewhat or very closely connected, 37% of Group A, 25% of Group B, 50% of Group C, and 52% of Group D said there were no similarities between the cultures. Fewer than I expected, however, felt disconnected from the African-American community. While 72% of Group A, 71% of Group B, 62% of Group C, and 55% of Group D felt connected to the African-American community, only 8% in Group A did not, 25% in Group B, 38% in Group C and the most, 48% in Group D.

²⁰⁸ Elizabeth Chacko, “Identity and Assimilation Among Young Ethiopian Immigrants In Metropolitan Washington.” *Geographical Review* 93, no. 4 (October 2003): 498-506.

Though thoughts and perspectives about Ethiopian-American views of the African-American and Jewish cultures vary, as the surveys and interviews demonstrate, their views on Ethiopian culture were more consistent. With the exception of the tribal question, most of the respondents had similar views of their Ethiopian-American community. Though many agreed to give their tribal group some abstained or adamantly spoke out against the question. One on-line respondent voiced the concerns of many others: “This test would have been much more efficient had it been more inclusive of other sects of being Habesha. Habesha's are not always Ethiopian-- or rather they may not always like being referred to as Ethiopians (Tigra, Tigrinya, Oromo, Blen, Afar...etc).”²⁰⁹ A majority of the Ethiopians surveyed came from the Amhara tribe with 41% of those who responded to the question in Group A, 22% in Group B, 50% in Group C, and 57% in Group D. The second largest groups, not including those who were of multi-ethnic groups, came from both the Oromo and Guragaye tribes.

In regards to culture, all four groups agreed that family customs among the top two most helpful ways to maintain their Ethiopian culture. Chacko’s explanation of the extended family of uncles, cousins and close friends of the family apply strongly to the Ethiopian-American community’s family structure. In addition to family customs, 85% of Group A said that language was an important way to maintain culture while 59% agreed in Groups B and C and 52% in Group D. Church was second to all groups except for Group A, with 64% in B, 70% in C, and 68% in Group D.

One question that I did not examine during the four chapters was #22: the Ethiopian-American communities’ view of the second-generation. Though the children who were born in

²⁰⁹ Aeden Keffelew, online survey.

America have come to shape the Ethiopian-American community in an important way, they did not experience the same immigration and assimilation process and challenges that their parents did. Tomala and Deaux explain that parents feel connected to their old culture, attempting to reinforce it by instilling parts of the culture into their children, and negating parts of the host country.²¹⁰ The children, however, tend to feel more of an connection to communities in the host country's, viewing "back home" as a distant place in their parents' and other community members' collective memories than a reality. Parents, thus, are given the responsibility and challenge of creating a tangible connection for children to the country back home while continuing the never-ending process of assimilating their cultures, foods, thoughts, and family structures to that of American society.

Regarding the value Schlesinger places on the importance of history in forming an identity, all four groups' respondents agreed that teaching the second-generation Ethiopian history was one of the most important ways to maintain the culture. Other aspects of the culture that they felt were important were the acquisition of Amharic, (77% of Group A, 52% of Group B, 63% of C, and 60% of Group D). The least important aspect of the culture for three of the Groups (A, C, and D) was the tribal language whereas Group B responded least to holidays.

"Our family is actually a small world. Everyone is basically the same" said Girma when speaking about the differences in the Ethiopian culture.²¹¹ Though this may be true in some respects, especially when looking at the larger cultural trends of the Ethiopian immigrant experience, in others, such as the acculturation of the second-generation, there is more variety. In

²¹⁰ Mahalingam, 36.

²¹¹ Girma Teffera interview by author, digital recording, Durham, NC., 23 March 2007.

examining the level of educational success and psychological well-being of the second-generation Ethiopian youth based on interviews, family knowledge and statistics, there are challenges. Whether it is induced by certain living environments, disillusionment with what parents recall of the Ethiopian culture, or cultural confusion, it seems that Ethiopian-Americans raised in the United States have a difficult time, just as some of their parents did, in adjusting to living in between an unknown myth of the Ethiopia their parents once knew and the American society in which they live now. Though research on this topic should be furthered, I hope that sharing the stories of the Ethiopian immigrant population will help strengthen the community's identity, especially those of the second-generation youth.

I understand the difficulty some may have in recounting stories and struggles that occurred in the past; however, it seems as though, just as Eshetu explained, that they can be viewed as “blessings in disguise” for both the story tellers and those listening. The reality is that even in Ethiopia, culture will continue to change. Governments will continue to shift, political ideas and organizations will continue to evolve, after all societies, cultures and homes are made up of individuals who are constantly being reinvented, shaped and altered by the circumstances around them.

How then can we define ourselves by a thing that is so constantly evolving? The myths we hold dear to, whether based on reality or not, are all – to interpretation, just as history is. In an interview, Yisehak explained it superbly explaining that generations will experience a different culture no matter how long the traditions, customs, and beliefs are held on to because people are constantly evolving. In the end, it is the belief that an individual holds that shapes his or her life most profoundly. And though beliefs are shaped by interpretations of history, actual events, and

both national and individual myths and ideologies, the individual decides the ultimate definition of him or herself. As we have seen in the narratives of the United States, Ethiopia, and citizens of both countries, each individual has a unique view and perception of his or her realities and the circumstances of life. National characteristics as well as self-proclaimed histories thus shape interpretations of the past and consequently, the outcomes of the future. History, blanketed by the incongruities of the past, is a living and changing thing based on our present beliefs and circumstances. We're living history, and the words of King Solomon, "As a man thinks in his heart, so he is" are true for both Ethiopian and Americans alike.²¹²

²¹² Proverbs 23:7 (New King James Version).