

Ethiopia's nationhood reconsidered**

Conventional theories trace nationalism to modern Western Europe, usually following the French Revolution. However, markers of nationalism used by most scholars are attested by evidence of Ethiopia's nationhood as early as sixth century C.E. This requires revisions in both conventional notions of nationhood and views of those who find Ethiopianness a recent invention. Moreover, the experience of Ethiopians in their recent Diaspora warrants rethinking the very notions of nationhood. Continuing ties of Ethiopian expatriates with their homeland and communication through electronic media manifest a new configuration of Ethiopia's nationhood, consisting now of three confluent parts: *bet-agar* (homeland); *wutch-agar* (diaspora); and *sayber-agar* (cyberspace).

Keywords: Ethiopia; nationhood; diaspora; global; immigration.

A nação etíope reconsiderada

As teorias convencionais associam o nacionalismo à Europa ocidental moderna, em geral a um período subsequente à Revolução Francesa. No entanto, no caso etíope, os indicadores de nacionalismo usados pela maior parte dos investigadores encontram-se atestados desde o século VI da nossa era. Este facto põe em causa as perspectivas convencionais sobre a ideia de nação, e questiona os que encaram o sentimento nacional etíope como uma invenção recente. Para mais, a experiência da recente diáspora etíope permite-nos repensar a própria ideia de nação. Os laços permanentes entre etíopes expatriados e a sua pátria, e a comunicação através de meios electrónicos, manifestam uma nova configuração da ideia de nação etíope, que se compõe agora de três partes confluentes: *bet-agar* (pátria); *wutch-agar* (diáspora); e *sayber-agar* (ciberespaço).

Palavras-chave: Etiópia; nação; diáspora; global; imigração.

Renewed scholarly attention to nationhood and nationalism in the 1980s produced an array of interpretations. Some analysts viewed nationalism as a political ideology that galvanized a social movement (Breuilly, 1982). Some

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saw it as a cultural glue for the new kind of society associated with industrialism — one driven by economic and scientific growth, impersonal, and built with mutually substitutable, atomized individuals (Gellner, 1983). Others took nationalism to be a symbolic form created to replace discredited religions, a symbolism, dispensed through printed media, projecting “imagined communities” of nations through which a sense of immortality could be evoked and with which otherwise anonymous individuals could identify (Anderson, 1983). Hobsbawm and Tanager (1983, 1990) defined it as an historically novel form, ministering to doctrinal needs so intense that rising elites felt compelled even to invent an ancient past through which they could claim historical continuity.

However diverse their viewpoints, these authors shared one problematic assumption. They assumed that nationalism is an essentially modern Western phenomenon, a byproduct of, if not midwife to, the democratic and industrial revolutions of the late eighteenth century. They adhered not only to Elie Kedourie’s benchmark formulation of nationalism as a *doctrine* — a doctrine which holds that humanity is naturally divided into nations, that nations are known by certain characteristics that can be ascertained, and that the only legitimate type of government is national self-government. They also followed his firm dating of the phenomenon: it was “invented in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century” (Kedourie, 1994 [1960], p. 1). Craig Calhoun’s more recent disquisition emphatically concurs: “nationalism is one of the definitive features of the modern era” (Calhoun, 1997, p. 12). They assume this, Philip Gorski (2000) has shown, in spite of the extensive use of “nation” and kindred terms in classical Greek and Latin and older European vernaculars, and despite the appearance of medieval and early modern nationalisms—facts they discount by claiming that such traces of national consciousness simply do not amount to full-blown modern nationalism.

To be sure, a few scholarly outliers have arisen to challenge the consensual “modernist” view of nationalism as a relatively recent invention. Liah Greenfield’s magisterial five-nation overview (1992) disputes the claim that nationalism originated with the French Revolution and locates its birthplace in Reformation England more than two centuries earlier. Gorski likewise places the birthdate of nationalist identities and ideologies in the early modern period, but emphasizes the Netherlands as birthplace of a truly modern form of nationalism. Yet even these revisionists seem content to keep the birthplace of nationalism in Western Europe in the post-medieval period. They ignore the fact that countries like Japan and Ethiopia had developed nationalist cultures as early as a millennium before their putative origins in Western Europe (Levine, 2007).

ETHIOPIA'S STATUS AS AN HISTORIC *NATION*

This is particularly ironic in the light of Gorski's analysis, which posits a form he calls "Hebraic nationalism" as archetype for modern forms of nationalism. Gorski points to numerous moments during the Dutch Revolt against Spain when Hebraic imagery figured prominently — celebrations of William the Orange in 1577 with tableaux that depicted David and Goliath, Moses, and Joseph; commemorative coins that showed an angel driving Sennach'erib from Jerusalem; official proclamations that commonly invoked the God of the Old Testament. Deployed to serve a liberation movement, such symbolism transcended cleavages of class, confession, and region on behalf of a burgeoning nationalism. It went on to facilitate that national formation through analogies with the biblical Covenant, which committed them to observe and enforce God's laws throughout the covenanted nation. Beyond that, in the post-1648 period two new discourses emerged. One lauded the House of Orange dynasty as an instrument of God, incarnating special gifts passed from father to son. The other appeared as a populist discourse, connoting the equivalence of such phrases as "God's People," the "Chosen people," and the "Netherlandish people." All this leads Gorski to posit a "Mosaic Moment" in early North Atlantic nationalism, a Moment that figured in England also, explosively during the Civil War and, in different garb, during the Restoration (Gorski, 2000).

About a millennium before these Old Testament morality plays were dramatized in the Netherlands and England, a comparable configuration took shape in Northeast Africa. In the *Kebrä Negäst* (KN), a text aptly referred to as Ethiopia's national epic (Levine, 2000 [1974]), the portrait of an early Hebraic nationalism was made with extravagant, gaudy strokes. All the themes that Gorski found in sixteenth and seventeenth centuries Netherlands appear there in vivid colors: a founding monarch presented as the son of King Solomon, named David in the KN; Exodic transport of an endangered Hebraic elite by miraculous passage above the Red Sea; inheritance of a Holy Ark of the Covenant; a monarchy sacralized both by Solomonic genealogy and divine anointment; and a People enjoined to witness, protect, and advance the divine Christian mission which, by virtue of the Hebrews' failure to follow Christ, had devolved upon the blessed Ethiopians. No Mosaic moment this, but a Mosaic Momentous.

Archaically *pre-national*, then? Consider what criteria the modernist scholars of nationalism have posited as defining the *sine qua non* of true nationhood in the effort to distinguish what they call prenational from truly national formations. They stipulate that true nationalism involves a political doctrine or ideology (Kedourie, 1994 [1960]; Gellner 1983); they refer to a special cognitive notion — "nation" = "people" = "state" (Hobsbawm, 1990) — or discursive

sive formation (Calhoun, 1997); they emphasize a social scope that includes the entire nation as a unit (Weber, 1976); they stress the element of political mobilization (Breuille, 1982). Heeding these criteria and thus pointing to (1) the Dutch reference to theirs as a nation among nations; (2) their early equation of nation with people; (3) the exposure to nationalist discourse and symbols throughout Dutch society, and (4) the resort to nationalist political mobilization, Gorski handily demonstrates that early modern Netherlands evinced all four of these ingredients.¹

As far as the limited documentary evidence allows us to understand, so did historic Ethiopia. A prime text for this claim, the *Kebra Negast* stands for nothing if not the image of the Ethiopian nation as belonging to a world of distinct nations among which it stands out by virtue of possessing a special mission. The bulk of the epic contrasts the nation of Israel with that of Ethiopia, mentioning Egypt along the way, and it concludes by naming several others — Rome, Armenia, and Nagran — and asserting the primacy of Ethiopia as God’s favored among the nations. One remarkable feature of this epic is its consistent reference to Ethiopia as a sovereign, inclusive polity, ignoring the numerous ethnic divides within historic Ethiopia. Although mentioning various provinces within the country, it names them only as geographical markers. Their unification under the sovereign state is manifest in passages like, “And all the provinces of Ethiopia rejoiced, for Zion sent forth a light like that of the sun into the darkness wheresoever she came” (Budge, 1922, p. 84).

With respect to cognitive categories, the KN assumes the equivalence of land = people = nation = polity. Thus, it speaks of the rejoicing which took place in *bihere Ityoppiya*, a phrase that connotes land, country, and people alike. And when David, the Ethiopian son of King Solomon, returns to Ethiopia with the Ark of Zion, he is welcomed joyously by the “*seb’a Ityoppiya*,” the people of Ethiopia, a phrase connoting the overarching nation.² Among other older records that instantiate the equation of people with nation, *hezba Iteyoppeya* is found in a document from the time of Na’od (ca. 1500).³

¹ The only feature that is missing here is what Kedourie stresses as romantic nationalism: an amalgam of post-Kantian self-determination, Fichtean glorification of the state, and Herderian enthusiasm for cultural diversity and language. But then, by this criterion, Kedourie considers neither England nor the United States to exhibit genuine nationalism.

² These phrases appear in chapters 85 and 55, respectively. Thanks to Dr. Getatchew Haile for confirming this interpretation of the significance and for the reference that follows.

³ See Andre Caquot, (1961, p. 86, lines 14-15): “tselleyu kama inekwen te’eyyerta la-hezba Iteyoppeya” (“Pray lest we be a mockery for the people of Ethiopia”). Caquot’s French, p. 11; lines 21-22: “Priez afin que nous ne devenions pas la risée des peuples d’Éthiopie.”

These symbols were spread throughout Ethiopian society by virtue of an extraordinary system of national communication that was provided by the Ethiopian national Church. Churches and monasteries throughout the country embodied a nationwide system of communication. Liturgically, it was unified by the classical Ethiopic language, Ge'ez, much as medieval Europeans speaking different languages were unified by Latin. Their texts likewise made mention of Ethiopia, especially the phrases from the Old and New Testaments that the Septuagint translated with that term.

Finally, from earliest times, the symbolism of Ethiopian statehood could mobilize members of diverse ethnic groups and regions on behalf of their national homeland. Although we have no evidence of the composition of the forces that accompanied King Caleb's expedition to Southwest Arabia in the sixth century, it is hard to imagine that they were not from a variety of regions and ethnic groups. But we do have evidence about the mobilization of forces on behalf of the national expansion under the Solomonid emperors of thirteenth to fifteenth centuries and of the mobilization against the Turks in the sixteenth century. This proud tradition was then fatefully drawn on to mobilize tens of thousands of troops in wars against Sudanese and then Italian invaders in the late nineteenth century.

ETHIOPIA'S NATIONHOOD IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

In the wake of Ethiopia's victory against Italy in the battle of Adwa in 1896, her nationhood was fortified by a series of changes: a national system of secular schools; a national bank and postal system; a national network of roads; a standing national army; an effective and prestigious national airline; and a number of cultural forms that gave expression to a modern Ethiopian national culture in such areas as athletics, literature, music, and the visual arts. Through these changes and the majesty of two powerful emperors, Ethiopia was well on the way to becoming a successful, independent nation-state in the twentieth century. Ethiopia proudly took its place among other sovereign states by joining the League of Nations in 1923. It played a prominent role in the United Nations as a founding member and a staunch supporter of UN collective security and other UN missions. Thanks to her historic role as a symbol of African freedom and the mediations of its skillful emperor, the regime became recognized as a major player during the decade of African independence of the 1960s. Addis Ababa was host for the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa. What is more, at two critical junctures, in 1960 and in 1974, the regime came close to becoming a constitutional monarchy, in which case there was every reason to expect its continued growth as a modernizing polity, in which democratic rights would have been extended, and a greater openness to civic participation by diverse religious and ethnic groups would have been accepted.

That this did not happen was due to a number of factors. First and foremost, the ageing emperor failed to take steps to ensure an appropriate process of succession. His retention of absolute power until the last moment left a vacuum which the most aggressive political forces would fill. Relatedly, educated Ethiopians failed to develop the lineaments of a movement, let alone a political party, in which the seedlings of liberal democracy might germinate. Instead, the active political space was monopolized by radical Marxist ideologues (Balsvik, 1979; Kebede, 2008).

This occurred in conjunction with a number of threats to Ethiopia's status as an historic nation — threats that stemmed both from tribalist movements and Marxist ideologues. The former represented an upsurge of particularistic demands of the sort that appear in all modernizing countries as states become more centralized and resourceful, and as citizens with local and ethnic identities seek a more effective voice (Geertz, 1963). The latter reflected the slogan of "self-determination of nationalities" imported from Soviet ideological mentors (Levine, 2000, p. xiv).

Accordingly, when Ethiopia's 2000-year-old monarchy was overthrown in September 1974, a tortuous period of revolutionary violence, political repression, chronic civil war, and ethnic fragmentation ensued, culminating in the 1990s in a new regime that initially rejected the notion of an age-old nation of Ethiopia altogether.

"NATIONHOOD" IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL SCIENCE

During the period when Ethiopia's nationhood was being challenged on the ground, academic critics were raising questions about the very notion of the nationally-circumscribed society as the foundational unit in sociological analysis.⁴ They pointed to the rising salience of international and supranational forms (Levine, 1995, 1996). They took note of economic globalization as a process that transcended national sovereignty and territoriality, and required a shift toward "transnational analysis" (Sassen, 1996). They highlighted the salience of transnational connections in the process of modernization (Levine, 2006). At meetings of the World Congress of Sociology in July

⁴ To be sure, long before the rise of these objections to using the trope of *society qua nation* as an authoritative notion for sociological inquiry, the sociological tradition included several strands of work that transcend this analytic focus. These include the Simmelian notion of interaction among parties at any level; the Weberian idea of "society" as a mere object of orientation constructed by actors; Parson's conception of the system of modern societies; and the multidisciplinary perspective of civilizational analysis — all perspectives that informed the lifework of one of the foremost sociologists of the late twentieth century, the late Shmuel N. Eisenstadt (Levine, 2004).

2002, one of the hot ideas in circulation concerned the obsolescence of the nation-state as a central unit for sociological analysis, and the theme of “sociology without society” was being taken up as a banner behind which to secure a putative emancipation from all previous sociology.⁵

In the spirit of such revisionist notions about the concept of nationhood, it was not only students of Western history who slighted the story of Ethiopia's precocious achievement of nationhood, it was post-modern Ethiopians and their sympathizers no less. Inasmuch as scholars of nationhood had already begun to dispute the salience of well-formed nations prior to the modern period, when the regime shift of 1991 catapulted into power an elite with a dim view of historic Ethiopia, apologists for the dismemberment of Africa's oldest independent nation could wear the mantle of academic respectability for some patently counter-factual reconstructions. Books with titles like *The Invention of Ethiopia* (Holcomb and Ibssa, 1990) and *Imagining Ethiopia* (Sorenson, 1993) could then brazenly claim that the Ethiopian nation-state was an invention of late nineteenth century imperialism.

FORMING A DIASPORA

Ethiopia's political upheavals in the 1970s added her to the list of countries suffering a massive hemorrhage of population through migration. In 1974 Ethiopia had the distinction of having the smallest proportion of its population living abroad of any country in the world. The traumatic dislocations of the Derg regime made it the nation with the *highest* proportion of its citizens living abroad just five years later. The World Refugee Surveys show a high of 1.9 million total refugees in 1981 from Ethiopia. Figures for 1983 report some 1,215,000 Ethiopian refugees in Northeast Africa (Somalia, Djibouti, Kenya, and Sudan), more than 10,000 in the Middle East (Saudi Arabia, UAR, and Egypt), tens of thousands in Europe, especially England,

⁵ The list goes on. Martin Albrow argued that the Modern epoch has ended and we have entered *The Global Age* (1997). Nico Stehr rejected the continuing identification of modern society with the nation-state as an obsolescent ideological and epistemological residue of the nineteenth century origins of social science discourse (2001, pp. 9-11). Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller faulted “methodological nationalism” for stifling social theory: “The social sciences have become obsessed with describing processes within nation-state boundaries as contrasted with those outside and have correspondingly lost sight of the connections between such nationally defined territories” (2002, p. 307). Some even argued that the age of sociology was over altogether, inasmuch as its essential heuristic unit, the national society, is now obsolete. This thesis informed Immanuel Wallerstein's widely discussed 1997 presidential letter to the International Sociological Association, which decried sociological investigation of national societies on grounds that only an interdisciplinary and evolutionary framework made sense for the social sciences.

Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Sweden, and about 10,000 in the United States. For most of the 1980s, Ethiopia was one of the top three contributors of refugees in the world.⁶

Following the collapse of the Derg in May 1991, a large number of Ethiopian refugees returned. The Ethiopian population virtually disappeared in Somalia and the Arab countries, and dwindled in Djibouti, while the UN High Commission for Refugees repatriated 83,000 from Sudan and 80,000 from Kenya. Even so, in 1993 Ethiopia still had the sixth highest number of the world's refugees. New waves of emigration kept the refugee populations in Kenya at 26,500 and in Sudan at 173,200. Massive airlifts helped bring tens of thousands of Ethiopian immigrants to Israel, where the total population of Ethiopian-Israelis now numbers more than 90,000. Substantial increases of Ethiopian immigrants appeared in England, Germany, and Canada.

Soaring above all others, the number of Ethiopian immigrants to the United States rose to more than 100,000. This represents a long-term cumulative trend, starting with groups of university students who became stranded after the Derg revolution and ended up staying, often sending for their families. The immigrant stream grew from a few hundred per year in the 1970s, to about 2,000-3,000 per year in the 1980s, and 4,000-5,000 per year in the 1990s. The current Ethiopian population in the United States has been estimated approaching half a million.

Like other immigrant groups in the United States, the Ethiopians found ways to keep in touch with one another and reproduce their home customs. They settled in the same neighborhoods — the Uptown area in Chicago; Arlington, Adams Morgan, and Silver Spring in the District of Columbia area; in Los Angeles, a section of the city recently publicized as “Little Ethiopia.” They established community newspapers, national magazines, and radio programs. Through these and other media, including even an “Ethiopian Yellow Pages” (in the Washington, D.C. area), they informed their fellow immigrants about Ethiopian and Ethiopian-friendly businesses. In many cities, they formed self-help organizations to minister to the adjustment needs of their compatriots. These community associations provided a wide range of services to assist new immigrants, improve the life chances of existing immigrants, and provide language study for the younger generation. For example, services of the Ethiopian Community Mutual Association of Seattle, Washington, include case management and advocacy for Ethiopian expatriates, job placement, language training (Amharic and English), translation and interpretation, and citizenship classes. The association also organizes sports activities, after-school tutoring, and parenting classes.

⁶ For most of the migration data, we are indebted to Sanyu Mojola, based on information kindly supplied by Bela Hovy at UN High Commission for Refugees. See Table 1.

Over time, the services became increasingly sophisticated. The Ethiopian Community Association of Chicago (ECAC) established a Computer Training Center; equipped with state-of-the-art facilities, the program includes career counseling and job placement services, and resettlement from many countries. Moreover, unlike immigrant populations of previous generations, the Ethiopian Diaspora took shape at a time when the melting-pot ideal had given way to a norm of respecting the identity and cultures of incoming populations. Ethnic diversity was coming to be celebrated, multiculturalism was in style, and ethnic Americans tended increasingly to cherish cultural heritages long buried by assimilationist trends. Immigrants were quick to establish restaurants serving traditional Ethiopian cuisine, in a (mostly) authentic manner. In many cities community associations organized celebrations of *Enquatatash*, the Ethiopian New Year. In Chicago, the ECAC organized an annual Ethiopia Day at the Civic Center, with live performances of Ethiopian music and dance. Indeed, some Ethiopian ethnic, regional, and religious groups created centers of their own: Oromo associations, a Gondare association, even a restaurant specializing in Gurage cuisine, a Kitfo Megab Bayt, in Washington, D.C..

A major bulwark of Ethiopian traditions in the Diaspora has been the formation of numerous Ethiopian houses of worship, mostly Ethiopian Orthodox churches and some mosques and Protestant churches. Ethiopian Orthodox Churches located across the United States include St. Michael's Ethiopian Church in Las Vegas, Debre Medhanit Medhane-Alem Cathedral in Columbus, Ohio, and three churches dedicated to Saint Mary in Los Angeles.

Depending on the size of the local Diaspora, similar institutions sprang up in Ethiopian communities elsewhere. One finds, for example, Ethiopian restaurants in Tokyo and Paris; a Medhane-Alem Church in Stockholm and a Debre-Tsion Kidist Mariam Church in London; and a number of active community associations in Israel which offer programs on parenting, civic skills, Ethiopian traditional music, and *shemgelen* (mediation by elders). In Germany, Diaspora organizations span a wide spectrum, from churches and humanitarian agencies to women's groups and community support organizations.

Such developments serve to maintain a sense of national identity and pride in Ethiopian culture. To be sure, the level and quality of interest in homeland culture becomes increasingly problematic with the second generation. In Israel, for example, observers have noted a certain dropping of Ethiopian cultural practices among youth, often for symbols associated with African Americans and Rastafarians — even among youngsters who may not know who the historic Ras Tafari was. Even so, many younger Ethiopians abroad have become active in attempting to reappropriate their homeland culture and in supporting political and civic actions to help its development. That has had an impact on the reconfiguration of Ethiopian nationhood.

An association called the Ethiopian Global Initiative seeks to network Ethiopian students and young professionals from many countries who believe that founded social entrepreneurship would transform Ethiopia.

DIASPORA CONNECTIONS WITH THE HOMELAND

What is more, in contrast to the mass emigrations of previous generations, the migration of Ethiopians coincided with the onset of extraordinary technologies of transportation and communication. Settling into their “Diaspora,” most Ethiopians have not turned their back on their homeland but have used these technologies to set up unprecedented networks of communication, among themselves, and with their homeland. One way they have done this is to maintain continuous communication with family and friends at home of a sort that would have been unthinkable before these newer technologies. Ethiopians now walk down the streets of Addis Ababa with cell phones, speaking to kith and kin who live abroad. Easier travel connections bring emigrants home for holidays, weddings, and ordinary visits. They send packages and monetary gifts.

Some groups get actively involved with development projects at home. One effort sought to collect 30,000 books to send to school libraries in the home country. The Gondar Development Association builds schools and hospitals in the Begemdir region. Ethiopians in Israel recently formed a kind of Peace Corps of volunteers to carry professional services back to their homeland. A potent group, the Ethiopian Physicians of North American Health Professionals Association, regularly sends teams of doctors, dentists, nurses, and pharmacists who volunteer one to two weeks each year working in Ethiopian hospitals and clinics.⁷

Since the fall of the Derg, many Ethiopians abroad have participated in business ventures with homeland partners. One particularly well-developed trade route of these “transnational entrepreneurs” involves Ethiopians in Israel who travel home to procure goods — such as *gesho* to make *talla*, Ethiopian barley beer, and *tef*, the preferred grain for making *enjera*, the daily pancake-bread — and bring them back for their nostalgic compatriots (Rosen, 2001).⁸ Media for making and maintaining these kinds of business connections are growing rapidly. These include annual conferences of Ethiopian American investors, and an Ethiopia Investor newsletter providing information about Ethiopian exports and agencies that facilitate transnational commerce.

Continued involvement with the Ethiopian Church keeps Diaspora Ethiopian Orthodox Christians attuned to ecclesiastical affairs in the homeland since,

⁷ <<http://www.enahpa.org>>.

⁸ For a discussion of this as a more general phenomenon, see Portes *et al.* (2002).

unlike nearly all other Christian religions, Ethiopian Orthodoxy is closely tied to the home nation-state. This political issue has been conspicuous in the past few decades, with the changes of regime: Abuna Tewofilos, who was deposed and then assassinated by the Derg, was replaced with Abuna Tekla Haymanot and then Abba Merkorios, who was in turn deposed by the EPRDF regime and replaced with Abuna Paulos. In the United States, at least, almost no churches accept the authority of the current official patriarch; some look to Abba Merkorios, and many are independent.

More generally, the flowering of Ethiopian national culture in the past generation has to be seen as a continuous homeland-Diaspora phenomenon. Audiences in both domains are galvanized by vocalists such as the late revered Tilahun Gessesse and renowned jazz instrumentalist Mulatu Astatke and younger vocalists like Aster Aweke and Teddy Afro. Combined Beta Israeli and Israeli musicians have jointly produced popular CDs. Film makers Haile Gerima and Yemane Dempsey attract equally enthusiastic audiences in Addis Ababa and Washington DC. Ethiopian painters, mindful of one another's work, flourish in both venues; for example, Fikru Hailemariam lives and maintains studios six months a year each in Addis and Paris (Levine, 2008). Fresh cultural creation in the Diaspora reached such proportions that an international conference on the subject was convened at Radcliffe/Harvard in 2008 (Shelemy and Kaplan, 2011 [2006]).

Party politics has offered a dramatic manifestation of Diaspora involvement with home events. Public demonstrations have been organized in England and the United States to protest policy and personnel matters that emigrants find offensive. Diaspora communities have participated vigorously in the organization of dissident political parties, several of which work in tandem with homeland counterparts.⁹

Relations between Ethiopian government officials and members of Diaspora communities have suffered from enduring currents of political

⁹ As is often the case with modern Diaspora communities, Ethiopian Diasporas in North America have been particularly active in "homeland politics." One reason is that the Ethiopian Diaspora in the U.S., like much of the Ethiopian homeland public, believes that the U.S., through the London Peace Conference in 1991, helped bring EPRDF to power and consequently have looked to the U.S. Government to help bring the derailed democratization process back onto track. Their distinctive political engagement was manifest in a nearly successful advocacy for passage of a bill known as The Ethiopia Freedom, Democracy and Human Rights Advancement Act of 2006 (HR 2003) by the House of Representatives in October 2007, through lobbying campaigns spearheaded by the Ethiopian American Civic Advocacy. Among 131 opposition party leaders, journalists, and civil society persons who were on trial for alleged constitutional coup attempts and incitement to genocide in the wake of the May 2005 elections, several were Ethiopians in the Diaspora in the U.S., including journalists working for the Voice of America (VOA).

distrust, but intermittently they have reached out to one another. From time to time, government officials have gone abroad to encourage support through overseas “nationals”. Such moments instantiate the concept of the “deterritorialized nation-state”, in which boundaries are defined socially rather than geographically (Basch *et al.*, 1994; Glick Schiller and Fouron, 1998). Diaspora Ethiopians thereby continue to be engaged by raising funds, organizing demonstrations, and launching advocacy and lobbying campaigns. Altogether, pan-Ethiopian nationalism, unbounded by its borders, manifests itself in this global era in what has been called “long-distance nationalism,” or the persistent claim to a national identity by people residing away from their homeland (Anderson, 1992; Glick Schiller and Fouron, 2001). In sum, transnational migration, rather than weakening the sense of pan-Ethiopian national identity, has actually strengthened it by creating a new incarnation of this identity in the form of long-distance pan-Ethiopian nationalism.

THE VIRTUAL NATION

The swift growth of information technology engineered a public space for the participation of nationals, both at home and abroad, in their homeland affairs. More particularly, such innovations made active civic engagement by Diaspora Ethiopians possible. Continuing engagement of Diaspora Ethiopians, in both their vibrant communities abroad and in interactions with their homeland, redefines the locus and scope of Ethiopian nationhood. What is more, in the global high-tech era, Ethiopian nationality asserts itself in a third arena space: cyberspace. Sassen has theorized this arena as follows:

Cyberspace is, perhaps ironically, a far more concrete space for social struggles than that of the national political system. It becomes a place where non-formal political actors can be part of the political scene in a way that is much more difficult in national institutional channels. Nationally politics needs to run through existing formal systems: whether the electoral political system or the judiciary (taking state agencies to court). Non-formal political actors are rendered invisible in the space of national politics. Cyberspace can accommodate a broad range of social struggles and facilitate the emergence of new types of political subjects that do not have to go through the formal political system. [Sassen, 2003, p. 13]

Cyberspace has produced remarkable new forms of civic participation. Digital networks have created virtual neighborhoods, bounded no longer by territory, but by access to requisite software and hardware. Due to the paucity in Ethiopia of the software and hardware on which these networks are

based, they are dominated by Diaspora communities, but they include serious participants from the home country who provide information for which the emigrants hunger. One major category of these media consists of news-centered websites. (See Appendix, Figure 2, for a partial listing of these sites.)

Other networks, known generically as “countrynets,” primarily facilitate discussion of Ethiopian politics and culture. These include the EthioForum network, a network sponsored by CyberEthiopia known as Warka, and the Ethiopian Email Distribution Network (EEDN), which purports to offer “a home away from home” and adopts the byline “One Country, One People, One Flag”. EEDN offers a forum for Ethiopians in many countries — recent messages have come from Ethiopians in Zimbabwe, Italy, Sweden, and England — as well as some at home. Like Burundinet, a countrynet for Burundi that has been analyzed in depth (Kadende-Kaiser, 1998, 2000), EEDN offers a medium for negotiating national and subnational identities, striving to overcome subnational claims to citizenship and rebuild a fragmented national community from afar. Its threads, which often draw as many as 25 different respondents, have included such topics as securing the release of political prisoners; ways to harness Ethiopia’s water power for development; what to do about the hated ethnic ID cards; the belief that “God selected Ethiopians as his chosen people”; and historical origins of the name Oromo. The constant growth of electronic networks and websites revivifies Ethiopian national identity and appears as a force in the creation of Ethiopia’s collective future.

The medium of “paltalks” has come to play a role in Ethiopian homeland affairs. Besides offering discussion platforms, paltalks afford Ethiopians a way to circumvent government restrictions on information access through programs that supplement chat service with text, audio, and video capabilities. A single paltalk chat room supports up to 500 participants; when a room is full, participants can enter another room, with no limit on the number of new rooms that can be formed. The May 2010 general elections formed a hot issue for thousands of Ethiopian paltalk users, who joined chat rooms to replay jammed media programs such as DW and VOA and discuss the electoral process.

ETHIOPIAN NATIONHOOD RECONFIGURED

Just as the historic realities of long-established nations like Ethiopia pose a challenge to conventional ideas about modern nationhood, so the contemporary Ethiopian experience reinforces pressures to rethink conventional notions of national boundaries. The nation whose conquest and dispersal

across the world two millennia ago gave rise to the term diaspora seemed anomalous up to the past century, when a home territory with well-defined and secure boundaries seemed the only way to construe nationhood. The Jewish case now seems normative for many countries, whose boundaries, like that of ancient Israel, have expanded to involve a level of co-determination that previously could not have been imagined. The globalizing tendencies favored by electronic media and easy transportation will continue not only to promote subnational and supranational communities, but will also play a major role in strengthening the age-old nation of Ethiopia, reconfigured now in three parts: *bet-agar* (Homeland); *wutch-agar* (Diaspora); and *sayber-agar* (Cyberspace).

APPENDIX

Ethiopian Refugee Stocks in Seven Industrialized Countries

[TABLE 1]

Country	Categories	ca. 1973	ca. 1983	ca. 1993	ca. 2003
USA	Total Immigrants Refugees	149 (1973)/ 2 582 (1979) 2 476 (1979)	9 761 (1983) 9 655 (1983)	96 000 (1998) 16 684 (1993)	86 000 (2001) 11 536 (2001)
Canada	Total immigrants Refugees			12 100 (1991) 7 786 (1994)	14 455 (1996) 2 034 (2001)
UK	Refugees		909 (1988)	5 026 (1993)	5 100 (2001)
Germany	Total immigrants			20 631 (1995)	15 305 (2000)
Sweden	Refugees			8 452 (1991)	681 (2001)
Netherlands	Total immigrants Refugees			6 438 (1996) 2 645 (1995)	7 149 (2002) 1 776 (2001)
Australia	Total immigrants			1 341 (1991)	3 544 (2001)
Other Europe	Refugees	218 (1980)	597 (1983)	1 159 (1997)	2 141 (2001)
Somalia	Refugees	1 175 000 (1979)	700 000 (1983)	399 (1993)	567 (2001)
Sudan	Refugees	46 300 (1973)/ 311 200 (1979)	484 000 (1983)	173 200 (1993)	16 120 (2001)
Djibouti	Refugees	28 800 (1979)	29 170 (1983)	16 383 (1993)	1 428 (2001)
Kenya	Refugees	1 170 (1979)	1 670 (1983)	26 466 (1993)	13 541 (2001)
Middle East	Refugees	840 (1979)	9 360 (1983)	969 (1993)	1 582 (2001)

Ethiopian Diaspora websites

[TABLE 2]

Periodicals

1. www.aigaforum.com
2. www.tigraionline.com
3. www.ethiomediamedia.com
4. www.addisvoice.com
5. www.nazret.com
6. www.tecolahagos.com
7. www.addisnegeronline.com
8. www.ethiopianreporter.com
9. www.allafrica.com/ethiopia
10. www.cyberethiopia.com
11. www.asmarino.com(Eritrean)
12. www.awate.com(Eritrean)
13. www.ethiopiadaily.com
14. www.deki-alula.com
15. www.addisfortune.com
16. www.jimmatimes.com
17. www.walta-info.com
18. www.capitalethiopia.com
19. www.ethiopiazare.com
20. Tadias
21. Ethio-American

Blogs

1. www.ecadforum.com
2. www.hmbasha.net
3. www.arefe.wordpress.com (Addis Journal)
4. www.smgebru.blogspot.com
5. www.alemayehufentaw.blogspot.com (Rasselas Review)
6. www.awate.com (Eritrean)

Entertainment Websites

1. www.hagerfikerradio.com
2. www.addiszefen.com
3. www.addislive.com
4. www.paltalk.com- several hundred paltalk rooms include *Ethiopians* Forum For Political Civility, *Ethiopian* Review, Ethio-Civility, Lesane *Ethiopia*, Geza Tegar, Assimba, *Ethiopian* Current Affairs discussion Forum (ECADF), and International *Ethiopian* Women's Organization (IEWO)
5. www.seleda.com -posted articles written by Ethiopians covering various themes; humorous, including a "top-ten list"

Informative Websites

1. www.ethiopiannationalcongress.org (information civic education projects)
2. www.ethioguide.com — Ethiopian news, cultural information, history, health, links to religious sites (including a few EOC church pages)
3. www.ethioyellowpages.com — similar to print version of Ethiopian Yellow Pages, but less detailed; run from Beverly Hills, CA; links to Ethiopian restaurants and markets in U.S. cities, Europe, Ethiopia

4. www.imperialethiopia.org — official site of Imperial Crown Council of Ethiopia with links to Dynasty, History, Church, and Charitable Work done by Monarchy and related organizations
5. www.ethioworld.com business news; online shopping and travel with some news as well as discussion forum
6. www.oromoliberationfront.com — official political OLF site
7. www.ethio.com (News, Ethiopia information (history, currency exchange, weather), can subscribe to Ethiolist (to directly receive Ethiopia-related news and information at email account)

Web Hosting Sites

1. www.ethiopiaonline.net (lists online newspapers and magazines)
2. www.ethioguide.com (lists Ethiopian news websites)
3. Several hundred paltalk rooms include *Ethiopians* Forum for Political Civility, *Ethiopian Review*, Ethio Civility, Lesane *Ethiopia*, Geza Tegar, Assimba, *Ethiopian* Current Affairs discussion Forum (ECADF), and International *Ethiopian* Women's Organization (IEWO).

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