Persecution, Migration, and Nationalism

The Amhara Experience

By

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Acronyms

AAPO	All Amhara People's Organization
AHSM	Amhara Heritage Society of Minnesota
ANDM	Amhara National Democratic Party
EC	Ethiopian Calendar
ECM	Ethiopian Community of Minnesota
EPLF	Eritrean People's Liberation Front
EPRDF	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front
EPRP	Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party
OLA	Oromo Liberation Army
OLF	Oromo Liberation Front
OPP	Oromo Prosperity Party
PP	Prosperity Party
SEPDM	South Ethiopian People's Democratic Movement
TPLF	Tigray People's Liberation Front

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Introduction
Methods and Voices in Native Ethnography

This ethnographic work investigates how first-generation immigrants who identify as Amhara in the United States craft their identities and establish both physical and social spaces for themselves amidst the rise of Amhara ethnic nationalism, which aims to counter anti-Amhara sentiments and practices embedded in Ethiopia's body politic since the late 19th century. Emphasis is placed on the historical development of the Ethiopian state, particularly on how discord from the Italian colonial era contributed to narratives of ethnic hatred toward the Amhara in a multiethnic Ethiopia. The book details how these and subsequent historical processes intensified antagonism between ethnic elites promoting competing narratives, ultimately leading to the emergence of the theory of national oppression, which sought to address Ethiopia's challenges through a Marxist-Leninist framework. This theory, in turn, fueled the persecution of the Amhara by labeling them as a "national oppressor" group, a dynamic that also deepened divisions among Ethiopian immigrant groups in the USA over the past three decades.

The book addresses essential aspects of after-migration experiences of the Amhara people, particularly how they engage in placemaking centered on *tizita* (nostalgia), a concept that encompasses remembering, memorializing, yearning, and longing for places left behind and for experiences preserved in memory. As discussed throughout the book, *tizita* holds profound significance in Amhara culture, reflecting a strong connection to their personal memories and national historical heritage. The book also explores the rise of nationalism as a response to these dynamics and examines the transnational cultural and political processes that shape identity formation. Additionally, it analyzes how Amhara immigrants forge new identities and replicate cultural landscapes (spaces) in their new environments. The book argues that

the experiences of Amhara immigrants in the USA provide unique insights into broader questions of how national political histories, colonial narratives, cultural heritage, and the negotiation between Western and non-Western cultures shape the transnational Amhara identity.

For further illustration, I also discuss below how I navigated my dual role as both a participant and an observer in this research, balancing objective academic standards with the more subjective dimensions of ethnographic study. Additionally, my involvement in advocating for human rights in Ethiopia has deepened my understanding of how dispersed communities connect and build ethnic spaces that transcend geographic boundaries. Therefore, this work presents a nuanced understanding of the Amhara diaspora and their evolving identities.

The Dilemma of Native Ethnography

While native ethnography or autoethnography presents undeniable challenges in a research process, it does not inherently prevent one from presenting genuinely authentic voices. Autoethnography becomes even more complex when the native group is at risk of persecution by politically dominant forces, and the researcher, being part of that group, attempts to describe a plight that they, too, experience. This scenario can, on one hand, convey the lived social pain as it is experienced by the group, but on the other, it can challenge objectivity, requiring researchers to scrutinize their own perspectives. I derive my understanding of autoethnography from Reed-Danahay (1997, p.9), who defined it "as a form of self-narrative that places the self within a social context", which "is both a method and a text, as in the case of ethnography," that "can be done by either an anthropologist who is doing "home" or "native" ethnography or by a non-anthropologist/ ethnographer," or "by an autobiographer who places the story of his or her life within a story of the social context in which it occurs". In this sense, the anthropologist has an opportunity to be part of the voices of the community represented.

I must note that any knowledge we study is already present, waiting for us to thematize, structure, organize, and publicize. We go to the community to learn from this accumulated knowledge, then return to synthesize and write it down, often structuring and refining it—perhaps even adding an artistic touch—before presenting it to the community, scholars, and the wider public. In this way, we can accurately say that we are retrieving knowledge from the community we study. In this context, the anthropologist is not only someone capable of understanding a community's knowledge system but is also equipped with the skills, techniques, perspectives, and methods to present it in a representative and meaningful way.

Being an activist while conducting ethnographic research within the same community can blur roles and introduce unconscious biases into the research process. It can be particularly challenging for anthropologists to write about their own native group when that group is the victim of crises instigated by both state and non-state actors. In this context, exposing crimes against one's own group may place additional pressure on the researcher to avoid bias in the research process. However, I am writing about a community that has been subjected to ethnic profiling, resulting in the murder and displacement of tens of thousands over more than three decades. As I will detail, my positionality is rooted in hard evidence witnessed in the everyday lives of the Amhara people. In fact, I believe I have conveyed less than what should be said, as this is not a history book dedicated to documenting the immense trauma endured by the Amhara people.

While reflecting on my positionality as someone studying my own native people, I have come to recognize that anthropologists, regardless of their connection to the study community, are human beings with emotions, sympathies, and biases. Though I do not intend to use this as an excuse to justify any potential bias in the research process, I acknowledge that ethnographic accounts rarely feature an anthropologist who does not, in some way, become an advocate for their study community. Undoubtedly, anthropological research fosters

strong connections between researchers and participants. Nonetheless, reputable ethnographic works have successfully conveyed enduring depictions of reality.

That said, I do not believe that my research has led me to adopt a more enthusiastic stance toward the Amhara due to the fieldwork or research process itself. Rather, my advantage lies in being a native, which grants me a deeper understanding of the Amhara cultural, social, historical, and linguistic knowledge systems. In fact, anthropologists who study communities to which they do not belong often develop stronger emotional bonds, as the study community represents a new social space where relationships are inevitably forged.

For the native anthropologist, however, the researcher implicitly or explicitly becomes one of the voices within the community, making it more likely that he or she will be represented within the community's narrative. This is especially true when the challenges faced by the community are the same challenges faced by the native anthropologist.

After-migration Experiences as Trivia Nights Tests

The Amhara people refer to places where they do not naturally reside as *yesew ager* ("others' country"), in contrast to *hegerie* ("my country"), *yene hager* ("my own country"), or *yegna hager* ("our own country"). *Yesew ager* could be just a few miles away or in another country entirely; it simply refers to a place inhabited by others, where one does not belong. For the Amhara, the world is distinctly divided between one's home country and others' home country. Leaving one's homeland means entering *yesew ager*, a foreign land. Among the Amhara, emigrating is seen as living in *yesew ager*, which commonly evokes feelings of reduced honor, lower social status, diminished rights, and limited access to privileges. There is an acute awareness of these social realities upon leaving one's homeland to live in a place where one is an outsider. However, in Chapter 3, we will see how the powerful image of America—portraying an extravagant level of comfort—challenges this traditionally held notion during the pre-migration scenario.

The experience of living in *others' country* is reflected in several Amharic proverbs, which often emphasize the downsides of emigration. Although, in many places, emigrants are looked up to, as they often return with money and elevated social status, the Amhara, wealthier immigrants—particularly political exiles—tend to experience a lowered social status. Nonetheless, the Amhara share a common understanding of how to navigate life after-migration. One proverb illustrates that an emigrant will inevitably conform to the customs and standards of the host country, regardless of how difficult or inconvenient they may be. The saying, "You shall only plough the land with oxen raised on it, for they know how to root out its weeds," highlights the necessity of adapting to the ways of the host society in order to manage challenges effectively.

Another proverb emphasizes the loss of dignity that accompanies emigration: "A person who lives in another's country will inevitably lose honor." Additionally, there is a warning about migrating with people from one's own homeland, expressed in the saying: "Do not emigrate with your countrymen, for they will later expose your secrets." These proverbs reinforce a pre-migration awareness of the challenges of living in another's country, including the need to endure the hostland's ways of life, the likely loss of honor, and the potential exposure of personal history by fellow emigrants. As a result, as discussed throughout this book, first-generation immigrants—the primary focus here—experience a duality between their homeland and hostland cultures. These two worlds may conflict, create deep unease, or gradually find reconciliation.

The motivation to understand cultural processes, identity formation, placemaking, and nationalism within this context is what brought this book to life. As discussed in Chapter 3, language barriers and cultural conflicts are the most common challenges that make life after-migration difficult. For Ethiopians, as for many other immigrant groups, moving to the USA without adequate knowledge of American culture can lead to confusion and hardship. Even small misunderstandings about how

things work can leave one feeling lost. In light of this, I also share some of my own experiences.

When I first arrived in Pullman, WA, the Department of Anthropology arranged for me to stay at the Native American Cultural House for the first four days. On my first night, I made a mistake that ruined the evening. After leaving my room, I unknowingly twisted the key from the inside, locking the door without realizing it, since I wasn't familiar with how those keys worked. When I returned later, I found myself locked out. I ended up spending the entire night on the couch downstairs, with no clothes to change, all in a somewhat eerie two-story building.

The only silver lining was that I hadn't changed out of my T-shirt, underwear, and pants before leaving the room. The next morning, around 10:30 a.m., one of the professors came to check on me. When she found out I was locked out, she laughed and began calling various school staff, trying for over half an hour to find someone with a key. Since it was a Saturday, this was no easy task. After several attempts, she managed to track down a staff member who unlocked the room for me. He looked at me and said, "Don't lock yourself out again. There are no thieves here."

Encountering unfamiliar machines can also cause problems. I had never seen a smart fridge before, let alone knew how to use one to tap a soda. This lack of familiarity led me to an embarrassing situation. During my first week at WSU, I went to buy breakfast at the Compton Union Building (CUB) student center. While trying to get a drink, I mistakenly poured lemonade instead of water from the fridge, as I couldn't distinguish between the taps. This small mistake turned into an unexpected ordeal. The manager, who was walking by inspecting the area, noticed and glared at me. He asked me to pour out the lemonade, explaining that the water was free, but the lemonade was not.

I was stunned by the accusation. Just a week ago, I was a proud and honest man—someone who had never stolen anything in my life. I had

never been questioned by security or law enforcement for any wrongdoing. Now, here I am, presented as a thief, caught red-handed over a simple cup of lemonade. This experience left me deeply embarrassed. My failure to understand such a seemingly minor aspect of life in this new environment felt like it had stripped away a piece of my dignity. The rapid shift from being confident in my identity to feeling humiliated showed me just how quickly one's sense of self can be challenged. A personality shaped over years can be shaken in an instant. This reminds me of a traditional Amharic song by Endelibie Mandefro, in which two stanzas emphasize: *Sew yale ageru* ("A person found in a country not their own"); *Aykerim menekatu kibru* ("Will never escape the test of a loss of honor"). The song draws attention to the idea that migrating to a foreign land inescapably leads to moments of loss of honor. This book, therefore, examines the widespread awareness of what may follow in the aftermath of migration.

During my second week at WSU, I was sitting in the CUB when three female students at a nearby table were eating their cakes. As they were about to leave, one of them approached me and asked, "Do you want to have these?" referring to the leftover cakes. I politely declined, but the act of the offer left me feeling sickened. In my cultural upbringing, being offered someone's leftovers felt demeaning, and I initially saw it as an insult. However, I later learned that such gestures are common and considered normal in the USA.

The stories I've shared are just a few of the many experiences I've had, but they illustrate how missteps can lead to cultural conflicts. I believe immigration research should pay closer attention to the vast differences in cultural models. For instance, trivia nights can highlight just how wide the cultural gap between the Amhara and American models can be. These events often expect less acculturated immigrants to perform well in tests grounded in American cultural knowledge. I occasionally participated in trivia nights, where most of the questions were centered on American culture. While I could answer a few questions related to world history and the geography of Africa, I struggled in nearly every

other category. The Americans, too, missed some specific answers, but they had a grasp of the broader themes behind the questions. My struggle wasn't just with the answers, but with navigating the very topics themselves.

Life-after migration often resembles a trivia night test—a disorienting cultural experience best described in Amharic as being "a fish out of water." Just as a fish thrives in its natural environment, a person is fully themselves when living within their own culture. Indeed, "to be human is to be cultural" (Cassaniti and Menon, 2017, p.8)—without learning cultures, we would remain mere biological entities. More importantly, we can only fully communicate and function as humans within cultures we understand well. In an immigrant context, therefore, the wisest individuals in their native culture can seem foolish in the destination culture. What is common knowledge in a destination society can become a significant obstacle for newcomers.

Psychological anthropologists and cultural psychologists agree that cultures construct selves, and selves construct cultures (Cassaniti and Menon, 2017), in a mutually cyclical way (Marcus and Kitayama, 2010). A culture far removed from one's own shapes individuals in ways that are difficult to comprehend or navigate without at least learning its core values. In terms of cultural divergence, moving from Ethiopia to the USA involves a monumental shift—from a semi-urbanized, less modernized, non-industrialized, largely manual culture to a highly digital, industrialized, and urbanized culture. Without sufficient knowledge of America's cultural complexity, adjusting to life after-migration can be extremely challenging.

There is a vast pool of cultural knowledge that insiders take for granted, but newcomers or outsiders must quickly learn in order to navigate a new society. This necessity to adapt to the local cultural framework often compels immigrants to navigate the intersection between cognition and culture, consequently shaping their after-migration experiences.

Immigration scenes are characterized by the convergence of different cultural groups, and the relationship between these dichotomized cultures profoundly defines the immigrant experience. In other words, an immigrant's life is shaped by the interaction and balance between the culture of origin and the culture of the destination. Typically, the destination culture holds the upper hand, expecting the assimilation of the immigrant's culture. The arrival culture, in turn, is often required to adapt to the norms of the destination culture. Note, however, that there may be multiple cultures within both the country of origin and the destination country. Here, I emphasize the duality between these cultures from the perspective of the newcomer's primary culture and the mainstream culture of the destination country.

Brief Account of Amhara Immigrants in the USA

Ethiopians began entering the USA at the start of the 20th century when a small number of students were admitted to American universities, primarily Howard University, a historically Black institution (Solomon, 2007; Levine, 2004; Chacko, 2003, 2011; Habecker, 2012; Kebede, 2012). These early Ethiopian immigrants to the USA were primarily educated elites who arrived as students (Chacko and Cheung, 2011, 130). Unlike many African countries, Ethiopia did not have colonial ties with European powers to send students abroad, making the United States the most common destination for higher education. In fact, Ethiopia was the first African country with which the U.S. established an official diplomatic tie, formalized through a treaty signed between Emperor Menelik II and U.S. Ambassador Robert P. Skinner in 1903 (Solomon, 2007).

The primary driver of Ethiopian immigration to the USA was political persecution. As a result, the first significant wave of Ethiopian immigrants to the US consisted of affluent individuals seeking asylum due to fear of persecution by the Derg regime, a group of lower-ranking military officers who overthrew Emperor Haile Selassie I in 1974. This made Ethiopian immigration to the US politically motivated from the outset. Over the following years, U.S. political reforms facilitated this

migration. The 1980 Refugee Act enabled many Ethiopians to seek refuge in the US, while the establishment of the Diversity Visa (DV) Lottery program in 1990 opened further opportunities for migration, particularly for professionals. Chain migration also played a role in expanding the influx of Ethiopians (Chacko and Cheung, 2011, p.130). As will be discussed, this period marked the planting of the first seeds of what Massey et al. (1993) refer to as the "culture of migration." In 1991, the overthrow of the Derg by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) led to the installation of ethnolinguistic federalism in Ethiopia, causing further emigration. Additionally, drought, famine, and the protracted civil war preceding 1991 contributed to the exodus. Most accounts (Solomon, 2007, Habecker, 2012) suggest that these events forced more Amhara to emigrate than any other ethnic group.

The emigration of the Amhara differs from that of other ethnic groups, as they were specifically targeted by successive regimes. The post-World War II period, particularly the pre- and post-1974 "revolution," saw the construction of a narrative that characterized the Amhara as national oppressors and bourgeois elements, as for the latter, based on the assumption that they exploited the working class (see Chapter 1). During this period, the Amhara faced dual challenges: they were perceived as both national oppressors and capitalist exploiters. The Derg regime, advancing its socialist/communist ideology, acted upon these negative perceptions by confiscating private properties, which resulted in both Amhara noblemen and workers experiencing sudden impoverishment. The Derg essentially seized assets from the wealthy and redistributed them to the poor, ultimately leveling both social classes. Rather than lifting the impoverished, this approach brought down the wealthy and self-sufficient citizens. Consequently, the majority of the Amhara became class enemies of the new regime. Families were torn apart, and on a broader scale, the traditional economic and political power bases of the Amhara were shattered, leading to significant repercussions in the decades that followed.

Moreover, guerrilla fighters such as the Eritrean separatists, the TPLF, and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) seized every opportunity to portray the Amhara as enemies, justifying their actions with the ideology that framed the Amhara as a national oppressor ethnic group. The anti-Amhara sentiment that emerged during the colonial era evolved into a dangerous narrative with real consequences. Following the Derg's rise to power, the Amhara became particularly vulnerable. Many lost their lives at the hands of the Derg, Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), TPLF, OLF, Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF), and other ethnic organizations, making emigration an unavoidable option. As a result, early Amhara migration was not primarily motivated by economic factors. Instead, the migrants, predominantly from the affluent class, became vulnerable due to their identity, political ideology, class position, and the anti-Amhara narratives prevalent at the time. Consequently, the Amhara represented the majority among Ethiopian immigrants (Solomon, 2007).

Throughout its lifespan, the Derg promised to maintain the country's territorial integrity by annihilating non-conforming separatist movements and combatant ethnic factions (Tibebu, 2008; Zewde, 2001, 2012). Many people left the country as a result, and those who were already abroad for work or study halted their return (Solomon, 2007). The Derg lost the province of Eritrea in 1991 after decades of bloody conflict. That same year, Ethiopia fell into the hands of TPLF guerrilla fighters, who, soon after taking control, espoused an ethnicized political ideology that sharply divided the country's 80 or more ethnolinguistic groups (CSA, 2007) into "oppressors" and "oppressed" groups, with the Amhara labeled as the former (Yideg and Premanandam, 2019). The TPLF formulated a constitution that enhanced ethnic identity, which led to the normalization of ethnic violence, ethnic-based displacement, ethnic profiling, crackdowns on dissenting voices, widespread human rights violations, and pervasive corruption. The Amhara remained the primary victims of this new political order not only up to 2018 but also in the years that followed.

Although widespread resistance ultimately brought the TPLF's iron-fisted rule to an end in 2018, no new political power emerged to fill the void. Instead, the Oromo and Amhara factions within the TPLF/Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) emerged as the new guardians of an ethnicized ideology, with the former aiming to establish an Oromo hegemony. The Oromo faction took control of the country, the government, and the party, successfully asserting its dominance in a short period of time. Within just five years, millions perished in a senseless war against the TPLF-controlled Tigray. As if the exodus-like waves of displacement and mass-murders in the decades prior to 2018 weren't enough, thousands of ethnic Amhara and others have continued to be massacred in the Oromo region and other areas. Furthermore, the regime waged war on the Amhara for more than 16 months now, resulting in enormous loss of life and property, continuing to cause indescribable suffering.

Given this context, it is not surprising that emigration has become a viable means of escape for large segments of the population. Those who have emigrated to the United States throughout those years have settled in major urban areas across the country, such as Washington D.C., Seattle, Washington, Columbus, Ohio, Uptown Chicago, St. Paul-Minneapolis, Minnesota, and Los Angeles, California (Solomon, 2007; Habecker, 2012; Chacko 2011; Levine, 2004), as well as Dallas, Texas, Georgia, and Portland, Oregon.

Among African immigrants in the USA, a 2019 report indicates that the growing Ethiopian population, numbering 260,000, ranks second after immigrants from Nigeria (PEW Research Center, 2022). This demographic shift has prompted scholarly research on various aspects of Ethiopian immigration, including historical explorations (Solomon, 2007), identity formation for specific ethnic and demographic groups (Brinkerhoff, 2011; Habecker, 2012), and the organization of placemaking around ethnic enclaves, sacred spaces, and sites of "authentic ethnic and cultural experience" (Chacko and Cheung, 2011; Chacko, 2003; Heldman, 2011). Additionally, studies have focused on

the creation of translocal connections both within the USA and with Ethiopia (Chacko, 2011; see also Levine, 2004), the use of language to construct a collective past (Chernela et al., 2009), and examinations of conflicting health and illness models (Fenta, Hyman, and Noh, 2004; McSpadden, 2006; Yewoubdar, 1992). Aside from Ethiopians, research on the settlement process examines upward economic mobility (Gans, 2009) or explores various forms of assimilation (Alba and Nee, 1997, 2003).

Why Emphasize Amhara?

Although the Amhara have existed as a distinct ethnic group in all recognized anthropological and sociological frameworks, recent literature has made little progress in treating them as such. More importantly, anthropological studies on the Amhara are not only scarce but have also largely failed to address them independently of the broader Ethiopian context. Earlier works conflated the Amhara with Ethiopian identity, with only a few addressing the Amhara directly. For example, earlier studies examined Amhara social stratification (Hoben, 1970), kinship organization (Hoben, 1963), the land tenure system (Hoben, 1973), family and property inheritance (Crummey, 1983), and the structure and function of religion (Reminick, 1975). More research on the Amhara has been conducted in the fields of history and the arts, such as music and painting. However, since the 1970s, there has been little to no substantial research focusing on the Amhara as a distinct people. During this period, anthropologists shifted their focus to other ethnic groups, including the Bashada (Epple, 2010), Gamo and D'ache (Freeman, 2006), Sidama (Hammer, 2002; Quinlan and Quinlan 2014), Mursi (LaTosky, 2010), and Jimma (Mains, 2004). Only recently have some articles been published that focus more directly on the Amhara, such as works by Yared (2022), Adugna and Aleminew (2022), and Birhanu (2023). Even these are not fully-fledged ethnographic works.

Perhaps the Ethiopian state was often perceived as an Amhara state, leading Western scholarship to focus largely on its artistic and historical dimensions rather than its distinct ethnographic aspects. Western

anthropological scholarship may have been saturated with studying an agrarian, semi-feudal, and predominantly Christian society that seemed to resemble medieval Western Europe, viewing it more as a subject for historical or aesthetic inquiry than for anthropology. Additionally, as Tibebu (1996) has suggested, the Amhara may have been "de-Africanized" by European scholars, as well as by early Ethiopian scholars, who approached Ethiopia from an orientalist perspective, thereby downplaying the distinct ethnocultural identity of the Amhara within Africa.

While scholars have not hesitated to refer to various ethnic groups by their actual names, they curiously refrained from doing so when it came to the Amhara, often conflating Amhara identity with Ethiopian national identity or treating it as part of an ancient entity called Abyssinia. Previous research frequently blurred the distinction between national and ethnic identities, ignoring the Amhara as a distinct ethnic group. Even well-respected scholars have confused the Amhara with Ethiopia. For example, Levine's (1972) *Wax and Gold: Tradition and Innovation in Ethiopian Culture*, one of the most renowned works on the Amhara, frames its subject as a portrayal of "Ethiopian" culture, subsuming the "Amhara" into the broader category of "Ethiopian." This is ironic because, as Levine himself pointed out, the Amhara have historically demonstrated significant linguistic and cultural dominance throughout Ethiopia.

The issue, however, is not solely confined to scholars. From roughly the 1970s to 2015, many people themselves tended to equate the "country of Amhara" with the national identity of Ethiopia, often saying, "Amhara is Ethiopia, and Ethiopia is Amhara." For a long time, they resisted being identified as Amhara, preferring to be called "proudly" Ethiopian. This suppression of their ethnic identity in favor of a broader national Ethiopian identity was later interpreted by non-Amhara radical ethnic elites as Amhara hegemony disguised as Ethiopian nationalism. These conflicting ideologies played a crucial role in shaping Ethiopia's political discourse in opposition to the Amhara.

Walelign Mekonnen's essay, "On the Question of Nationalities in Ethiopia" (November 17, 1969), widely regarded as a cornerstone of the Ethiopian Students' Movement (hereafter Students' Movement) at the time, advanced the narrative of a dichotomy between the "oppressor Amhara" and the "oppressed others." Scholars note that the Students' Movement was a very radicalized political and social opposition force that emerged in the 1960s through early 1970s that mobilized students and significant sections of the society against the monarchical rule. It contributed to the fall of Emperor Haile Selassie I in 1974, and the ideologies it promoted significantly shaped Ethiopian politicalscape in the subsequent regimes (Zewde, 2012). Unfortunately, the flawed categorization of "oppressor" versus "oppressed" national groups led many non-Amhara ethnic elites to develop ideological resistance and guerrilla movements aimed at dismantling what they perceived as "Amhara oppression" operating under the guise of Ethiopian nationalism.

The effort to understand after-migration experiences can be made more nuanced by narrowing the broad national reference into a more accurately describable ethnographic unit. Homogenizing immigrants under the term "Ethiopians" while ignoring their internal ethnic distinctions is misleading, even if it provides a convenient shorthand. Such an approach overlooks the differences in each ethnicity's identity. Bozorgmehr (1997), for example, used the term "internal ethnicity" to highlight that immigrants are not a monolithic group but consist of subgroups, and demonstrated with the varying experiences of Iranian immigrant subgroups that were previously generalized as simply Iranian. Note that, for the sake of the fluidity of ethnic boundaries, some individuals with mixed primordial heritage may in certain contexts embrace Amhara cultural identity fully.

As discussed in Chapter 4, the after-migration experience is mediated by shared spatiality and cultural landscapes in the host country. Recognizing that the Amhara have their own unique historical, political, psychosocial, religious, military, and cultural attributes helps

in examining their cultural negotiations. Distinguishing between Amhara ethnic identity and Ethiopian national identity is crucial, as some ethnic groups do not feel they share Amhara culture. Treating Ethiopian national identity as homogeneous entity can lead to misrepresenting the Amhara when analyzing the negotiation of American and Amhara cultures and identities. I argue that immigrants' efforts to integrate into the host culture are shaped by their perception of their home culture, which in turn influences how they reconstruct cultural landscapes in the host countries.

As noted above, one key issue in research on Ethiopian trans-nationalism is the tendency to conflate national identity with ethnic identity, or to prioritize the former. By homogenizing Ethiopia's more than eighty ethnic groups, researchers overlook the possibility that each group has unique cultural attributes and varying contexts for identity construction. In the case of the Amhara, ethnic (cultural) homogeneity in areas such as political ideology, ethnic identity, history, heritage, and values is significant, which warrants treating them as a distinct object of analysis.

Building on the above rationale, I present a lived experience of a research participant that illustrates the importance of treating the Amhara ethnic group separately. Eyasu Michael (all names of research participants, hereafter participants, are changed) is in his fifties and has lived in the USA for nearly four decades (as of 2019, also applies to all participants' ages). Eyasu speaks softly yet assertively, embodying the characteristics of the older Amhara generation. Despite having lived in the USA for so long, during our meetings, he noticeably strived to present himself with the same etiquette he would have displayed if he had still been in Ethiopia.

As a member of what is commonly referred to as Ethiopia's "generation of the 1960s," Eyasu's identity is shaped by memories of significant national events that continue to hold relevance today. He witnessed the upheaval of the Students' Movement, which eventually contributed to the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie I. He saw the end of the

monarchy in 1974 and lived through the rise of the Derg regime, which officially adopted socialism in a deeply religious Ethiopia. Eyasu also experienced factional warfare between different Marxist groups. He witnessed the destabilization of Ethiopia's political order due to separatist movements, notably the EPLF, the TPLF, and the OLF. Additionally, he lived through the devastating drought in northern Ethiopia, which claimed thousands of lives. And finally, he recounts the story of his own emigration.

When I first met Eyasu one evening in July 2018, I explained my purpose for being in the Twin Cities (St. Paul and Minneapolis), but he showed little interest—neither in who I was nor in what I intended to do. He didn't seem particularly engaged in our conversation, and I felt as though I was trying to establish rapport with someone who was content to avoid me. Later, however, I discovered that Eyasu had been the first to respond to the anti-Amhara persecutions in Ethiopia by founding an Amhara community organization some 20 years ago. His quiet demeanor was not indifference but rather a sign that he was assessing whether I was worth his time and attention. We eventually scheduled an appointment for an interview, and then he quickly disappeared into the dim light of the business he owns and manages. My friend, who had introduced us, and I sat on the balcony with bottles of beer, waiting for our meal.

During our scheduled interview, Eyasu told me that he completed two years of college in Ethiopia but had to emigrate before finishing due to fear of political persecution by the Derg regime. After arriving in the USA, he resumed his studies, eventually earning a bachelor's degree. He then worked in various roles, including staffing coordinator, training administrator, and regional manager in a healthcare institution. Throughout his time in Minnesota, Eyasu remained deeply committed to supporting the Amhara community. When the TPLF-dominated EPRDF regime implemented ethnolinguistic federalism and incited massacres against the Amhara across Ethiopia, Eyasu worked tirelessly to bring attention to the crisis through his community

organization, fundraising, and diplomatic efforts to advocate for Amhara rights.

Despite his success in mobilizing local communities, Eyasu never considered himself a typical "activist" in the political sense. He was primarily concerned with the survival of Amhara people. Eyasu emphasized that the Amhara have suffered immensely from years of displacement, war, and exploitation. His focus was on ensuring the survival of his people, first through political and advocacy efforts, and later by emphasizing the importance of preserving Amhara cultural heritage.

In Eyasu's view, the key to understanding the Amhara experience is recognizing that they have historically been sidelined, marginalized, and often misrepresented. For Eyasu, the idea of being "Ethiopian" is inseparable from being "Amhara," yet his activism is rooted in the struggle to establish Amhara identity within a highly ethnicized Ethiopian framework that continues to undermine their distinct ethnic heritage.

Approaching After-migration Experiences

The book addresses several core research questions: How are pre-migration expectations of life in the USA negotiated with after-migration experiences? How do competing views of Ethiopia's state history affect after-migration interethnic relations? Why have colonial-era anti-Amhara discourses persisted as post-WWII problems for the Amhara? What triggers an immigrant group to engage in separate placemaking? How does *tizita*—the culturally significant Amhara concept of nostalgia, memorialization, and homesickness—shape placemaking? How do immigrant groups strategize to represent their cultural attributes and identities in the host country? And, finally, how do immigrant groups create layers of identity in the hostland?

To explore these questions, while focusing primarily on history, cultural conflict and negotiation, placemaking, and identity

construction, I draw on several theoretical approaches. I argue that immigrants—whether forced or voluntary—navigate between two conflicting cultural worlds and identity models, necessitating methodological and theoretical diversity to fully understand their experiences. These frameworks help explain how Amhara immigrants perceive cultural differences between America and Amhara, and more broadly, the discrepancies between their pre-migration expectations and after-migration realities, while also uncovering their preferred solutions to these challenges. By employing the following diverse theoretical models, the subjective experiences of immigrants and the dynamics of interethnic and intercultural contact are better understood.

The book conceptualizes cultural conflicts and negotiations through the lens of cultural schema theories, which are understood as shared cultural knowledge structures stored in memory and lived through collective experience (Garro, 2000; Quinn, 2005, 2011; D'Andrade, 1995; Strauss and Quinn, 1997, 2005). For example, Quinn (2005) analyzed American metaphors of marriage, such as lastingness, sharedness, mutual benefit, and difficulty, using cultural schemas to reflect shared cultural experiences. Similarly, D'Andrade (1995) examined respondents' knowledge structures (schemas) regarding illness, showing how these mental frameworks shape their logical beliefs. While this book does not strictly apply cultural schema theories, it draws on the idea that pre-migration and post-migration knowledge structures, along with overall cultural assets, are negotiated to develop an updated understanding of the world. In this process, immigrants bring their cultural knowledge into a host country with a different set of norms.

Within this broader theoretical framework, race-ethnic schema (RES) (Oyserman et al., 2003; Oyserman, 2008) helps explain how and why immigrants become ethno-racially conscious, identifying in-group and out-group traits, aligning themselves with their perceived communities, and distancing themselves from others. Shame schema (Sharifian and Jamarani, 2011) illustrates how Amhara culture conflicts

with and negotiates American culture in specific areas. Stereotype schemas (Lawrence, 2004) provide insight into how one group's mentally constructed views of another influence after-migration experiences. Time orientation schemas (Fulmer, Crosby, and Gelfand, 2014) compare and contrast Western and Amhara conceptions of time and their significance in after-migration contexts.

Social identity theory (Klein, Spears, and Reicher, 2007; Phinney et al., 2001) aids in understanding identity performance, mobilization processes, and their role in creating distinct social spaces. This analysis is enriched by emphasizing placemaking as an expression of imagined communities (Anderson, 1991; Appadurai, 1996; Gupta, Akhil, and Ferguson, 1992). Social network theory (Berkman et al., 2000; Mitchell, 1974; Croucher, 2011) is also crucial in explaining how the absence of social connections in after-migration experiences can lead to the expression of *tizita* and the drive for placemaking.

Finally, self-construction theories (Vignoles et al., 2016; Cassaniti, 2017; Cassaniti and Menon, 2017; Singelis, 1994; Markus and Kitayama, 1991, 2010) highlight the creation of shifting, multiple, context-dependent selves as a result of intercultural contact. Kondo (1990), for instance, working within a Japanese cultural context, demonstrates how individuals craft new selves and identities based on their occupations, with socioeconomic forces and power relations playing critical roles. This process of constructing multiple selves is applicable to the experiences of Amhara immigrants as they navigate between their home culture and identities and those of the hostland.

Fieldwork: Rationalizing Methods

The same path that brought early Amhara Ethiopian students to the USA also brought me here on a scholarship. After experiencing cultural differences, confusion, and language barriers, I developed a strong desire to understand the after-migration way of life and what it means to immigrants. I began questioning: if cultural learning defines what it means to be human, what happens to a person in a cultural

environment that is entirely new? If someone is recognized as a fully enculturated individual in their native culture, what do they become in a completely new culture? Wouldn't they need to forge a new sense of personhood, one that aligns with the new cultural environment? These questions, along with many others, formed the foundation of my research.

Hence, I lived in Minnesota for one year, from July 2018 to July 2019, conducting fieldwork among Amhara Ethiopians. Prior to this, I became familiar with the Amhara Diaspora since 2015 through my human rights activism. This activism provided me with opportunities to present my views at various community meetings (up until 2024): five times in Seattle, Washington; once in Dallas, Texas; seven times in Washington, D.C.; three times in Atlanta, Georgia; and once in Portland, Oregon. One of these meetings, hosted by the Amhara Professionals Union (APU) in Washington, D.C., allowed me to present my book *Gihonism: The Roots and Routes of Amhara*, which was published in Amharic in January 2018. I also participated in numerous virtual meetings, expanding my social network and gaining insights.

From July 28 to 30, 2018, I embarked on a 23-hour drive from Pullman, Washington, to the Twin Cities, with overnight stops in Missoula, Montana, and North Dakota. This was my first time driving solo for such a long distance, trailing my friend Dr. Mark Caudel—a postdoctoral scholar at WSU and a member of my committee due to his research experience in Ethiopia—who was on his way to his home state of Michigan. The journey turned out to be quite an adventure for me. Upon arriving in Minnesota, I quickly reconnected with Ethiopian friends from both home and social media. On September 29, 2018, I met even more friends at the *Meskel* Celebration (the Finding of the Cross) in Phalen Park, St. Paul. With their support, I further explored the Twin Cities and the surrounding suburbs. Throughout my stay, "Minnesota Nice" lived up to its reputation, although I did struggle with some allergy issues.