Leaving Out of Babylon, Into Whose Father’s Land?

The Ethiopian Perception of the Repatriated Rastafari

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Abstract

This project is the first to investigate the way in which Ethiopians view the Rastafari, a post-colonial religious faith. Since originating in Jamaica in the 1930s, Rastafari have moved to the East African country to settle, viewing the country as the Promised Land. Given this centrality of Ethiopia to Rastafari, my dissertation documents the perception of Rastafari and Rastafarians within Ethiopia and the role these immigrants play within Ethiopian society.

The methodology used is that of thick description—making an attempt to engage with as many different narratives about the Rastafari as possible. Thick description allows for an understanding of what is happening as regards the interaction between Rastafari and Ethiopians, but also provides a sense of context and meaning. After extensive interviewing in the Ethiopian cities of Shashemene and Addis Ababa, a comprehensive review of Ethiopian media coverage as well as analyses of academic, religious and government documents, the multiplicity of perspectives found demonstrated a view of a unique immigrant community, as well as a multifaceted view of Ethiopia and Ethiopianness.

I draw from the many narratives about the Rastafari a sense of what these narratives can inform relative to Ethiopian identity itself. Unlike traditional development workers who stay on average two years, Rastafari wish to settle in Ethiopia. The challenge, therefore, to Ethiopians is to find a way to legally recognize these immigrants within the already complex historical and social spectrum of Ethiopian identity. The Rastafarian desire for citizenship and involvement in Ethiopian society challenges the idea of what it means to be Ethiopian and simultaneously demands that Ethiopian and Rastafarian identity re-evaluate its sense of self. As the Rastafari involve themselves more fully in Ethiopia, through the establishment of both humanitarian and business initiatives, and engage with more levels of Ethiopian society, they present a more sustainable identity within the country.

The Rasta belief in themselves as Ethiopian stems from a post-colonial understanding of the world. In Ethiopia, this perception comes up against a non-colonial view of the world, as found in Ethiopia's independent consciousness. I demonstrate how the Ethiopian perception of the Rastafari presents a situation in which different conceptions of identity come into dialogue and the notion of cultural citizenship is negotiated. Indeed, the negotiation between Ethiopian and Rastafarian identities ultimately illuminate the fact that as a symbol, Ethiopia is quite clearly defined, yet in reality, it is constantly in dynamic change.
Sommaire

Ce projet est le premier à explorer la manière dont les Éthiopiens voient le Rastafari, une croyance religieuse post-coloniale. Depuis leur début en Jamaïque au courant des années 1930, les Rastafaris ont déménagé pour s’établir dans le pays d’Afrique de l’Est, le voyant comme la terre promise. Due en partie au rôle central que détient l’Éthiopie au sein de la religion Rastafari, ma dissertation documente la perception du Rastafari et des Rastafariens à l’intérieur de l’Éthiopie et le rôle que joue ces immigrants dans la société éthiopienne.

La méthodologie utilisée est celle de « description dense »—tentant d’engager avec autant de récits sur le Rastafari que possible. La méthode de description épaisse permet à la fois une compréhension de l’interaction entre les Rastafariens et les Éthiopiens, tout en fournissant un contexte et un sens. À travers de nombreuses entrevues dans les villes éthiopiennes de Shashamene et d’Addis Abeba, une critique compréhensive de la couverture médiatique de l’Éthiopie, ainsi qu’une analyse de documents académiques, religieux et politiques, la multiplicité des perspectives retrouvées présentent un regard unique sur la communauté immigrante, ainsi qu’un point de vue varié sur l’Éthiopie et l’éthiopicité.

De plusieurs récits sur les Rastafariens, je retire un sens de ce que ces récits peuvent dire sur l’identité éthiopienne comme telle. Les Rastafariens diffèrent des travailleurs en développement international puisque ceux-ci ne restent qu’en moyenne deux ans, alors que les Rastafariens eux, désirent s’établir de façon permanent en Éthiopie. Par conséquent, le défi qui se présente pour les Éthiopiens est de trouver une manière de reconnaître légalement ces immigrants à l’intérieur de la complexité historique et sociale de l’identité éthiopienne. Le désir Rastafarien de citoyenneté et d’implication au sein de la société éthiopienne pose un défi à l’idée de ce que cela veut dire d’être Éthiopien et en même temps exige que l’identité éthiopienne et rastaferienne ré-évalue son sens de soi. Comme les Rastafariens s’impliquent davantage au sein de l’Éthiopie à travers des initiatives d’affaires et humanitaires, et s’impliquent à plusieurs niveaux de la société éthiopienne, ils présentent une identité plus durable à l’intérieur du pays.

La croyance Rasta qu’ils sont eux-mêmes Éthiopiens est issue d’une compréhension post-coloniale du monde. En Éthiopie, cette perception s’affronte contre un point de vue non-colonial sur le monde, retrouvée dans la conscience indépendante de ce pays. Je démontre comment la perception éthiopienne du Rastafari présente une situation à l’intérieur de laquelle différentes conceptions d’identité entrent en dialogue et la notion de citoyenneté culturelle est négociée. En effet, la négociation entre les identités éthiopiennes et rastafariennes illumine le fait qu’en tant que symbole, l’Éthiopie est clairement définie, mais dans la réalité, elle est en changement constant et dynamique.
Foreword

This dissertation has been a while in the making. I have not done this by myself and have had help at every stage. Thanks to my advisor, Dr. Jonathan Sterne, who made me feel as if this was a fascinating topic and encouraged me throughout. I know I wouldn’t have finished without him. Also, thank you to Dr. Jenny Burman for both feedback and support, and Dr. Will Straw for asking excellent questions.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table of Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Introduction</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting to Shashemene: Research and Positionality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter One</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I and I ah Ethiopian”: The Rastafari Vision of Ethiopia and Ethiopianness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Two</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Problem with Ethiopianness: Nation, Nationality and Plural Visions of Identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Three</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Space in/and Shashemene</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Four</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa Unite, Bob Marley, the Media and the Backlash: A Case Study in Perceptions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Five</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Music and Art: Representations of the Rastafari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Chapter Six</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development and Cultural Citizenship: Open to Possibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>230</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conclusion</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perception meets Perception</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>270</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Appendix</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>279</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>References</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>288</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Introduction**

**Getting to Shashemene**

To get somewhere in Ethiopia, there’s the incredibly expensive Land Cruiser option, in which you get to drive in air-conditioned comfort, but there’s also the lower cost mini bus and then the dirt cheap public bus. Public transportation means sometimes putting up with unreliable buses, imported probably over thirty or forty years ago. Without the funds for the most comfortable option, I stood on a corner reputed to be a good place to catch mini buses to Shashemene, a town about 250 kilometers south of Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia. As it became increasingly obvious that I wasn’t going to get on one of these except to go to other parts of the city—the laughter of various drivers made this fact plain—I decided that public transit might have to be the way to go.

Walking to the short distance bus station (buses in Ethiopia are divided between short distance—probably three to seven hours—and the so-called “countryside” buses that can take days on difficult and dangerous roads so as to get to some of the country’s most remote villages) I wondered if this was such a good plan. My idea was to go and visit Shashemene, a town that I had read about in books, but mostly heard about in reggae songs. It was the place where I had heard that Rastafari, who view Ethiopia as the Promised Land, had developed a settlement on land provided to them by Haile Selassie. At the time, I had few further details.
I sat down at the back of the bus next to a young woman who introduced herself as Meskarem. After I said “yikertah”, excusing myself for shimmying into the last available space, she looked at me shocked. “Amarinya techaalalesh?” she asked, wanting to know if I spoke Amharic. I told her that I had a little knowledge of the language: “Amarinya itchaallalo, tenish tenish.” Delighted, we set upon a bit of a language trade as the bus left Addis Ababa.

It takes nearly six hours to make the journey to Shashemene, including a lunch stop in Ziway, about 100 kilometers from the final destination. I had lunch with Meskarem and had to argue quite forcefully in order to be able to pay for the kitfo. The two other foreigners waited on the bus. This was the third time I had been on a bus from Addis to somewhere—each time I had been offered food, drink, lunch and conversation. It appeared, however, that the foreigners, both of whom wore dreadlocks, did not receive the same treatment. I noticed one of them giving cookies to children, and remembered how I had been told by staff members of the NGO I volunteer for, Habitat for Humanity, that I should avoid giving such things, as I couldn’t possibly give to all the children in a particular town. I asked myself, did my reaction, by not giving, came from experience, or a sense of superiority? Was I observing, or was I placing myself in a specific social grouping—one that perhaps places me closer to Ethiopians and further from the foreign Rastafari? If this was my question, it was answered by Meskarem.

Again demonstrating my limited skills in Amharic, I pointed at the blond-dreadlocked, twenty-something white fellow sitting halfway up the bus next to an

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1 My conversation with Meskarem was not a formal interview.
2 Kitfo is normally raw, spiced ground beef. I asked for it half-cooked—apparently this was quite a brave decision for a forenge. Meskarem told me that she was happy that I’d want to eat the “national food.”
equally dreaded older Jamaican man—I say Jamaican because I recognized the accent in his speech as I walked to the back of the bus.

“And ferenge (meaning one foreigner or white person),” I said, pointing at myself, “Oulette ferengeuch (meaning two foreigners or white people),” pointing towards the white Rasta. Meskarem shook her head. “Sost ferengeuch, (meaning three foreigners)” she corrected, nodding at the Jamaican. I had yet to hear an Ethiopian describe a black person as “ferenge”. There, at that moment, by myself on the bus, independent of anyone who knew me, I immediately wanted to learn more. I was now seeing the experience as “an ethnographer rather than a participant” (Amit 2000, 7). Meskarem’s comment led me into an entire thought process regarding the construction of both “Ethiopian” and “Foreigner” identities.

What had happened when Meskarem delineated the identities of myself and the other “foreigners”, was that she had revealed a number of different elements. From her perspective, she saw me as a foreigner. Meskarem related me to the two Rastafarians on the bus and decided how she then related to the rest of us. Both the Rastafari and myself were considered forenge, foreigners. Meskarem’s statement reflected back on her own sense of identity, which prompted my thinking about the reception and perception of the Rastafari within Ethiopia.

Was Meskarem’s delineation of foreign-ness as regards the Rastafari a reflection of a divide between continental Africans and Africans in the diaspora? In Obiagale Lake’s “Toward a Pan-African Identity: Diaspora African Repatriates in Ghana”, she describes the difficulty of African diaspora integration into Ghanaian society and “suggest[s] that [the] ideological separation of indigenous and diaspora
Africans is a result of and is consistent with the hegemonic forces that inhered during the European extraction of Africans from their motherland” (1995, 21). Was this the reason for Meskarem’s observed disconnect?

Meskarem’s statements were based on a way of seeing herself and others—this way of seeing or perceiving is based on what one may call the “reality” of her identity. Postcolonial literary scholar Edward Chamberlin, in his book If this is your land, where are your stories? Finding Common Ground, writes that “the reality of our lives is inseparable from the ways in which we imagine it” (2003, 2). In this way, it is what Meskarem tells herself (or, in Chamberlin’s words, “imagines”) about her own Ethiopianness—informed by history, experience, other people—the narratives that exist in Ethiopia, helping to construct Ethiopian identity.

Rastafari, however, have their own narratives. The two sitting on the bus that one day had their own reasons for getting to Shashemene and their own “imaginations” informing their identities. As Chamberlin writes,

What Rastafarians have done is to make up a story—and I say this in high tribute—that will bring them back home while they wait for reality to catch up with their imaginations. It is an immensely powerful story, and its influence through the music of reggae is a measure of that power. . . Rasta and reggae provide a ceremony of consolation and commonality even as they present a litany of suffering. They provide one example of the way beyond conflict and loss—through the very stories and songs that remind us of them (76).
What causes Rastafari to pick up and move to Ethiopia is a powerful narrative—a narrative that “brings them back home”. This narrative is informed by the immense suffering of the history and legacy of slavery and colonialism, a history and legacy that created the African diaspora. Ethiopia becomes a powerful source of meaning through this narrative. The issues, however, that I wish to address have to do with not only the narrative of the Rastafari, but also the narratives of those other travellers to and inhabitants of Shashemene.

On my journey, the bus had a significant number of technical problems, so the trip was significantly longer than normal. The two Rastafari were dropped off just outside of Shashemene proper, at the entrance to a large compound. I later came to know this large building as the Twelve Tribes of Israel Headquarters. Their reasons for travelling to Shashemene were clearly different than mine. The bus continued until I saw the road that led to my hotel—a hotel, I eventually learned, that is owned by a Rastafari who moved to Ethiopia from Manchester, England. I called to the driver to stop by yelling the correct word in Amharic: “Warehje!” The bus slowed, I said goodbye to everyone I’d been sitting with, and I stepped down from the bus. Along with the Rastafari and the other Ethiopian passengers, including Meskarem, I had reached my destination in Shashemene.

Shashemene. This is a place where Rastafari had come to settle on their Promised Land. At that moment, disembarking from the bus, I had already begun the thinking which would become this dissertation, a project that still is and will continue to be a work in progress, based on the reality of my topic and the changing, layered, complex notion of identity, especially within Ethiopia.
It seemed as if many travellers to Ethiopia, and especially those foreigners who travel to Shashemene, were fascinated with these individuals whose strong belief led them to this part of the world. Giulia Bonacci, in her PhD dissertation entitled “Pionniers et héritiers: Histoire du retour, des Caraïbes à l’Éthiopie (19ème et 20ème siècles)” (“Pioneers and Heirs: A History of Return from the Caribbean to Ethiopia [19th and 20th Centuries]), contextualizes the Rastafari in a history of repatriate movements (such as to Sierra Leone and Liberia, as well as through the efforts of Marcus Garvey)

3, delineates the trajectory of Caribbean peoples to Ethiopia and outlines the history of the Rastafari community in Shashemene. Although her thesis provided a strong, detailed and thorough historical narrative, she herself said in a 2002 interview, “We possess very little information on the real reactions of Ethiopians. A lot of rumours exist” (Mayer 2002). 4 In casual conversation with Ethiopian friends, many would say things to the effect of “It’s about time someone asked Ethiopians their opinion on the Rastas.” What I didn’t count on was how excited many people would be to speak about the Rastafari—as if they had never been asked. My thesis presents the first study of these “real reactions”.

The impact of the Rastafarians, in terms of what the Ethiopian population perceives, has yet to be discussed. Though the references are limited, in the field of

3 Bonacci’s work clearly situates the desire for Rastafari repatriation within the reality of the African diaspora, a desire resulting from a “distinct social movement, deployed over several centuries, with the objective of ‘repairing’ the forced displacements resulting from slavery, escaping the state of socio-economic struggle and colonial servitude under which they have been living” (2007, 13) [“mouvement social distinct, déployé sur plusieurs siècles, dont l’objectif était de ‘réparer’ les délocalisations dues à l’esclavage, d’échapper aux conditions socio-économiques et au statut colonial du sujet qui en étaient issus.” My translation.]

4 “On ne possède que très peu d’informations sur les vraies réactions éthiopiennes. Il existe beaucoup de rumeurs.” My translation.
African diaspora studies\(^5\), there have been scholars who have researched the meeting of indigenous African and diaspora Africans, such as the above-mentioned study by Obiagele Lake.\(^6\) In a 2003 paper, Jennifer V. Jackson and Mary E. Cothran analysed the relationships between African, African American and African Caribbean people, though the African peoples in question were limited to individuals from Nigeria and Ghana and the study took place not in Africa, but in the United States.

South-south connections such as those between Bob Marley and Ethiopia, Gabon and Zimbabwe, as investigated by Grant Farred (2003, also see nt. 16 of the chapter one in the present work) and the work of Guyana’s Walter Rodney in Tanzania, as addressed by Viola Mattavous Bly, have produced examples of the “relationship of Africa and its diaspora” (Bly 1985, 129). Both Farred and Bly present images of negotiation between Africa with the diaspora, while avoiding “illusions” (Bly 129).\(^7\)

Elliot Skinner asks for the “restoration of African identity for a new millennium” in the title of his essay found in *The African Diaspora: African Origins and New World Identities* (1999, 28). Here, in the present day Rastafari community, located in Ethiopia, we have an example of attempts at this “restoration”, attempts described and historically recorded in Bonacci’s work, but


\(^6\) Lake herself bemoans the lack of attention paid to relationships between diaspora and indigenous Africans, saying “the anthropological literature has ignored transnational relations between Africa and its diaspora” (1995, 21).

\(^7\) A longer quotation from Bly is instructive: “Rodney left Tanzania in 1974 with a firm conviction that Africa’s success in liberating itself from capitalism would have a decisive impact on the Black struggle in America. However he had no illusions about the nature of the relationship between Africa and its diaspora. Thus, he urged Black Americans to make distinctions between Africa’s many social classes and align themselves only with the most progressive” (1985, 129).
the response of the surrounding community has yet to be explored. Here with, we have an opportunity to see a negotiation of the type Rodney and Marley engaged in—here for the Rastafari a negotiation between the idea of Ethiopia and the lived experience of life in Ethiopia.

Paul Tiyambe Zeleza writes, in his article “Rewriting the Africa Diaspora: Beyond the Black Atlantic” that “[t]he challenges of mapping out the dispersals of African peoples over the last millennia are truly daunting. Also extremely difficult to delineate are the changing engagements between these diasporas and Africa” (2005, 63). Understanding the great challenges, I hope, through this thesis, hope to engage with these “difficult . . . engagements” and contribute to the field of diaspora studies interested in intersections between indigenous and diaspora Africans.

Also, in looking specifically at scholarship on Rastafari, there is an obvious lacuna in the research, which will be illustrated in the following chapter. There is little explanation or discussion of the Ethiopian perception of the Rastafari. Through researching the scholarly work on Rastafari, it becomes evident that the interplay between these narratives has yet to be investigated.

The initial focus developed from this concept of two narratives and how they come to communicate and dialogue with each other: the post-colonial Rastafari versus the non-colonial Ethiopian. I found, however, that there exists a large variety of both reactions and perceptions—all of which providing a commentary on narratives of identity, nationality and citizenship. I present an investigation into the relationship between the Ethiopian population and the
Rastafari, which ultimately presents a case of multiple narratives of meaning coming together, both conflicting and negotiating.

My project therefore investigates the relationship between Rastafari and Ethiopians, as situated within the space of Ethiopia. I interviewed over seventy-five people in Ethiopia, primarily in Shashemene. These individuals included high school and college students, farmers on the outskirts of the town, teachers at the local college and high schools as well as those who had worked for a Rastafari-run school; merchants who owned businesses in the area; local NGO workers; a banker that had worked on the financing of a Rastafari-run hotel; journalists, from both print and broadcast media; government officials at the level of the municipal government, including the mayor of Shashemene; musicians and artists; Orthodox priests and Protestant pastors—among others. I also interviewed Rastafari repatriates, many involved in business and humanitarian initiatives within Ethiopia.\(^8\) I gathered Ethiopian media coverage of Rastafari, as well as academic and religious writing on the subject. Through this wide range of sources collected in Ethiopia, I was made aware that the Rastafari receive a varied reception in the

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\(^8\) Of the interviewees, eighty percent were men and ninety percent were literate, with at least a high school education. Though I did make attempts to speak to more women and tried to gain access to as wide a cross section of individuals as possible, those individuals in media, government, NGOs and businesses, or those who are involved in religious affairs, were, in my experience, overwhelmingly male and reasonably well educated. I interviewed as many women as I could, but my attempts to interview members of various classes of society revealed that those individuals in Shashemene (which is a very impoverished town) who are struggling to care for their families were indifferent to my project—and the Rastafari. On more than a few occasions, individuals living in this difficult economic position told me that they did not have an opinion on the Rastafari, and they were therefore not interested in an interview. Other individuals of the community who wished not to be interviewed were leaders of the growing Muslim population. One mullah told me that there was “no need” to speak to him, because him and other Muslims did not care about the Rastafari community. Any attempt at continuing the conversation was met with frustration on his part. Should this research be expanded, perhaps further attempts could be made to speak to more individuals—especially in those I discuss here, given the difficulty I had in arranging interviews.
country—there is a gap between the Rastafari population and the Ethiopian population, and this gap is interpreted in many different ways.

The multifaceted research I undertook allowed for an understanding of what is happening in the interactions between Rastafari and Ethiopians, but also, through points of connection between interviews and written documents, I gained a sense of the context and meaning of these interactions. This multiplicity of perspectives presented to me were extremely wide ranging and demonstrated a heterogeneous view of an immigrant community, as well as a view of Ethiopia and Ethiopianness. The Rastafarian belief system is challenged by the reality of Ethiopia, a country in which the issue of origins is a non-issue—Rastas look to Africa as a homeland, whereas Ethiopians view their homeland as a given. In the following chapters, not only will I investigate the further commentary on the divinity of Haile Selassie, but also the local perception and impact of the spatial orientation of the Rastafari within (and without of) Shashemene.

Chapter One begins with a look at the Rastafari view of Ethiopia. Outlining the development of a sense of Ethiopian identity from the perspective of the Rastafari, I introduce some of the disconnects between Ethiopian perception and that of the Rastafari, as regards this sense of identity. Chapter Two investigates the Ethiopian perception of Ethiopianness, with reference to the Rastafari perception of the very same thing. The nature of Ethiopianness is presented, building on a historiocultural perspective based primarily on changes that have occurred within Ethiopia during the past century. I look at the ways in which identity has been formed, reformed and been in conflict as a result of various government initiatives.
as well as ethnic constructions. The chapter ends with a look at the Ethiopian view of Rastafari as foreigners, turning to a story recounted by many Ethiopians over the course of my research. This story provides a narrative as to why the Rastafari view Haile Selassie as divine and Ethiopia as the Promised Land. As a story, however, it is incredibly different from that told by the Rastafari themselves. Using this story as a foundation, I investigate the view of the Shashemene population towards the Rastafari.

In Chapter Three, I continue with an analysis of Shashemene, discussing the issue of land and space and the meanings that stem from this space—specifically how the space and the meanings drawn from it reflect the difference between the Rastafari population and that of the inhabitants of Shashemene.

I take a much broader view of the perception of the Rastafari in Chapter Four, by turning to the Africa Unite celebration of what would have been Bob Marley’s sixtieth birthday. The series of events took place in February 2005 and was covered extensively by the Ethiopian media. I look at the varied reactions through media as well as through other sources, such as those of the Protestant church—institutions that profoundly question the Rastafari—and then compare these reactions with the stated goals of the Bob and Rita Marley Foundations. Through this process, further layers of the Ethiopian perception are revealed. Chapter Five further elaborates the popular perception of the Rastafari by looking at music and artistic representations of the faith.

Finally, I turn to the potential of the Rastafari population on a grassroots level, as development workers within Ethiopia demonstrate a way in which further
integration into Ethiopian society may be achieved. At present, in Shashemene, there have been two Rastafari NGOs founded: the Ethiopian World Federation and the Jamaican Rastafarian Development Community. These organizations have developed a large-scale rainwater harvesting project and subsidized school respectively. Rastafari in Shashemene have also opened a tofu factory, two hotels and numerous other small businesses. Unlike traditional development workers who stay on average two years, Rastafari wish to settle in Ethiopia. A main problem, however, is that the Rastafari, regardless of how long they have been living in Ethiopia, are not recognized as citizens. At present, the laws of Ethiopia do not allow for this recognition; there is simply no official policy on Rastafari and citizenship in Ethiopia. The challenge therefore, is not only to find a way that recognition of these immigrants might be negotiated, but also to recognize diverse conceptions of national identity—yet another negotiation. By looking at projects and initiatives undertaken by different groups of Rastafari, it becomes evident that citizenship, though denied officially to the Rastafari population, might be, culturally, within their grasp. Chapter Six provides a framework for understanding the potential for connection between the Rastafari and the surrounding community as well as presenting points for further investigation into Rastafari humanitarian and business projects and plans for the future of the community in Shashemene.

Note on Positionality: Situatedness and Shashemene

I am making daily experiments now and I find I am able to take passing horses at a lively trot square across the line of fire . . . spokes well defined—some blur on top but sharp in the main . . . please notice when
you get the specimens that they were made with the lens wide open and
many of the best exposed when my horse was in motion. (Ondaatje 1991, 5)

In July of 2006, after having been involved in my third three-week Habitat
for Humanity build—this time in Shashemene—I had returned to Addis, said
goodbye to the volunteers, visited friends and then promptly turned around and
went back from whence I’d came, back to the town the Rastafari call the Promised
Land. The occasion was His Imperial Majesty’s 112th birthday, celebrated on the
twenty-third of July, according to the western Gregorian calendar, but the sixteenth
of Hamle according to Ethiopia’s dating system. My reason for this was, quite
plainly, to test the waters of my own plan to eventually perform what I’ve come to
understand as “fieldwork.” In this note, I wish to describe my fieldwork and the
approach I took to this research, which took place in Ethiopia, both in Addis Ababa
and Shashemene, during the larger part of 2007 and January of 2008.

During my research, I spent four months teaching at a local college in
Shashemene and spent the balance of three additional months speaking with
various members of the community in Shashemene as well as those various
interviewees mentioned as additional informants. I engaged in interviews with
Ethiopians and Rastafari, both in Shashemene and Addis Ababa. The interview
process involved my providing of the questions to the interviewees, be they
translated into Amharic, Afaan Oromo (a language often referred to as Orominya,
it is the language of the Oromo people, as Amharic, or Amarinya, is the language
of the Amhara) or in the original English. I also had release forms, approved by the
Research Ethics Board at McGill University (see Appendix) and ensured that all interviewees signed these documents after I explained my project as clearly as I possibly could. Some interviewees requested anonymity. I have made attempts to provide for that in this thesis, understanding that sometimes anonymity within one’s own community is difficult to achieve. This point, however, was made to interviewees. In addition, I did research at the Institute for Ethiopian Studies at Addis Ababa University, and, alongside my research assistant Salamawit Kidane, I gathered media coverage.

Though my research was based primarily on data collection and interviews, I did involve myself in a level of participant observation, by virtue of the fact that I was working alongside teachers at the college, attending various college related events and Rastafari gatherings. I also volunteered as a kindergarten teacher at a local NGO’s school. Being in Shashemene for this period also allowed me to gather both observations and experiences, often of everyday life and the daily goings on of the town, many of which relevant to the Ethiopian perception of the Rastafari.

While doing these different types of fieldwork, I was involved in what might be referred to as a type of ethnography (perhaps I might be better in claiming that this work is not an ethnography, but rather my research is ethnographic in nature), an anthropological method which I discuss in this thesis and which became a major part of my collection of information. According to Vered Amit, “anthropology, at best, collapses the distinction between micro and macro and challenges reifications of concepts such as diaspora, state, globalization and so on,
which, in their geographic, political and social reach, can easily appear distant and abstract” (2000, 16). The theoretical discussion surrounding both anthropology and its methods is of importance in that questioning my research, my positionality, and my site of research involves dealing with many of the same challenges and raises many of the same points of discussion.

I needed to think about how I, a white, female, Canadian researcher, would deal with my research topic. I wished to be clear on my position as a researcher and make use of elements of the anthropological method of ethnography, aware that my position and the way I present myself has relevance to the information I received.

Firstly I moved from being a tourist, as on my first trip to Shashemene, to an NGO worker, as with my experiences with teams of volunteers—teams with a specific purpose and even more specific itinerary that had been carefully developed by myself and the kind people at Habitat Ethiopia’s National Office—to my fifth trip, all alone, with the specific purpose of looking at the Ethiopian perception of the repatriated Rastafari. There are implications of having worked with Habitat for Humanity. Though in my estimation an effective and valuable humanitarian organization, it is still ideologically driven in that it is Christian, yet it is ecumenical. Through my involvement with Habitat, I was viewed as having a purpose in Shashemene—at that point my identity was that of a development worker. There was always a reason for me being there and so I did not have to deal with the assumption that I was in Shashemene as a tourist, and therefore specifically interested in the town’s unique Rastafari population. This made
interviewing Ethiopians very easy, as they saw me as disconnected from the Rastafari.

The staff at the Habitat Office was, from my second visit, aware of my research interests. They knew that my eventual goal was to spend an extended period of time in the country, and specifically in Shashemene. But when I began the ethnographic experience, I felt like I was entering new territory. I knew a number of people in Shashemene and the surrounding communities, but my identity was no longer that of development worker or volunteer, but that of a researcher.

I have a working knowledge of Amharic, but it is not competent enough to complete full interviews. I worked with a translator that I came to know very well over a period of three years before I began the fieldwork. I had explained my project numerous times, so he did have a good idea of the types of questions I was asking, however the language barrier did mean that I was limited. Also, working as an English teacher meant that many people would want to be interviewed in English as a means of practicing the language. Some of these interviews were less valuable than others. I interviewed as many people as possible so as to be able to gain some sense of when individuals were often trying to provide answers they thought I would want to hear—sometimes verbally doubting themselves as having anything important to say—as opposed to simply answering questions.

As Amit writes, “ethnographic field workers [exploit] intimacy as an investigative tool” (2000, 3). My work in Ethiopia had been with and for an NGO—Habitat for Humanity. Through this relationship I have developed a
closeness with various people who became, for research purposes, “informants.” I must recognize that participant observation is “uneasily perched on the precipice between the inherent instrumentalism of this as of any research enterprise and the more complex and rounded social associations afforded by this particular method” (3). The personal and the professional are therefore very close here. Certainly, I cannot expect to completely separate myself from my experiences and my identity, but I believe that Judith Okley’s call for “autobiographical reflexivity” (1996) is important element of research technique. This sense of reflexivity is an understanding that I am always a part of my observations. I want to make sure that I am consistently questioning and requestioning myself and my research so as to ensure the issues of representation are never far from my mind—“representation”, as Gayatri Spivak demonstrates, that “has not withered away” (1988, 104).

I am, in the writing of this thesis, speaking for others. In doing this, I remember the words of Linda Alcoff, who warns that “the practice of speaking for others is often born of a desire for mastery, to privilege oneself as the one who more correctly understands the truth about another’s situation or as one who can champion a just cause and thus achieve glory and praise” (1995, 116). My immediate love of Ethiopia and ease of working with Ethiopians, juxtaposed with my initial frustration with the reluctance of the Rastafari population to be interviewed was something that I had to work through—after all, the reality of fieldwork reveals frustration and challenges that cannot be expected. This project does not wish to judge, nor did I set out to present a certain image or “truth” of any
population. The multiplicity of ideas and images that I received in my interviews demand additional research—this project is by no means complete.

In addition, undoubtedly my position as a white, English-speaking, female foreigner enabled me privileged access to various individuals and various sources. For instance, though I never offered money or was asked for money for any interview, my position allowed me to work as a teacher, a volunteer job that was key to many connections that led to many valuable interviews. My western-ness and connections to the expatriate community in Ethiopia allowed me to make contact with the incredibly helpful community of Ethiopian returnees—Ethiopians who had migrated elsewhere (the United States, Canada and England, most often) and had returned to the country as adults. My presentation and position as PhD researcher made it possible to access materials from the Institute of Ethiopian Studies at Addis Ababa University as well as create a connection with Selamawit Kidane, my research assistant, who gathered the media source material describing the events of the Bob Marley Africa Unite Concert.

I write this short note here so as to make clear my positionality and my experience as I entered in to this research project. I make no claims to completeness, and I understand the limitations of my experiences. As Keya Ganguly writes, “our accounts of the world (as well as ourselves) are inherently incomplete interpretations, rather than unmediated descriptions of the ‘really’ real” (1992, 61). I do, however, feel that what is presented herein is, as is described by Ondaatje in his introduction to The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, a book which attempts to describe the identity of the famous outlaw, delving into multiple
perceptions and layered experiences. The resulting “photograph” has “some blur”,
but is “sharp in the main”. This is my aim: looking at as many perspectives as
possible, recognizing that there will always be blur, but that I may provide the
beginning steps towards a general portrait of the Ethiopian perception of the
Rastafari. I will, through these coming chapters, aim to keep my “lens wide open”
and acknowledge that the “best exposed” take into account “motion”—the dynamic
nature of Ethiopia, a country that has experienced so much change and adaptation,
even within the last half century.
Chapter One

“I and I ah Ethiopian”¹:

The Rastafari Vision of Ethiopia and Ethiopianness

*Ethiopia, Ethiopianism and the Rastafari*

Rastafari is an African way of life. Our deity is African, our prophet is African, our signs and symbols and philosophy are also African. Therefore, to live according to the principles of Rastafari is to live out the essence of an African way of life. This is the depth to which we are able to take the concept of repatriation (Williams, qtd. in Erskine 2005, 48).

I'm trodding . . . yes I'm trodding,

Straight to Ethiopia, that's where I wanna be.

-Natty King, “Trodding”, 2005²

Africa for Africans, Marcus Mosiah speak;

Unification outnumbers defeat.

What a day when we walk down Redemption Street,

Banner on heads, Bible inna we hands.

One and all let’s trod the promised land;

Buju go down a Congo, stopped in Shashemene land.

The city of Harar where Selassie come from,

In Addis Ababa then Botswana, left Kenya end up in Ghana.

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Oh, what a beauty my eyesight behold;
Only Ethiopia protect me from the cold.

-Buju Banton, “’Til I’m Laid to Rest”, 1995

Rastafari is an Afrocentric faith. Those who declare themselves Rasta believe in the divinity of Emperor Haile Selassie, the Solomonic former Emperor of Ethiopia who ruled from 1930 to 1974, and, in addition, view Ethiopia as symbolically or literally central to their faith. This belief in Ethiopia as a space of black empowerment began before Ras Tafari’s coronation and Jamaican preacher Leonard Howell’s subsequent declarations of the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy in the person of Haile Selassie I. As Carole Yawney writes, “The most basic and predominant characteristic of Rastafarian ideology is its Ethiopianism” (1978, 87).

In W.B. Carnachan’s *Golden Legends: Images of Abyssinia, Samuel Johnson to Bob Marley* he outlines how Ethiopia has existed in the minds and stories of various cultural communities, with specific focus on Britain and Jamaica, from the eighteenth century onwards. As regards Jamaica, the birthplace of Rastafari, George Eaton Simpson has written that Ethiopia’s importance arguably began the moment the Christian Bible was introduced into Jamaican society, as

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4 The basic tenets of Rastafari are difficult to specify since it is such an open movement with many sub sects. It is possible to state that one tenet all Rastafari share is a belief in Haile Selassie as not simply a divinely ordained ruler, an attitude that is, in my experience, generally not denounced by Ethiopians, but that he is the personification of God. He is, for Rastafari, not divinely ordained, but divine. For example, at the 23 July 2006 birthday celebrations for Haile Selassie, held in Shashemene by the Rastafari community, each performer declared the following: “God Bless Jesus Christ who came to us in the personality of His Majesty Haile Selassie. King of Kings, Lord of Lords, the Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah.” I am attempting here to focus on the issue of repatriation specifically, however for further information on the theology of Rastafari, please see Erskine 2005, specifically chapters 3 and 4.
5 Tafari Makonnen was Haile Selassie’s birth name before he took the name Haile Selassie, when he became Emperor of Ethiopia on 2 November 1930. *Ras* is the Amharic word for “king”.

early as the eighteenth century. The oft-quoted verse, Psalms 68:31, looms large over all Ethiopianist thought: “Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God” (Simpson 1985, 286). References to Ethiopia in the Bible could potentially have held a “liberatory promise” from the moment the book entered the Jamaican slave or black consciousness. “[W]hen contrasted with the indignities of plantation bondage,” these mentions of Ethiopia “showed the black man in a dignified and humane light” (Shepperson, qtd. in Chevannes 1994, 34). Here we see how Ethiopianism is not simply an interest in the history and narrative of the country, but it is a “philosophical orientation generally embodying notions of pan-Africanism and African liberation” (Yawney 1978, 87). Beyond simply a reference to Ethiopia as nation state, the reference to Ethiopia is that of a reference to freedom, liberty and justice. In Fikru Gebrekidan’s *Bond Without Blood: A History of Ethiopian and New World Black Relations, 1896-1991* (2005), he demonstrates how Ethiopia has been viewed in this way by various groups in the African diaspora, only one of which being the Rastafari.

Ethiopia was concretized as the Holy Land for Rastafari when Selassie was crowned. Leonard Barrett, who wrote the first extensive study of the Rastafarian faith, explains how the combination of economic and political crises in Jamaica and the rise in Afrocentric belief systems as promoted by people like Marcus Garvey (and his Back to Africa philosophy) at the time led to a belief in Selassie’s reign as more than the continuation of Ethiopia’s monarchical government system: “A forgotten statement of Garvey . . . ‘Look to Africa for the crowning of a Black

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6 Barry Chevannes has tracked the history—as it developed in Jamaica—of the idealization of Africa, specifically Ethiopia, in chapter one of *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology.*
King; he shall be the redeemer’—came back like the voice of god. Possessed by the spirit of this new development, many Jamaicans now saw the coronation as fulfillment of Biblical prophecy and Haile Selassie as the messiah of African redemption” (Barrett 1997, 81).

By thwarting a white, European vision of Christianity and viewing Selassie as messiah, the African consciousness of Rastafari allows for a tremendous level of empowerment amongst people for whom blackness and African-ness has historically been viewed as inferior. Rastafari speaks against this historic racism: “Rastafarian doctrine is radical in the broad sense that it is against the oppression of the Black race, much of which derives from the existing economic structure (Sherlock and Bennett, qtd. in Erskine 2005, 76). The economic structure of colonialism led to a great gap between rich and poor—both in terms of the colonizing nations and the upper classes within colonial environments—upper classes that did not disappear at the moment of independence. For As Leo Erskine writes, “It must be kept in mind that the discourse concerning the divinity of Haile Selassie and the claims concerning biblical warrants that justify this claim are being made in the socio political context in which the vast majority of Rastafari are at the base of the socio economic ladder” (2005, 74).

Establishing Selassie as messiah and Ethiopia as the focal point in the quest for emancipation and redemption also provides a possible answer to the postcolonial question of origins. When Jamaican poet Kamau Brathwaite writes in the persona of a Rastaman, he makes plain this empowered belief that comes with a turn to Rastafari: “Rise rise / locks- / man, Solo- / man wise / man, rise / leh we/
laugh / dem, mock / dem, stop / dem, kill / dem an’ go / back back / to the black / man lan’ / back back / to Af- / rica” (1973, 43). The dreadlock clad Rasta rises up, is descended from King Solomon, is wise and able to mock “dem”—the oppressors. Just as Brathwaite’s poem takes advantage of the object pronoun so as to return the subject position to the black speaker, so too does the religion of Rastafari. In the Rastafari faith, the subject position, the “I”, is the seat of power. In terms of linguistics, “[t]he ‘I’ becomes a full speaking subject through its incorporation into the cultural structures of linguistic communication, where it becomes the subject who speaks and from whom knowledge apparently comes” (Weedon, Tolson and Mort 1980, 196). For the Rastafari, the “I” not only has the power to speak and produce knowledge, but it, especially in the form of “I and I” (or “I n’ I”) acts as a connection between “self, life and the world” (Nettleford, qtd. in Pollard 2000, 7).

It links the Rastafari with and “I” that is King Solomon, the God that exists, for

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7 The “I” also has great import in what Rasta scholars call “Iyaric” or “dread talk” (Kebede and Knottnerus 1998, 509; Pollard 2000, passim). Not only does this mode of speech allow the formation of a community amongst its speakers, but the language itself reflects the Rasta belief system in its very words. To extend the quotation provided above: “The Rastafarians are . . . creating a means of communication that . . . faithfully reflect[s] the specificities of their experience and perception of self, life and the world” (Nettleford, qtd. in Pollard 7). The use of the pronoun “I” is a specific example of (hence the alternative name for “dread talk” as “Iyaric”). Rastafari believe in what is referred to as “I and I consciousness” (Erskine 2005, 90)—a concept that rejects the need for external authorities as demanded by the colonial system and instead reifies a belief in the self and a personal, not hierarchical, ethos: “a new self in terms of collaboration and cooperation” (90). Hence, when in “Jah Say No”, Peter Tosh sings “[Jah] will not give I and I more than I can bear”, he uses the word “I” where, in other forms of English the object pronoun “me” would be used. In addition to the reference to I and I consciousness, the elimination of the object pronoun “me” in dread talk is an act of enforcing subjectivity. Through a history of slavery and colonialism, African peoples were objectified, and the ubiquitousness of “me”, found in Jamaican creole acting as both subject and object pronoun is, from a Rastafari perspective “a product of the slave era and denotes submissiveness (Kebede and Knottnerus 510). Instead, the pronoun “I”, on the other hand, “symbolizes subject, or personhood, as opposed to non-identity” (510). The use of “I” therefore not only presents the seat of power in Africa, but also presents a consciousness of the power of the spirit, the “I”—a consciousness that one can bear regardless of location. As an additional aside, Iyaric contains words that have been altered such that the phonology matches the meaning of the word (Pollard 24). An example of this is “downpression” in lieu of “oppression”—the reasoning being that oppression keeps people down, it does not lift them “up”. “Politricks” and “overstand” are two additional examples of this aspect of dread talk.
Rastafari in the personification of Haile Selassie, and Africa. This Africa, however, is both symbolic and literal, representing the continent itself as well as a sense of power and Afro-centricity that comes with Rastafari consciousness.

As Barrett writes, the “love” for Africa and Ethiopia is a major emphasis in Rastafari thinking:

Africa and Ethiopia are two “holy” places to most Jamaicans. Africa is often called Ethiopia—in fact, most Jamaicans confuse the two. This was true of the great lover of all things African—Marcus Garvey. To the Rastas, Ethiopia means that territory ruled by Haile Selassie, who is the God of the black people. It is through him that Blacks shall be removed from the far-flung places where they as Africans have been carried into slavery and, through repatriation, will be returned to their homeland. (1997, 268)

This raises the point that Ethiopia and Africa are, for Rastafari, often collapsed. Referring to Ethiopia is referring to Africa and vice versa. Ethiopia, in this case, becomes a metonymic stand-in for the whole of the continent—it is the universal homeland for the African diaspora. Joseph Owens, in his book *Dread: The Rastafarians of Jamaica*, further explains this concept: “Africa for the Rastas is not . . . the same as Africa for ‘society’ people,” and by “‘society’ people”, Owens means non-Rastafari. “Even as regards the name the brethren stand apart, since they consider the proper name for Africa to be Ethiopia. Such it was called in the Bible, and, they maintain, only those who have an interest in concealing the truth about the promised land will give it another name” (1976, 223). The view of Ethiopianism as being connected with pan-Africanism (the view expressed by
Yawney 1978) through the pan-African ideals of Haile Selassie (Selassie did establish the United States of Africa), also connects Ethiopianist thought with what might be called Africanist or Afrocentric thought. All of this allows for what some might call the inconsistency of the belief of Rastafari in Ethiopia as a homeland. The African diaspora in Jamaica, the birthplace of Rastafari, would, strictly historically speaking, call West Africa the homeland, given the history of the heinous trans-Atlantic slave trade.

But, the very same thing that Paul Gilroy argues in his book *The Black Atlantic*, can be argued here about the Rastafari:

\[\ldots\] the modern world represents a break with the past, not in the sense that premodern, ‘traditional’ Africanisms don’t survive its institution, but because the significance and meaning of these survivals get irrevocably sundered from their origins \ldots\] It is proposed here above all as a means to figure the inescapability and legitimate value of mutation, hybridity and intermixture. (1993, 222-23)

Is it really necessarily about the direct, exact historical connection to Africa, a connection that is, as a result of colonialism, completely impossible to track? Or, rather, is it about the fact that based on being “irrevocably sundered from their origins”, the Rastafari present a “legitimate” connection to Africa and specifically Ethiopia, a place that represents resistance against the very colonialism that led to the sundering in the first place. Gilroy takes issue with the need to resurrect or reconstruct a narrative of Africanness based on authentic connections to Africa. As Tommy L. Lott writes, “Gilroy criticizes the Afrocentric doctrine for its
commitment to a narrative of Western civilization that only couches a different set of political interests in the same terms” (2003, 172). To critique the Rastafari on the basis of presenting a narrative that, through insisting upon Ethiopia as source, denies history in some way, is to base the evaluation of Rastafari on a Western model. Rastafari is, in fact, “legitimate” in that it has resulted from “mutation, hybridity and intermixture”. Ethiopia is important because of what it represents.

In Giulia Bonacci’s work, she presents a statement of agreement by saying that “The entire bibliography of pan-Africanism mentions, in one place or another, or in certain lines or chapters, the predominance of Ethiopianism in the formation of social, religious and nationalist black thought. In effect, Ethiopianism is indissociable from work on race and raciality in the world: Ethiopia and Ethiopians serve, by analogy, to designate black people” (2007, 77)\(^8\). This point is underlined by the Ethiopian World Federation (EWF), who, in their General Overview of the organization write that the “major goal” of their organization is as follows: “The Ethiopian (meaning all black people), World (everywhere), Federation (autonomous groups working together), desiring to do all we can to restore the continent of Ethiopia-Africa to her former state of complete independence” (2006, 1). By writing this, the EWF attempts to establish the universal nature of the concept of Ethiopia and, also, the relationship between Ethiopia and Africa. An Ethiopianist focus therefore leads the EWF to suggest that work on the development of Ethiopia “effect[s] a social and economic betterment of the race

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everywhere” (1). Echoing Bonacci, the EWF presents the idea that Ethiopianism is interested in the fight for social justice, equality and economic betterment for members of the African diaspora.

Land, and that land being Ethiopia, is also of specific symbolic importance. According to Edward Chamberlin, a desire for land and a sense of home/origins is at the centre of the colonial conflict between “us” and “them”—a conflict that takes on multiple shapes and guises. The Rastafari claim Ethiopia as a site of origins, a home. This claim is made regardless of the fact that the statement of Ethiopia as a home might also mean the continent of Africa. Through colonialism, conflicts over land and the complete dispossession of much of Africa created, for diaspora Africans, a vacuum whereby “home”, and all of the spiritual, cultural, and social meanings that “home” contains was in varied and different ways destabilized, fragmented and replaced by an external notion (or notions) of home, courtesy of European colonizers. In addition, the horrors of the trans-Atlantic slave trade enforced a system in which large numbers of people were completely denied any property or ownership rights alongside a total and complete lack of basic human freedom. For Jamaica, the place in which Rastafari as a faith originated, this is a major point. Erskine writes that “identity issues in Jamaica cannot be properly discussed without reference to land” (2005, 93). From a social, cultural, spiritual and historical standpoint, land is a central concern. And it is Shashemene that moves the Rastafarian dream of a homeland and all of the symbolic resonance of

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9 This concept is elaborated in *If this is your land, where are your stories? Finding Common Ground* (2004). Also notice the importance of the subject pronoun and who has the opportunity to use it—the act of postcolonial writing against colonial oppression tends to first and foremost require a “taking back” of the subject position.
Ethiopia and Africa from a symbolic concept to an actual reality of a place, a piece of land within Ethiopia\textsuperscript{10}. As Brent Hayes Edwards writes, “If black New World populations have their origin in the fragmentation, racialized oppression, and systematic dispossession of the slave trade, then the Pan-African impulse stems from the necessity to confront or heal that legacy through racial organization itself: through ideologies of a real or symbolic return to Africa” (2001, 46).

What has been established in this section is a brief description of the way in which Ethiopia and Africa figures in Rastafarian belief. For Rastafarians, there is no doubt of the importance of Ethiopia as a homeland. As Ras Tagas King, the resident country representative for the EWF in Ethiopia, said: “We see Ethiopia as our Promised Land. That’s why we are here. There is no other place in the world we cherish more than Ethiopia, so it’s special”\textsuperscript{11}. Concurring with this statement is Vernon Judah, a child of Rastafari who repatriated in 1975: “We believe that Ethiopia is our land . . . when I say Ethiopia, I mean before colonization, for instance, when Sudan was part of Ethiopia . . . We believe Ethiopia is the Promised Land”\textsuperscript{12}.

\textit{“Jamaica” in Ethiopia: The Shashemene Settlement}

Numerous stories exist regarding the establishment of the section of land outside of Shashemene, Ethiopia, as a settlement for repatriated Africans,

\textsuperscript{10} Just an aside: As Chamberlin writes, the act of creating a border, setting off a particular piece of land, is less about preventing the act of crossing and entering that space than it is an act of establishing that there is a space. Borders “function like the threshold of a church, or the beginning of a story; and they need to be acknowledged if proper respect is to be paid to those for whom the place is sacred or appropriate contempt shown to those who are polluting it” (63). The creation of these borders is, of course, also concomitant with a belief in what side of the border one might be on.

\textsuperscript{11} Ras Tagas King (Resident Country Representative for the Ethiopian World Federation), interview, 1 September 2007.

\textsuperscript{12} Vernon Judah (Electrician, repatriate, born in Ethiopia), interview, 3 August 2007.
specifically Rastafari. According to the Jamaican Rastafarian Development Community (JRDC), “exactly seven years after the liberation of Ethiopia and the return of the Emperor in 1941, the triumphant Emperor Haille Selassie [sic] I gave a gift to the black people of the west of 500 acres of land in Shashemene, Shoa Province”.¹³ William F. Lewis’s *Soul Rebels: The Rastafari*, describes how representatives of the Rastafari faith travelled to Africa in the 1960s in order to locate land to which they could be repatriated. Selassie was apparently impressed by the Rastas and therefore granted them land. John Homiak, however, suggests that the settlement was a “landgrant . . . given by Selassie to African-Americans” (1993, 961).

Most recently, the focus of Bonacci’s “Pionnieres et Heritiers” (thesis defended in April 2007, published as a book in 2008)¹⁴ was to establish the history of the repatriates and the land grant. In this work, she firmly establishes the details of the gift of land to the EWF by Haile Selassie. She tracks the processes of repatriation, the initial settlers and the development of the settlement until the early part of the twenty-first century. Through her work, and that of others, it is clearly evident that it is important to the Rastafari that Selassie himself bequeathed the land.

For the Rastafari, this land has become an escape from Babylon, salvation from the oppressive system that exists in Jamaican society as well as in the west.

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¹³ This quotation was from the JRDC website, (www.jrdcommunity.org). This website, since August 2008, no longer exists. It would appear that the online presence of the JRDC and its activities, as of October 2009, is managed by the Shashamane Settlement Community Development Foundation Incorporated USA (www.shashamene.org). On this new website there is information about the JRDC school as well as information about other projects and the history of the community.

Independent from Babylon, the Rastafari can build a classless society that denies the divisions made so apparent within the colonial period. The postcolonial (or, more correctly, neo-colonial) present still struggles with these divisions of race and class; by exiting the west and entering a self-sufficient existence in the Shashemene settlement, the Rastas believe they can make real the emancipation from mental slavery of which Bob Marley sings. This ideal is viewed in the utopian sensibilities of the space that are discussed in chapter three.

As Erskine writes, “Rastas seek in their living to preserve a rhythm between themselves and nature” (91). Life in Shashemene allows for the Rastas to denounce oppressive Babylon and embrace what is often referred to as “I-and-I consciousness.” This Rasta philosophy embraces a oneness with all living things—there is no hierarchy. “There is no individual, no super Rasta man who is able to impose his will on organizations and groups” (91). The Nyabhungi, Bobo Ashanti and Twelve Tribes of Israel sects till the soil and live off the land: this lifestyle is possible in Shashemene. This all suggests the possibility of an idyllic lifestyle for the few hundred inhabitants of the Rasta community, referred to as “Jamaica” by Ethiopian residents of Shashemene.

The problem, however, is that the Rastafari themselves have a very specific view of Ethiopia/Africa; a view that has been briefly described here. This view of Ethiopia as homeland, as a liberatory space, and a coherent sense of identity that can be taken on by the repatriates themselves, is challenged by the reality of Ethiopia and the perceptions of Ethiopia’s people. Before looking at the Ethiopian

16 An interesting choice which I will discuss later.
perspective and at the spatial conception of Shashemene in addition to its impact on these varied identity formations, as I will in chapters two and three, I wish to look at what has been written thus far about the experience of the Rastafari post-repatriation.

What happens after repatriation?

The major studies of Rastafari tend to discuss the reasons for repatriation and the philosophy of repatriation, as well as the sense of what Ethiopia symbolizes; however, the reality of what happens after repatriation has been rarely covered. There is mention of those Rastafari who wish to travel to Ethiopia and Africa in general, but the lived reality of what this means for those who do actually repatriate has not been discussed in works dealing with the philosophy of Rastafarianism. Shashemene does not often even appear in indexes of books about Rastafari. The reactions in Ethiopian society to repatriated Rastafarians receives even less attention.

Of various books written about the Rastafarians, there is almost no reference to the Rastafarian settlement in Ethiopia. Leonard Barrett’s The Rastafarians deals predominantly with the development of the movement, its philosophy and worldview, and the lifestyle of Rastafarians themselves. Stating initially that the “Rastafarian cult is a messianic movement unique to Jamaica” (1), his focus is solely on the role of the Rastafarians in Jamaican society. Though he discusses the resonance of the “fabled glory of Ethiopia” (1997, 68) and role of Ethiopia in Rastafari thought, the site of Shashemene, Ethiopia is not referenced:
“The majority [of Rastafarians] see Ethiopia as their homeland; others view Africa as the true homeland,” he writes. “There is no unanimity about the destination” (1).

Joseph Owens’s *Dread* discusses the development of Rastafari within Jamaica and dedicates a chapter “Dread Zion” to the discussion of repatriation to Ethiopia, however, with the exception of a few secondhand comments about stories told by those who had visited Ethiopia, there is no reference to Rastafari repatriates who live and work in Ethiopia (1976). Barry Chevannes’s *Rastafari: Roots and Ideology* also tracks the rise of the faith “since the movement's rise in the early 1930s” (1994, 1). Although Chevannes sees repatriation as “one of the cornerstones of Rastafari belief” (1), there is no discussion of actual, physical repatriation in his book. In fact, Shashemene is not mentioned. Instead, Chevannes speaks of “the Idealization of Africa, a broader concept in which Africa or Ethiopia becomes a symbolic point of reference, whether as ideal home hence denoting repatriation—or as source of identity—hence identification” (34). Discussion of repatriation is limited to the concept’s position in Rastafari doctrine or ideology as opposed to an investigation into the act of repatriation itself.

In *Rastafari Theology: From Garvey to Marley*, Noel Leo Erskine discusses the role of Garveyism and Ethiopianist thought in Rastafari theology, but he does not mention the actual act of repatriation or acknowledge the existence of the repatriate community in Ethiopia (2005). Instead, for Erskine, Rastafari theology has changed. In an interview about his book, Erskine detailed this succinctly: “It’s not over there; it’s here. The kingdom of God is where we are . . . They have refined [the repatriation goal] to say: Africa is within . . . [Now they] talk not about
going back to Africa, but about discovering Africa in Jamaica, just like the concept of the kingdom of God” (Terrazas 2006).

Horace Campbell’s *Rasta and Resistance: From Marcus Garvey to Walter Rodney* differs from the other texts in that it focuses on Rastafari as a political movement as opposed to a religious faith. Campbell’s sense that Rastafari is “based on the spirit of resistance” (2007, 121) leads him to look at the way in which it has helped to raise awareness about oppression world wide, through reggae music among other ways, and how it has been instrumental in political movements, such as the rise of democratic socialism under Michael Manley in Jamaica and other related left-wing movements and governments in the region and beyond.

In his book, Campbell does provide a brief description of Bob Marley’s visit to Shashemene, and how this visit led Marley to see repatriation as more of a symbolic attempt at refocusing (repatriating) the mind to an understanding and valuation of Africa. The album *Exodus Movement of Jah People* (1977) was a record that dealt both with the issue of mobilisation for freedom as well as a desire for repatriation to Ethiopia (Campbell 2007, 143). The 1978 visit of Marley to the Rasta settlement in Shashemene, Ethiopia caused him to recognize “concretely the problems of translating a dream [of repatriation] into reality” (143). Marley’s disappointment with the settlement and the possibilities available in Ethiopia led him to encourage a more symbolic sense of repatriation, i.e. “emancipat[ing one’s] self from mental slavery.” It can be imagined that Marley witnessed the state of the settlement at the height of communist Dergue regime, a time during which the land grant had been decreased and the settlers, not to mention the Ethiopian populations,
were dealing with a new government’s land arrangements, which will be discussed in chapter three.\footnote{If Campbell sees Marley’s trip to Ethiopia and experience in Shashemene, Grant Farred suggests that Marley’s trip to Ethiopia left him “impressed with the Ethiopians’ Pan-African spirit” (2003, 261), but, though “unable to critique Selassie” (260) for the same sorts of “elitism and self-indulgence” (263) he found in the leadership of Gabon as well as in his careful treatment of Robert Mugabe. Accoring to Farred, “he found . . . a lyrical way to make his point . . . Selassie was charged—if not indicted—by association if not by name” (260). Farred then goes on to express how, in the lyrics to Bob Marley’s songs, particularly the 1979 album \textit{Survival}, Marley presents a view of “late-twentieth-century Africa” (267). He promotes a “continental-diasporic alliance” (270) in a song like “Africa Unite”, yet “undercuts the celebratory tones” an optimism (263) of a song like “Zimbabwe”, by singing “soon we’ll find out who is / The real revolutionaries / ‘Cause I don’t want my people to be / Tricked by mercenaries” (qtd. in Farred 263). Here we see both an optimistic connection between Bob Marley, a member of the Caribbean diaspora, and Africa, as well as a pragmatic commentary on present day Africa.}

His subsequent music turned to the topic of African liberation and this “expression linked Rastafari to the advanced struggles for liberation at the front of racism [as can be seen] in [the line] . . . ‘Africans a liberate Zimbabwe’” (Campbell 2007, 144). Campbell also turns away from the physical, actual movement to Africa and Ethiopia and focuses more on a mental reframing that places Africa and Africanness in the forefront of Rastafari thought. Like Chevannes and Erskine, Campbell does not address the reality of repatriation for the repatriates themselves. Campbell focuses his analysis on Rasta as a force for resistance worldwide, from Jamaica to Africa to the UK to America to wherever there is a need for relief from oppression—hence the title of his book.

The bulk of academic writing on Rastafari shares Campbell’s sensibility of Rastafarianism as act of resistance and desire for justice: Chevannes sees Rastafari as a direct result of “social and ideological forms of resistance to . . . oppression” (1994, 43). Looking at the work of Simpson and Watson provides additional examples of the relationship between resistance and Rastafari. In addition, there have also been some writings on the impact of the faith on British as well as other
European societies (see Bonacci 2007 and Cashmore 1983 for examples). Also, though Neil Savishinsky has looked at the spread of Rastafari in West Africa and its impact on youth in Ghana (1994), beyond the few projects I mention in the following paragraphs, there has been little work done on the repatriate community, and even less work that documents relations between Ethiopian and Rastafarian communities in Ethiopia.

As for the establishment of the section of land outside of Shashemene as a settlement for Rastafari, John Homiak, an anthropologist who has written about Rastafari and published a review of a BBC documentary on the community, “The Emperor’s Birthday”, suggested that the settlement was a “landgrant . . . given by Selassie to African-Americans” (1994, 961). In William F. Willis’s Soul Rebels: The Rastafari, he dedicates a whole chapter to the issue. Lewis describes how representatives of the Rastafari faith travelled to Africa in the 1960s in order to locate land to which they could be repatriated. The first to mention the Ethiopian reaction to the Rastafari, Lewis details a conversation with an Ethiopian woman, formerly married to a Rastafari, who “fled” because she “found the Rastafari way of life too oppressive” (112). The woman presents quite a negative portrait: from her perspective, the Rastafari are oppressive, violent and threatening, not allowing Ethiopian wives to engage in any Ethiopian customs. Lewis, through his observations of interactions between a Rastafari in the local Shashemene market, suggests that “to the Amharic, [the Rastafari] appear gruff, short tempered and

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18 Lewis’s interview with the individual he describes as “an Amharic woman” (111), was arranged by Catholic missionaries. The woman, reports Lewis, “had lived with her husband for four years and then broke the marriage. Exasperated after he locked her and her daughter in the back room, she fled the commune” (111-12).
poorly tuned to the pace of the Amharic peasant” and claims that the Rastafari community “keep to themselves” (1993, 112).19

For other brief indications of the impact on or perception on behalf of the Ethiopian community, one can turn to Bonacci’s work, in which she provides a few glimpses. She describes briefly how the Rastas “... find themselves more directly confronted with hostility from Ethiopians than many other foreigners in the country” (2007, 463)20 and observes a “lack of understanding between the populations [of Rastas and Ethiopians]” (463)21. Bonacci also provides reports from three Ethiopian wives of Rastafarians, detailing the difficulty of Rastafari in accepting outsiders: “‘They don’t like outsiders . . . They think that only Jamaicans can be Rastas, but this can’t work! . . . They don’t like when others approach them and they don’t want others to believe in their God’ ” (426)22. All of these statements are interesting, as is Bonacci’s outline of development projects instituted by the Rastafari, but they are secondary to her overall project. The observations meet with little analysis as regards the meaning or significance of the Ethiopian perception. This is understandable as Bonacci’s primary objective is to present a history of the land grant and the community of repatriates themselves. Bonacci’s work fills a gap in that, unlike any earlier work, it provides a very complete look at Rastafari in Ethiopia as opposed to other parts of the world. Her scholarship will most likely act as the definitive history of the community, but

19 It is unclear whether the statement that the Rastafari “keep to themselves” is information gleaned from Lewis’s conversation with the “Amharic woman” or a personal observation.
20 “... ils se trouvèrent plus directement confrontés à l’hostilité des Éthiopiens que de nombreux étrangers dans le pays.” My translation.
21 “... méconnaissance entre les populations . . . “ My translation.
22 “Ils n’aient pas les étrangers . . . Ils pensent que seuls les Jamaïcains peuvent être Rastas, mais ça ne peut pas marcher! . . . Ils n’aient pas que d’autres s’approchent et ils ne veulent que personne d’autre ne croie en leur Dieu.” My translation.
questions as to how Ethiopians process their experiences with and views of those who engage in this spiritual migration are left unanswered.

Another recent text, Gebrekidan’s *Bond Without Blood*, presents a history of Ethiopianist thought within North America and the Caribbean. Though Gebrekidan’s discussion exemplifies the role of Ethiopia in various liberatory movements for black people, he dedicates only one section to the Shashemene settlement (2005, 169-86), and presents a brief historical account of both Garveyite and Rastafari migration to the area. In referring to this, what he terms “the Melkaoda experiment” (182), he suggests that “repatriation is increasingly seen as a process of psychological transformation” (182). This reflects the very same attitude of scholars of the faith such as Chevannes and Campbell. Gebrekidan’s discussion deals mostly with the mentality and motivation behind repatriation and therefore deals little with the ongoing existence and impact of the Rastafari community in Ethiopia.

*Initial thoughts on the Ethiopian Perspective*

Some Ethiopian academics have also dealt with Rastafari: Alem Kebede analyses various Rastafarian thinkers for his PhD thesis, “The role of cultural/historical contingencies, decenteredness, and movement culture in the endurance of the Rastafari” (1999). Though his thesis does not deal with the Ethiopian perception of the Rastafari, in an interview he was able to provide some insight and also agreed that this line of inquiry would be valuable to those interested in Rastafari, Ethiopianism and Ethiopian identity.

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23 Kebede, Alemsegedh (Professor), interview, 25 August 2007.
Kebede admitted that curiosity about the Rastafari led him to his thesis topic, and that the Ethiopian population, in his opinion, see the Rastafari from a perspective that takes into account a different way of looking at the figure of Haile Selassie.

I was one of those people who was saying to myself, “why would they consider Haile Selassie as God?” And, secondly, why would Ethiopia, which is very poor nation, why would they take it as and consider it as the Promised Land? . . . I was dismissing their movement. I was saying that there is no way someone in their right mind could believe that Haile Selassie was a living God. I think there is misconception of the Rastafari when they talk about Haile Selassie. They are not talking about what you and I or the rest of people know. They don’t have this kind of historical view of this person. They have this symbolic understanding about the living God. Then, at that time, during the 1930s, you see Haile Selassie emerging as a very important figure and of course afterwards he is one of the founders of the Organization for African Unity and internationally he is a very interesting figure. All of those things were very important symbolic elements, in order for [the Rastafari] to make a decision in terms of who this person was, so I think that is how they came to the conclusion that Haile Selassie was God and Ethiopia, heaven on earth.

Though Kebede’s explanation here does not possess the detail of Chevannes or Erskine in terms of presenting the importance of the former Emperor to Rastafari, he demonstrates a gap between what he refers to as an Ethiopian, “historic” notion
of Selassie, and the Rastafari “symbolic” view. Also presenting the immediate reaction to Rastafari, namely asking why Selassie and why Ethiopia, he demonstrates that the answer, for Ethiopians, is very different from the Rastafari.

Ababu Minda’s MA thesis “Rastafarians in the Promised Land: A study of Identity, its Maintenance and Change” begins to address the interactions between the Rasta and Ethiopian populations in the Shashemene area; however, his focus is primarily on the children of repatriates. But over the course of his project, Minda makes some interesting observations. Firstly, he suggests that the relationship between the Rastafari and Ethiopian society, particularly in Shashemene, is one that demonstrates a certain level of integration within the local Ethiopian culture, through marriage and otherwise:

Generally speaking, the Rastas have a good relation with the local people. Many of them have married Ethiopian wives. Locals often greet them when they see them in town. Some Ethiopian youngsters have taken their style of dress and matted hair. Rastas also are known masons and carpenters, and they help the local people when the need arises. The Rasta music band plays during public festivals, annual school days and on weddings. A few young Rastas play football in the stronger teams for the town, most importantly, Ras Kabinda, a self trained physician, gives medical treatment

24 Kebede’s commentary privileges a more recent history of Ethiopia and Selassie. The Rastafari claim to Ethiopian identity could perhaps be viewed as “historic” in that it takes into account an ancient, biblical connection to Ethiopia, further in the past than west African histories of trans-Atlantic slavery. For an example of a connection between ancient Ethiopia and pan-African experience, Miriam Ma’at-Ka-Re Monges “The Queen of Sheba and Solomon: Exploring the Shebanization of Knowledge”, Journal of Black Studies, 33, no. 2 (2002): 235-246. Monges utilizes the bible and the Kebra Nagast (an Ethiopian scripture) to provide a connection between the thinking of Ethiopian-born Queen of Sheba (husband to Solomon, mother of Menelik, beginning the Solomonic line that connects to Haile Selassie) and African consciousness against a backdrop of Euro-centrism. For Kebede, however, his view is of Selassie the man; for him, Selassie was the Ethiopian leader for the bulk of the twentieth century.
for local patients free of charge. These few points indicate the good relationship Rastas have with the local people. (1997, 21)

It would seem, however, that the relationship between the Rastafari and other Shashemene residents lacks a specific definition. Certainly, cultural involvement is important and sport presents an opportunity for a level of engagement between different communities. And yes, Rastafari have married Ethiopian women, which demonstrates an intimacy between individuals, but there is no clear sense of how these multi-ethnic families indicate a wider integration within the town or within Ethiopian society. One could see these elements demonstrating a strong interconnectedness between the two communities, however might then also ask why there remains a distance between the two populations.

Also, to state that locals greet the Rastafari when the Rastafari are in town is not surprising. Greetings are a very important part of Ethiopian communication and one of the first things foreigners learn. In fact, since one gathers very quickly, in Ethiopia, that the greeting is essential, it is a small bit of linguistic knowledge that most foreigners are comfortable with. Thus, the ability of *forengeuch* to run through the formal series of greetings, including reference to time of day, blessing from God and inquiries about one’s family (or business or livestock) is common within Ethiopia.

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25 In both Ababu Minda’s and Giulia Bonacci’s theses, they describe some of these intermarriages, however there are no specific statistics available. In an interview with Gebre Gebru, (Jamaican Consul General to Ethiopia), 11 January 2008, I asked about statistics on intermarriage. His response was that although anecdotaly he was aware of these marriages, there are no statistics. My anecdotal experience in Shashemene was that many people mentioned these marriages as an example of how the communities are connected. More research could be done in this area.
The mention of the Rasta involvement in local trade (carpentry and masonry) is very vague, as is the mention of the “Rasta music band”. Is there more than one band? Whose weddings? Which public festivals? At which schools? The fact that a few—which would indicate not so large a number—play football (soccer) on local teams is also not demonstrative. There is no context for these moments of integration. The only point here that provides some real sense of connection is the mention of Ras Kabinda, who, in addition to medical treatment, is also, according to anecdotal evidence, involved in an organic farming initiative within the town. Thus, even though Minda comments on these aspects which demonstrate possible indicators of integration of the Rastafari into the Ethiopian society of Shashemene, he presents the areas in very brief and general manner, dealing with issues of lesser importance than when he turns to public critique of the Rastafari. It is, again, brief, however the issues discussed are of consequence.

According to Minda, the religious belief in Haile Selassie as divine is a significant theological hurdle for Ethiopians living around the Rastafari (Minda 1997, 86). These Ethiopians are predominantly Orthodox Christians who do not believe in any other God than that of the Bible. As he writes, “it is also known by some of the people who attend the same church with them that immigrant Rastas believe in the divinity of Haile Selassie which to [Ethiopians] is outright paganism” (87). Using the term “outright paganism” demonstrates quite a strong reaction towards Rastafari. Minda also speaks of the “cultural” differences, writing vaguely about the problem some locals have with “eating and dressing habits” as
well as the “smoking of marijuana” (87). In addition, Minda discusses the issue of land ownership:

. . . the local Oromos are not comfortable with the presence of an alien group in [sic] the land which they consider as their own. The Oromos who are mainly farmers and who live in the vicinity of the Rastafarians’ settlement would very much like to secure the farmland for themselves. (67)

Here Minda very briefly mentions an issue not mentioned in any other text dealing with Rastafari. The question of Oromo identity vis a vis the Rastafarian identity has yet to be investigated as well. These critiques demonstrates that on the level of spirituality, culture and land ownership, there are major concerns regarding the Rastafari—these concerns are perhaps not abated through the performance of a band or playing on a sports team.

In an interesting undergraduate honours thesis from 2006, entitled “The Rastafarians Living in Shashemene: Economic Impact Assessment” by Shewit Gebre-Hiwot, she discusses the isolation of the Rastafarians in that they live “3-5 kilometers away from the centre of the town . . . the absence of other social groups made Rastas isolated” (36), though she does state that in recent times, this is changing. There are no details beyond her statement regarding the “expansion of the town” and the “increase of the population” (36). Gebre-Hiwot also mentions the “self-containment” of the Rastas. Because they act as subsistence farmers as well as business owners, they need not rely on any other members of the town to help them. As the businesses are concerned, Gebre-Hiwot provides a description of

Minda also writes quite a great deal in his thesis about the difficulties he himself had in attempting to work with and research the Rastafari (8-9).
different types of business initiatives established by the Rastafari such as hotels and museums as well as a very brief description of development projects such as the Jamaican Rastafarian Development Community school and the EWF soy processing project—she does, however, suggest that “most” EWF projects “have terminated due to one or another reason” (38-40). Though she mentions that the “Rastafarians’ physical appearance and smoking of ganja have disposed them to a great deal of bias from the towns’ people [sic]”, the paper is limited, as Gebre-Hiwot’s research project did not require extensive analysis. Interestingly, however, she does mention very briefly that “there is a widespread feeling of uneasiness among the Oromo [ethnic group] since they believe that alien forces are taking their land away” (39). In the work of Gebre-Hiwot, we receive a very brief introduction to some of the other issues that impact the Ethiopian perception, namely the spatial orientation of Rastafari community in Shashemene, the business initiatives established, the problem that the Ethiopian population has with the use of marijuana and the issue with the surrounding Oromo community.

In the conclusion to Bonacci’s thesis, she points toward a disjuncture between the Rastafari and the surrounding community.

On the local level, in Shashemene, the Rastas support the Emperor, who, in the eyes of the Oromo people, represents a coercive central power. In a region still marked by a history of alienation from land and economic and social dominance, symbols of Imperial power are not appreciated. At a national level, a group like the Rastas, who identify with an Imperial Ethiopian nation, the Amhara, centralization and revolution, runs counter to
a national imagination that is still being constructed and founded on ethnic
distinctions and the autonomy of various federal regions. Paradoxically,
Rasta identity and the power of their imagination have permitted them to
leave everything behind to come to live in Shashemene, but this very same
identity is a hindrance to their acceptance and their “absorption” by the
nation of Ethiopia. (2007, 500)²⁷

Bonacci here points towards a Rastafari conception of identity that is coherent. It
views Ethiopia as an Imperial nation under an Amhara, Orthodox Christian
monarch—thus making that ethnic identity, by default, the national identity. In
addition, the Rastafari view that Ethiopia is Africa presents a pan-Africanist
perspective—one that would indicate a desire for the centralization of African
states. She is right in that the clarity of the Rastafari vision is what provides them
with the impetus to get up and move from Jamaica or the UK or the US or
wherever they are, and come to Ethiopia. This is a powerful narrative of identity.
The reason why this might be a “hindrance” can partly be connected to the present
government’s policy of ethnic federalism, however it is more than the past eighteen
years of policy that challenges the Rasta conception of Ethiopia.

Bonacci’s thesis ends with a very brief discussion of the contemporary view,
within Ethiopia, of the Rastafari. She touches on the desire for citizenship, the

²⁷“À un niveau local, à Shashemene, les Rastas étaient assimilés à l’empereur, symbole, aux yeux
des Oromos, du pouvoir coercitif du centre. Dans une région encore marquée par l’histoire
d’aliénation des terres et de la domination économique et sociale, les symboles relatifs au pouvoir
impérial étaient forcément dépréciés. À un niveau national, un groupe tel que les Rastas, qui
s’identifie à une nation éthiopienne impériale, amhara, centralisée et révolue va à contre-courant
d’un imaginaire national encore en construction et fondé sur la distinction ethnique et l’autonomie
des régions fédérales. Paradoxalement, l’identité des Rastas et la puissance de leur imaginaire leur
ont permis de tout laisser derrière eux pour venir s’installer à Shashemene, mais cette même identité
est un frein à leur acceptation et leur “absorption” par la nation éthiopienne.” My translation.
attitude of the Ethiopian population of Shashemene towards the Rastafarians—from the Rasta perspective, mind you. She quotes one Rasta repatriate as saying “I think they’re still not sure what the hell is we about, dem kinda watching we, they don’t really overs [overstand] the seriousness of InI\textsuperscript{28} spiritual aspiration and trod. Hard for them as well . . . I’m just watching, they have a problem, cause as much as they like or dislike we, we love Ethiopia so much they can’t help like we!” (479). Another says “Rasta is the only outside body they [the Ethiopians] accept as their own. That’s who they identify as Jamaicans. When the realisation will come eventually, it will be the acceptance of Rastafarians” (478).

Both of these statements demonstrate the sense that Rastafari have of the fact that they have not integrated completely within Ethiopian society. As individuals who have moved to Ethiopia from other countries in the world, they are aware of the fact that the Ethiopian population may not understand “what the hell [they] are about”, but a belief that “eventually” they will be accepted.

Finally turning to the children of Rastafari, born in Ethiopia, some to parents who are both Ethiopian and Rastafari (it would seem that all reported instances of Ethiopian and Rasta marriages it is the woman who is Ethiopian—Minda and Bonacci’s work both demonstrates this fact\textsuperscript{29}), Bonacci discusses the distance that these children feel from the Rastafari faith. As quoted in her work, one child of Rastafari states the following: “My father used to tell me Haile

\textsuperscript{28} As mentioned in more detail above, “InI” is a Rastafari pronoun meaning “me; I; we; mine, myself” (Pollard 2000, 46). It is both singular and plural.

\textsuperscript{29} It would seem that this could be an example of Gayle Rubin’s observations in “The Traffic of Women” (1975), such that women represent the first level of exchange between different cultural groups. From anecdotal reports within Shashemene, this could also be representative of a desire for a woman (and her family) to marry into wealth, given that foreigners are viewed as wealthy. This would be an area for further specific research.
Selassie is God and I used to do all this and say Haile Selassie is God, not understanding . . . I used to say it [be]cause I was a little boy then[;] I didn’t have my own understanding to read the Bible and see the truth. But after some time I read the Bible myself and I know Haile Selassie is not God” (487). Another states a similar feeling: “I don’t really defend him [Haile Selassie] on that kind of way [divine], but I would say yeah some things about him, some mystical about him, some kingly character and he does a lot of work he teaches, inspires our fore parents” (488). Here we see the distancing of the children from the beliefs of their parents—a sense that one will learn that Haile Selassie is not divine. Instead of a “realization” that causes an Ethiopian or Ethiopian-born child of Rastafari to accept the Rastafari belief system, it is a “realization” upon living in Ethiopian society that causes him to do the opposite. In looking at the second statement, we see a denial of the divinity of Selassie, but we also see a recognition that the belief system, the power of the figure of Selassie and his works, is valuable and relevant as an “inspiration” to people who have come before. The repatriate experience is part of a narrative that places Haile Selassie in the position of “divine teacher” that will free the African diaspora. This comes from a specific sense of identity.

Much of the conception of the Rastafari’s Ethiopian identity is based on this narrative of liberation, as discussed earlier in this chapter—the Rastafari move from the Babylonian captivity of the West into their homeland, the Zion of Ethiopia. What is problematic is that Ethiopians do not share this same understanding. A main focus of Minda’s thesis is the second generation, the so-called “‘First Free Born Generation’” (1997, 108), so named because they are
“free . . . from any kind of brutality by another religious group, nation or race” (108). For Minda, the problem with the passing down of the Rastafari belief system is that this new generation does not understand the context of which their parents speak. They do not understand the existence of Babylon:

The term Babylon is used by Rastafarians to express the harsh socio-political experience they have passed through in their home land. Since members of the second generation are born and grow up here, such terrible experience is alien to them, and consequently, the reference of this experience, Babylon, is not used by them in the sense that their parents use it. (108)

In addition to a lack of comprehension of the immediate difficulties of Rastafari life in Babylon—i.e. during the periods of the repatriates lives—there is also a lack of understanding of the history of slavery and colonialism which led to the creation of the African diaspora. This is not part of the historical experience of Ethiopia30 and therefore these young people do not understand.

In addition, it is not only the children of Rastafari who have a difficult time understanding the Rastafari conception of Ethiopian identity. The average Ethiopian does not share this perspective either.

The Ethiopian people have a strong narrative and sense of self—as do the Rastafari, but it is part of a different story. Minda describes an interaction between himself and some Rasta elders in which they said the following to him:

30 This is not to say that colonialism did not have an impact or Ethiopia or that Ethiopia was not involved in the slave trade. What it is to say is that the history of Ethiopia is different and does not connect with the narrative upon which the system of thought, concepts and symbols of Rastafari is based.
Look Ababu, your problem is you do not know what it means to be a second class citizen in another person’s country. You do not even know what it means to be a slave because you have always been a free man. That is why you do not understand why we say the West is Babylon. We tell you what we saw and passed through. The way of the white man is evil. It is not a natural environment for us and we can not feel at home there. We (black people) have our own culture which is by far better than theirs. We are not barbarians as they make us believe to be. (1997, 50)

This commentary shows that there are two different conceptual frameworks or narratives at work here. The Rasta elder must explain the concept of slavery to Minda; he must express an understanding of identity, the history and development of the African diaspora, and the systematic racism, experienced in the West. The history of colonialism creates a completely different sense of identity: as the Rasta says to Minda, how can he understand “what it means to be a slave” if he, as an Ethiopian has “always been a free man”. As Theodore Vestal has written, the result of Ethiopian independence, especially the victory at Adwa, causes Ethiopians to “bas[k] in national pride and a sense of independence, some might say superiority, that was lost to other Africans mired in the abasement of colonialism” (32).

These two different frameworks come in to conversation when the Rastafari move to Ethiopia, and specifically to Shashemene. An example of the way in which differences manifest themselves is displayed in stark relief in the form of what I refer to as the “Miracle Story”, a common tale that showcases the gap between Rastafari and Ethiopians.
The Miracle Story: Cultures in Conversation

“I know that the Jamaicans are here because of our king,” Daniel Wogu, an eighteen-year-old student and Shashemene inhabitant working towards acceptance in a medical program, told me. “They believe that he is sent from god to save them or make the black people free from slavery. They have their own history. As I have learned from Ethiopian history, they say that our king went to their country to visit and there were some unexpected happenings. There was rainfall or something. They say then that this proves that Haile Selassie is not actually a man, but is God. 31

Henock Mahari, an Ethiopian reggae musician born and raised in Addis Ababa, the city where he still lives and works in Addis Ababa said something similar: “He was once in Jamaica and it hadn’t rained, and then it did rain. They accepted him as a god because of this miracle. They see him as a messiah and call Ethiopia their Promised Land and leave there home to come here and finish their life here.”32

In a general discussion with my hundred-strong English language class at the Afrika Beza College, a female student told me that “Jamaican people live in Shashemene and they like Ethiopian people very much because Haile Selassie went to their town and at that time there is no rain. When Haile Selassie got there, there was rain. So, after that day, Jamaican people like Ethiopia very much.”33

32 Henock Mahari (musician), interview, 9 August 2007.
33 Discussion. Afrika Beza College English Class, Shashemene. 24 July 2007. The Afrika Beza College is a private college located in Shashemene. My classes were part of a continuing education English language instruction program. There were four teachers who taught courses; I was the only native speaker. The classes had students ranging in age from mid-teens to older, mature students in their forties and fities. In terms of linguistic ability, the students’ knowledge and experience in English was as wide-ranging as their
Over coffee, Shemelis Safa, a high school teacher in the town, recounted a similar explanation for why the Rastafari move to Shashemene:

As I know, Haile Selassie went to Jamaica. It was very dry and they needed rain. Unfortunately, when this king arrived in Jamaica, the rain came. There started a superstition, a belief—“oh this is a good person,” they said. Their famous singer Bob Marley and other leaders told the people that the King is a very nice king and Ethiopia is very nice, so they associate the king with their religion . . . Haile Selassie is from the Solomonic dynasty and they consider Selassie God, so they respect him more than the people in Ethiopia. We Ethiopians saw Haile Selassie as a king—a man who made many mistakes and did some good things. I could recount more of these stories, but they all amount to the same thing. There was a drought in Jamaica, and when Haile Selassie arrived to visit the country, the rains started and the people of Jamaica were thankful. No individual I spoke with could provide further information about location or impact, or, most importantly, a specific source for the story. The miracle of rain is directly related to the consideration of the Emperor as God.

A story like this does not take into account any of the “symbolic” aspects contributing to a belief in Haile Selassie as define, the aspects discussed by Alem Kebede and outlined earlier in this chapter. Though Wogu and Safa do mention the connection to freedom from enslavement and the Solomonic dynasty.

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34 Shemelis Safa (Teacher, Paradise Valley College, Shashemene), interview, 28 June 2007.
respectively, the main thrust of the stories is that of the rain falling, a miracle made possible by His Imperial Majesty, Haile Selassie I, King of Kings, Lord of Lords, the Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah.

In addition to the importance placed on rain in Ethiopia, given its high numbers of subsistence farmers and historic prevalence of drought, the focus on the miracle performed by Selassie and thereby presenting a reason for belief in the Emperor as divine can possibly be linked to the Orthodox Christian tradition of reading the miracles of Mary as part of the church service: “. . . miracle stories were designed to be read in the churches and monasteries of the empire, as indeed they still are, during daily church services like the reading of the gospel” (Ya’kob and Haile 1992, 2). Given the role of miracle stories in the Ethiopian Orthodox church, this reading of the Rastafari faith can be viewed as inserting the Rastafari into an Ethiopian understanding of religion. This means to say that the otherwise strange belief in the former Emperor as God is able to be placed in the context of an Ethiopian narrative of faith.

Watching Vin Kelly’s documentary footage of Haile Selassie’s arrival in Jamaica on 21 April 1966\(^{35}\), however, it is obvious from the wet tarmac that something quite different occurred than the miracle described above when Haile Selassie arrived in Jamaica. As Dr. M. B. Douglas reported to Leonard Barrett,

\begin{quote}
    The morning was rainy and many people were soaking wet. Before the arrival of the place the Rastafarians said that “as soon as our God comes, the rain will stop.” This turned out something like a miracle, because the rain stopped as soon as the plane landed. (1997, 158).
\end{quote}

\(^{35}\) The Lion of Judah Visits Jamaica, DVD, directed by Vin Kelly (1966).
This description, though also described as a miracle, is the complete opposite to the miracle outlined by my Ethiopian informants. Instead of Selassie causing the rain to start, here he stops the rain so the celebration of his arrival can begin.

For both Rastafari and Ethiopians, identity is important. It has been the purpose of this chapter to gain an understanding of Ethiopian identity according to the Rastafari, and understanding that is necessary in order to be able to move on to the context of the following chapter’s description of Ethiopian identity as it relates to native Ethiopians. Clearly, these varied identities—both between Rastafari and Ethiopian as well as amongst Ethiopians themselves—have each evolved and developed from very distinct historical narratives.
Chapter Two

The Problem with Ethiopianness:
Nation, Nationality and Plural Visions of Identity

*Ethiopianness and Nation*

Upon my return to Shashemene for the fourth time, in July 2006, a fellow with whom I had worked with before and whose English is somewhat limited, introduced me to his childhood friend. This friend is a college English teacher and local business owner named Kebede. Kebede said that he would take me to the Rastafari celebration commemorating Haile Selassie’s birthday. In advance of this, I spent some time with Kebede, eating lunch, running errands and then teaching an English language class at a local college. It was the college where I ended up teaching for four months the following year. He asked if I would answer some of the students’ questions, and I was only too happy to oblige. When I told the students I was doing research that had to do with the Rastafari, the class giggled and made some comments and gestures that were clearly meant to reference marijuana usage. One made a joke about how maybe I just wanted to get my hands on “hashish”. I told the class I was interested in what Ethiopians thought about the Rastafarian population and my statement was met with what I would call surprise. The class seemed shocked that I would be interested in their opinion about the Rastafarians. After all, upon arrival in Shashemene, foreigners are often approached by local youth, asking if they want to be shown to the Rastafari area of the town. There is an immediate assumption that foreigners would be interested in the unique inhabitants of their town—the idea that a

1 Name has been changed.
foreigner would be interested not just in Shashemene proper, but what the inhabitants of this area think about the Rastafari population was all the more unique.

As with the class, over the course of my first day with Kebede, we had a number of conversations. He was confused as regarded my interest in the Jamaicans and asked me all sorts of questions about them. As a Protestant Christian, he explained, he was nervous about the fact that the Rastafari worship a “false idol” in the form of Haile Selassie. He also intimated that the Jamaicans tended to marry “habesha women”, and this left him, a habesha man, worried about his marriage prospects and wondering what these cross-cultural marriages would be like. This questioning and threatened attitude of Ethiopians towards the repatriated Rastafari is also reflected in William F. Lewis’s recounting of his interview with an Ethiopian woman, as recounted in the last chapter. The former wife to a member of the Rastafari community illustrates questions about the Rastafari—“she did not understand [the Rastafari] hatred for the Babylonian oppressor”—and also a sense of a threat to Ethiopian values: “they will not allow their Ethiopian wives to follow any Ethiopian customs in their kitchens” (1993, 112).

Though Lewis’s informant presents an individual perspective, Kebede had these same concerns, which also were reflected in some of the interviews I

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2 This word, habesha (sometimes transliterated as habasha), is used to mean “Ethiopian” in this case. Habesha, or, in English, “Abyssinian”, is used most often in this way. It is important to mention, however, that Oromo nationalist scholars such as Asafa Jalata do not use this term to describe the Oromo people—and, more generally, all non Amhara or Tigrayan peoples (2008b).
conducted. But, after we went and spent time at the Rasta celebration, he was quite impressed. Over the course of the evening, there was a great deal of musical and cultural entertainment, ranging from attempts at Amharic pop songs, to reggae (Bob Marley’s work made an appearance), to dance numbers. He enjoyed the fact that each performer and speaker made reference to Jesus Christ before praising Haile Selassie as the “personification” of God. Also, Kebede thought the food was quite tasty. While eating rice and peas, a common Jamaican dish, he pointed to the kidney beans and said that beans are a Wolaita staple food, referring to one of the eighty-some ethnic groups in Ethiopia.

“Perhaps there is some connection,” he said at one point, “Maybe the Jamaicans are Wolaita—actually they seem to be attracted to Wolaita women.” I asked if he was attracted to Wolaita women. “No,” he responded firmly, “I am Gurage. I would like to marry another Gurage or an Amhara lady.” This, and other conversations throughout the day and evening shed some light on the issue of what it means to be Ethiopian. At first, Kebede spoke generally about Ethiopianness, and then, later, distinguished between ethnic groups. Connecting the Jamaicans to the Wolaita would connect them to an Ethiopian ethnic group, but, to Kebede, it would still divide him from them based on this ethnicity issue.

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3 In many interviews there were instances of perspectives that presented Rastafari as threatening to Ethiopian culture—through the importation of cultural practices that seemed “American” and, of course, the practice of smoking marijuana.
4 This was not an isolated statement, in a later interview with a local teacher who wished to remain anonymous, though in this dissertation I refer to him as Mohammed Tibebu, I was told that “[People] say they are from Wolaita. This is the rumour—Haile Selassie put them here because there are more Wolaita people! If they put them in Gonder, it might be a shock for them . . . Let them stay nearby to Wolaita. Their appearance looks like Wolaita people.” Name has been changed. (Teacher, Shashemene), interview, 17 August 2007.
Within this chapter I aim to discuss briefly the development of and difficulty with any coherent sense of Ethiopianness or Ethiopian identity within Ethiopia. What does it mean to be Ethiopian? This question, in the last chapter, was answered through a look at the Rastafari perspective. Asking the same question in this chapter relative to Ethiopian views of Ethiopianness, I can frame an analysis of the relationship between the way the Rastafari view what it means in comparison with the Ethiopian definition of Ethiopian identity. This identity (or, more properly, these identities) has (or have) been constituted from within as well as from without. An Ethiopian perception of the Rastafari population is framed by a sense of what it means to be of Ethiopian nationality.

Given Ethiopia’s status as a historically independent nation, it has been positioned as unique amongst African nations, and, arguably, it is unique in the world. As William Scott writes, until the 1985 famine, Ethiopia represented “a mythical space, an idealized place of singular black power and special promise” (2004, 11). The Battle of Adwa is emblematic of this “special promise”.

On 1 March 1896, Emperor Menelik II led his 100,000 soldier Ethiopian army in a successful battle against the Italians, who had already established Eritrea as a colony. The Italians suffered what historian Theodore Vestal has called “a total disaster” (2005, 29). It was a decisive victory and it still stands as one of the most important examples of the resistance to European colonialism. Demonstrating this point, in Paulos Milkias and Getachew Metaferia’s edited book of essays on the topic of Adwa, they begin by stating the following:
If Adwa holds a significant place in Africa’s history, it is because its meaning overflows the social and political conditions that made it possible and go beyond any relevance to its initial circumstances. The success at Adwa throws light on the normative dimensions of Ethiopian civilization; it challenges the demeaning Western conception of African cultures; it demonstrates that being targeted for colonization is not a prelude to fatality and that colonialism can be defeated; and, to Africans, it poses new political questions and sets novel historical tasks. (2005, 5)

According to Milkias and Metaferia, Ethiopia’s triumph at Adwa demonstrated that the country—and perhaps Africa as a whole—need not accept colonialism: “colonialism can be defeated”. Ethiopia fought for and maintained its independence—eliminating the possibility of foreign intervention through the twentieth century. The country also resisted Italy’s second attempt at colonialism, an invasion followed by only five years of occupation between 1936 and 1941. In a significant way, this series of historical events has placed the country in a space removed (but not necessarily separate) from the colonial and post-colonial struggles (and narratives) of other African nations. Of course, by post-colonial struggle I mean the struggle against European colonial rule. As will become evident in this chapter, other, alternate colonial narratives function in Ethiopia.

Just as Adwa “poses new political questions” and “sets novel historical tasks”, I postulate that Ethiopia itself poses questions about traditional paradigms that have shaped theories of citizen, nation and nationalism. The country presents a difficult task as regards thinking about these very issues. The

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5 The Ethiopian army called on British support to aid in the expelling of Italian occupation.
difficulty of speaking about Ethiopianness and/or Ethiopian identity stems from the “novel” nature of the country. Concepts that have been discussed and challenged in terms of a discussion of nationalism in the west are further complicated and challenged by the case that is Ethiopia. A sense of Ethiopian identity is and has always been contested, especially within the last hundred years, during which the country has experienced three incredibly different styles of government and nation building. Though many observers of Ethiopia have made and continue to make assumptions of the country as an “ancient” and “mysterious” land, in fact, many new ideas and theories that have been developed to deal with issues of globalization and the contemporary reality of global connectedness are fitting when applied to Ethiopia. As a country, it may be considered a so-called developing nation that has only recently entered some semblance of “democracy”, however, as a concept, Ethiopia’s existence as a multiethnic, pluralistic perhaps cosmopolitan nation means that Ethiopianess and Ethiopian identity, especially since the most recent change of government in 1991, are contested in ways that are perhaps similar to those experienced and theorized about in so-called developed nations in the Western world.

**Multiethnic History**

Donald J. Donham describes the history of Ethiopia as a move from “a hierarchical arrangement of cores and peripheries, apparent to all and inscribed upon geographical surfaces, to a more open series of interactions drawing upon

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6 W.B Carnochan’s 2008 *Golden Legends: Images of Abyssinia, Samuel Johnson to Bob Marley* describes the various ways in which Ethiopia has been viewed externally, the overwhelming majority of observers focusing on the ancient-ness of the country as well as its mystery—hence the reason for these words in quotation marks here. Ethiopia has most certainly captured the imagination of many—including the Rastafari.
partially shared and intersecting ‘ethnoscapes’ of the imagination” (2002, 2). Donham’s reference is to Arjun Appadurai’s idea of “ethnoscapes” in that Ethiopia is a site of multiple connections between different groups that are not necessarily connected to a particular space. Appadurai utilizes this term in order to acknowledge “the changing social, territorial, and cultural reproduction of group identity . . . groups are no longer tightly territorialized, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogenous . . . the ethnoscapes of today’s world are profoundly interactive” (2003, 48). Identification of certain ethnicities is difficult, as is a definition of Ethiopia and Ethiopianness for exactly the reasons Appadurai presents. Whereas previous governments of Ethiopia tried (mostly unsuccessfully) to insist upon specific boundaries, the recent past has seen so much movement of these boundaries and contestation of the very reasons for their institution in the first place, thus underlining this “profoundly interactive” and “changing” nature of Ethiopian identity.

In Donald N. Levine’s book *Greater Ethiopia: The Evolution of a Multiethnic Society*, he describes the historical development of the country known today as Ethiopia, tracking thousands of years of history and discussing the ways in which disparate ethnic groups have come together and separated over time to produce a nation that is, as he quotes from Abraham Demoz, “the despair of the compulsive classifier” (1974, 33). Levine’s work details relationships between various ethnicities throughout the history of the area of Africa now called Ethiopia. In attempting to organize these groups (which, as mentioned above, number in the eighties), Levine admits that he must “abstain
from any one principle of classification”, opting instead for a “flexible approach” (1974, 33). He cannot find any way in which to definitively divide the population of Ethiopia into clear sections. The resulting chart and map that appear in his book are full of intersecting arrows pointing in various directions, connecting various groups of people to other peoples, not to mention the overlapping of numerous geographical areas. For the reader, it’s most certainly not an easy framework to get one’s head around.

This is the reality of Ethiopia. It is difficult to understand exactly and clearly what constitutes an Ethiopian—what, when one uses the word, does it mean to say “I am Ethiopian”? To ask this question is not to fall in to the trap of viewing the country of Ethiopia as an “artificial, even mythical construct” as developed by those external to the country, a view that Paul B. Henze warns against in his *Layers of Time: A History of Ethiopia* (2000, xiii). Instead of turning to the image of Ethiopia that has informed what Paul Gilroy calls “the project of racial regeneration” (1999, 20), the answer to the question, in terms of this discussion, is not based on a pan-Africanist view of Ethiopia. Pan-Africanism has been a powerful force—one which informed and still informs the theology and philosophy of Rastafari. Haile Selassie’s pan-African ideals resonated powerfully throughout Africa and the African diaspora, however it is not necessarily reflective of the perception of Ethiopians within Ethiopia.

“Ethiopianness” may still indeed be a construct, but a construct created primarily within Ethiopia. With a history dating back to between 4000 and 5000 years (Henze 2000, 1), it means that Ethiopia itself, in its various guises over this
period of time, has dealt with extraordinary variation in terms of culture—as made plain in Levine’s work. Even contemporary tourists travelling through the country are shocked at the visual variation. The north, with its near-homogenous Orthodox residents, some Amhara and speaking Amharic, some Tigray and speaking Tigrinya, many dressed in the traditional white cloth *gabis* and *natalas*, could not appear more different than Harar, with its Muslim inhabitants—the Oromo women in extraordinarily bright-coloured clothing. And this is a contrast between only two different areas of Ethiopia. The forms of Christianity, Islam and Judaism in Ethiopia possess elements specific to the country. Cultural variation from the culture of the Hamer people in the south, specifically the Omo Valley, whose cow jumping ceremony and intricate beaded clothing have fascinated anthropologists and tourists alike, contrasts with the northern nomadic Afar, and the western Nuer, known for intricate facial scarification. The Ethographic Museum of Ethiopia, located within Addis Ababa University presents an exhibit of the various cultures existent in the country. Walking through the exhibition is overwhelming—there are simply so many ethnic groups—some populations numbering in the hundreds, others in the tens of thousands, but all within Ethiopia.

Levine makes attempts to connect Ethiopians through a reference to certain cultural “themes”, admitting, however, that “few, if any of the people of Ethiopia make use of all of those themes, but most exhibit most of them” (1974, 47). There can be certain connections, but Ethiopia presents itself as a nation that cannot necessarily be described in any one particular way. There are always
variables of difference—whether it be any or all of language, ethnic group, area, self identification—and these variables defy any national description of the country. The fact that Amharic is the most visible language—often described as the lingua franca—is not evidence of a common linguistic connection between Ethiopians. It was, until the institution of ethnic regions under the EPRDF (Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front), the language of primary school instruction, however, at present, primary education is provided in local languages—the language or languages relevant to specific regions.

Amharic may be indeed the language of the constitution and government documents, but is not the most spoken language in the country; Afan Oromo, the language of the Oromo people, is more widely spoken. And even if one takes into account both of these widely spoken languages, this does not consider the other eighty-four languages currently in use in the country (Gordon 2005). Here also presents a unique situation. Though Ethiopia is a country that was never colonized, it presents the standard colonial situation of one language being viewed as more important than others and established as the lingua franca which must be used. This “Amharization” was a policy of the communist Dergue regime “inherited from the Imperial regime” (Hammond 2002, 104). The establishment of ethnic regions could be seen as destabilizing this policy, and the 1995 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia states that although “Amharic shall be the working language of the Federal Government”,

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7 The specific situation with the Oromo population will be discussed further, later in this chapter.
8 The information about the languages of Ethiopia is available in the cited source as well as online at www.ethnologue.com.
“All Ethiopian languages shall enjoy equal state recognition” and “Members of the federation may by law determine their respective working languages” (78). Language, along with various other factors such as ethnicity and geographic location, has long been at issue as one of the many constituents of Ethiopian identity.

Combine this reality with the fact that Ethiopia, over the past thirty five to forty years, has undergone two profound changes in government. From the monarchical reign of Haile Selassie, which ended in 1974, to the communist Dergue regime from 1974 to 1991, to the contemporaneous EPRDF government who came to power under the banner of “economic liberalization, democracy and human rights” (Donham 2002b, 151), each of these governments has attempted to distill some semblance of Ethiopian identity through uniting the country under some sort of national vision.

As Edmond Keller writes, it was under Haile Selassie that there was an “[attempt to create the myth of a multiethnic but unified nation-state whose citizens viewed their ‘Ethiopian’ national identity as the most important socio-political category” (1998, 109). Himself identifying with the Amhara ethnic identity and Orthodox Christian religious faith, it became this specific ethnic identity and religion that was the blueprint for a broader Ethiopian character. To this end, Selassie’s government “conscientiously avoided any reference to ethnic, linguistic or religious diversity and eschewed mentioning such matters in official documents” (110). Selassie was the first to develop a constitution for Ethiopia, so this lack of reference to diversity is of specific importance. By avoiding the
issue of Ethiopia’s incredible ethnic diversity in this, the initial constitution, Selassie makes a strong statement about identity. The 1931 Ethiopian Constitution establishes a specific notion of Ethiopianness, thus defined by the Imperial government.

Also, the 1931 Constitution was based on Japan’s Meiji Constitution of 1889. For Selassie, “the constitution was an instrument of centralization . . . such centralization was necessary for national unity and effective modernization” (Clavitt Clarke 2004, 40). Looking to Japan, the so-called “Japanizers” in Ethiopia saw a successful society with a feudal system under an Emperor. This was, of course, attractive to the Imperial government of Ethiopia. Also, the fact that Selassie, emperor of an extremely diverse populous, chose to model the first constitution on that of a far more homogenous state demonstrates that even if the evolution of the Ethiopia state included the rule of one ethnicity, Selassie underlined this need to create a singular national identity through his constitution.

As for the Dergue government, there was an attempt to eliminate ethnicity from the equation in favour of “mass organizations based upon . . . economic or social roles and positions” (Keller 1998, 112). As a Marxist government, the idea was to create a sense of Ethiopianness without referencing any particular ethnic group. Instead of a ruling government that provided a specific model of identity based on ethnicity, the Dergue wished to maintain power based on a promotion of communism. Perhaps as a direct response to this

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attempt to unite the country under communist ideals instead of cultural connection, Dergue military government leader Mengistu Hailemariam’s demise came at the hands of organized ethnic resistance groups in various parts of the country: the Tigray People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) (who connected with other ethnically-based groups/parties to form the present ruling EPRDF), the Eritrean Peoples Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF). The OLF dropped out of the EPRDF and the Oromo question has been and remains controversial. The issues of multiple ethnicities and multiple nations—Cedric Barnes calls Ethiopia a “multi-National Empire” (2003, 508)—challenged the attempt at uniting Ethiopia under communist rule, but also, at the same time under a specific definition of what it meant to be Ethiopian.

It is the EPRDF regime that still rules Ethiopia. The Prime Minister is Meles Zenawi, the same leader who assumed power during the transition between Mengistu’s Dergue regime and the EPRDF. As the new form of government altered the framework of Ethiopia significantly through the institution of (some would say controversial) ethnic regions, arguably altering the sense of ethnic identity and Ethiopian identity, I will spend some time discussing the changes instituted by the EPRDF government and its impact on Ethiopianness. The EPRDF replaced the administrative provincial regions with nine new regions are directly connected to ethnicity. The capital of Addis Ababa, however, was designated a multi-ethnic region unto itself and Dire Dawa, the second most populous city, also constitutes its own region. Benishangul Gumuz and SNNPR (Southern Nation, Nationalities and People’s Region) are also
multiethnic regions, whereas Tigray, Afar, Amhara, Harari, Somali and Oromiya are all specifically regions of single ethnicity, as denoted by the region name. This does not bear out as cleanly as the descriptions suggest, as Shashemene, the town in which many Rastafari live, demonstrates. The town is located in Oromiya, but is no doubt multiethnic. I have met people of multiple ethnicities in Shashemene: Wolaita, Kombatta, Gurage, Amhara, Harari and Oromo people, among others. Shashemene and this multicultural reality will be analyzed in the following chapter with an attempt to present a socio-spatial view of the city and its inhabitants including the Rastafari.

Figure 2.1: Map of Ethiopia, noting the ethnic regions. Source: UNDP-EUE, 1996.

As Henze writes in *Layers of Time*, “serious questions remain about the working of an administrative system based on ethnic structuralism and
decentralization. Will minority rights be respected and minorities protected? How will leaders of ethnic states be kept from creating self-perpetuating oligarchies?” (2000, 341). In asking these questions Henze is pointing to a concern with how ethnicity functions within Ethiopia. Reporting for the U.S. Institute of Peace, Henze described a country with sixty-three, mostly “ethnically based” (Henze 1995, 33) political parties active by 1992. “Emphasis on ethnicity has caused widespread unease among professionals, technocrats, and the old elite as well as among some ethnic groups themselves”, he wrote (33).

Ethnic regions “can serve as a basis for regional development initiatives” (Henze 1995b, 4) in as much as they allow for a more localized focus—the regional government has control/jurisdiction over what happens in the region, so the decisions are made with reference to the region rather than to the entirety of the country. This can be seen in terms of the shift in the educational system, allowing for education in local languages. Disadvantages of this model, however, include “priority to artificial and contrived issues while important national priorities and longer-term interests are neglected” (6).

These numerous changes in government have led scholars to ask, as Christopher Clapham did as the title of a 1993 review article, “How Many Ethiopias?” Clapham, through his review of various historical descriptions of Ethiopia, presents a range of different perspectives on the history and formation of the modern Ethiopian nation state. Cedric Barnes, in a review essay published ten years later, refers to the title of Clapham’s article as still representative of “the complex nature of Ethiopia’s sovereignty . . . [the] claims and counter-
claims”. Barnes mentions the question of Eritrea, the issue of Somali secession and the issues that arise from Oromo nationalism (2003, 508). All three of these challenges to a sense of Ethiopian sovereignty are important—and complex. The Oromo question, however, is significant to the case at hand, in that Shashemene is located in Oromia. Under the ethnic federalist government of the EPRDF, this is the Oromo nation.

With the transition from the Dergue government and the advent of ethnic regions, this issue of Oromo nationalism has, as Barnes notes, gained ground. Though the Oromo is the most populous ethnic group in Ethiopia, the Oromo people have not held the seat of power in the country. Nationalist sentiment on behalf of ethnic/cultural groups, such as the Oromo, however, did not begin with the fall of the Dergue and the rise of the EPRDF. Given the Amhara political dominance of the monarchy—under this regime “Ethiopian identity was at a fundamental level based in the Amhara language and Ethiopian Orthodox religion” (Keller 1998, 111), the sense of Oromo (or other ethnic groups’) alienation from power is not anything new. Indeed, a complex hierarchy of ethnicity existed before even Selassie, but as mentioned above, it was during the time of the Emperor that this was underlined for the twentieth century. The new government, however, is subject to much criticism in terms of the way in which it has decided to deal with the contentious issue of ethnicity and power. Critic Kahsay Berhe speaks from having been a part of the initial formation of the new government and being disenchanted with said government. Berhe analyses the way in which the new government has dealt with the relationship between
ethnicity and achievement of or alienation from the power structure within Ethiopia.

In Berhe’s *Ethiopia: Democratization and Unity*, a book about the rise of the TPLF and the transition from the military Dergue regime to the present government of Ethiopia, he discusses the nature of the Ethiopian state through reference to the pre-colonial period. “In pre-colonial Africa,” he writes, “the common political entities were multiethnic empires. It is almost certain that a normal development of African nations into nation-states has been disturbed by the intervention of European colonists” (2005, 145). Ethiopia, as a “multinational” (145) entity, reflects the reality of contemporary nations. As Berhe writes, “today, the overwhelming majority of states in the world are multiethnic” (146). In Ethiopia, this has always been the case. The contesting between various ethnic groups is part and parcel of Ethiopia and its history, especially during the last forty years of governmental shifts. The huge changes from monarchy to communism and now to an attempt at democracy (I say attempt because many Ethiopians in my experience do not consider the present government to be very democratic) have revealed and put emphasis on this multiethnic reality. But, the multiethnic character of Ethiopia has meant that the country has always struggled with the notion of identity. Ethiopianness is obvious when it is defined in opposition to foreigners, but it is difficult for the term to be described positively.
In terms of the issue of the Oromo, who, as mentioned above, are the most populous ethnic group in Ethiopia\(^\text{10}\), the narrative that is presented by Oromo Nationalists is that of colonial domination under all governments—within the 20\(^{th}\) century from Haile Selassie to Meles Zenawi’s EPRDF. The Oromo case provides a specific example of the difficulty of defining Ethiopianness.

Asafa Jalata, perhaps the most well known of Oromo Nationalist thinkers, edited a series of essays entitled *Oromo Nationalism and the Ethiopian Discourse: The Search for Freedom and Democracy*. In an essay in this volume he outlines the ways in which Oromo people and Oromo culture have been systematically removed from the Ethiopian historical narrative. He writes of how certain Ethiopianist scholars (and when he refers to Ethiopian it is in contrast to the Oromo people) “argu[e] that the Oromo are a people without history or civilization” (1998, 258). In one of the other essays in Jalata’s volume, John Sorensen explains how, in contrast to an “[emphasis on] the links of highland Amhara culture to the ancient past”, “Oromo nationalist discourse has also sought to demonstrate the validity and complexity of Oromo culture by constructing connections to other civilizations of antiquity” (236).

For many outsiders, as well as scholars, there exists the narrative of Ethiopia as an independent, unique, African Christian nation—“the age-old fascination with Ethiopia as a symbol of anti-colonial defiance” (Gebrekidan

\(^{10}\) According to the most recent census data, taken from the 2007 census, Oromo number 25,488,344 or 34.5% of the population. The second, third and fourth most populous groups are as follows: Amhara, 19,867,817, 26.9%; Somali, 4,581,793, 6.2%; and Tigray 4,483,776, 6.1% (Statistical Agency of Ethiopia 2008).
2005, 168). Tibebu Teshale problematizes this perspective in an article titled “Ethiopia: The ‘Anomaly’ and ‘Paradox’ of Africa”, explaining initially the following: “Ethiopia is . . . one of the very few places that managed to sustain an unbroken chain of historical civilization free of foreign ‘corruption.’ Unlike . . . others that were later overrun by alien and destructive forces, Ethiopia maintained its brand of African civilization intact.” Teshale then goes on to describe how this status, when viewed through the lens of Western Ethiopianist thought caused Ethiopia to be “systematically de-Africanized in the annals of Western high culture”— here indicating an impact of colonial thought on Ethiopia. Teshale, for his part, calls for Ethiopian history to be “studied afresh . . . A political economy approach to Ethiopian history, within the larger cosmos of African history, can be an alternative paradigm” (1996, 414, 428).

Herein lies the concept of Ethiopian exceptionalism, an idea which arose numerous times in my research, particularly during an interview with Abiyi Ford11, a professor at Addis Ababa University and, at the time of my research, the dean of Journalism and Communications. Ford, self described as “African by heritage and Barbadian by parentage, Ethiopian by birth, British by registration, American by naturalization and Ethiopian by repatriation”, represents a perspective on Ethiopianness based on not only his layered, multiple identities, but also many years in Ethiopia—his parents were some of the first Garveyite settlers in the country. Speaking of the victory at Adwa, Ford provides the following explanation for exceptionalism:

11 Abiyi Ford (Dean of Journalism and Communications, Addis Ababa University), interview, 28 July 2007. Dean Ford was the first to mention the concept to me.
Right after the battle of Adwa, this was problematic for the European psyche as well. How can a major European force be defeated by a bunch of savages? That cannot be. Well, it’s because these are not really savages, these are sub-divisions of the Caucasoid race; this is why they were able to do this. And so the notion of Ethiopia being in Africa, but not of Africa, the land of Prester John,\textsuperscript{12} surrounded by a sea of Islam, Ethiopians lay dormant for centuries oblivious to their surroundings, Ethiopia not having anything to do with black Africa, etc. was a resurgence of literature along those lines. Ethiopians are not Negroes, they’re not Negroid, they’re not this, they’re different, some are Semitic\textsuperscript{13} . . . And this was picked up very, very effectively by the Ethiopians in high quarters and this is, in fact, post-Menelik literally that this became very, very strong . . . A lot of scholars wrote in that sense. And they were people like Haggai Erlich who talk in terms of Ethiopia’s future, that Ethiopia should not look towards Africa, but should look towards the Middle East, that’s our rightful affiliation, and all that. A lot of things have been done so that academically, the window was wide open for you to make references in your scholarly work to Ethiopia and Egypt, Ethiopia and Israel, Ethiopia and Syria, Ethiopia and India, Ethiopia and Arabia—anything is fine. But you could not make one step

\textsuperscript{12} Prester John is a reference to a figure of European legend said to have, in the medieval times, ruled a Christian nation surrounded by Islamic countries. As legenda has it, the land of Prester John could be Ethiopia. For more, see Carnochan 2008.

\textsuperscript{13} Semetic can refer to language, as Amharic and Tigrinya are semetic languages alongside Arabic and Hebrew, to name but two others. Here Ford seems to be also referring to ethnicity, classing the Ethiopian population as related to the Middle East rather than the rest of Africa.
toward Ethiopia and the West, into Uganda, into Sudan, into Kenya—
taboo. It’s academic suicide. So this shows you that there was a re-
definition in the literature that carved Ethiopia away from the rest of
Africa.

Ford provides a concise description of how certain perceptions—here described
as having been developed in “high quarters”—divide Ethiopia from the anti-
colonial struggles of the rest of the pan-African world. These perceptions view
Ethiopia as not only unique within Africa, but disconnected from Africa.
According to Ford, through this view, Ethiopians become divorced from the very
continent for which it has become a symbol.14

Further complicating the view of Ethiopia as a site of freedom from
colonial domination, this very depiction denies, according to Oromo Nationalist
academics, the reality of internal colonialism within the boundaries of present-
day Ethiopia. Jalata’s general view is that the Oromo people have been, over the
centuries, colonized by Ethiopia—and by this he means highland peoples: the
Amhara, primarily, and the Tigray people. This colonialism is directly connected
with the narrative of European colonialism. As he writes, “Ethiopian colonialism
and world imperialism in collaboration have repressed the autonomous social
development of Oromo society” (1998, 32). In this statement, Jalata is inscribing
the Oromo experience into that of colonized peoples worldwide. Continuing in

14 As an anecdotal aside, during my research I had a conversation with an Ethiopian
returnee—he had been raised in America, but had made his home, after graduating from
college, for the past decade in Addis Ababa. He spoke to me about being on a committee
meant to organize commemorative events for the one hundredth anniversary of the battle of
Adwa. The idea was to celebrate the anniversary under the banner of “Adwa: An African
Victory”. This was resisted by other members of the committee who insisted on “Adwa:
An Ethiopian Victory”.

this vein, Jalata writes that “[t]hose nations that were colonized and lost their political and cultural power could not use their accumulated past until they began their national liberation struggles . . . Oromos refuted the ideologies of colonialism and cultural universalism” (32-33). Here again we see the connection between the Oromo and other colonized peoples, declaring the need for resistance and struggle.

Jasafa also addresses the issue of Ethiopian exceptionalism, referring to Ethiopia as “[b]eing in and out of Africa” in a title of a 2008 article (2008b). Unlike Teshale, however, who describes Ethiopia as having been “systematically de-Africanized in the annals of Western high culture”, Jalata describes a “duality inherent in the concept of Ethiopianism”, describing it as

. . . shift[ing] back and forth between claims of a ‘Semitic’ identity when appealing to the White, Christian, ethnocentric, occidental hegemonic power center and claims of an African identity when cultivating the support of Sub-Saharan Africans and the African diaspora while, at the same time, ruthlessly suppressing the history and culture of non-Semitic Africans of the various colonized peoples, such as Oromos.

Jalata, who writes as much as an activist as an academic,15 views Ethiopians as “surpres[sing] thei Africanness or Blackness”, but places the blame on “successive Ethiopian state elites” who “have used their Blackness to mobilize

\[15\] Harold Marcus, in a review of Jalata’s 1993 book Oromia and Ethiopia: State Formation and Ethnonational Conflict, writes that “Asafa Jalata pretends no particular objectivity . . . provi[ding] a socio-historical construct from the Oromo side of the hill” (1994b, 599-600). Marcus critiqued Jalata’s scholarly rigor, writing, “if a tertiary source substantiates one of Jalata's notions, it is cited, whereas the existing corpus of scholarship that may contradict the assertion is ignored” (600). In this dissertation, my object is not to defend Jalata as either an activist or an academic, but to present his work as a perception—a narrative that exists and informs what it means to be Ethiopian.
other Africans and the African diaspora for their political projects by confusing original Africa, Ethiopia, or the Black world with contemporary Ethiopia (former Abyssinia) and at the same time have allied with Euro-American powers” (1).

However, just as Jalata points to the inconsistencies within and incorrectness of the so-called “Ethiopianist” discourse that seems to favour the Amhara people, and northern highland populations in general, Oromo nationalist narratives also possess “contradictions”. As John Sorensen describes, “on the one hand [Oromo discourse] seeks to invert the Ethiopianist discourse which has portrayed the Oromo as aggressive . . . by asserting the democratic and peaceful traditions of the Oromo . . . while . . . also celebrat[ing] warrior traditions” (1998, 240). Also, even though there is a desire to cleave a demonstrable divide between Amhara and Oromo people, “while avoiding the assertion that Oromos are completely assimilated into a national Ethiopian identity, we must question whether the division between these groups is as clear as either the proponents of Abyssinian chauvinism or Oromo nationalism would have it” (241). The view of the Oromo as having been colonized by northern highlanders, specifically the Amhara, is problematized by various accounts. In addition, there is also the question of whether any claim to ethnic “purity” could be successful given Ethiopia’s long history of cultural intermixture.

Within Ethiopia today, there are “over 100 ethnic group-based political parties (organisations)” (Wondimu 2001, 14), reports the Netherlands-Israel Development Research Programme (NIRP) Research for Policy study on the role
of ethnicity and stereotypes in contemporary Ethiopia. The report goes on to state that “in the past 25 years, Ethiopia has gone from the normative idea of ‘one country, one nation, one people, one culture’ to that of ‘one country but all to their own ethnic groups’. This implies the corresponding challenge to national integration and to even development of the wider national unit” (14-15). Here, the policy study asks a question directly related to the development of nation and nationality. How can there be a nation if all ethnic groups are viewed separately? Is this a multicultural nation or a divided nation? What is the purpose of ethnically based regions? The answers to these questions are not entirely clear. What can be drawn from the study’s inquiries is a concern with negotiation of Ethiopianness. Ethnic regions present a way of dealing with Ethiopia, however there are still questions as what this means to the definition of “Ethiopian”.

In addition, when reading the 1995 constitution, one of the “fundamental principles” (Article 8; 79) is that “[a]ll sovereign power resides in the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia” (79). In this statement, the government is presenting a multiplicity of identities under the banner of Ethiopia. Contrary to this governmental designation of plurality, the NIRP study found that “80% of respondents [to their study] prefer to be referred to as Ethiopian rather than the member of a given ethnic group” (40). Demonstrating this tension, the study also found that “many respondents felt social pressure to have a specific ethnic affiliation (identity)” (4).

In addition to all of this discussion of ethnicity, it is also evident that there are other factors which come into play. As Professor Fikru Gebrekidan said,
“it seems that in Ethiopia, class tends to trump race and ethnicity” (personal conversation, 2009). Class has been an issue in a country where feudalism existed until 1974. Haile Selassie “presided over a modernizing feudal kingdom” (Milkias 2006, xvii), but a feudal monarchy nonetheless—one with claim to roots in “the 3,000-year-old dynasty of the legendary Queen of Sheba and King Solomon” (xvii). This ideological claim was, until the Dergue government, the status quo in the country. However, even during this time (and continuing until today) the increasing numbers of Ethiopians who have been abroad also complicated (and continue to complicate) the issue of Ethiopian identity.

These individuals are those who have the resources to be able to make such moves. Back in 1969, in a two part article for the *Addis Reporter*, Gedamu Abraha and Solomon Deressa introduced the term “hyphenated Ethiopian” to describe the difficult situation in which many of these more privileged Ethiopians are caught between the modern and the traditional. This is an issue that adds another layer to Ethiopian identity beyond that of multiethnicity. As Abraha and Deressa put it, “the period of the hyphenated Ethiopian”, which they saw as beginning in the 1960s, under Haile Selassie, “is a period of tension—the tension of the transitional situation” (“Part 1” 13). Viewing these individuals as existing “in the dual world of ascriptive behaviour and achievement-oriented style of life” (“Part 2” 11), Abraha and Deressa mean to suggest that Ethiopians were (and perhaps are still) working to integrate different “value systems” (“Part 2” 12). This leaves Ethiopians in a situation where they “belong to no community . . . and possess nothing of [their] own” (“Part 2” 12). The
description of the hyphenated Ethiopian is that of an upper class individual—a
city-dwelling urbanite who has opportunities to connect with a world beyond
Ethiopia. It is interesting that this individual was viewed as “lost” and not
grounded in or connected to a sense of identity as Ethiopian. Within the article is
a sense that foreigners (forengeuch in Amharic) and Ethiopians who consort
with forengeuch are leisure-loving consumers who do not care so much about
the cultural elements of Ethiopianness (although it must be said that there is a
lack of clear definition as to what this means in the article itself), but rather turn
to consumer culture and money. The interest in finance and the accumulation of
capital is of great concern to Abraha and Deressa. As a conclusion to their article,
the authors ask the somewhat clichéd question as to whether or not it is possible
for Ethiopia and Ethiopians to connect traditional values with those of the so-
called modern world. Hence, not only does the piece ask about the integration of
foreign values, but there is also a reference to tradition and therefore ethnicity.

In 2003, Tecola W. Hagos referenced “The Hyphenated Ethiopian” in his
essay “Paradigm of Poverty and Humanism: Undoing Ethiopia’s Modernity”.
“The hyphenated Ethiopian,” he wrote,

... is an individual caught in between social forces and is being torn
apart in different directions ... Let us assume just for argument sake that
I might have undermined the wisdom of Haile Selassie’s persistence on
adopting western clothing as a vehicle of modernization, maybe a change
of habit would have led to a change of attitude and state of mind; but
then, if that was the philosophy behind his actions, why did Haile
Selassie maintain the most obnoxious culture of bowing and groveling of subordinates, including requiring his Ministers, highly educated men, to kiss his feet?

For a leader whose desire was to be a “non-European nation” that “could embrace modern civilization and stand culturally and technically on par with European countries” (Clavitt Clarke 2004, 44), this type of behaviour is problematic. Through this description, here Wagos points to the continuing issue of how to integrate different elements into Ethiopian identity. It is not so clear as to how this should be done and, like the example he provides of Haile Selassie’s inconsistent embrace of modernity, there is clearly no set way as to how to arrive at some sort of balance or equilibrium. The levels of identity continue to grow and become complicated by the reality of Ethiopia.

From this brief description of issues to do with Ethiopian identity and Ethiopianness, it is evident that the Ethiopian public do not present a coherent sense of what it means to be Ethiopian both to themselves and to the outsider. As I move forward in this thesis and discuss the Ethiopian perception of the Rastafari, it is important to keep this fact in mind. The Ethiopian sensibility is that identity is multifaceted. Even when an attempt at national identity formation is made—as in the case with the Imperial government through feudal means or Dergue government through insistence on communist principles, it is undermined by other elements of the Ethiopian experience. To understand how this situation might interplay with the Rastafari sense of identity, I will turn to
some theories of nation and nationalism—ways in which the post-colonial world deal with nation and nationality. The Rastafari come from this world.

**Nation and Nationalism: Theories from the West, Applications in Ethiopia**

Craig Calhoun begins the first chapter of his most recent book, *Nations Matter: Culture, History and the Cosmopolitan Dream* stating that

In the wake of 1989 [i.e. the fall of communism] . . . Many embraced an ideal of cosmopolitan democracy. That is, they embraced not just cosmopolitan tastes for cultural diversity . . . ; not just the notion of hybridity with its emphasis on porous boundaries and capacious, complex identities; and not just cosmopolitan ethics emphasizing the obligations of each to all around the world. They embraced also the notion that the globe could readily be a polis, and humanity at large organized in democratic citizenship. (2007, 11)

The ideal of “cosmopolitan democracy” described by Craig Calhoun here—something that takes into account different and complex sets of identities—is a solution to a problem which exists in Ethiopia as well, regardless of the supposed end of communism in 1989\(^\text{16}\). In fact, in the wake of the transfer of power from the Dergue to the EPRDF, the 1995 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia presents an attempt at “embrac[ing] an ideal of cosmopolitan democracy”. Calhoun quotes Ulrich Beck’s description of a “‘politics of post-nationalism’ in which ‘the cosmopolitan project contradicts and replaces the nation-state project’” (14) and acknowledges that, in

\(^{16}\text{Perhaps one might suggest that the fall of the Ethiopian Dergue government might possibly be related to the events of 1989, however the internal struggles of Ethiopia and their impact, as described by Berhe, seem to have eclipsed those of the west.}\)
discussions of nation and the nation-state, it is often that the state being
discussed is either assumed to be western or that there is some sense that
discussions of nation do not require specificity. Obviously, this approach is
problematic, as would seem to be the case when one looks at the situation in
Ethiopia.

The study of nations and nationalism has become quite a well discussed
and researched topic in recent times—especially considering the rise of
globalization and the increase in connections between states, such as the advent
of the European Union. By looking at theories of the nation, one can see the
ways in which these ideas came about as a result of a colonial understanding of
the world. The eventual birth of the “cosmopolitan ideal” is a direct result of this
process. As Calhoun writes, “The nation-state became relatively clearly
formulated and increasingly dominant in Europe and the Americas during the
nineteenth century”(14), therefore nationalism is identified as being “distinctly
modern” (52). Nationalism, for Calhoun, is a direct result of resistance—against
monarchy in the UK and France or against Spanish and British colonialism in
the case of North and South America. Thinking of the history of the nineteenth
century, alongside the increasing power of these nation-states (which came about
through varied struggles against other powers) within Europe and the Americas,
this was also the time of near complete colonial domination of Africa and the
West Indies—especially Jamaica, the birthplace of Rastafari. Ethiopia, however,
is outside of the model of colonialism on the part of the West and outside of the
types of earlier struggles that Calhoun suggests created the impetus for the initial
forms of nationalism. My argument here is that Ethiopia’s consistently negotiated and renegotiated identities have been constituted as per a different narrative (or, more specifically narratives) than that of the colonial powers and their colonies.

In Benedict Anderson’s *Imagined Communities*, he discusses the way in which “nationalism has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it” (12). He discusses the role of religion and language in creating the “imagined communities” of nations. Toby Miller also discusses the way in which language—in the form of the printed word—created a sense of “collective identity” (27). The use of Amharic (especially given that it is a printed and not only oral language like some of the other languages found in Ethiopia) and the Orthodox faith have been galvanizing forces in the history of Ethiopia, however the attempt at a nationally imagined community has always been undermined by the existence of alternative narratives. If, for Miller, “the nation is a oneness of imagination that binds citizens to states . . . it may be founded on genetics and/as history, or it may exist despite either or both of these, on the basis of policy, perhaps a postcolonial hangover of boundaries drawn to suit metropolitan bureaucrats and industrialists” (26), Ethiopia exists outside of this paradigm.

The reality of Ethiopian history and culture does not produce similar colonial or postcolonial consciousnesses—policies attempting to create a sense of Ethiopian identity, especially within the last hundred years, have not only met resistance, but Ethiopians seem to possess an ability to layer identities and see the identity
formation process in a very different way. As an example, I turn to Melakneh Mengistu’s explanation, with reference to literary history, in *Map of African Literature*, how “Amharic [Ethiopian language] literature does not thematically conform to the rest of Black African fiction” (147). Mengistu notes that, unlike the situation in colonial Africa, Christianity is not deemed a “white” religion.

The attitude of Ethiopians and other Africans towards Christianity appears to be diametrically opposed. Christianity is viewed as an intrinsically alien and destructive culture by Black African writers . . . The church is regarded as an agent of evil since it has lured the people away from traditional gods . . . On the other hand, wherever Christianity enters Amharic literature, it is never portrayed as an alien culture but as a deep-rooted heritage (148-9).

In addition, Mengistu also mentions the fact that although the “dominant theme of political African fiction is the theme of political struggle for independence” (149), for Ethiopia, its socio-political experience has not been that of European colonialism. There have been internal struggles—and, of course, like that of the Oromo discussed above, some continue to this day. There is, however, no external “empire to write back to”\(^\text{17}\) in Ethiopia. Ethiopia does not struggle for independence, from an external ruler, but rather a struggle from within, between various forces, ethnicities, identities and ideologies with the goal of creating an Ethiopia—of defining the country and its people.

\(^{17}\) Here I reference the title of the influential text *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* (1989).
Yet for all this, elements of the “cosmopolitan ideal” seem to still present themselves as relevant to Ethiopia. Ethiopia may not have developed in a way that can be easily described by a Western model—even the Oromo attempt to see its own struggle as a reflection of a colonial narrative meets problems for it is a situation outside of the European colonial paradigm. There are numerous nations and nationalities existing in the same country. The Ethiopian Constitution underlines this fact, and the lived reality of a space such as Shashemene, which will be discussed in an upcoming chapter, demonstrates it to be the case. There is a constant and controversial negotiation—between various ethnic groups that has to be undertaken in order to keep Ethiopia in existence as a coherent nation. Perhaps it’s helpful to turn to Miller’s discussion of civic culture and the postmodern subject: “While postmodernity may be defined by absences, it calls up a sense of loss of something never had. This leads to a plentitude of representations—and hence formations—of publics and their appropriate conduct” (1993, 48). Miller gets to this point by describing the development of nations and citizens over time—the very term postmodernity obviously connoting something after the modern nation-state as presented by Calhoun, Anderson and others. It is as if Ethiopia’s ethnic federalism model is not quite cosmopolitan and post-modern, but not an example of the traditional nation, stemming from a “collective identity . . . historically achieved” (Miller 1998, 29).

**Ethnic Federalism and Rastafari/ “Jamaican” Identity**

In this new/current model for Ethiopia, how do the Rastafari fit? They live, primarily, in the Oromia region, but are, of course not Oromo. Kebede
thought to slot the Rastafari in to whichever ethnic identity seemed closest—the Wolaita. Shirlene Hall\textsuperscript{18}, of the JRDC, discussed why they chose the designation of “Jamaican” (as in Jamaican Rastafarian Development Community) when devising the name of the JRDC non-governmental organization, an organization that is involved in many different initiatives throughout Shashemene, the most well known being a school that serves both the Rastafari and Ethiopian communities.

The Rastafarian community itself, had its own problem in that the name “Jamaica” so there were people who stayed away from the JRDC. Ethiopians refer to Rastafarians as Jamaican. If you go up north, they say “Jamaica!” If you go south, east, west and central, they say “Jamaica”. So it was important for us not to change the name at that time. Because it is what the people know. Ethiopia is very suspicious, they have had a lot of wars over the years. But we have not been successful in getting this message across to even our community. Because people say, “Well I’m from St. Kitts, I’m from Barbados, I’m from Trinidad, I’m from Britain, I’m from America and whatever.” You find that people didn’t accept the name. What we are trying to do is educate the people\textsuperscript{19}.

From this statement, we can see a recognition of the Ethiopian perception of Ethiopianness—especially within the context of the EPRDF policies on ethnicity. This attempt, however, according to Hall, has not met with a positive response in the Rastafari community. She describes the lack of acceptance, but recommends

\textsuperscript{18} Shirlene Hall (Jamaican Rastafarian Development Coordinator), interview, 28 June 2007.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
“educating” the Rastafari—perhaps in the Ethiopian notion of ethnicity. For there is a strong notion of what is not Ethiopian—and this can be seen in the assumptions made, on the part of the Ethiopian population, of the Rastafari.

In order to discuss the Ethiopian perception of the Rastafari, it is therefore important to establish a sense of what it is that Ethiopians see as Ethiopian, for themselves. This chapter has therefore presented a brief history and depiction of Ethiopian identity and Ethiopianness. It is the multiplicity of identities that construct the country of Ethiopia and have constructed Ethiopia over time—ethnic, class and otherwise—that challenge the Rastafari and lay the foundation for the perception of this new immigrant community within Ethiopia.

The Rastafari, as was discussed in the previous chapter, dealing with the history of the movement’s connection to Ethiopia in general and Shashemene in particular, focus on Ethiopia as presenting the answer to a question—the fulfillment of something lost. The actual movement from various parts of the world to Ethiopia is an attempt at reconnection to roots. Ethiopia in general, and Shashemene in particular, is, for the Rastafari a Promised Land. For Ethiopians, it would seem that the negotiation between various representations and formulations of publics is a given. The unique situation of Ethiopia is perhaps that of having always been postmodern—having always dealt with a “plentitude” of “publics and their appropriate conduct”. In reacting to the Rastafari there is therefore a desire to have the Rastafari fit into one of the preexisting categories—as Kebede tried to do in the anecdote that began this chapter—or perhaps fit into a new category—to present themselves as yet another ethnic
group, another nation that can fit into the plural, perhaps cosmopolitan society of Ethiopia.
Chapter Three

Space in/and Shashemene

Before arriving into Shashemene, one travels through a number of small towns, each one introduced by a small, white sign with black letters in both English and Amharic. Maki, Ziway, Arsi Negele—each announced by these government signs. Swaths of farmland separate each of these towns, municipalities that look like clusters of buildings, lining the highway, each small shop or home or government building constructed primarily of mud—buildings constructed out of *chika*, the Amharic word for wattle and daub. As this is the Rift Valley, the road is straight and generally flat. The weather is warmer than in the higher altitude of Addis Ababa, and, even during the rainy season, the area is characterized by dust. In this area of the country, the soil is very sandy, which makes construction easy, but the growth of crops is sometimes difficult. Farmers live and work on the outskirts of the city, in the same area as the Rastafari settlement. A kilometre or so down the road reveals a town bustling with shops, people and motor vehicles. Horse drawn carriages ply the sidestreets, taking inhabitants to the large, open air market in town, or to any number of other businesses off the main roads. A number of hotels and restaurants line the main street—many are of rather low quality, though there are at least a few that serve both foreign and domestic tourists. A brand-new Orthodox church has been built on the outskirts of Shashemene, but there are a number of other Orthodox churches and Protestant places of worship. Mosques are evident too, demonstrating the religious variety in the town. As well,
the ubiquitous use of both Afaan Oromo and Amharic reveals that this is not a homogeneous community.\(^1\)

Just in advance of Shashemene, however, the town is announced by statements of welcome in three languages—Afaan Oromo, Amharic and English—on a large painted billboard of Bob Marley—it is a facsimile version of the portrait on the cover of \textit{Legend}\(^2\), his multi-platinum selling singles collection. The sign also depicts the Ethiopian flag as well as the flag of the Oromia region. Though the painting was commissioned by the Shashemene Urban Local Government (this is also indicated in Afaan Oromo), the actual paint job is not totally accurate or in proportion, and the resulting portrait of Jamaica’s most famous citizen looks more than slightly awkward. The same might be said for the spatial orientation of the Rastafari population in Shashemene, a topic I will discuss over the course of this chapter.

The issue of space is of incredible importance where the repatriated Rastafari are concerned. After all, they have taken the concept of Ethiopianism, as discussed in the previous chapter and added a spatial dimension. The idea of a symbolic Ethiopia is transformed into a reality by the repatriates, who save up money to travel to Shashemene, whether to establish businesses, aid in development, or fulfill the dream of repatriation in and of itself. Based on what has been presented thus far, between Ethiopians and Rastafari there is a gap created by differing notions of identity—the former based on a history and ethnic variety that

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\(^1\) Given my involvement with Habitat for Humanity Ethiopia and my experience in the area, this is my perception of the area’s characteristics.

\(^2\) On the billboard, it is labelled that the picture was painted by one Elias Samuel in 2004. Perhaps this was completed in advance of the Bob Marley sixtieth birthday concert and the subsequent celebrations in Shashemene.
is far from the latter’s conception of identity shaped by a history of colonial oppression. This gap manifests itself in a spatial fashion as well. The Rastafari conception of identity—specifically that of a sense of Ethiopianness or Africanness as defined not by Ethiopia, but by Rastafari, elicited a physical move—their repatriation. They altered their surroundings/space by travelling to and settling in Ethiopia and Shashemene in particular. They enter the space of Ethiopia, but this space has been, and continues to be, produced—the Rastafari simply present another version.

Ras Tagas King, resident country representative for the Ethiopian World Federation, the organization to whom Haile Selassie officially granted land, explains his connection to this space:

[The land in Shashemene] is the land that our pioneer families were residing on and since then more of our people have been coming home to Ethiopia . . . The city limit used to be just before our land grant. Now it’s increased and encroached and overtaken all of the land grant. There is a different building policy, a planning policy involving urban areas . . . Meaning to say for us wanting to come home, to the Shashemene land grant, we have to follow under this policy.

In this statement, King not only describes his perspective on the difficulty of dealing with the land itself, but he identifies the land as “home”. This is the relationship the Rastafari have with the land in Shashemene—it is home, it is the Promised Land. As a piece of land, it takes on a particular symbolic resonance. Through the conceptualization of Ethiopia, as discussed in the last chapter, the
Rastafari have created a sense of the space as blessed and divine. It is the ideal, and this view is significantly different from the conception of space on the part of Ethiopians. We will return to this sense of Shashemene as ideal—even utopian—as we think through the ways in which this space is lived, interpreted and conceptualized.³

To understand these varied views of the space of Shashemene, post-modern geographers are useful in that they provide the tools to think through how space becomes imbued with meaning. Henri Lefebvre, in *The Production of Space*, provides a strong reason for a discussion of space and its production.

> Instead of uncovering the social relationships . . . that are latent in spaces, instead of concentrating our attention on the production of space and the social relationships inherent to it . . . we fall into the trap of treating the space as space ‘in itself’. (1991, 90)

This chapter will take stock of the “social relationships . . . latent” in Shashemene, recalling that “*(Social) space is a (social) product . . . space thus produced also serves as a tool of thought and action; that in addition to the means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power; yet that, as such, escapes in part from those who would make use of it*” (26). The “space” of Shashemene has been produced in different ways by the varied people who exist within its borders—which have changed over time. Those who “make use” of the space are shaped by it themselves.

³ Rastafari also live in other areas of Ethiopia, primarily Addis Ababa—where Ras Tagas King makes his home. According to Gebre Gebru, the Jamaican Consul General, the Rastafari settle primarily in Shashemene, though increasingly in Addis Ababa. Anecdotally, there are reports of a Rastafari community outside Bahir Dar, the capital of the Amhara region in the north of the country. Gebru did not mention this community in our conversation on 11 January 2008.
Edward Soja, extending from Lefebvre, writes that space is a “social product . . . simultaneously the medium and outcome, presupposition and embodiment, of social action and relationship” (1989, 129). In his terms, by and through the research I have conducted in and about both Ethiopia and Shashemene, I have the data to describe the “social product” that is the town of Shashemene—including both its Ethiopian and Rastafari inhabitants. Certainly, this specialized conceptualization will be incomplete, in that, based on my positionality and research limitations, it cannot take into account the entirety of all “social action[s]” and “relationship[s]”, however it can both frame and offer an analytical perspective on the Rastafari presence in the town, or perhaps, more specifically (where the Rastafari are concerned) on its outskirts. Through a broader look at the spatial conceptualization of Ethiopia over the past century, this framework also offers an analytical perspective on Rastafari presence in Ethiopia and the way in which varied modes of spatial production interact.

What has resulted, since the land was granted by Haile Selassie, is an example of what Henri Lefebvre has described, in that “space and the political organization of space express social relationships but also react back upon them” (qtd. in Soja 1989, 81). The granting of land “expressed” a particular social relationship in that it meant there was an implicit invitation, taken up predominantly by Rastafari settlers, to enter the space of Shashemene, but this has impacted the surrounding community and created a “reaction” towards the Rastafari themselves.
Through my research I worked towards an understanding of the meaning of this place/space and how that meaning is communicated between various groups of people: the Ethiopian residents of Shashemene, themselves members of disparate ethnic, religious and linguistic groups; the so-called Jamaicans, also comprising a variety of races and nationalities, but who, however, share a set of beliefs that insists upon the sanctity of this space; and myself, the academic who wants to gain some sense of how this all works—and how it might extend to and from additional spaces in the ex- and neo-colonial world. While the previous chapter on Ethiopianness and Nationalism discussed the notion of Oromo identity within the context of Ethiopian and other identity formations, addressing the concept of colonialism on behalf of the Amhara, the chapter did not discuss how this colonial conceptualization deals with the issue of space.

As I continue through this chapter I will investigate the way that “social and spatial relations are dialectically inter-reactive, interdependent; that social relations of production are both space-forming and space-contingent” (Soja 1989, 81). Using this discourse and critical approach, I will demonstrate how the reality of space has great impact on the Ethiopian perception of the Rastafari population within Shashemene in particular. To begin, I will outline the development of this space, taking into account the changing face of Shashemene over the time the Rastafari have been there.

In chapter one, I discussed the lack of discussion, among scholars of Rastafari, about the actual movement to Shashemene. Certainly, Giulia Bonacci’s work has provided a strong history of the Caribbean/Rastafari presence in Ethiopia,
specifically Shashemene. While her focus was on establishing the historical
timeline of the factors leading to the land grant and establishment of a settlement of
Caribbean peoples in Ethiopia, my focus is on the perception of Ethiopians of this
series of historical events, leading to the present day situation as evidenced in my
fieldwork. The fact of the space itself and its location has led to a particular
relationship between Ethiopians in the area of the Shashemene wereda\textsuperscript{4} and the
Rastafari. This analysis of space, and its organization, is important because it will
reveal evidence of the social relationships and the dynamics between them.

As mentioned in the first chapter, though repatriation has long been a
concept discussed throughout the twentieth century in the context of the African-
diaspora, in the case of Ethiopia, actual space was delineated for repatriation. The
importance of this gift of space from Emperor Haile Selassie to the EWF is
underlined in EWF documentation printed over fifty years after the land grant was
made. Demonstrating the centrality of the granted space in Shashemene, on the
first page of a 2006 document entitled “General Overview”, as part of the “Profile
of the Organization”, there is a section that reads as follows:

\[
\ldots \text{as a result of the support Ethiopia received from the black people of the}
\text{west during the Italian invasions 1935-1941, the Emperor granted five (5)}
\text{Gashas of land in Shashemane, Ethiopia, to the E.W.F. Inc, for African}
\text{people in the diaspora who desired to return to the motherland}\textsuperscript{5}.
\]

\textsuperscript{4} An administrative district of Ethiopia that is a collection of kebeles, the smallest level of administrative
division.

\textsuperscript{5} “Profile of the Organization: Ethiopian World Federation, Incoporated.” \textit{The Ethiopian World
This granting of land by Haile Selassie to the African diaspora is a granting of space, however it was initially granted over half a century ago. Before investigating the spatial relationship of the Rastafari within (and without) the city, it is informative to consider the spatial conceptualization of Ethiopia as the state developed its control/management of space from feudalism to communism and then to the present regionalism.

**Reshaping Land/Reshaping Space in Ethiopia**

When Lefebvre writes that “the social and political (state) forces which engendered . . . space now seek, but fail, to master it completely” (1991, 26), he could be speaking of the numerous forces which have attempted to define Ethiopia. The varying ideologies that have governed Ethiopia through the past century have each “engendered” the country’s space in different ways. These different ways have led to different interactions with the incoming Rastafarian repatriate population, who, though they did not begin arriving until the mid-1950s, were shaped according to the changing spatial conception of the country.

As Christopher Clapham writes in his essay, “Controlling Space in Ethiopia” (2002), the state of Ethiopia developed from a power structure based in the Northern Highlands and controlled by the Amhara ethnic group. Levine explains how the development of Ethiopia is related to the struggle between Oromo and Amhara peoples (this is acknowledged by Asafa Jalata as well; “Oromo Nationalism” 1998, 2), describing the expansion of Amhara influence through the north in the fifteenth century and the south in the seventeenth century. Amhara rule continued through to the twentieth century, which opened with “Greater
Ethiopia . . . as a resolutely independent empire in the early stages of becoming a multi-ethnic national society . . . under the kings of the Amhara” (Levine 1974, 165). The reality of this situation on the level of identity has been discussed in chapter two.

The existence of the Ethiopian Orthodox church and the use of Amharic—both of which are emblematic of the Amhara culture in the north, were therefore spread into the space of the south, presenting, in Jalata’s words, an “Ethiopian colonial system” (1998, 2). Keeping this in mind, one of the historical narratives of the southern space of Ethiopia, where Shashemene is located, is that of colonial conquest of the Amhara over the Oromo. Under imperial rule through to Haile Selassie, this was a feudal system. Lands were conquered and administered by the crown—after the late nineteenth century, in the newly established capital of Addis Ababa, conveniently located in almost the centre of the country, thereby forming “a nodal point of a communications system spreading out to the furthest parts of the state” (Clapham 2002, 11). As Clapham argues, the way in which Ethiopia was run demonstrated that “any regional politics that acknowledged the distinct identities of different societies within the empire was limited to interests that could be mediated through the patrimonial mechanisms of the court” (13). The land was controlled by the feudal government, which, under Haile Selassie, could be administered according to his and his courts “interests”, nationwide. This means that it was up to the Emperor’s discretion how land would be allocated and to whom.
Hence, it is not surprising when one reads in Benti Getahun’s history of Shashemene, completed as a dissertation for a PhD at Addis Ababa University, about the distribution of lands around the city under Selassie. He speaks of how government land was “granted to the so-called balawuletas for their military services during the Italo-Ethiopian war” (8). These were soldiers from Eritrea who had abandoned the Italian forces, enabling them to fight alongside the Ethiopian army. This was a grant of land near Shashemene on behalf of the Emperor himself. Getahun writes that the land was located in “Melka Oda in the outskirts of the town of Shashamanne on the way to Addis Ababa” (8). In an interesting addition, Getahun notes that “oral sources” reported that these lands were granted to “punish the people of Shashamanne who had collaborated with the Italians” (8).

Similarly, some of my oral sources mentioned this idea that Selassie used the granting of land to the Rastafari as “punishment”. The sources would speak of it off hand, often not wanting to discuss it and laughing it off as speculation, but when I would ask directly about the issue would state that the Emperor must have chosen the land near Shashemene to make a statement to the Oromo—that by having Rastafari live on these lands, people who deify the Emperor, that it would present the power of the Emperor to the Oromo people, or, at the very least, frustrate them. As an example, one interviewee, who asked for anonymity, told me about a “rumour”. He said that “certain ethnic groups have an attitude towards [the Rastafari]”, but then told me to “drop it”. When I asked if he was referring to the Oromo, he said yea, and that it was because of “the idea that Haile Selassie gave land to Rastas and Eritreans in order to bother the Oromo”.
Given the history of the land grant, and the fact that it was given to “the black people of the world”, only to be taken up predominantly by Rastafari later, this could not be the case. The first settlers to take up the offer of land in Shashemene were James and Helen Piper, originally from Montserrat via New York, USA. According to Gebrekidan’s description, they arrived in Ethiopia in 1955 and, in 1961, they were still the only settlers in Shashemene (172). The first Rastafarian to arrive was Noel Dyer, who, according to Giulia Bonacci, arrived on foot in 1965 (370), ten years after the Pipers. Hence the land was not specifically provided for the Rastafari. Therefore it could not be the case that Haile Selassie would give land to those who saw him as God in order to raise the ire of the Oromo.

It remains interesting, however, that this idea exists and comes up in casual conversation—it underlines the very same idea that Getahun expressed in his 1985 thesis: not only that the land around Shashemene was sectioned and given away, but that there is a perception that the Emperor felt it might be good to have people who supported and admired him occupying this land. Therefore, in addition to the visibility of the Amharic language in this space, there would also be individuals who would represent the Emperor’s presence if not his influence.

The location of the lands granted to the Rastafari are, like those granted to the balawuletas, located outside of Shashemene proper and in close proximity to the village of Melka Oda. At the time of the grant in the mid-twentieth century, the land would have been located almost two kilometers away from the centre of Shashemene. Bonacci’s map demonstrates this very fact. In it can be seen the distance between the granted land and that of Shashemene. The grant begins at the
Melka Oda river and stops a significant distance before the dividing road that leads south to the Bale mountains, here labelled “Balé Goba”.

The map depicts the location of the *don de terres* (“land grant”) as it was in the 1950s, when the first settlers arrived and began to live on these lands. Between then and now, however, further changes have occurred that have impacted the spatial relationship between what has become the Rastafari settlement or, in the words of the local residents, *Jamaica sefer* (“Jamaican village” or “Jamaican area” in Amharic, sometimes just shortened to “Jamaica” by locals). The major change resulted from the fall of the Haile Selassie regime.

![Map of Melka Oda river and surrounding area](image)

Figure 3.1: (Bonacci 2008, 352)

It was, in fact Emperor Haile Selassie’s land management that, according to Paulos Milkias, was the main factor in the regime’s downfall. The revolts and protest that led to the eventual replacement of Selassie’s regime with that of the communist Dergue were related to the issue of land. After all, the Royal Family and the Ethiopian Orthodox Church together controlled over ninety percent of the
land in Ethiopia. As Milkias points out as regards the government situation leading up to the revolution against the Emperor,

land reform, a sensitive and crucial issue, was totally neglected. The emperor and the imperial family were not prepared to dispense with their own gabbar meret (feudal landholdings). Anyone who advocated reform in feudal land tenure relations was immediately attacked by the aristocracy as being “bought by a foreign enemy.” In parliament, which was already packed by the nobility, a land reform bill had been repeatedly rejected.

(2006, 190)

The aristocracy (and those the aristocracy deemed capable/acceptable) both owned and controlled the lands in Ethiopia—and this had been the case for centuries. It was, of course, in the interest of the government to maintain this situation because through land, the government was able to control the space of Ethiopia.

When Milkias speaks of his own involvement in the student movement against Selassie’s government, he recounts a 1967 conversation with Prince

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6 As Milkias wrote in an email dated 5 March 2009: “The land issue was the most important. In actual fact, that was the only weapon the students [including myself] had in attacking the regime and bringing about its overthrow. Our slogan was ‘Land to the Tiller’. I can even say that it would have been a daunting task for the revolutionaries to succeed to overthrow Haile Selassie had he listened to the advice of people like Ras Emeru, his cousin, and brought about land reform. The Emperor adamantly refused to go along with the dismantlement of feudalism. And land is at the core of feudalism. Some two thousand families, together with the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahdo Church and members of the Royal family controlled 90% of the land. Ninety percent of the people were landless peasants who paid up to 75% of their produce to their landlords. The Royal family alone owned millions of acres under names like Ginde Bel, Bet Rist, Itege Meret etc. Obviously, if Haile Selassie had to bring about land reform as was done for example in India, he would have to dispense with his huge landholdings. You cannot imagine that this kind of system which disappeared in Europe in the era of Enlightenment could persist in the 20th century. But the emperor seemed totally oblivious to this fact; this ultimately brought about his downfall.”

Michael Makonnen, grandson to the Emperor. The Prince asked Milkias why there was a movement against the imperial regime. The response: “Haile Selassie [is] an epitome of Ethiopian feudalism, and . . . if radical changes such as land reform were not instituted immediately, much violence would issue . . . [in] the impending revolution” (2006, 185-86). The very leader and system that provided the Rastafari with the land grant—and act of granting land in and of itself—was viewed by those who opposed the monarchy as extremely problematic. Student groups and various movements across the country were criticizing the regime and the revolution of which Milkias spoke occurred in 1974. Nearly immediately, in 1975, the new Dergue government, led by Mengistu Hailemariam, set about with a broad and complete program of land reform.

According to Clapham, the Dergue modeled their plan on that of the French Revolutionary Jacobins: “a project of *encadrement*, or incorporation in to structures of control, which was pursued with remarkable speed and ruthlessness” (2002, 14). The land was completely nationalized and then redistributed to Ethiopian peasantry in a very controlled way. This was unlike the feudal system in that land ownership did not constitute being part of a particular class, however the land allocation implemented by the Dergue demanded specific patterns of ownership. Re-appropriating and redistributing land led not to freedom for the peasant classes, but instead developed another system of control. For the purposes of Shashemene, inhabitants were organized under the “structure of local government . . . which incorporated these areas far more intensively into a national administrative structure than had even been in the past” (Clapham 2002, 15). Both
the Ethiopian population and the Rastafari had to deal with the transformation into a far more controlled environment.

To discover how this process impacted the Rastafari, I turn to Ras Tagas King, who explained the way the process of nationalization impacted the land grant and its implications for the Rastafari population, who, at the time were the only remaining settlers. Non-Rastafari settlers such as the Pipers, who had been the first settlers on the land grant, left shortly after the Dergue took power.

When the Dergue came into power, they nationalized the land grant, which was 500 acres for 500 families. So, they took all the land. That was in September, harvesting time, and the land had been cultivated. They reaped all the crops, and then they came with tractors and they plowed the land, and they plowed right up to the door thresholds of the early pioneer settlers. This means to say that newly plowed land was now nationalized. So the settlers opened their door, trod on the plowed land and were told: “you are now trespassing.” So, in this duress, under these circumstances, these early pioneers got together and wrote a letter using the name of the Ethiopian World Federation and with the help of the Jamaican Embassy they petitioned the Dergue and reminded the Dergue why this land had been granted for our organization for the black people of the world and reminded them also that our parents also spilled blood in the defense of the Ethiopian integrity. There were some sympathetic members of the Dergue who discussed it and agreed that for the eighteen pioneer families that were present, each of them should get 2.2 hectares each which was the new land
proclamation that farmers of a family size would have 2.2 hectares . . . We have that proclamation signed by Mengistu, and in it he says that 2.2 hectares will go to the remaining settlers and more land will be given when you develop this⁸.

Taking this approach of the Dergue government, it would seem that, post the land proclamation of 3 March 1975, the space granted to the “black people of the world”—as opposed to the people of Ethiopia—was transformed along with the space of Ethiopia. Before this moment, those who had settled on the land between the Melka Oda river and Shashemene, land that had been bequeathed by a feudal leader, had arrived as foreigners, coming to live in Ethiopia. By signing a document that stated that “the eighteen pioneer families that were present . . . should get 2.2 hectares each which was the new land proclamation”, these pioneer families were being treated in the same way as the Ethiopian families. There is parity between the treatment of Ethiopians and the treatment of the repatriates. At this moment, it could be argued, the government provides a tacit acknowledgement, through the allotment of space, of the Ethiopianness of the settlers.

The overarching goal of land reform, the so-called encadrement, however, was to emphasize the power of the government. As described in the chapter on Ethiopianness, the Dergue government aimed to create a national sense of identity. Part of this project was the organization of space. Replacing the monarchical

⁸ Ras Tagas King (Resident Country Representative for the EWF), interview, 1 September 2007. King also argues that the Shashemene authorities did not heed the instructions of the government and did not provide the 2.2 hectares for each family so that, in effect, the land was less than what had been promised. The history of the land reform and its impact on the Rastafari population was confirmed by Rastafari repatriate Ivan Coore in his paper “The Early Years of Settlement in Shashemene, Ethiopia”, presented at the Association of Cultural Studies Crossroads Conference at the University of the West Indies, Mona. Kingston, Jamaica. July 4-8, 2008.
regime—a system that created a relationship between the central power in the centre and the weaker elements, namely peasants, in outlying areas—the Dergue was involved in social engineering. This was done through a process of “resettlement and villagization” (Clapham 2002, 19). Not only were populations moved to develop specific areas as selected by the government, but then the government sent out groups of students, called zemecha, to modernize these newly organized spaces. Donald Donham quotes from official material about the zemecha project:

According to an official statement of the campaign, “For centuries the people in general and the rulers in particular have lived with out-moded beliefs . . . These dividing ideas worked against progress and enlightenment.” It would be the students who would bring progress and enlightenment to the countryside. (1999, 34)

Through the movement of the students from Addis Ababa to the countryside space, the idea was that they would bring the ideology of the communist government—they would encourage the population to support the regime’s desire for communal concern. It would also aid in the enforced creation of a sense of unity amongst all Ethiopians. If the spaces were unified all under the same model, perhaps a unified Ethiopian identity would be created—this was the impetus for this altered spatial development.

The Rastafari were in the middle of this whole situation. Believing in Haile Selassie as a deity would clearly mark them as supporters of the now ousted regime,

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9 See Donham, Donald. Marxist Modern: An Ethnographic History of the Ethiopian Revolution (1999) for a full account of the zemecha project.
however the granting of the land suggests that the Rastafari were invited to join into post-revolutionary Ethiopia. As a result of Selassie’s downfall and the subsequent land reform, the land grant was changed and not eliminated. While the land was granted by Selassie, it was arguably actually \textit{re-granted} by the Dergue. The very government that disdained the feudal allocation of land allowed this granting to stand, albeit a lessened amount. The Dergue could have simply eliminated the land grant—as it eliminated the land holdings of others. The Dergue government’s actions can be read as an acknowledgement of the symbolic importance of the land near Shashemene, beyond simply addressing the needs of the eighteen families and can be viewed as a statement about the significance of space and that space in particular. This justified the presence of Rastafari during the transition from Selassie to the Dergue, or from feudalism (which is based on a hierarchy of space) to socialism (shared space). Mengistu’s action, in signing the proclamation, suggests that the Rastafari were part of the shared space of Ethiopia. The fact that the Dergue took this action demonstrates that even though the Rastafari continued to worship Haile Selassie (as they continue to do so today), under this new government, their land grant was respected on some level.

Gebre Gebru\textsuperscript{10}, who worked at the Jamaican Embassy in Ethiopia from 1985 until its closure ("for purely economical reasons"\textsuperscript{11}) in 1992, is an Ethiopian who has acted as the Honorary Consular General for Jamaica (i.e. the connection between Jamaican citizens and the Ethiopian government) for the past seventeen years. He concurs with the above explanation, underlining the fact that the Dergue

\textsuperscript{10} Gebru, Gebre (Jamaican Consul General, Ethiopia), interview, 11 January 2008.

\textsuperscript{11} By this, Gebru explained, he meant that the Jamaican government could simply not afford the diplomatic mission to Ethiopia and it therefore had to close.
regime treated the Shashemene settlers in the same way they treated Ethiopians:

“During the Emperor’s time, it used to be one gasha (500 hectares). During the military regime it was reduced to ten hectares. The military regime cut everything. The military regime did recognize them though by giving them a small amount of land each. Just like each Ethiopian. The policy was the same for Rastafarians as it was for Ethiopians”\(^\text{12}\).

In 1991, however, the space of Ethiopia was again altered as a result of the ethnic regionalism introduced by the incoming EPRDF government who took power from the communist Dergue. Had it worked according to the Dergue’s plan, all of the towns and villages would have been engineered to function as a unit under the communist government. As it developed, however, the result of the encadrement was that there was a level of autonomy granted to the outlying spaces, and, as support for communism waned in the rest of the world, ethnically based opposition groups, as mentioned in the previous chapter, grew and took hold throughout the country. The TPLF was in the north, along with the EPLF, and the OLF (who eventually dropped out of the coalition whose actions brought down the Dergue) was, and remains, primarily in the south, where Shashemene is located. The OLF represented the interested of the southern Oromo population and, when the EPRDF took power, there was a need to connect all of these different ethnic groups together. Given that ethnic connection was the basis for the growth of the opposition groups, it is not surprising that ethnicity became the criteria for yet another shaping of the space within Ethiopia, as the government introduced ethnic federalism.

\(^{12}\) Interview. Gebre Gebru (Jamaican Consul General to Ethiopia), 11 January 2008.
Though the EPRDF re-divided the country into fourteen ethnically-based regions, offering voluntary relocations, the government maintained communal ownership over the land. As it states in the 1995 Ethiopian constitution:

The right to ownership of rural and urban land, as well as of all natural resources, is exclusively vested in the State and in the peoples of Ethiopia. Land is a common property of the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia and shall not be subject to sale or to any other means of exchange (98).

What is different about this envisioning of space is that “whereas the Derg saw itself as protecting ‘national unity’ against divisive forces, the TPLF saw itself as representing one of a diverse group of people who had been more or less arbitrarily incorporated into a single political unit” (Clapham 2002, 26). The language of “Nations, Nationalities and Peoples” indicates this change in perspective. The coherent sense of nationalism and attempt at consistent spatial organization was dismantled and land was then revisioned. This change in the administration of space within Ethiopia now means that Shashemene is not located in the Shoa province, as it was under the Dergue, but is now in Oromia, the largest region.

After the EPRDF’s reform, Afaan Oromo has become essential for government and business administration within the region. Names of towns have been changed—for example, Nazret, a town that was named as such by Haile Selassie, is now officially known by its Afaan Oromo name of Adama. Driving from Addis Ababa, both a city and another region, into Oromia, one can see the linguistic change in the signage on stores and restaurants. On certain painted signs splashed
paint cross out Amharic script. The space is now visibly more Oromo than any other ethnic group, and initial research begun by Gunilla Bjeren, which I will discuss later, demonstrates this reality.

The fact that government ownership of land was maintained as policy by the present EPRDF regime and that according to the constitution, land is a “common property of the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia and shall not be subject to sale or other means of exchange”, means that the use of land, for residential purposes, is permissible only for Ethiopians. Foreigners can make use of land only if there is a significant investment in the country—whether for business or humanitarian purposes. Gebre Gebru confirms that, at present, there is simply no land available for new Rastafari repatriates. “According to the Emperor’s grant to the land,” he said, “there are many Jamaicans living in Shashemene, as you know. There were only eighteen people who have been granted land. Only eighteen in the history of the land grant. And no more. The government of Ethiopia stated that there is no additional land to offer to other Jamaicans. They don’t have enough land to offer them in that area or anywhere else”13.

**Municipal Organization of Space: A New Conceptualization**

The politics of space have played a large role in the development of Ethiopia and have impacted the Rastafari who have made their repatriation to the country. Shashemene’s spatial makeup has changed as well. The desire on behalf of the EPRDF government to have the ethnic regions has led to numerous changes in the issue of spatial usage. As Demisse Shito, mayor of Shashemene, told me in 2007, there was a new master plan created for the city in 2003 (the development of

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a new master plan for Shashemene was also mentioned by Gebre Gebru). This new master plan places the village of Melka Oda and the entire space of the original land grant within the boundaries of the city of Shashemene itself. This has impacted the Rastafari and the Ethiopian population, in the form of the municipal government, has responded. Both communities have lived through the major transformations of spatial consciousness that have occurred over three changes in government, and they both possess differing relationships to space.

On 21 November 2007, a Community Development Forum was held at the Shashemene municipal government offices. A representative from the British Consulate was present as was the Director of Oromia Representative Government and members of the municipal government, including Mayor Demisse Shito. Members of the Rastafari community were present and the forum was conducted in front of a public audience. This roll call is presented to demonstrate the level of significance of this particular meeting. The first topic on the agenda was that of land. One of the Rastafari delegation, Ras Desai made the following statement:

It is not the intention of [Rastafari] to come as tourists but to live in Ethiopia on the land Emperor Haile Selassie give to the Black people of the world. The Mengistu Government changed policy and the land was nationalized after which the first set of families left Ethiopia. [At that time]

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14 For the sake of accuracy, according to the minutes of the forum, taken by Madge Hylton, a member of the Rastafari community, the following people who were in attendance were listed by Hylton as follows: “Present at this Development Forum were the British Consul, Mr. Dave Denyer; Director of Oromia Representative Government, Mr. Sivaj Kedir; Shashemene Mayor, Mr. Demisse Shito along with prominent members of the Municipality, Police Commander in Shasheme, Aro Dereje Muleta; Ato Mulatu Gebre, Vice Head Culture and Tourism Office, Ato Samuel Makonne of Land Dept., and other prominent official as well as members of the Rastafari Community: Bongo Rocky, Ras Desi Priest Paul, Ras Reuben, Ras DC, Ras Desai, Ras Dawitt who made their contribution to the discussion. Others remain part of the audience.” These minutes were provided to me by Demisse Shito, Mayor of Shashemene.
the present Government gave individual land holding at which time the population of Shashemene grew to approx 50,000. Then, some persons acquired 2,000sq. m of land. Recently land holdings have been reduced to 200sq. m. It is not that we were requesting additional land but that there be recognition for whatever holdings already exist with a will to create a provision for sharing with others who are expected to come in the context of existing government principle; 200sq. m to each Ethiopian\textsuperscript{15}.

An additional spokesperson for the Rastafari references documents found in archives in Addis Ababa showing the gift of land. Here we see a reading of the land grant based on the decisions of two previous governments. In response to this, the mayor is quite definitive, saying “what was then and now is different”. Explaining further, Shito describes how while “the land was owned by people at the time of Haile Selassie, some is now owned by the Regional government” and that it is not possible to “destroy the legislation rules or regulations of the country”\textsuperscript{16}.

The Rastafari turn to a historic understanding of the space, only to be informed that they must respect the present reality of the spatial organization of the town. In an attempt to explain the importance of the space of Shashemene to the Rastafari, a member of the Rastafari delegation named as Ras DC, expresses the basis of his understanding: “We argue as Ethiopians, who have returned after being away for hundreds of years,” he says, “Most of us coming to Shashemene come from places called Ghettos, from which many problems develop. We should be

\textsuperscript{15} Community Development Forum. Minutes taken by Madge Hylton.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
creating something to avoid division”\textsuperscript{17}. This reference to another space is important in that it reveals a connection to the space of Ethiopia based on the Rastafari’s perception of the country as a spiritual home—a Promised Land. In addition, the reference to “Ghettos” indicates a spatial understanding that has been influenced by locations outside of Ethiopia. Ras DC here presents a reference to a space outside of Ethiopia to express his sense of what should occur within Ethiopia, specifically Shashemene. In another direct reference to the space outside of Shashemene, Ras DC insists that the Rastafari have “come from outside . . . which has helped to put ‘Ethiopia on the Map’ . . . responsible for the influx of tourists visiting Lalibela, Axum, etc. We have done much in publicizing Ethiopia”\textsuperscript{18}.

The response of the Mayor to these statements is to discuss the issue of investment within the community. Given the Mayor’s focus on “good government and urban development to reduce poverty in cities”\textsuperscript{19}, one might expect a statement of understanding of Ras DC’s position, however Shito immediately moves the discussion to the “Shashemene administrative portfolio” asking that Rastafari not have “money problems” when they register for investment, as this will mean that they will not “meet stipulated criteria”\textsuperscript{20}. By offering opportunities to invest, there is little recognition (or cognition) of the “ghetto” environment of which Ras DC speaks. The discussion clearly remains within the city limits of Shashemene—and within the realm of concerns specific to the spatial conception of the mayor and the municipal government.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Community Development Forum. Minutes taken by Madge Hylton.
\textsuperscript{19} Demisse Shito (Mayor, Shashemene Municipality), interview, 30 August 2007.
\textsuperscript{20} Community Development Forum. Minutes taken by Madge Hylton.
What is being made clear here is the existence of very different conceptions of what Lefebvre would call “lived space”, which results from a combination of “conceived” and “perceived” space (1991, 38-9). As Zhongyuan Zhang writes, in an interpretation of Lefebvre’s “spatial triad” (38-9), “The third term of lived space is balanced carefully between the two poles of conceived space (purely idealism) and perceived space (pure materialism). It embodies both elements without being reducible to either” (2006, 3). It would seem that, in the records of the Community Development Forum, that the Rastafari and the Municipal government are setting the balance in very different ways. The mayor’s sense of space is one that is weighted further on the practical economical/financial/developmental side—the perceived space. The many references to present legislation—specifically the commentary from the land department representative, Samuel Makonnen, who speaks of the rules regarding land tenure how the Rastafari will be treated is “only through investment if they fulfill the criteria. [Makonnen’s] examples were [two hotels] for which land certificates were already provided in the areas of investment”21. This demonstrates a material view of the space in the context of monetary investment and development projects within the town. It also presents a specific understanding of the space and the role of Rastafari within that space.

In speaking of the past, a different maneuver is undertaken by the Rastafari and similar response to what is received. They look outside the time and space of Shashemene to make an argument about the space of Shashemene. As we have seen, the three governments of Ethiopia have defined the space in ways that have each attempted to eclipse the last. Mengistu’s government wished to divorce itself

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21 Ibid.
from that of Haile Selassie. So too does Meles Zenawi’s EPRDF government separate its conception of space from that of the Dergue. Ethiopia has been engaged in an organic process of social remapping, whereas, by referencing the granted land by the Imperial government and the negotiated maintenance of this land through an agreement with the Dergue the Rastafari are using old precedents—what could be referred to as old maps—to locate their space.

Therefore, as regards the Rastafari conception of space, the representatives at the forum, though they discuss elements of perceived space, such as land certificates, their focus on the past as well as their references to the spiritual and cultural importance of Africa—Ethiopia specifically—places more weight on the conceived space of Shashemene. It would seem that the Rastafari, who ask for recognition based on the past, are asking for this recognition within a very different lived space than the mayor and the municipal government, who represents a kind of modern representational or civic model in the present.

Now, I wish to turn to this present and expand the analysis to look at the spatial relationships as they relate to the lived experience of individuals in both the Rastafari and Ethiopian communities. My research was conducted primarily in 2007, and thus the perceptions of space are taken from this time period.

**The Space of Shashemene**

The road to Shashemene is one of the best in the country, in terms of condition. Unlike many narrow, dirt and stone roads through the country, it is a two-lane paved highway. It continues, if followed, all the way to Nairobi. With a
present population of 102,062\textsuperscript{22}, Shashemene’s people are extremely varied in ethnicity. This was underlined in Gunilla Bjerens’s 1985 \textit{Migration to Shashemene: Ethnicity, Gender and Occupation in Urban Ethiopia}, based on research undertaken in the 1970s, as well as in Mesfin Getahun’s examination of marginal craftspeople in Shashemene. Getahun describes Amhara, Oromo, Gurage and Wolaita people as being “numerically dominant”, with “Kombatta and Tigray” people accounting for a “significant percentage of the population” (2001, 269). He also writes that the town is “rapidly expanding”, quoting the 1994 census population as 52,000, only slightly less than half the population quoted in the most recent census, only thirteen years later. Clearly the town, which was founded in the “second decade of the twentieth century” (Getahun 2001, 269), has grown a great deal in a very short time.

Due to this incredible amount of change in population and demographics, Gunilla Bjerens has recently begun research into the present state of the town’s population, so to compare with her initial research from almost forty years ago. This research began in 2008 and remains unfinished, though certain trends can be seen. In conversation with one of Bjerens’s research associates, Atakilte Beyene\textsuperscript{23}, he described the city of Shashemene as continuing to be multicultural, containing many of Ethiopia’s ethnic groups. The city itself is still expanding, now predominantly to the south, and there are seven sub-towns contained within Shashemene. According to Beyene, during the earlier research, the majority of the town identified as being of the Amhara ethnic group, however this has changed and

\textsuperscript{22} Central Statistical Agency of Ethiopia. 2007.
\textsuperscript{23} Phone conversation, January 2009.
now the majority of the town identifies as Oromo. This being said, the inhabitants of the town, in recent interviews, demonstrated a decline of emphasis on ethnicity, moving towards language as an identifying feature, though many people could speak both of the major languages of the town: Amharic and Afaan Oromo. The Ethiopian Orthodox church has become less of an influence, with the 2005 census revealing a first-time drop in Orthodox adherents. There is no conflict between Muslims and Christians, however it would seem that there is somewhat of a tension between Orthodox Christians and Protestant Christians. This was borne out during my research when I would speak to Protestants who would talk of the Orthodox church as one for the uneducated and illiterate.24

Based on this shift in issues relating to ethnicity, language and faith, Beyene continued by describing individuals in the town as occupying multiple roles and identities based on different spaces and times: the people of Shashemene, do not, as a rule, see themselves in any categorical way. This underlines the sense of identity discussed in the first chapter. Shashemene is an example of a site in which the varied notions of Ethiopianness are being negotiated. Also, another new trend in the city is that of global migration. Whereas in the 1970s, there were very few, if any, Shashemene residents who had left Ethiopia, now there are a number of migrants from the city to the United States, in particular, but also Canada and the United Kingdom. Therefore, the sense of space within Shashemene is not limited to the city itself, but there is a sense of a connection with not only the rest of the country, through the trade connections, but also the broader world.

24 There is much potential research to be done regarding the relationship between the protestant community in Ethiopia and the Orthodox church community.
As for the Rastafari, they remain small in number. Bjeren did not include
the Rastafarians in her 1985 study, and it does not look as if the Rastafari represent
a large enough population to be included in the new data set this time around. The
reality, however, is that, although small in number, the Rastafari are very visible—
their existence in the space of Shashemene is marked by indicators such as the sign
mentioned previously and the brightly painted buildings. Also, the Rastafari
themselves both use and move through the space differently than that of the
Ethiopian population.

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, before one actually gets to
Shashemene proper, one travels through the Rastafari settlement—and the presence
of Rastafari is evident. Small shops are covered in the red, green and gold colours
of the Ethiopian flag and the road drives right past the headquarters of the Twelve
Tribes of Israel—the location of many celebrations, one of which is the annual
party for Haile Selassie’s birthday on 23 July each year. A few people mill around
and some sit outside the couple of cafés in the small area. This is the area of the
land grant, the *Jamaica sefer*. It has been given this name for, as explained above,
the Ethiopian population refers to Rastafari as Jamaican, regardless of nationality.
It also suggests that the Rastafari live in a village unto themselves. By naming it as
such, it becomes a separate area of the town. Though, as I will describe below,
different areas of Shashemene have been given different names, the *Jamaica sefer*
is the only space in Shashemene that has, in common parlance, been designated its
own village apart from the town itself. As Tsega Siyak, a preparatory school
student, said to me: “They are in their village, the Jamaicans. They are not
distributed throughout Shashemene. I don’t know why. Maybe it’s because people call it the Jamaican village so when Jamaican people come, they go and settle there.”

A more complete image of the town requires further detail. Continuing past the isolated Rastafari buildings, one passes schools and a gas station, going down the old road into the town, over a bridge and up a hill. There are then more shops; there are more people on the road. This space, with people filling the street, and cars, taxis and trucks speeding down the road, is significantly different than the *Jamaica sefer*. There are people carrying products, strolling down the road, greeting each other, turning the corner up towards the municipal offices, located in the centre of the town. There are restaurants and cafés, internet shops and boutiques selling everything from women’s clothing to stationary. Music blares from storefronts, playing some reggae and pop music, but most often Orominya, Amharinya, Wolaitinya, Guraginya or another ethnic group’s popular music.

Turning a corner and walking down to the market, the streets are dusty and crowded. Donkeys, goats and sheep mingle with shoppers every day of the week, but especially on Saturday, the main market day in many towns across Ethiopia. Shashemene is no exception. I travelled through the market many times, as Kebede, my translator, had a job at a grade school near the market. I rarely witnessed Rastafari in the market area or near the busy *Arada* area near the bus station. I asked Kebede once how often he saw Rastafari in town, off the main road. His response: “Not very often. And they are always moving quickly; they are always

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lonely.” He then corrected himself to say “I mean they are always alone, and
Ethiopians usually walk together.”

Evidencing this, in the evenings people crowd the main street into the
evening, young people walking, eating roasted corn and chatting with each other, a
practice that I was told is quite popular in the town. Large Isuzu trucks line the
main road—their drivers resting and refueling, providing evidence of
Shashemene’s reputation as a crossroads, a trade gateway to the south of Ethiopia.
The difference between this space and that of the Rastafari is palpable. There are
more people, there is obvious interaction between individuals on the street,
greeting each other, chatting, buying and selling goods. Foreign visitors walk
relatively unnoticed, whereas in the Rastafari area, there are constant requests by
Ethiopian youth to provide a “tour” of the *Jamaica sefer* for a small fee.

As part of my research I interviewed numerous Ethiopians living within
Shashemene as well as Rastafari. Given my focus on the Ethiopian perception, I
would ask questions about the Rastafari and the *Jamaica sefer*. The initial response
from many interviewees was to tell me that I should go to the *Jamaica sefer* if I
wished to know about the Jamaicans. When I would say that I wished to know
about the Ethiopian perception or opinion of the Jamaicans, I would often receive
the response that I should speak to people who “live around them”. This was a
common response. I would need to speak to someone who lived and/or worked in
or near the *Jamaica sefer* to get “good information”. The message in this was that
someone who would live closer to the space defined a certain way would be able to
impair knowledge about that definition. Spatial orientation led to a greater
understanding: for the Ethiopian population, to know the Rastafari is to know the space of the Rastafari. Those individuals who would tell me that they did not know about the Rastafari would often say that it was because they never found themselves anywhere near the *Jamaica sefer*. These statements demonstrate how significant the issue of the location of the *Jamaica sefer* was in terms of an understanding of the Rastafari. With nearly no exceptions, in all interviews the issue of space was prevalent—one needed to be in proximity of the Rastafari in order to have information about them.

Though people would say they don’t spend much time in the *Jamaica sefer*, there were many opinions expressed about what occurs there and assumptions about the Rastafari use of the space. One student in my class made the statement that “they are dangerous”\(^{26}\). Another student explained: “Many people say they use some kind of cocaine—which is called *izt* in Amharic. People hate them because of this.”\(^{27}\) Shemelis Safa, a local teacher, concurred, and related the drug use directly to the use of the land to cultivate drugs.

I know them very well. Personally I like them. But when I see their behaviour and actions I don’t like them very much. They are known by their production of cocaine. They use this bad plant, this cocaine. When I see the attitude of the people around them, they hate them very much. They have a negative impact. For example, they come and buy with a small price their land, their residence. I don’t want them to live here. I have participated in many public meetings with teachers and farmers around their residence and

\(^{26}\) Ibid.
\(^{27}\) Discussion. Africa Beza College English Class, Shashemene. 24 July 2007.
the people are murmuring. They are saying that they have to leave this area. Every year there is a big meeting including teachers. The people are complaining. “Why are these people here? They have nothing good. They are disturbing our culture. Our children become idle and smokers, and addicts. They have stopped working and are simply standing on the road. They are buying our land . . . and they are planting this cocaine. The farmers have stopped agriculture and have started planting this plant and this is expanding. All the people around there, all the boys and girls and farmers are using this plant and they are addicted. No students around there pass grade ten. They stop their education even. People wonder—why is the government sending them here? The government should take action.28

At the beginning and end of this long and angry statement, Safa makes it clear that on a personal basis, he is okay with the Rastafari and that he is only speaking of some Rastafari. The rest of his speech, however, outlines the use of the space for the growing of drug plants—here referred to as cocaine instead of marijuana, the only drug acceptable to Rastafari29. All of these statements are based not in truth, but in the assumptions made about the space of the Jamaica sefer. The focus on the “buying” of land—firstly at a low cost, and secondly for the purpose of producing drugs—demonstrates that it is not just the drugs but the simple acquisition of land that is the problem. In both cases, however, there was no concrete evidence for either claim30. The distance between the town proper and the

28 Safa, Shemelis (Teacher, Paradise Valley College, Shashemene), interview, 28 June 2007.
29 For a description of the role of marijuana, or ganja, in the Rastafari faith, see Erskine 2005, 96-98.
30 Ironically, also, in referring to marijuana as incredibly dangerous, there is never any reference to Shashemene’s cultivation and use of t’chat, a stimulant drug used by chewing the leaves of the t’chat
*Jamaica sefer* gives credence to reports like Safa’s, since a minority of people travel to the Rastafari area.

This could, however, change. For myself, as a researcher, having been back and forth to Shashemene, I have noticed great changes in the space of the town even in the past five years. First, there has been obvious expansion that has narrowed the gap between what one might view as the centre of town—the *Aposto* area, as it is called in Amharic—and the *Jamaica sefer*. This is to say that various businesses have been developed, both Rastafari and otherwise, between *Aposto* and the space of the original land grant. In addition, a new bus station has opened, much closer to the *Jamaica sefer* than to the old bus station that was located in the area called *Arada*, near the market and behind *Aposto*. As well, it has become much easier over the past couple of years to travel in between various areas of the city as a result of the rise in *bajaz* vehicles, which are inexpensive, motorcycle-driven taxis. *Bajaz* taxis were completely unheard of in Shashemene until 2006. Before then it was necessary to hire a car or take a *gari* (horse-drawn carriage). The ride was either expensive or very slow (*garis* would take almost twenty minutes). Presently, it is both inexpensive and quick (less than five minutes) to travel from one end of Shashemene—where the *Jamaica sefer* is located, to the other end where the road bends towards Awassa, the closest town to Shashemene. This may not seem like a large difference, but for residents of the town, this means

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plant. In my observation *t’chat* is seen used by everyone from cab drivers to bus passengers to locals sitting and chewing while enjoying a cold drink. It is also seemingly being used by clearly destitute individuals whose erratic behaviour and tell-tale bleary eyes (*t’chat*, over long periods of time, can limit and prevent sleep) denote a habit or possibly an addiction to the substance.
the entirety of the town is more accessible and the distance between people—both literal and figurative—has been shortened.

The growth of the town, resulting in the decrease in space between the commonly designated Rastafari space and the rest of Shashemene, in addition to the increased access between spaces is made clear in the competing narratives surrounding the development of an area of land as an exhibition area to be opened in time for the 2007 Ethiopian Millennium celebrations\(^{31}\). This is located at the entrance to the town where a large banner archway welcoming visitors has also been installed. Formerly very far away from the centre of the town, this area is now much closer to the constantly increasing population and far more accessible.

The exhibition centre presents the culture of the Oromo people, announcing itself by a large statue of a woman, in traditional Oromo cultural clothing, pouring a cup of coffee—after all, some of the best coffee in Ethiopia comes from the region of Oromia. This image is of Shashe, the woman who, according to local legend, was the proprietor of a bar where people would rest as they travelled through the area. This reflects not only the history of the town, but its present day existence as a trading crossroads. Three buildings accompany the monument, each one full of Oromo cultural objects and artifacts. On a tour conducted by the Mayor, I was told that the exhibition centre would be expanded to included Oromo cultural documents and historical records of the town. The idea would be to attract scholars who would wish to study the area. I was also told that the town was to invest in internet access and computers to help with the needs of researchers. In addition to these buildings, an Africa Unite mosaic is located behind the statue of Shashe, in

\(^{31}\) According to the Ethiopian calendar, the year 2000 was celebrated on 12 September 2007.
reference to the Bob Marley song of the same name and the Rastafari population living in close proximity to the centre. The tour of the exhibition area revealed that, alongside the Rastafari, the Oromo have a strong cultural connection to the land. Yes, the municipality is interested in economic contribution to and research about the area, but the mayor’s emphasis on the richness of the Oromo culture, demonstrated that the primary cultural element of the area has been established as Oromo.

According to Ras Tagas King, the EWF had suggested alternate plans for the very same area now filled by the statue as well as the exhibition and research centre. Given that the city had expanded in 2003 to include the Jamaica sefer, King explained what had been presented by the EWF and the results:

When they told us that they have increased the city limits, we were now in an urban area, and that the only way we could get land was as investors, we called a community meeting and we devised and put together a project of commercial development on the lands on each side of the road—the front page, as we referred to it. Within that now, we wanted to develop shopping plazas, supermarkets, offices, banks, gas stations, restaurants and cultural shops—the whole works. We engaged an architect and made a master plan of schematic drawings. We presented it to the local authorities, the idea being that we as a Rastafarian community would finance this commercial development. The only thing we wanted was the authorization. They didn’t give it. Instead, they hijacked the whole concept. There is a “V” formed by

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32 This reference was explained to me by the mayor. The Africa Unite mosaic also has Oromia highlighted.
two roads in Shashemene. Right on the apex of the “V” we have proposed to erect a statue of his imperial majesty and also the founder of our organization Dr. Malaku Bayen. Instead they have hijacked our idea and are now putting up a statue to represent Oromo culture, which we believe is a woman pouring out a cup of coffee. So these are the things that are very hurtful, because if they had allowed us, it would have brought an influx of money from our people still in the west who have money and want to come out and develop it. Secondly, by putting up a statue of his majesty and allowing us to build restaurants and shops and supermarkets offices and gas stations it would mean that really we are having a Rastafarian village developed which is going to attract more and more tourists. They didn’t give us the green light—instead they hijacked it and now what they are doing is building in this very, very sloppy manner which is just downgrading that front page area which was our original Shashemene. These are the difficulties we are facing.33

This specific conflict demonstrates again the very different conceptions of lived space. The idea of having a statue of Haile Selassie stems from the Rastafari belief system. A statue of Dr. Malaku Bayen, Ethiopian founder of the EWF in Harlem, New York, in 1937 would reference not only events outside of Ethiopia, but the history of the EWF instead of the history of Shashemene. In this instance, however, what is more important to King is the economic potential of the space. In this case, the Rastafari are attempting to place emphasis on the conceived space—the

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33 Ras Tagas King (Resident Country Representative for the EWF), interview, 1 September 2007.
potential material benefit. What is important to the mayor and the municipality is the perceived space—the idea behind the space, the history, the culture of the space.

It would seem that in both cases—at the Community Development Meeting, and here, in the conflicting visions for the space of land at the entrance to the town—the Rastafari and the local Ethiopians, here represented by the government, are at different ends of the spectrum. Here again, there is a clash between the Ethiopian and Rastafari perceptions of space.

**Oromo Culture and Rastafari Culture**

Asafa Dibaba, a Oromo cultural scholar, describes this divide. As Dibaba explained in an interview in September 2007, “Ethiopians are hospitable, but, practically, on the ground may be different. There are problems with granting land already owned by people that worsens the relationship between newcomers and the already indigenous people . . . I think that from outside, one can infer problems . . . When you look to [Selassie’s] line, on his father’s side is Oromo, his mother Gurage . . . it doesn’t give sense. This person put into bondage his own people, from his father’s side. Then to be the one who freed Africans? I’m not happy with this.” Dibaba refers to Selassie’s ethnic makeup—half Oromo, half Gurage. This means that Selassie, to Dibaba, acted as a colonial leader over his own ethnic group. Dibaba directly connects this factor to land rights. From this perspective, Selassie simply cannot be viewed as a liberator. If one views the former Emperor in this way, and then goes ahead and makes use of land originally owned by those oppressed by the Emperor’s government, it “doesn’t give sense” for Dibaba.
Therefore, in Oromia, a statue of Haile Selassie would, on top of everything else, most certainly not “give sense” in any way.

When the EPRDF came to power in 1991 and introduced ethnic federalism the region of Oromia was established and the regional government grants permission for all land use in Oromia (Hameso and Nebo 2000). Through the work of Asafa Jalata, and in conversation with Asafa Dibaba, it becomes evident that the Oromo might have concerns about the Rastafari use of land. Kebede Asfew, a bank manager who worked with the Rastafari on business initiatives that required land acquisition, also acknowledged this reality: “The native people claim that the land is theirs. The Oromo people say that,” he said. “The Oromo see the Amhara as the invading group—they have expanded down to Kenya.” In a description of the arrival of the Prime Minister of Trinidad and Tobago to Shashemene, Asfew also added a comment which described the tension that could exist between the Rastafari and the local Oromo population: “I went to their religious festival. The Prime Minister from Trinidad and Tobago came to Shashemene and I was invited. I saw the ceremony. Even the PM himself took part. He said a lot. He looks Ethiopian, and he said it was his homeland, but the Oromos are crying down there. They [the Rastafari] don’t see that.”

Local farmers provide a practical commentary on the Oromo land issue. In January 2008 interviews with Oromo farmers living and working in the Melka Oda area—the same area where the Jamaica sefer is located—this was explained. “The Rastafari have money and they give the money to get the land and the farmers give the land towards them,” (8) said Leenco Ibsaa, referring to the practice of selling
access to land—though the Ethiopian people collectively own all land, in accordance with the constitution, individual Ethiopians have the right to the use of land, and this is what they sell. “This has a negative and a positive side. The negative side is that when the farmer gives their land for them the farmers move away from the town to the rural area where there is no town, no clean water. The positive side is that when one Rastafarian person is here, he has money. When he brings the light and the water for him, the society in the area gets to use from him.”

Usman Leenjiso described apprehension about the long-term effect of selling land. “In our society, some people sell their land to them to get money,” he said, “This is a great problem. The farmers in our society have their children and if they sell their land, their children become landless.”

The concern about land is voiced alongside worries about the impact of Rastafari in Shashemene. Usman explained his sense of the reasons why the Rastafari come to Shashemene and his views on their presence: “Historically, during the regime of Haile Selassie, he gave them five gasha of land because he had a strong relationship with them. When the regime of Haile Selassie was replaced by the Dergue, the Dergue didn’t like Rastafari. They didn’t let them build houses. They stayed during the Dergue regime, and, after the EPRDF came to power, there was democracy so they built houses and established their school. Their great problem is that they start something and they don’t finish it.” Leenco referenced the use of land in relation to development projects: “They took land by saying that they would establish a great hospital for the Shashemene town ten years

34 All names have been changed. The interviews took place in January 2008 and were translated from Afaan Oromoo.
ago,” he said, “but now it is still in the beginning stages.” In using the verb “to take”, he presents his complaint about the lack of progress on a hospital project in an all the more pejorative way.

Echoing Jalata and Dibaba, farmer Bunna Mohammed spelled out one of the main issues regarding acceptance of the Rastafari. “In the Oromo region, Oromo people don’t like Haile Selassie. Generally, most of our society doesn’t like him.” Concurring, Usman said that “during the reign of Haile Selassie, here in [the Shashemene area], there is a separation between the Oromo and Amhara people.” In addition, drug use is troubling to the farmers. Leenco explained: “They have changed the norms of the culture of the young generation. For example, they use marijuana or the other drugs and the young participate. Unnecessary attention is therefore given to us. For instance, Shashemene town is given a bad reputation for drug abuse and crime.”

**Conclusion: Utopia and “Our Original Shashemene”**

In the final words of the statement Ras Tagas King made about the dispute regarding the area on the outskirts of the town, he refers to “our original Shashemene”. In the words of the farmers, they use the words “our” and “us” to describe both themselves and their town. They are connected to this land as well—but in a very different way. King’s words, however, like those of the farmers, imply a sense of ownership over the space, but also, using the word “original”—a sense of a plan—an idea for the town. This being said, given the role of this space in Rastafari thought—that of the Promised Land—it becomes useful to think of the “spaces of utopia”, as David Harvey refers to them. Looking at various images of
idealized city spaces over the course of recent history—from Edward Howard’s imagining of “new towns” (2000, 164) to Le Corbusier’s 1920s “Dream for Paris” model of the city metropolis (166)—the idea of working with urban space is discussed. The individuals who developed these areas, argues Harvey, “set about their tasks by combining an intense imaginary of some alternative world (both physical and social) with a practical concern for engineering and re-engineering urban and regional spaces according to radical new designs” (164). This sounds very similar to a concept envisioned by the EWF.

Certainly, it is evident that Shashemene does not present itself as a utopia for the average visitor, however, as King, being the Ethiopian Officer of the EWF, describes, the idea of the EWF for Shashemene to become a “model” city presents a similar impetus to those who have, through history, desired to create utopian spaces:

That’s why we are trying our best to make the local authorities understand that we need them to recognize and understand what it is we want to achieve. We want to achieve a self-sustainable model city on that land grant. That’s the only opportunity we’re looking for, which would help to provide income for these poor people. If we can’t come at that level, we are always going to be victims. We need to be coming in at the level where we are providing major projects so our main objective is to provide a self-sustainable model city. To get to that goal, there are so many other phases that we have to pass through. It is a long term objective and we feel that it is at that level we would be able to improve the relationship between the
Rastafarians and the local community in Shashemene. They can see that we are providing work for them, providing education for them, better health for them, and all of this would come in the establishing of a self-sustainable model city. This is where our main long term objective is at.

The “self-sustainable model city” would be located on the land grant, separate from Shashemene itself. In Harvey’s book, he cites Louis Marin’s categories of utopias, mentioning the “degenerate utopia”: a “supposedly happy, harmonious, and non-conflictual space set aside from the ‘real’ world ‘outside’ in such a way as to soothe and mollify, to entertain, to invent history and to cultivate a nostalgia for some mythical past” (2000, 166-67). Though Marin speaks of these types of spaces as being developed in the interest of capitalism and commodity culture, the “self-sustainable model city”, of which King speaks, also risks similar categorization. A Rastafari utopian space of this nature could be seen as—and, in some instances, is explained as—a place for entertainment in which a history of the Rastafari and of Ethiopia is presented. This history, based on the differing sense of identity and space of the surrounding community risks being viewed negatively and, certainly, the sense of the former Emperor Haile Selassie as a God who gifted land is somewhat of a “mythical past” narrative where the space of present day Shashemene and its inhabitants are concerned.

Though the Rastafari present numerous ways in which they can contribute to the space of Shashemene—it is true that their presence is a draw for tourists to Ethiopia and that they present a positive image of Ethiopia abroad. The term “degenerate utopia” is given because spaces of this type, when actually
“materialized” do not “offe[r any] critique of existing state affairs on the outside” (167). The idea of development of which King speaks is valuable and laudable, but it needs to engage with the “existing state affairs on the outside”—it needs to engage with the lived space as defined by the relationship between all inhabitants of that space. It would seem that, at present, there is a problem in terms of understanding differing notions of space. Given the fact that the Rastafari make up less than half a percent of the Shashemene community, it would seem that, in order to work towards development and integration, the Rastafari community must work to understand the space of Shashemene that has been produced and exists now, in the present.

This, however, is made difficult, when the representation of Rastafari on a popular level complicates the issue. In the following chapter, I will discuss the way in which a broader Ethiopian perception of the Rastafari can be viewed through the framework of a large-scale event that presented Rastafari, albeit through the lens of reggae, to the Ethiopian public.
Chapter Four

Africa Unite, Bob Marley, the Media and the Backlash:
A Case Study in Perceptions

On 6 February 2005, a large concert was held in Meskel Square—a huge central piazza in Addis Ababa. In order to understand exactly how large this concert was, a short illustration of Meskel Square is necessary. It is a large, stadium-sized area next to a confusing intersection of seven roads and nine lanes of traffic. Every September, during the Ethiopian Orthodox festival of Meskel—the “festival of the true cross,” meskel meaning “cross”—the square is flooded with people. A huge bonfire is set and priests celebrate the location of the “true” cross of Christ. The square was, in the past, used for elaborate rallies under the communist Dergue government. At present, the square is used for athletic training: mostly running in the mornings and soccer throughout the day. Crowds gather to view British premier league football games on a giant screen at the end of the square in the evenings. From this description, it is evident that the square itself has (and has had) many differing cultural, religious and government functions.

Closing down this central square was quite a feat, but it was achieved to celebrate “Africa Unite”¹, a concert event held in honour of the sixtieth anniversary of Jamaican reggae superstar Bob Marley’s birthday. Over the course of the day, performers included members of the Marley family, other Jamaican stars such as the I-Threes, Senegalese musician Youssou N’Dour, Beninese

¹ This event is to be an “annual celebration of the goals and vision of Bob Marley” and there have been subsequent events in Accra, Ghana in 2006 and a planned event in South Africa in 2007 that did not occur due to funding problems. Information from <http://africa-unite.org/site/component/option,com_frontpage/Itemid,55/>. 
Angelique Kidjo and American R&B singer Lauren Hill. There were dance troupes, demonstrations of Ethiopian music and a few Ethiopian singers, but the concert really only showcased the talents of one major Ethiopian pop star, the wildly popular Teddy Afro. Five hundred thousand people were expected, yet estimates in the media range from half that amount\textsuperscript{2} to four hundred thousand. In addition, during the days leading up to the concert event, a symposium on pan-African unity was also held in Addis under the auspices of a number of United Nations organizations. There were 250 attendees to the symposium: young people, artists, academics and activists\textsuperscript{3}.

Because of the size of these events and the ubiquity of the concert itself within the popular consciousness of Ethiopia, I believe that Africa Unite—and specifically the concert held 6 February 2005—present the ideal elements for a case study on the Ethiopian perception of the Rastafari. In addition to the local Rastafari community in Shashemene, this international initiative broadens an understanding of the Ethiopian perception.

I did not have the opportunity to attend the event, so my analysis is based on reportage of the concert—by the media and otherwise. In this sense, Africa Unite, for me, is very much a media event. This being the case, I am able to frame my analysis through the descriptions and representations of the event that are available through various media. In *Media Events* by Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, they describe how “media events . . . offer a national, sometimes

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{3} This information found in a document entitled “Why and What Accomplished”, available online by the Bob and Rita Marley Foundation, <http://africa-unite.org/site/content/view/29/58/>.
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international, ‘sense of occasion’ ” and “[o]ften such events portray an idealized version of society, reminding society of what it aspires to be rather than what it is” (1994, viii-ix).

The “sense of occasion” is found in the fact that a central square was closed. There is great significance in the fact that this happened alongside the Ethiopian government, with international agencies involved to promote a Rastafarian in what he, according to his faith, considered to be his “homeland”. Also, the multiple points of entry into discussion, through narrative (media sources), art (products of music and visual art) and religious responses involved in this event make it a strong subject for media anthropology. If Dayan and Katz are right, what might I see as the version of the “idealized” society of Ethiopia that is presented?

Looking at various journalistic sources, turning to music, and then to religious documentation and promotional literature will provide an anthropological “thick” description of this event and perhaps this “idealized” society—a description that acknowledges not only the “multisited” nature of media, but also of culture. This “thickness,” meaning thinking as broadly and as thoroughly as possible about the consumption of media by an individual and its effect (or non-effect) on particular forms of (cultural) interaction and production is an idea enforced by Clifford Geertz in his discussion of culture. I will also be making use of Stuart Hall’s “encoding/decoding” (1991) formulation to inform my thick description. This will involve a consideration of many sites of observation and interpretation.
In this chapter, I will elaborate on this approach and then, through the multiple sites of analysis, I will look at the Ethiopian perception of the Rastafari through the filter of print and broadcast media. The description of the event will be as thick as possible, given the resources and perspectives available. In this interest, I have collected articles from the state as well as private media in both English and Amharic. I have also spoken to various reporters and producers of media in Ethiopia. The reaction to the concert, at first glance, was positive; however, the issue of pan-Africanism, the role of Haile Selassie, and the depiction of Ethiopia—as emphasized by the organizers and Rastafarian performers—are all viewed very differently by the Ethiopian population. Hence, through this approach, we may be able to discern elements of the relationship between Rastafari and Ethiopia as well as between differing concepts of identity.

In addition, some of Ethiopia’s religious communities—specifically the protestant communities—viewed the concert and related activities with questioning, suspicion and what might be seen as outright hostility. The Ethiopian Evangelical Church Makane Yesus, who, according to church documentation, are the largest Christian denomination (after the Ethiopian Orthodox church) in the country, compiled a booklet entitled “Former Ethiopian king Haile Selassie: Man or God? Rastafarians and their beliefs” that was made available at the festivities. Another protestant denomination, the Ethiopian Kale Hiwot Church, which also claims to be the largest Christian church in Ethiopia, published and distributed two pamphlets “An Abomination in the Heart of Addis Ababa” and “Rasta Worship or Birthday Celebration” on the sixth of February. This reaction on

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4 I have read this claim from more than one Protestant denomination.
behalf of religious groups helps to answer the question as to how the religious communities view the Rastafari within Ethiopia.

As mentioned above, this concert and series of events acts as a focal point for many issues involving the Rastafari in Ethiopia. After utilizing Africa Unite as a springboard to discuss the response to and opinions of Ethiopians in advance of and following the event, I will turn to a document entitled “Why and What Was Accomplished,” published by the Bob and Rita Marley foundation. This document, found online, states that there was more to the event than celebrating Marley’s birthday, holding the symposium, discussing pan-African unity and drawing attention to Ethiopia itself. The document states that “Many youth are now experiencing a new sense of unity under the banner of Rastafari” and that “Ethiopia is once again centre stage under the banner of His Imperial Majesty. It is time that the world acknowledged that he was neither a thief, imposter [sic] or [sic] fraud. He is what he is, a direct descendant of the Solomonic dynasty, a descendant of the only monarchy in Africa, still loved by his people and an important figure in the history of African civilization and unity.”

Through this statement, it would seem that the involvement of Rastafari—and Rastafari thinking—was significant in the organization and execution of the various events. In addition, writing that “Ethiopia is once again centre stage under the banner of His Imperial Majesty” would suggest that Africa Unite was involved in drawing attention towards the legacy of Haile Selassie. Rastafari was very publicly

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showcased both symbolically through imagery and, literally, through the music and lyrics performed at the Africa Unite event.

Clearly, in contrast to the report by the Bob and Rita Marley Foundations, there is a difference between the organizer’s intentions for the concert and the way it was received by the Ethiopian public. Through analysis and thick description, I will discuss this disjuncture and point to the way in which it demonstrates different conceptions of Ethiopian identity. The varied reactions to the concert will be interrogated alongside the Bob and Rita Marley Foundations’ above stated rationale and goals. First, however, I will introduce more fully my methodology.

**Approach—Media Anthropology**

When anthropologist Francisco Osorio states, of anthropologists, “We study culture” (2005, 36), what does he mean? By the early 1970s as a reaction against the stultifying tradition of Levi-Strauss’s structuralism and the search for universal meanings, Clifford Geertz was rethinking culture as expressive and interpretive. Geertz’s concept of culture as “semiotic” and symbolic, presented the work of anthropologists less as “an experimental science in search of law, but an interpretive one in search of meaning” (2000, 5). This results from a conception of culture as being something subject to multiple interpretations and a focus on “thick description,” i.e. the analysis of “a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures” (2000, 7). Through this chapter, many “meaningful structures” will be investigated in the aim of providing thick description.

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*Anthropology has not necessarily always been engaged with “culture” per say. Franz Boas’ idea of culture, the founding idea of North American anthropology, was an integration of all four fields.*
Thick description demands the broadest approach to a subject by demanding the accounting of as many particularities as possible. Meanings engage with other meanings in a multitude of ways—all the ethnographer can only ever hope for is a view of culture that is “contested, temporal and emergent” (Clifford 1986, 19). All that one can hope for are bits and pieces: “Ethnographic truths are thus inherently partial—committed and incomplete” (7). Of course, this technique demonstrates the inability to come to any obvious conclusions, but it also avoids the danger of generalization and provides a far more nuanced and relevant analysis. Anthropologists like Richard Price have acknowledged the incompleteness of any anthropological or ethnographic work; specifically, Price “has published a book that is a series of fragments . . . [so as] to present an inherently imperfect mode of knowledge which produces gaps as it fills them” (Clifford 1986, 8). Ethnography has moved from being singular and authoritative, to being representative of “a multiplicity of descriptive experiments and interpretive paradigms” (Scholte, qtd. in Stanton 1997, 20). I include this commentary for I do not wish to suggest that this case study is a full and comprehensive view of the Africa Unite event.

What I do wish to suggest, however, is how this movement from prescriptive to self-reflexive and from culture as coherent subject to culture as symbol allows anthropology to become an ideal tool to be used in the study of media and communications processes. Discussing media as a cultural product, from an anthropological perspective, inevitably “leads to an appreciation of the

of anthro (physical, linguistic, social, archaeological) (Clifford 1986, 4). Edward Evans-Pritchard, for instance, in his famous study of the Nuer, was after a “totalizing picture” (Pratt 1986, 41) of the society—his focus was less cultural and more social.
complexity of how people interact with media in a variety of social spaces and the resulting shifts in the sense of the local as its relation to broader social worlds becomes almost a routine part of life” (Ginsburg 2005, 20). The numerous levels of interpretation existing in the varied responses to the concert present a unique view into these very relationships. The varied media and individual reactions I provide will detail these interactions. With the Africa Unite concert, the local of Ethiopia interfaces with and also clashes, contests and confronts the international image of Bob Marley and broader social worlds of reggae and Rastafari.

In addition, anthropology offers the tool of ethnography. Ethnography has developed over time, as described above, into a self-reflexive form of study that pays “attention to cultural difference,” has “a commitment to close observation and recording,” insists on “ ‘thick’ description” and pays “attention to the contiguity of what is being described to broader aspects of the social process” (Clifford 1986, 2). Given the fact that Africa Unite is a single event, I am not proposing a full ethnography, rather I am taking an ethnographic approach in proposing an analysis of the concert utilizing multiple sites.

Looking at media reportage and information found in pamphlets will also require an additional technique. John Sorenson, in his *Imagining Ethiopia*, finds the Foucauldian notion of discourse particularly valuable. I feel that I too, in looking at, comparing and contrasting the varying statements of media reportage and interviews with media professionals, am “look[ing] beyond the ordinary boundaries of individual texts and to propos[ing] different continuities” (Sorenson 1993, 10) so as “to conjure up their rich, heavy, immediate plenitude” (Foucault
1989, 52) and thereby add to the thick description. I do feel, however, that the most useful tool I could use would not be Foucault’s discourse analysis, but rather Hall’s “famous ‘encoding/decoding’ formulation, [allowing] for multiple interpretations of media texts during both the processes of production and reception” (Askew 2002, 5), for it has been through the influence of Stuart Hall and the emergence of Cultural Studies that anthropology has been able to make a leap to the study of media and communications. Introducing his concept of encoding/decoding Hall writes, that “mass-communications research has conceptualized the process of communication in terms of a circulation circuit or loop . . . sender/message/receiver” (1991, 117). For Hall, and for anyone who reads a newspaper or watches a television program, it is evident that the material received by the reader is “encoded” in such a way that it can be “decoded” by whosoever reads or watches.

In many interviews I conducted as part of my research, especially in regards to the Africa Unite event, I was told that if I wanted to know about the Rastafari, I should ask the Rastafari themselves. I would repeat, over and over, to many interviewees, that I was not looking for the truth of the Rastafari, but rather the representation of Rastafari in Ethiopian discourse. However, looking at the Ethiopian perception of the repatriated Rastafari, as viewed through a series of texts—written primarily, but also otherwise—is not meant to locate some specific, complete, coherent and final truth about this perception. The discourse surrounding Africa Unite is rich in information and opinion—it provides various narratives and views about the Rastafari presence in Ethiopia.
In the context of the Bob Marley Birthday celebrations in Addis Ababa, there are numerous negotiations going on between many levels of cultural production. In describing the press coverage, I attempt to describe what the newspapers expressed, and then look to how the articles might present a particular perspective or perspectives (based on the difference between state and independent media). There is the level of the concert and the meanings that stem from it and other organized events, the reception by the media and their negotiation of meanings from the event, and the potential meanings the reading public might draw. Here we see the encoding of particular ideas and perspectives and the potential different ways these articles can be decoded. Looking at Ethiopian media professionals (from various sections of the media) as well as religious representatives, all help to create a sense of how the culture of Rastafari is viewed by the Ethiopian public. As an analytical tool media anthropology is useful in discerning meaning from various types and levels of cultural production as well as dealing with audience receptivity.

Thus, in the case of Africa Unite, to build the thick description, “encoding/decoding” is an ideal investigative concept that becomes part of the media anthropological approach. An expansion of the analysis of television (to use Hall’s example) to include the audience requires an approach that would enable an understanding of this audience and its interactions with any given media product—here, the Africa Unite concert. Hall’s description of the “process . . . produced and sustained through the articulation of linked but distinctive moments—production, circulation, distribution/consumption,
reproduction” (1997, 128) is relevant to the production of the events of Africa Unite—the way in which the event was held would demonstrate a type of circulation of information. It’s also relevant in terms of the differing ways in which the event was consumed by the Ethiopian public and then reproduced in the Ethiopian press.

By combining media anthropology with encoding/decoding, Africa Unite will reveal a wide-ranging illustration of the impact of Rastafari within Ethiopia on as many levels and in as many ways as possible.

Journalism—reporting from differing perspectives

As mentioned above, the Africa Unite concert received attention in both the state and local media. I will review this reporting and make use of discourse analysis to investigate the different currents of thought about the concert itself. To begin, it is important to understand that in Ethiopia there is both state and private media. The daily state media publications of Addis Zemen (Amharic) and the Ethiopian Herald are available across the country. Where private media are concerned, I chose to utilize the Reporter (Amharic), Addis Admas (Amharic) and the Ethiopian Reporter. These papers are available on a less consistent basis. I have drawn from these five publications because they provided the most thorough

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7 It may be important to note that 2005 was the year of controversial elections, held three months after the Bob Marley concert. In light of the controversial results which seemed to place the opposition party in good stead, journalists described to me how the ruling EPRDF party limited the independent press. Although the press freedom was greater previous to this situation, and it is possible to find articles critiquing the government in the context of the Africa Unite events, one must keep in mind that the government did have the power to quiet the independent press. In addition, the tension between the state media and the independent media is such that often times, in independent media, articles are not attributed. Certainly, this can be the result of having used direct translations without permission or because a writer or editor does not wish for the article to have a byline. Whatever the reason, I have tried to ensure accuracy of citation as best as possible.
coverage of all the available reporting. In addition, my decision to analyse the papers listed was based on the fact that they were the publications I found to be most accessible and widely available in Addis Ababa, the site of the concert. Indeed, there are further mass media publications in Ethiopia, but reports of just how many publications exists tend to vary, based on the source consulted. In the Ethiopia Country Report from the UK government’s Home Office, the document quotes two sources with very different results: the US state department (which suggests that there were, in 2002, “a total of 81 newspapers, 22 magazines, and 2 news agencies) and a 2004 BBC country profile (which suggests that there are only ten regularly published newspapers) (2004, 45-46). A report from the African Media Development Initiative (funded by the BBC World Service Trust) quotes the Ethiopian Ministry of Information as saying that fifty-six newspapers and twelve magazines were being published on a regular basis as of 2006. The report admits that, apart from the state media and the private, mostly international news related Daily Monitor, “[t]here is no information available to distinguish whether the remaining 53 newspapers are national or regional papers” (Gebretsadik 2006, 24). In addition, the report also admits that “it is difficult to comment on the exact size of the newspaper market, as there is no research available in this area.” (Gebretsadik 2006, 27)

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8 In many of the English-language articles these sources, there are numerous grammatical and spelling errors. To ensure an accurate account, in all quotations these errors will not be corrected. As for the Amharic sources, often times authorship is unclear and therefore certain articles will have incomplete citations. As well, the articles from the independent Amharic language newspapers are filed under date, utilizing the Ethiopian calendar. In citations, these dates have been provided so as to reflect the correct issues of the papers.

9 An extended quotation from the BBC World Service report is instructive, as it presents a broader, more detailed picture of print media in Ethiopia:
According to statistics found in Sahilu Kassa’s Master’s thesis entitled “Readership Satisfaction of Addis Zemen and Addis Admas in Addis Ababa”, the Ethiopian ministry of information provides the following circulation numbers for the newspapers addressed herein:

**Addis Admas**: Weekly circulation of 31,000

**Addis Zemen**: Daily circulation of 18,443


Kassa’s thesis, though dealing with Addis Admas and Addis Zemen primarily, does present the information that, of Amharic newspapers non-affiliated with a political party (though one might of course argue that the state media is the voice of the ruling party, however given that it is the state media and has such large circulation numbers, it is relevant so as to gauge the present government opinion), the Addis Admas and the Amharic-language Reporter are the two most read papers with at least weekly publication.

My choices of newspapers were therefore based on this minimal amount of statistical information and information on newspaper preferences and reading.

Anecdotally, however, there was evidence of high demand for private papers during the May 2005 election period, but with a contraction in the number of private papers after the election. Only a few of the newspapers, such as The Reporter (with Amharic and English editions, owned by the Media Communication Centre) and Addis Admass (in Amharic) are backed by strong private investment. Some papers have folded after not being strong enough to withstand challenges pertaining to legal or other matters. Some complain about delays in getting permits due to delay in finalisation of the provisions of the new Press Law. Another barrier to newspaper sector growth, according to the International Press Institute (IPI, 2005), has been the banning of some newspapers and the detention of journalists following the unrest after the May 2005 elections.

There is a state-owned news agency, Ethiopian News Agency, and a private local one, Walta Information Centre, both of which mainly serve the state media. Walta Information Centre is owned by the ruling party (EPRDF), so is categorised as state-owned in Figure 9. The private media do not have arrangements with these news agencies to provide them with the content they require, and this remains a major challenge for the private media. The other five news agencies operating in the country, such as Reuters and AFP, are all international (25).
habits solicited from acquaintances, but most of all from my experience in Addis Ababa. The newspapers I selected for the purpose of this analysis were those I saw most often. Other magazines and newspapers are either subject-focused (there are weekly papers dealing with topic-specific information—sports and health for example) or often unreliable and not containing original journalism, instead relying on translations from international newspapers. Two financial papers, *Capital* and *Fortune*, did report on the concert and related events in the context of arts and entertainment, but there was no broader coverage beyond a basic outline of the goings on planned to celebrate Bob Marley’s birthday. In addition, there are a number of newsletters and periodical publications that reflect the ideas of various political parties/political interest groups. These types of publications did not, in my overview, contain coverage of the Africa Unite concert.

The aim in this chapter is to take the discourse surrounding the event and see what types of narratives and meanings are produced. The choice of quotations, the opinions expressed and the elements covered in various stories in the various newspapers indicate an interaction between the culture of Ethiopia and that of the Rastafari as there are as many images of Rastafari presented as there are images of the Ethiopian perception of the Rastafari.

A detailed look at a cartoon published in the independent Amharic-language *Reporter* can act as an initial entry point into the discussion. It presents a balance between different perspectives—in this instance a balance being attempted on the part of the Ethiopian state. The unattributed cartoon, reproduced
here, displays a Rastafari musician (depicted with the iconic dreads and a guitar), clearly performing, as is demonstrated by the microphone placed in front of him.

Figure 4.1: Anonymous editorial cartoon from Amharic language Reporter

The Rastafari (perhaps a rendition of Bob Marley himself, though the caricature is unclear) is kneeling prostrate before a rendering of a famous portrait of Emperor Haile Selassie, worshipping and praising the former Ethiopian King with his hands raised upwards. The small man in the corner of the frame, who is holding up the portrait, is a caricatured depiction of Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. By propping up the image, it illustrates a type or form of support (or perhaps approval) the Ethiopian government provided to the Rastafarians in the context of the Africa Unite event. This support could be viewed as political, calculated and strategic—all possible interpretations of the image. By holding the

10 This unattributed cartoon is from the issue of the Reporter dated 29 Tir 1997.
picture, Meles Zenawi’s action in the cartoon could be read as controlling, perhaps even manipulating the situation.

In Meles’s hand, however, is an incense burner—an item that is emblematic of the Ethiopian Orthodox church. By combining both representations of the Rastafari faith and the Orthodox church, the cartoonist presents a message that questions the role of the government in supporting something that may be seen as contrary to Ethiopian culture.

The cartoon, however, also suggests that the government is willing to put on a façade of acceptance—the reality is that Ethiopia remains Ethiopia, the country retains elements of its own identity (like Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity), but it is also able to behave according to the wants and needs of the Rastafari, given that the Rastafari presence itself places a positive spotlight on the country. The economic benefit is perhaps part of this and, even though it is not overt in this cartoon, it is evident in other coverage of the event. But does Meles Zenawi reflect the will or perception of the Ethiopian people or simply the government of the country? Also, it is possible to see the placement of a microphone as representing the concert event itself, thereby providing a reading of the concert as Rastafari worship and the government as condoning this worship while not necessarily agreeing with it or being involved in it.

As an introduction to a survey of journalistic coverage, this cartoon, published in the independent media, presents somewhat of a framework for the analysis of the coverage. As state media, the discourse of the Ethiopian Herald and Addis Zemen is meant to present an image of the Africa Unite event that will
present Ethiopia—and its government—in the most positive light. The independent media—the English- and Amharic-language *Reporter* and the Amharic-language *Addis Admas*—then represents a questioning of this position and an elaboration of further views—some critical—about the Rastafari.

**State Media; State Promotion**

When viewed as a whole, the state media presented the event as a means of promoting Ethiopia and its government. Government media presented a consistent distancing from anything beyond that which would place too much emphasis on Rastafari, preferring to focus on the way in which the concert would have a clear benefit to Ethiopia. Although there was some discussion of Rastafari, the major thrust of the coverage was to demonstrate the ways in which the event presents a positive image of Ethiopia. Bob Marley was presented as a symbol of such overwhelmingly positive attributes as freedom, unity, and “brotherhood and sisterhood”, among others—nothing controversial.

Turning to the state media coverage specifically, on 18 January 2005, the first major article about the concert was published in the Amharic-language newspaper, *Addis Zemen*. The article, by Haile Gebru, titled “Bob Marley: Ethiopia’s Ambassador”, provides a short background of Rastafari, detailing the Ethiopian “miracle story” (as described in chapter one) of Emperor Haile Selassie’s visit to Jamaica and Rita Marley’s subsequent conversion to Rastafari and marriage to Bob Marley. It then discusses how Marley represents peace, unity
and freedom—how he is a “bringer of good news”\textsuperscript{11} to the people of Africa. The praise here is for Marley, and not for Rastafari.

In the English language version of the state media, the \textit{Ethiopian Herald} newspaper, the first major article that appeared during the run up to the concert was published on 29 January 2005. “\textit{Africa Unite} organizers optimistic Bob Marley’s Birthday celebration promote image of Ethiopia”\textsuperscript{12} reads the main headline on the front page of the paper. The article describes a press briefing given at the Addis Ababa Sheraton (the most luxurious hotel in the whole of the country) in which not only Rita Marley and representatives from the Bob Marley Foundation were in attendance, but also government officials. The State Minister of Information for Ethiopia, Netsanet Asfaw, states that

the celebration would have [a] positive interpretation not only for the Ras Terferians in Ethiopia but also for you people who come from all over the world . . . it is an example of how a person from a humble beginning becomes a great man . . . as Ethiopia is working . . . towards fighting poverty and backwardness, there would be a great lesson for the people and the government of Ethiopia from Bob’s life.

As for the organizing committee, the comments focus on how the event will portray Ethiopia positively: “in different light eluminating [sic] beautiful historic country that has a great legacy, a legacy that are near and dear to the Ras Terfarians [sic] . . . it is a positive reflection of Ethiopia’s commitment to the

\textsuperscript{11} Gebru, Haile. “Bob Marley: Ethiopia’s Ambassador.” (\textit{Ye Ityopia Ambasador}) \textit{Addis Zemen} Vol. 64, No. 130, 5.
\textsuperscript{12} Meressa, Shemelis. “\textit{Africa Unite} organizers optimistic Bob Marley’s Birthday celebration promote image of Ethiopia [sic]” \textit{Ethiopian Herald}. Vol. LXI, No. 121.
advancement of Africa.” Here there is both a reference to the way in which the event will be a good public relations tool for Ethiopia, as well as for the government. The event will therefore suggest that the Ethiopian government is working towards “fighting poverty and backwardness.” After describing the numerous tourists, dignitaries, academics, activists and celebrities (including international personalities Danny Glover and Angelique Kidjo specifically) that will also be in attendance, the article concludes by saying that the “historic, global outreach initiative is conceived by the Bob and Rita Marley Foundations and AFRICA UNITE 2005 is sponsored by UNICEF, the World Bank, the African Union, the Addis Ababa City Government, the Ethiopian Ministry of Information, Ethiopian Airlines and the Ethiopian Tourism Commission.” Given that this is the state media, this is a clear attempt to demonstrate the support that the event has throughout not only the Ethiopian government, but also at the level of the United Nations.

One can read this text as presenting both local, and international approval for the event(s) as well as the blessing of various sponsors. Ethiopia’s participation is not necessarily related to Rastafari or an act that demonstrates Ethiopia as condoning Rastafari beliefs. The focus on the “advancement of Africa”, “fighting poverty” and the involvement of so many levels of government—local, federal and international—distances the event from Rastafari. In fact, the emphasis on these elements can be read also as demonstrating desire on behalf of the Ethiopian government to reach out beyond the “Ras Tefarians” to “people who come from all over the world”.
Similar statements of admiration for Bob Marley and calls for peace, unity and respect for Africa are found throughout the coverage of the Africa Unite event in the state press. In the context of announcing an art exhibit opening in concurrence with the Africa Unite festivities, a description of the show states that it will celebrate “the works of Bob Marley, history of Ethiopia as well as inspirations and visions of Africa”\(^\text{13}\). This provides a connection between Marley, Ethiopia and the wider continent of Africa; however, a specific focus on Ethiopia is underlined in a news story about the dedication of a square in Addis Ababa to Bob Marley. The Mayor of the city is quoted as saying “[Bob Marley . . . used the struggle of the Ethiopian people for freedom as a greater inspiration for his work. He loved Ethiopian culture . . . He used Ethiopia to inspire many as they fought for freedom”\(^\text{14}\). The mayor’s words place much emphasis on Ethiopia, yet there is, of course, no reference to Rastafari—Ethiopia is not the Promised Land, but rather an “inspiration” for those fighting for “freedom”.

As part of the celebrations, the media reports that Rita Marley was provided with “honourary residency” in Addis Ababa. In *Addis Zemen*, Haile Gebru describes this as follows:

We Ethiopians, whether too little or too much, are grateful to those who provide for us and those who appreciate us. Therefore, by giving [honourary] name of national status, by giving the key to the city [residency in the city], by giving permission for residency for an


undefined amount of time, and above all by giving honour and complete Ethiopian citizenship, we pay back our debt not mentioning the distant times but citing recent events.\textsuperscript{15}

This is somewhat ironic, given the struggle for citizenship and recognition that the Rastafari have been fighting for since their arrival in Shashemene over forty years ago. Yes, this could be considered but a ceremonial representation of citizenship; however, the juxtaposition of the reported “honourary citizenship” for Rita Marley and the situation of the repatriates still has resonance. It is where we view a strong divide between the representation of Rastafari at the level of Shashemene—the Rastafari who have repatriated to Ethiopia—and the representation of Rastafari at the popular level. Rita Marley’s honour is completely disconnected from the desire for citizenship on behalf of other Rastafari.

It is important to note that the broader struggle for Ethiopian citizenship by Rastafarians who live in Ethiopia, though not mentioned in the state media, is also mentioned in an article in the English language \textit{Ethiopian Reporter} on 5 February, quoting Ras Tagas King as saying, “In any other country in the world if you stay in the country a number of years and have children, those children would have citizenship, but not here.”\textsuperscript{16} This issue will be more fully elaborated in a later chapter, however, in the context of this discussion, the discrepancy between the honour bestowed upon Rita Marley and the Ethiopian government’s decades-

\textsuperscript{15} Gebru, Haile. “Bob Marley: Ethiopia’s Ambassador.” \textit{(Ye Ityopia Ambassador) Addis Zemen} Vol. 64, No. 130, 5.
long lack of movement on the issue of citizenship demonstrates a further divide
and difference between the Rastafari community and the Ethiopian state. Also,
given that it is only the independent media who mention the plight of the
repatriated Rastafari (state media use this as an opportunity to promote the Africa
Unite events), one can come to a limited number of conclusions: a) the issue of
citizenship for the Rastafari population within Ethiopia is simply not on the
government’s radar, not significant enough to be mentioned, or b) the government
does not connect the repatriate community with someone like Rita Marley. This
raises an additional question: does Rita Marley represent the Rastafari in
Ethiopia? Given the lack of any reference to the citizenship issue from Rita
Marley as well as from the state media, it would seem that the Africa Unite event
is, in fact, distanced from the lived experience of the Rastafari in Shashemene. As
mentioned above, the state media is reporting being grateful for those who
“provide” and “appreciate”. The word “provide” is indicative, given the
investment of money and portrayal of the Africa Unite event in the state media as
something that will attract tourism to the country.

To underline the significance of this event, I must mention here that it is
also reported in the independent press. On 29 January in the *Ethiopian Reporter*,
there is a description of the opening ceremony—the same ceremony described in
the state news in which Rita Marley was awarded “honorary residence”—and
the role of the Orthodox church. The Patriarch of the Ethiopian Orthodox church,
His Holiness Abune Paulos, is described as providing a benediction to the event.
Here again the focus is on “how much it means for Addis Ababa and Ethiopia for
such a big event to take place here.”

On 30 January, the Amharic language
*Reporter* also speaks of “honorary residency” and how there will be a square
designed in honour of Bob Marley. This is reported simply as news, with little
further explanation.

Alongside the disconnect between the concert and the Rastafari repatriate
community as represented by Rita Marley’s honorary citizenship, the discussion
of Bob Marley himself in the state media further removes him and his music from
Rastafari. Indications of this disconnect are found in the Amharic state media
African Union is Bob Marley’s vision.” In this unattributed piece, the writer
begins with a rough translation of Bob Marley's song “Africa Unite” and then
discusses how Marley’s music provided a style for Rastafari. The writer
underlines that although Marley is connected to Rastafari and is from Jamaica, his
music is not limited to Jamaica or Rastafari and that it circulates worldwide and
touches everyone. The article praises Marley generally, with a few places in
which the author separates the greatness of Marley from Rastafari, without
specifically describing Rastafari. This article, being published ten days before the
large concert can perhaps be seen to be increasing the public’s comfort with
Marley and attempting to disconnect Marley from Rastafari as a whole. If one

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18 “A Square will be named in honour of Bob Marley.” *Bob Marley sim adebabey liseyen nwo* 22
Tir 1997, 40.
19 All Amharic sources utilize the Ethiopian calendar dates. I have converted all dates to the
Gregorian calendar. Also, all titles have been translated from Amharic. In these notes I have
provided a transliterated version of the Amharic titles.
Zemen* Vol. 64, No. 37, 5.
were to criticise Marley on the basis of his Rastafari faith, an article like this would act as a means to lift Marley above the criticism.

According to the article, all of the dignitaries present at this ceremony mentioned the need for unity, but specifically African unity to face problems such as overcoming poverty and war. The mayor of Addis Ababa points towards a need to unite Africans in the diaspora and on the continent. The Deputy Executive Secretary of the Economic Commission for Africa, Josephine Ouedrago, spoke of Marley “ignite[ing] the fire of African self-determination” and Netsanet Asfaw, here again, points to the inspiration of Ethiopian history and Bob Marley’s messages about “freedom from war and poverty”21. This emphasis on unity is made without a definition of what “unity” entails. It might also be possible to glean meaning through the fact that the state media does not translate “unite”, but rather transliterates the word into Amharic. Granted, the state media tends to freely use transliterated English words, however this could perhaps indicate a distancing from any type of clear definition of the word or discussion of the concert’s intent. The Ethiopian Reporter, however, which does interrogate the intent of the concert and does print articles illustrating various responses to the event, makes use of the translation of “unite”, using the Amharic word abri in some articles. In the state media, however, questions such as, is African unity a union of states on the continent or is it a pan-African unification of all the African diaspora? Or, on top of this, what of the unity of Ethiopia itself which is now divided along ethnic lines? All go unanswered.

On the day following the concert in Meskel Square, the back page of the *Ethiopian Herald* featured a biography of Bob Marley and some “Quickies” (with the source reference revealing that these small articles were actually drawn from the online encyclopedia Brittanica.com) defining “Reggae,” “Haile Selassie,” “Bob Marley” and “Rastafarian”. These articles can be seen to provide a context for the event and perhaps reveal the lack of knowledge on behalf of the paper as regards Rastafari and reggae music. The paper presents biographies of Bob Marley and Haile Selassie and capsule histories of reggae and Rastafari, but there is no real explanation of the relevance of these pieces to the Africa Unite event. By printing these short descriptions there is a sense of a need to explain to Ethiopians that a connection between Rastafari and the event exists. But, given these “quickie” definitions, perhaps it also reveals the lack of information Ethiopians have about these topics.

Above these definitions, there was an article entitled “Bringing people together under ‘Africa Unite.’” This piece discussed the celebrations, but also provided descriptions of conversations with Rastafari who were in attendance. The writer spoke to Desmond Martin, a Rastafari who has lived in Shashemene for over thirty years. Martin describes the NGO work instituted by the Rastafari community and the love he has for Ethiopia. He also states that Rastafarians “belong to the Orthodox church” and that the “relationship [Rastafari] have with Ethiopians is so wonderful,” describing the integration of Rastafari in the Shashemene community and how the “majority” of Rastafari have married Ethiopian women. Though within the article it serves to present a portrait of how
the Rastafari have integrated into Ethiopian society, these particular facts are not necessarily born out in reality.\textsuperscript{22} Yes, there are Rastafari who are members of the Orthodox church, but the Orthodox church does not recognize any belief in the divinity of Haile Selassie, which is a major element of Rastafari faith.\textsuperscript{23} Thinking back to the disconnect between Rita Marley’s honourary citizenship and the lack of recognition of Rastafari repatriates, this article could be seen as attempting to overstate the case of Rastafari integration. The article’s discussion of successful integration precludes any discussion of the real issues and gap between Ethiopian and Rastafari populations in Shashemene.

Two other Rastafari speak with the writer of this article and underline the importance of African unity and working together, as Africans, for the benefit of African people. Various charity and development projects such as the Rastafari school and orphanage in the Tigray region, and funding for a medical centre in Shashemene (a donation of US $50,000), are mentioned\textsuperscript{24}. In a later article, this health facility is also discussed: “The Bob Marley Foundation announced that it

\textsuperscript{22} Though there are no statistics available on intermarriage, it is possible to gain anecdotal accounts as found in Bonacci, Lewis and Minda. Intermarriage occurs, but it is not possible to confirm the statement that a “majority” of Rastafari have intermarried with Ethiopians.

\textsuperscript{23} According to Ethiopian Orthodox Archbishop Yesehaq, who visited Jamaica in 1970, speak of the Rastafari asking to be baptised in the name of Haile Selassie: “On being informed by the visiting head of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in the United States Archimandrate LAIKE M. MANDEFRO that he could baptize them under no other name than Jesus’s the cultists became angry and shouted that they would be baptized in no other name than Ras Tafari” (1997, 205-6). Although Archbishop Yesehaq goes on to say that “Rastafarians should not be ridiculed or condemned”, but “be brought gradually to Jesus Christ” (208). I spoke to Orthodox priests in Shashemene, and their attitude was the same, one saying that the Rastafari, deep down, do not believe in Haile Selassie as divine, but really do believe in Jesus Christ. More work on the role of the Orthodox Church in Rastafari would provide greater insight into this perception. It was, in my experience, very difficult to gain access to the Ethiopian Orthodox church authorities. I did not want to use local priest interviews as representative of church doctrine, opinion or perception.

will build a health facility at a cost of US $50,000 in Shashemene.” The mayor of Shashemene, Demisse Shito, is quoted as saying that the town is in support, but he also calls upon the foundation to expand its reach beyond Shashemene to other parts of Oromia. Specifically, he says, “Jamaicans could invest in the woreda where 68,000 hectares of land is designated as industrial zone.” Here we see a strong indication of the desire on behalf of government officials, specifically in Shashemene, to have the Rastafari act as investors. The goal is to connect with the community through investment. Again, by focusing on the Rastafari as investors in the country, there need not be any discussion of citizenship and, moreover, there need not be any discussion of the Rastafari faith. By framing the situation in this way, the Rastafari are portrayed as potential industrial and business investors. Certainly there are individuals who are capable of doing this, but, as we will see in the final chapter, there is still an element of adhering to faith. The Rastafari can be investors in Ethiopia, but their faith is what brings them to the country in the first place and therefore they will never be able to limit themselves to being simply business people.

On the front page of the 8 February *Ethiopian Herald*, there is a substantial photograph of a huge crowd of people illustrating an article that suggests 300,000 people attended the Africa Unite concert. It describes the various dignitaries who attended and the performers—members of Marley’s surviving family, American pop singer Lauren Hill and Benin’s Angelique Kidjo, as well as Ethiopian singers Zeleke Gessesse and Teddy Afro, among others. The

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article also mentions a press conference that declared the success of the event, the raising of $40,000 US in funds, allocated towards development projects in Shashemene and tsunami relief in Somalia. Dr Desta Meghoo, a Rastafarian and Chief Event Organizer, not only made these claims, but also suggested that the event “would benefit Ethiopia economically and promotes its image in such a positive way that . . . [is] very rare in the international media.”

Interestingly, on the front page, there is also an article about the UN Country Team in Ethiopia (this includes all of the various UN organizations and bodies, such as UNICEF [United Nations International Children’s Education Fund], WFP [World Food Program], UNHCR [United Nations High Commission for Refugees] and UNDP [United Nations Development Program], among others) and their “booth” at the festivities. The goal was apparently to showcase the work of the United Nations, and specifically the UN Refugee Agency (UNHCR) and their refugee camps for displaced Sudanese, Somali and Eritrean peoples. It would appear that this article demonstrates the way in which the Bob Marley concert was utilized to promote the activities of various aid organizations and humanitarian initiatives—and Ethiopia as a whole. Even the Rastafari Chief Event Organizer is quoted as suggesting that the event “promotes” Ethiopia.

Utilizing the public relations capital that comes with such a huge public event, the UN and its subsidiary organizations have their own interests alongside that of the other stakeholders—none of which are the Rastafari repatriates. The


focus is on the government, commercial sponsors and the Bob and Rita Marley Foundations. In the above mentioned article, there is no comment on Rastafari-related organizations—the event becomes simply a way of drawing attention to Ethiopia and these numerous additional parties are piggyback on the publicity, enjoying the opportunity to showcase their achievements. Ironically, there is no mention of any of the humanitarian or business achievements of the in-country Rastafari.

As a final commentary on the concert and the other events surrounding it, a week following the concert was published a “Society” column titled “What does Addis Benefit from Bob’s birthday?”28 The focus in this piece is on the fact that Ethiopia was able to host such an event, even though it is viewed as a “poor” country—it “builds the confidence” of Addis. Also, the writer states that “it shows to the outside world that poverty doesn’t matter to decency.” Here the writer discusses how there is an assumption that poverty is linked to violence, whereas at the concert, even though there were hundreds of thousands of people, “NOTHING OUT OF LINE HAPPENED” (writer’s emphasis). Ethiopia, according to the writer, demonstrates itself as a safe place, and the reason for this is that

Ethiopian culture moulds its citizens to respond alike regardless of life standards. Religion and fear of God is considered by many as one of the main reason for this. That’s why despite the level of poverty and large

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population the number of crime committed compared with other African
countries is minimal.

Clearly, in this statement, there is a sense of Ethiopian identity as being different
from other African nations. The writer, however, immediately after differentiating
Ethiopia from other countries then discusses how African unity was an important
part of the concert’s aims. However, the position of Ethiopia is primary: “We
know that all Ethiopia governments have done their best to unify the African
continent and promote brotherhood and sisterhood.”

**Independent Media; Another Perspective**

The independent press begins its coverage on 15 January 2005 with a Rita
Marley interview. She speaks of her intention to bring Bob Marley’s remains to
Ethiopia. The interviewer, Henok Semaegzer, asks the question, “What would be
the significance of Bob Marley’s remains to Ethiopia?” Her answer does not deal
with Ethiopia and Ethiopians, but rather with the fact that the country is “[Bob’s]
nomadic spiritual and physical resting place . . . if you listen to his interviews, he says
‘Ethiopia, Africa is my home’. I’m just trying to be obedient.” This comment
indicates that Ethiopia has (or had) significance to Bob Marley, but the
significance of Bob Marley to Ethiopia is less direct than his significance to
Jamaica, made obvious by the interviewer’s multiple follow up questions about
possible opposition to the idea from Jamaicans. From this article, however, the
collapse of Ethiopia/Africa is made by Rita Marley. As was mentioned in chapter
one, Ethiopia can stand in for Africa—therefore, in making this statement, Rita

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29 Ibid.
Marley might be suggesting that Ethiopia is where Bob should be buried, but really it is as much Africa—“Ethiopia, Africa is my home”—which may be his “spiritual resting place”.

At the end of the interview, Rita Marley is asked what the message of the Africa Unite concert will be. “Our aim is to bring unity to Africa,” she responds, “We can shine a light to the globe because of our love for Ethiopia and what Ethiopia stands for.” What is significant here is the use of the pronouns “Our” and “We”. This could potentially mean the organizing committee or Rastafari in general—but does it include Ethiopians? Also, what does Ethiopia stand for? It would seem that to Rita Marley, Ethiopia stands for African unity and resistance, as she mentions it being “time for God’s people to rise”.

In the Amharic language Reporter, an editorial from 30 January asks the question “What does Bob Marley have to do with us?” and deals with the potential of Marley’s remains being moved to Ethiopia. The article discusses how Bob Marley’s positive view of Ethiopia is valuable to the country and then goes on to suggest that, since Marley was Rastafari and believed that Haile Selassie is god, then “the soul’s resting place” for Bob and Rita Marley would be in Ethiopia. The editorial individualizes the situation—if, as individuals, Bob and Rita Marley feel the way that they do, then their dying wishes should be respected. The article, however, ends with a call for respect for the history of Ethiopia, saying that Haile Selassie and Mengistu Hailemariam are part of our history and that if Bob Marley’s remains come to Ethiopia, they should be

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received “with joy”. From this, the article seems to suggest a more ecumenical approach: that these figures are all part of Ethiopia’s history and it is the history of Ethiopia that should be celebrated—not necessarily Rastafari or any other specific group. From a political perspective, what is encoded in this treatment is a respect for numerous figures in Ethiopia’s history. What therefore becomes evident to the reading audience is that it places the independent media apart from the state media, which does not mention the need to glorify Ethiopia’s past—in this case the past governments. Critique of the present government for focusing away from the past is something that pop singer Teddy Afro comments on in his song “Yesteseriyal”. This track, which demands recognition of history, has been banned by the government. This song, and its connection to Rastafari, will be discussed in the following chapter.

On 29 January, there is a general article in the Arts and Culture section of the English language *Ethiopian Reporter* on Bob Marley32 and an announcement of the events that will occur over the following week. In the same issue, however there is an article entitled “Ras Tafarianism and repatriation: a spiritual fulfillment”33. This provides much more information on the repatriated Rastafari than any of the state media coverage. In this piece, the writer speaks with “a repatriated Rastaman who prefers to be called Ras Qunteseb Kidane Meheret Selassie.” He is a Trinidadian, educated in England, who lived in Canada where he had a wife and three children. He now lives in Ethiopia with an Ethiopian wife and two Ethiopian children. The article presents this Rastafari’s life story and his

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philosophy of Afro-centricity. Though the piece is an attempt at an objective
description, certain elements provide a different view. “For Rastafarians,” the
article reads, “the coming back to Africa movement is more than just a desire to
come to the poorest continent.” The writer also mentions the “poverty, famine,
ethnic conflicts and political unrest in all corners of the continent.” Both
comments demonstrate a view of Africa that is different from the view of Ethiopia
and Africa as a place of “sanctuary”—as described by Ras Qunteseb. Indeed, he is
quoted as saying that he “didn’t have an ideal Ethiopia or an image of perfect
people;” however, the sense of spiritual fulfillment is described in the face of the
writer’s insistence on putting the term “holy land”—when associated with
Ethiopia—in quotation marks.

Continuing with this somewhat questioning attitude is a reprint of
Anthony Mitchell’s Associated Press story, “Ethiopians suspicious of Marley
festival,” published on the day of the concert. This article outlines some of the
main issues in the country as regards the Rastafari presence: the fact that Rastafari
are seen as “an oddity,” that they “are accused of spreading drugs and crime,” that
Haile Selassie himself “never held a particular affinity for Rastafarians.” Man-in-
the-street commentary surrounding the Associated Press article is titled “Vox
Pop” and details a sampling of public opinion. Of the seven commenters, four
suggest that the concert will be a boon for the country, drawing tourists and much
needed foreign currency. Of the remaining three, one is worried about the lifestyle
of the Rastafari and the use of drugs, one is excited about the concert and the last
admires the symbolism of freedom that Bob Marley represents.
Rather than any indication of the importance of Rastafari or even the unity of Africa, the primary benefit to Ethiopia is the fact that this is a world-class event—and it’s taking place in Addis Ababa. There are a few other articles in the 29 January issue of the English-language daily—one of which declares the concert a “dreadlock Rasta jam”\textsuperscript{34}. There is also a discussion of the technical aspects of the concert—the fact that the sound system will be audible from over fifteen kilometers away and the event will be broadcast in many African countries and the rest of the world.\textsuperscript{35} In addition, on the same page is an article on how musicians can “spread the message of the unification of Africa”. Though the article speaks of artists from across Africa and the Caribbean, the only sources quoted are Jamaicans—artist and NGO worker Dr. Kerida McDonald and painter and musician Teddy Dan Miller.

As a follow-up, there is Henok Semaegzer’s article, the lead Arts and Culture article published in the \textit{Ethiopian Reporter} on 12 February 2005, a week after the Africa Unite concert event was staged. “Africa Unite: Concert for Whom?” read the headline. The lead paragraph kicks off with a stinging criticism of the concert: “Four letters better explain the birthday anniversary of the great reggae artist Bob Marley . . . P-O-O-R. Poor organization, poor performance, poor sound system and poor Ethiopian music fans who . . . were not given enough respect.” Semaegzer goes on to discuss all of the preparation and work invested in this concert and how the promises regarding the artists and the concert were “not fulfilled”. An audience member, 28-year-old construction worker Tesfa Gebru, is

\textsuperscript{34} Semaegzer, Henok. “Time to take up the call.” \textit{Ethiopian Reporter}. 5 February 2005, 4.
\textsuperscript{35} Melakedingel, Nolawi and Henok Semaegzer. “Come and Jam to Reggae!” \textit{Ethiopian Reporter}. 5 February 2005, 22.
quoted as saying, “I guess it was a VIP concert as the presentation and the sound system were designed to please the important ones.” A photograph accompanying the article depicts Rastafari dancing, the caption “Africa unite was indeed a concert for the VIP.” The response to the question of the headline seems to be that the concert itself was a Rastafari concert for Rastafari—it was, according to Semaegzer’s piece just as the earlier article declared, a “dreadlock Rasta jam”.

Photographs of the event confirm that certain people—more than just public government figures (including Prime Minister Meles Zenawi) that would traditionally be front and centre at public events—were able to get much closer to the action than those of the general public. Viewing Stephanie Black’s *Africa Unite* documentary, which features concert footage of the event also confirms Semaegzer’s comments. Most of the individuals pictured close to the stage appear to be Rastafari. Granted, this could be as a result of particular camera angles. In addition, one might argue that at any event as large as Africa Unite, the “VIPs” always have a better view, however it is clearly an issue for Semaegzer, who continues this expression of the opinion that the concert did not reach out to the Ethiopian public by describing how the host of the affair, who spoke English that was little understood, and discussed marijuana, a substance that the writer notes “could be a ‘holly [sic] leaf’ in the Rasta religion but it is definitely a substance of abuse that is illegal in Ethiopia.” Both of these factors distance the host from the audience and present a political view that is not in keeping with the laws of the country.
As an answer to the headline’s question, the concert was not for Ethiopia, according to Semaegzer, it was for VIPs and for Rastafari. Not only does the article detail the difference in opinion about marijuana, but it mentions a problem of communication. The content of what was being said by the host of the concert was not only problematic, but the language was difficult to understand. There was a problem of communication between the Rastafari and the Ethiopian public at this concert, and the result of this lack of communication was a shift in focus from the unity promoted by the event to a sense of division. The sound was not powerful enough—this isolated those who could hear it from those who could not. By selling VIP tickets for the concert and having a VIP area, a division was created between members of the crowd by virtue of class and status. Tourists and visiting Rastafari would be more likely to be able to afford to pay the ticket price for the VIP section based on the discrepancy in wealth between the countries from which the visitors came and Ethiopia. From this the concert becomes simply a public commercial event. For Semaegzer, The ideals of unity are lost in the reality of desire for commercial success.

Speaking to Tefera Ghedamu, host of the flagship Meet ETV television program on the government funded Ethiopian television network and independent contributor to the International service of American Cable News Network (CNN)’s Inside Africa, he complained about the fact that covering the event was difficult:

We did cover the Africa Unite concert . . . this was not supposed to be commercial. You are talking about a movement that is not supposed to be
commercial; you are talking about sending the message, and it wasn’t branded well to my knowledge. Because I had an interview with the director of the Rastafarian foundation: Dr Desta. And then the following morning I went [to Meskel Square] and there were thousands and thousands of people . . . I was at the stage and started shooting. I did some and after a few minutes, I would say ten minutes, they called me. I wasn’t allowed to go through here, they said. Ok. I went down and they said “don’t, we will confiscate your camera.” I said, “who the hell are you to take my camera.” That’s the way it started, the whole argument. As an independent producer, I have never been prevented from shooting wherever I go. Unless I need a permit to shoot some places. Now [Africa Unite] is happening here in Addis, but they say you can’t and confiscate your cameras. They didn’t take my camera, but I was so pissed off and I left and I set my camera to shoot from distance So that is how we put together the Inside Africa story for CNN and we had to deal with some international whatever there are companies or ETV and all this bullshit. It wasn’t properly branded or marketed in a way because it shouldn’t have been some greedy corporation or media whatever, saying “we have exclusive rights to this event”. Make it available for everybody! How much are you going to get by preventing others from shooting this? It was ill organized . . . This points me to a very shaky image of the whole movement. Are you trying to make this as popular as possible so people know about it, so then you have more new foot soldiers joining the
movement for Rastafarianism? They wanted to make money through that event. But what is the point? You want to make money or you want to talk about Rastafarianism? All these people who congregated at the square were not Rastafarians. They were Ethiopians and forengis who came to have a good time like a concert like you would find in Toronto or New York or whatever. It should have been separate because he is talking about the movement he is trying to send a message across the board so others would learn. All we found was some fat ass priests of that establishment telling us all this bullshit. Nobody would even listen to that. Nobody would even care to listen.36

I provide this long statement from Ghadamu not to argue who had the rights to the event, but rather to discuss one of the narratives being constructed by media commentators which has to do with the issue of access and entitlement. Ghadamu’s lack of access to the concert leads him into a discussion of the purpose of the concert, immediately leading to a conclusion that the concert was to make money. He suggests, through his comparison of concert goers at Africa Unite to other concert goers in other parts of the world, regardless of the Rastafari thrust of the concert. Utilising the word “establishment” to describe Rastafari and discussing the “branding” of the concert directly presents the event as being more of an economic reality than any of the discussions of the ideals of Rastafari. In fact, it is near opposite to the Rastafari narratives as presented in chapter one.

Ghedamu’s commentary connects with that of Semaegzer’s in that it points to this economic perspective. For both, the Africa Unite event was

36 Tefera Ghadamu (television producer/host), interview, 23 August 2007.
disconnected from Rastafari. For Semaegzer this is due to the observation of its service to the elite; for Ghedamu it was self-serving to the extent that it could not possibly be a vehicle for the understanding of Rastafari and was a money-making event. Looking at Ghedamu’s narrative, we see not only a disconnect between Rastafari and Ethiopians, but also a disconnect between the organizers of the event and everyday citizens, therefore not providing any sort of education to the public about Rastafari. Whereas the state media distanced Bob Marley and the concert from Rastafari, Ghedamu’s suggests that the Rasta organizers were complicit (at the very least) and supportive (at the other extreme) of such an effort in order to make a dollar. One might suggest that Ghedamu’s comments would be different had the concert been run differently, however the reality is that the concert occurred in such a way that decisions were made that prevented universal access to the event.

Also mentioned in Semaegzer’s piece is the element of the accompanying symposium, also raising the question of for whom the Africa Unite was organized. An interviewed professor who had attended these events suggested that the idea of “Rastaman as messenger for the unification of Africa . . . [is] out of context. The urge [has] to come from within Africa and from those who live in the continent. Unification cannot be achieved by word. It involves a collective examination of all stakeholders be it the government, the people and our brothers and sisters in the diaspora.” Within this piece the question becomes “Who speaks for Africa?” Raising this issue of positionality is of paramount importance.
For the answers to this and other questions, I turn to Amharic-language editorial coverage of the event. These news outlets present not only strong questioning of Rastafari as a faith or movement, but also questioning of the purpose or meaning of the Africa Unite event for Ethiopia. The independent Amharic language coverage provides far deeper discussion. On the day of the concert, for instance, the Amharic-language Reporter printed an editorial, titled “Let’s have a good time”. I reproduce a large section of it here because it makes very clear the divide between Ethiopia and Rastafari, answering questions of who the concert is for and who speaks for Africa:

The current ruling party (Ihiyadeg) said in a statement on the eve of the Emperor’s funeral that, because the King was corrupt and reactionary there would not be a special funeral ceremony for him. The government put out that kind of statement and turns around and says the king is the Creator, he is God, and now they go and spend money in order to properly receive his believers . . .

Next Tuesday is the celebration of Emperor Tewodros' 150th year since taking power. Not a single breath has been wasted on honouring [this day] for him. Without the desire to talk about Emperor Tewodros's 150th year, for Bob's 60th year, to do this much seems to involve a distorted connection between the government and the people.

Last year was the 160th year since Emperor Menelik's birthday, the ninetieth year from the year he died. Nothing was done for him even close to how Bob Marley is being revered in the government and population. It's
useful to remember our history in the age of Ihiyadeg, in which “Adwa Square” is named and called this, now it's destroyed and next to it “African Diaspora” is what it's called. Pushing aside the victory of Adwa and remembering “African Diaspora”—why this was chosen seems to point to a distortion in our way of thinking.

There is a lot to say about this, but since today is the day of the concert, let's just mention the sadness and distortion and leave it be. Let's move to the positive aspects of the concert.

At least three positive contributions can be attributed to the concert. The first is clear and at least the first half million of the people that go in person will enjoy the time. In every house people will enjoy it on TV. In other countries, the viewers will enjoy it. The arts have an important place. This is the main use.

This concert will obtain a greater utility. Ethiopia has been known as a country of famine and war. This type of musical concert, because it will be distributed throughout the world, the world will see and know that Ethiopia is a place of concerts, dancing and enjoyment. Because of this, the concert will let the world see the positive aspects of our country. Where we have not achieved the results of many attempts, this stage may be successful.

It has another primary use. For this holiday many foreigners will come. These guests will drop their money here and leave; they won't take our money with them. The visit of these guests will open the door for
future guests. It will provide a great contribution for the growth of tourism. The economical effect will not be small. Foreigners will fill our hotels. Our city will be alive. I don't know how long it will last, but even for a few days Addis Ababa will have a special life—a life of music and joy. We need to be careful not to make it a life of marijuana. The feelings of the young people can be easily manipulated, so we need to take the good and throw out the bad. We need to know how to choose.37

First, in this piece there is a mention of the present government’s condoning of the event. There is a reminder of the government’s attitude towards Haile Selassie as “corrupt and reactionary” when speaking to the Ethiopian public, whereas they publicly support the concert in which music that praises the king will be performed. Like the editorial from 30 January, this piece makes reference to the need to reflect on Ethiopian history. Here, however, the author far more critically views Bob Marley as not just as someone to be recalled along with other figures from Ethiopian history, but a figure that eclipses the legacy of other historical figures important to Ethiopia’s development as a nation. Here we see the fact that the role of history in Ethiopian society is important. As discussed in the first chapter, the concept of Ethiopian identity has transformed numerous times over the past century and the remembering of past events would therefore be fraught. The concept of Ethiopia as an independent, uncolonized state within Africa has been of great significance. According to the piece, the reference to the lack of commemoration of former Emperors versus the large-scale commemoration of

37 “Let’s have a good time.” (Inizinanna) Reporter. 29 Tir 1997, 2.
Marley’s birthday presents a “distortion between the government and the people”. What is being expressed is a sense that importance is being placed on a foreigner as opposed to the heroes of the nation. We see here a definite tension between the indigenous African perspective and that of the diaspora—here specifically in the renaming of a square in Addis.

Mentioning the changing of a square’s name from “Adwa” to “African Diaspora” moves the resonance from an Ethiopian victory against colonialism to a commemoration of pan-Africanness. This is, of course, part of the Rastafari ethos. Granted, Ethiopia represents resistance to colonialism, but in writing that the name change of the square also represents a “distortion”, it indicates a shift, or decoding, from a commemoration of Ethiopian history to a movement beyond Ethiopia. It would seem that this editorial wishes to reinforce Ethiopia and Ethiopian history and views the Rastafari perspective, as presented by the government in particular, as a “distortion” and perhaps, therefore, a threat to the understanding of Ethiopia as a nation.

The positive elements of the concert then are those which are completely divorced from history or spirituality. The concert is stated to have artistic, economic and public relations value. Much like what the state media focused on, the Reporter editorial underlines. What is problematic, however is that resistance to the concert is based on a fundamental difficulty to accept the spiritual narrative
of Rastafari. This is exemplified by those who vocally opposed the concert, a group that was mentioned in the Amharic-language *Reporter*:

> Bob Marley's holiday is beyond a tourist attraction for Ethiopia. The ones who give their opinion say that the Jamaicans say that Haile Selassie is God and their goal and the goal of the production must be to spread their faith... Many pamphlets are being spread in opposition, saying that the Orthodox believe Haile Selassie was man, not God... It should be noted that the production's effort to spread and teach the Rastafarian faith is being openly opposed by several groups.

This, along with the rest of the independent press coverage, presents a narrative of questioning. In English as well as Amharic, there are questions about the meaning and purpose of the event, the Amharic coverage presenting a far more serious questioning of motive and analysis of the relevance to Ethiopia. By diverging with the state media, the Amharic independent press directly points to the government by asking how the Rastafari vision of Haile Selassie and the history of the country can be made to fit with an Ethiopian perspective.

As for the religious questioning of Africa Unite, I now turn to the very acts of protest discussed in the *Reporter*.

**Pentecostal Problems: A Trouble with Rastafari**

In reaction to the concert, the question on behalf of religious groups would be perhaps less “A concert for whom?” but more seriously “A concert for what...”

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38 It would be interesting to be able to compare the treatment of the Rastafari with the treatment of a particular ethnic group or groups by a particular paper. Unfortunately the scope of this study prohibits such an analysis.

purpose?” The journalistic response presents various narratives of meaning. Through the methodology of media anthropology and thick description, we now see how these narratives of meaning are competing, being covered by certain sources and being ignored by others. This is because Rastafari presents contested terrain within Ethiopia. The comparison between state media and independent media demonstrates competing interests for why the event was or was not important. Only the Amharic independent media mentioned the acts of protest against the concert. Though the Orthodox community was not involved in the organization of the concert or commentary surrounding the concert, beyond the appearance of the Patriarch of the church at various official events, pamphlets and other documents regarding the Rastafari were handed out by members of the Protestant religious community in Ethiopia, who represent almost twenty percent of the Ethiopian population, according to the most recent Ethiopian census (Summary and Statistical Report 2008).

To explain and analyze this, I turn to a discussion I had with Kasahun Yosef, a leader of one of the country’s largest protestant church denominations (he asked for his real name not to be used) about how the concert might have raised the international profile of Ethiopia or perhaps aided in drawing tourism and bringing business to the country. Within this context, Kasahun spoke as follows: “In my world view, to transform a nation holistically, we have to do things the right way. I was not in town when the concert happened, but it did
bring in people. But what is behind all that? Who are these people? What is their motive? What are they after? What are they trying to do?40

Without, in their view, substantial answers to these questions, protestant religious groups protested the concert and printed various broadsheets and booklets decrying not only the concert, but Rastafarianism as a whole, claiming that the concert was an excuse to worship Haile Selassie and engage in practices (such as the smoking of marijuana) that are counter to the beliefs of the various Protestant denominations in Ethiopia. These religious groups are often referred to as Pente, which is short for Pentecostal, although a large church communion like the Ethiopian Evangelical Church Mekane Yesus (EECMY) is actually a member of the Lutheran Church Communion and the Ethiopian Kale Hiwot Church (EKHC) has its basis in the Presbyterian missionary work of the early part of the twentieth century. These two large church organizations were those that presented views counter to the Rastafarian faith and attempted to decry the faith through pamphlets distributed at the Africa Unite concert itself.

The EECMY’s booklet entitled “Former Ethiopian King Haile Selassie [sic] Man or God? Rastafarians and their beliefs” is but one example of a reaction against Rastafari. Among many other statements, the booklet claims to represent “99.99%” of Ethiopians in claiming that Haile Selassie is a “mere mortal person and not a god”, “Ethiopia is just a nation among the nations and not the promised land/Zion where Rastas need to return to”, and “Ethiopians are not special or chosen people but just normal African people”.

40 Name has been changed. (Head of major protestant organization in Ethiopia), interview, 4 September 2007.
The book, in general, makes the attempt to indicted Rastafari through reference to drug use. In order to provide a sense of authority, the booklet states that most of the quotations are taken from Barry Chevannes, author of *Rastafari, Roots and Ideology*, naming him as from the “West Indian University Sociology and Social work department”. Though the university is incorrectly named (it is the University of the West Indies), some quotations seem to have actually been drawn from Chevannes’s work\(^\text{41}\). Chevannes, however, does not present a judgment in his work, though the quotations drawn from his text are used in the interest of doing just this.

This judgment is seen immediately. For, after providing a general overview of how Rastafari is a form of idolatry, the booklet goes on to state that, given Ethiopia’s long history of Christianity, Rastafari does not fit in Ethiopian culture. There is an acknowledgement of Marcus Garvey as one who fought against colonialism and describes him as someone who, though not Rastafari himself, he opened the way for the faith. Though the booklet lists aspects of Rastafari such as important holidays and symbols, the main thrust of its contents is extraordinarily damning. According to the text, Rastafari is dangerous for Ethiopians living abroad and it leads to insanity. The booklet provides a short story of an Ethiopian smoking marijuana with some Rastas. Some of his Ethiopian friends became Rastas and went crazy. Finally, however, the book states that since Rastafari do drugs, this leads them into homosexual relationships and encourages them to both rape both men and women.

\(^{41}\) As a side note, in a conversation with Professor Chevannes, he told me that he was not aware of any Ethiopian document utilizing his work.
Obviously extreme, the booklet ends by insisting that it is not meant to spread hatred against the Jamaican people. Instead, the point is to dissuade Ethiopians and blacks from converting. “Ethiopia has long been Christian, believing in one God, the Trinity . . . we need to be faithful to our culture and biblical tradition and we need to protect and distinguish ourselves from this faith.”

The pamphlet handed out by the EKHC on the day of the concert, entitled “Rasta Worship or Birthday Celebration?” is a document which details the issues as “prepared after consultations were held with EKHC theologians and other Ethiopian intellectuals on the subject matter”. It immediately jumps to a question about the aim of the concert, analyzing the banner slogan “Africa Unite”. The words of Bob Marley’s song of the same name are quoted, including specifically the lines “Africa unite . . . we’re moving right out of Babylon—we’re grooving to our Father’s land . . . We are the children of the higher man—we are the children of the Rasta man”. The pamphlet then corroborates this lyric with a quotation from the Bob and Rita Marley Foundation stating that Africa Unite was “planned & presented . . . to encourage Exodus Movement of Jah People [emphasis EKHC, not Bob and Rita Marley Foundation] from across the globe”. They then quote a 1 February 2005 speech from Dr. Desta-Meghoo-Peddie, head of the Bob Marley Foundation, saying, as she welcomed participants to the Africa Unite series of events, “It is a fulfillment for all of us to stand here in our fatherland, the land of Haile Selassie Jah Rastafari.” Through these quotations,

42 Kasahun Yosef told me about how certain members of his organization were pursued and hassled by police for handing out these pamphlets. I was not able to confirm this piece of information, however, even so, it would be unwise to make the assumption that the government was attempting to silence a particular sector of the population because I am not aware of the circumstances surrounding the events of which Kasahun spoke.
the EKHC aims to present the aim of the concert as one to encourage believers in Rastafari to come to Ethiopia: it is “fulfillment for all of us”; the idea is to “encourage Exodus” and “[move] right out of Babylon”. For the EKHC, the aim of the concert is that of encouraging a “mass immigration” of Rastafari into Ethiopia. They even suggest that, should Bob Marley’s remains be moved to Ethiopia (an idea bandied about both before and during the period of the concert) it, along with the Africa Unite event, would trigger this “mass immigration”.

Figure 4.2: Pamphlet examples in both Amharic and English

The fear of Rastafari moving in large numbers is based upon the fact that the EKHC views “Rastafarianism” as heretical. Though the pamphlet
acknowledges the “beg[innings]” of the movement as a “black . . . struggle for freedom”, they see it not as a “movement” any longer, but as a “religion, which believes in the deity of Ethiopian king Haile Selassie [sic]”. This suggests that certain elements of Rastafari—such as the resistance to oppression—make sense, but the concept of belief in Haile Selassie is perhaps the main problem. The pamphlet also presents a comparison between the Christian religion and that of the Rastafari, as presented in the table on the following page.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Christianity</th>
<th>Rastafarians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The God of the Bible is the Almighty God</td>
<td>Haile Selassie is the Almighty God</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The people of Israel are those mentioned in the Bible</td>
<td>The people of Israel are the black people of the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Land of Israel is the one mentioned in the Bible</td>
<td>Ethiopia is the promised land of Israel/Zion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus Christ will return back to judge the world</td>
<td>Haile Selassie will return back to judge the world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real peace comes only through Jesus Christ</td>
<td>We will smoke marijuana to bring peace and foster brotherhood. Marijuana is allowed in our religion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4.3: Chart taken from EKHC pamphlet, distributed 6 February 2005.

By comparing Christianity and the “Rastafarians” in this way, it sets up a divide between not only the two religious faiths, but it also denies the connection between Ethiopia and the Rastafarians. It distances the two and occludes differences among Christian sects. Also, by writing that there “is a hidden agenda of the Rasta people to declare Haile Selassie as God right in the middle of God-
believing people of Ethiopia” there is an additional implication that the Rastafari are a threat to Ethiopian culture and religion. Making a similar point to the pamphlets, instead of a love for Ethiopia (an Ethiopia that is, however, to the EKHC, a Christian country threatened by the potential negative impact of the Rastafari), the Rastafari present something that is counter to Ethiopia. This could be seen to reflect some of the journalistic statements, namely that Rastafari presents a threat to Ethiopian history—the sense of Ethiopia as a country, a nation.

A second pamphlet with the title “An Abomination in the Heart of Addis Ababa (Feb. 6, 2005)” was also handed out on the day of the concert in English and Amharic versions. Both pamphlets were provided to me by Kasahun at the time of my interview. This takes particular aim at the Rastafari from the perspective of history as well as the development of the country. The pamphlet begins by decrying Bob Marley and contrasting him with other “leaders”: Martin Luther King and Nelson Mandela. Marley is characterized as someone who has promoted sexual promiscuity, homosexuality\(^{43}\), drug use and disdain for authority. Certainly this disdain comes from the religious faith of Christianity, but the pamphlet also asks “what does Bob Marley have to do with Ethiopia” and “do we really need to flatter by the Rastafarians who claim to love us”? Taking these questions at face value, the pamphlet turns to the Rasta relationship with Ethiopia. It details the fact that both Bob and Rita Marley have claimed to be Orthodox

\(^{43}\) According to an early article on the topic, homosexuality is strictly forbidden in Rastafari. See Kitzinger, Sheila. Protest and Mysticisim: The Rastafari Cult of Jamaica. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 8, no. 2 (1969): 240-62. Contemporary research on Rastafari does not specifically discuss this issue, however, in reggae and dancehall music, performers who purport to be Rastafari (as well as others) are seen as controversial for their support and promotion of homophobic beliefs. For a discussion of this controversy, see Cooper, Carolyn. “Lyrical Gun”: Metaphor and Role Play in Jamaican Dancehall Culture. *Massachusetts Review* 35, no. 3/4 (1994), 429-47.
Christians, however neither has formerly denounced their belief in Haile Selassie as divine. In both the Orthodox church as well as the Protestant denominations (and the Catholic church within Ethiopia) this is unacceptable. To consider the former Emperor as divine is contrary to the beliefs of both the Protestant and Orthodox faiths. The pamphlet continues by arguing, through the use of the Bible, the same facts stated in the first pamphlet discussed: first, that Haile Selassie cannot possibly be a “Living God”, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah is actually Jesus Christ, and, last, that Ethiopia cannot possibly be Zion. With stinging clarity, the pamphlet states “The Rastafarians would have us think that the feelings they have for us as a nation are mutual . . . What a lie.”

In further argument against the Rastafari, the pamphlet describes Shashemene as drug ridden with a high prevalence of HIV. Also, it asks why the Rastafari have not come to Ethiopia’s aid in recent history—especially under the Dergue. Why did the Rastafari not help Selassie when he was “detained” under the Dergue? Why did they not help during the famine? Why have they not helped to develop the country? The pamphlet ends with the following statement:

As Ethiopians, we speak to you Rastafarians; don’t pretend you love us when you are inspiring us to worship your false god. Celebrate your events anywhere but not here. Don’t come here claiming that our former emperor is God, and don’t call our nation Zion, for we are not. We are one of the African nations working towards economic and social development. For all of the discussion of economic development and social unity in the state newspaper coverage of the Africa Unite event, the worship of Haile Selassie
prevents any of that message from being heard in the context of the growing Protestant community in Ethiopia. And, the argument that the Protestant community is making is in reference to both Protestantism and the Ethiopian Orthodox church. There is a consistent distancing between Christian Ethiopian culture and that of the Rastafari. Given the concept of unity within the title of the events and also within the philosophy of Rastafari, it would seem that the Protestant movement within Ethiopia is not, at present, able to connect with the Rastafari for basic reasons involving differing belief systems. The trouble here is that the Protestant representatives perhaps have a point, when they write in the same pamphlet that the Rastafari cannot “approach the people by directly asking to organize a Rastafarian worship even in Ethiopia”. Had the concert been described as a “Rastafarian worship”, postulate the Protestant pamphleteers, it would not have occurred.

The editorial cartoon described in the Journalism section displays this—there is a contradiction between supporting the event and maintaining Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, as there is in maintaining protestant Christianity. As in the previous chapter, which discussed the spiritual and cultural perspective of the local Ethiopians towards the Rastafari, the understanding of the Rastafari is varied, but even its multiplicity, it does not connect with the Rastafari view of Ethiopia.

**Ethiopia, Rastafari and the Marleys**

The organizers of Africa Unite created a document entitled “Why Ethiopia & What Was Accomplished”, available at the Africa Unite website⁴⁴, which

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⁴⁴The website can be seen at www.africa-unite.org. According to the website, the goal of the 2005 concert and future Africa Unite events is as follows: “The efforts of the Bob Marley and Rita
describes the choice of country as well as a list of five specific accomplishments of the events. This particular document contains numerous statements that not only present a generally different perception than those stated above, but there is also a divide between what one might call the “international face” of Rastafari and the lived experience of the repatriate population. It is labelled “From the Marley family and friends”, so it must be seen as representing the opinions of the Marley family and the Bob Marley and Rita Marley Foundations. It cannot and should not be viewed as representative of Rastafari in general—it is directly attributed only to the Foundations and lacks reference to Rastafari in Ethiopia.

By describing the history of Ethiopia, its ancient buildings and cultural patrimony, the document presented by the Bob Marley and Rita Marley foundation does emphasize the role of Ethiopia as “an independent free African state”, but immediately references Haile Selassie as “Him, Allah, Eloihim, Jahnoyh, One God for us all” (1). This initial statement is clearly contrary to the attitude of the protestant pamphleteers, but also, there is no piece of journalistic writing that suggests the divinity of Selassie.

It continues by providing a concise history of the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the pan-African movement of the twentieth century. Referencing historical and present injustices, the document continues by mentioning the need for reparations. It then states that there is still more to do and specifically mentions the work of the Rita Marley Foundation with the “rural poor” (3) in Ghana. There is acknowledgement of the poor in Shashemene and a quotation from “a

Marley Foundations are giving life to the words of Bob Marley: ‘Africa Unite!’ Sponsoring a series of events each year in a different country, the goal of uniting Africa is becoming a reality.”
Headmaster in Shashamane [sic]” saying “Many people understand now what this celebration is all about. They now realize that Bob Marley’s message is for everyone especially the poor. It is a great thing for Ethiopia” (3). There is then a description of how the family had heard children call out “Bob Marley, Jamaicans, freedom” and suggest that this “evidenc[ed] approval and identification” (3) Throughout the document, this is the only section that mentions anything about Rastafari beyond Addis Ababa—and even in this case it only discusses the travel to Shashemene, and mentions the plans for a stadium to be built in the town, but says nothing about the Rastafari community in this area. There is no discussion of the repatriate community or repatriation. This is particularly significant, given that the document mentions the honourary citizenship “bestow[ed] on Mrs. Marley” (4). Citizenship is such a fraught issue for the Rastafari in Ethiopia that this is a problematic oversight in that it does not connect the Africa Unity event with the lived experience of Rastafari in Ethiopia.

Of the five goals listed accomplished, the first three are undoubtable. One: “the entire world once again joins in the celebration of Bob Marley’s birthday”. Yes, this was successfully achieved. Second: “the historic symposium . . . brought together 250 youth, artists, academics and activists from the continent and the Diaspora”. From the film Africa Unite, it is obvious that this was very successful and many attendees were pleased with the symposium and the connections made as well as projects initiated. Three: “the African world joins Ethiopia in recognition of the need for African Unity, while the rest of the world realizes the power of music as a unifying force”. Indeed, a concert attracting hundreds of
thousands of people does present the unifying power of music. And, the
discussions at the symposium and in the media raised the issue of African unity.
Numbers four and five on this list, however, are perhaps less definitively
accomplishments. Four states that “Over the past year Ethiopia has experienced
an awakening of unity amongst its people. Many youth are now experiencing a
new sense of unity under the banner of Rastafari”. It is difficult to know what
evidence the Bob Marley and Rita Marley Foundations have for making the
statement about the increase in Ethiopian unity during 2004 and the beginning of
2005. Given the reality of the May 2005 elections—which were extremely
controversial—it would seem that even if there were “a new sense of unity”, it
was short lived. In addition, the statement that “youth are now experience a new
sense of unity under the banner of Rastafari” is also debatable, especially given
the many attempts at distancing the Africa Unite event from Rastafari in the
media. In addition, my personal experience working with and interviewing young
people in Shashemene at the Afrika Beza College revealed a range of attitudes
about the Rastafari, but no real examples of any “sense of unity under the banner
of Rastafari”. Finally, for number five, repeating an earlier point, the document
states that

    Ethiopia is once again centre stage under the banner of His Imperial
    Majesty. It is time that he was neither a thief, imposter or fraud. He is

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45 As an aside, of both my English language students and a local charity club called WillPower, I would
suggest that the palpable sense of unity was that of a desire for education. As an English language teacher
in Montreal, I rarely experience the type of commitment and enthusiasm for education as I did in
Shashemene. WillPower—a club of over one hundred members in 2007—also presented a sense of unity
as regards youth interest in community development. Their projects in gathering money for poor school
children’s books and pens as well as cultural events were well supported and officially commended by the
mayor.
what he is, a direct descendant of the Solomonic dynasty, a descendant of
the only monarchy in Africa, still loved by his people and an important
figure in the history of African civilization and unity.

As the editorial in the 6 February edition of the Amharic-language *Reporter*
indicated, Meles Zenawi’s ruling party has never been too fond of Haile Selassie
and the treatment of the Rastafari during the Africa Unite events is seen, by the
author, as problematic. In addition, as mentioned in earlier chapters, Haile
Selassie’s rule is viewed in many different ways, depending on the perspective.
For the Oromo in particular, Selassie is most certainly not loved. The document is
correct in stating that Selassie is “an important figure”—this is most certainly
something that the media coverage acknowledges. Even the extraordinarily
negative pamphlets admit to this fact.

Most significantly, however, the event is referred to as being “spiritual not
political, emotional not commercial, and most of all historical”. The sponsors are
listed and the list contains all of those mentioned in the state media, adding Coca
Cola and Sheraton Hotels. The document acknowledges that there may have been
some weakness in the event since certain artists were not able to attend, but
mentions the “massive outlay of funds” from the Marley family that allowed for
Meskel square to be updated. A list of events is enumerated, including the naming
of a stadium to be built in Shashemene funded by the Bob and Rita Marley
foundations as well as the Ethiopian government. Here we see a situation that is
somewhat similar to the experience of Ethiopians and their Rastafarian neighbors.
Like the situation described in chapter three when the municipal government
presented a very different perspective relative to space, here, in a high level international political context, as there, in a community oriented local context, we see a divide between the spiritual and emotional Rastafari and the political and commercial Ethiopians. Just as the Mayor of Shashemene references economics and politics, the main thrust of the state media as well as the independent media, in terms of positive benefits of the concert, were seen as financial and political, in so much as the concert and related events would draw tourist dollars to the country and Ethiopia could be showcased on the world state as being safe and well governed.

Resulting from these perspectives is a lack of focus on the Rastafari living in Ethiopia. Not only does the concert attempt to present an “idealized” version—as per Dayan and Katz—of Ethiopian society as safe and worthy of investment, but there is also an idealized version of the Rastafari that is presented. The idealized version that is conceptualized by the papers is one that attracts commercial investment and tourism to Ethiopia, one that does not threaten Ethiopian values—one that ignores the differences between narratives. This is what is presented by the state media. The independent press presents alternate views, but the ideal version of the Rastafari as simply attractive for reasons that do not challenge Ethiopian society are also presented. The Pente churches may be radical and overstating of the case against Rastafari, but their reaction is the only one that decodes the meaning of the Rastafari as threat. This reality is in stark contrast to the stated success—perhaps another idealized version of the Rastafari—presented by the Bob and Rita Marley Foundations. This version,
however connected to Rastafari faith and ideals, is completely disconnected from the repatriate community.

Beyond this divide, the reference to the sponsors of the concert, and the expressed relationship with the Ethiopian government itself, undermines the statement that the event was to be “spiritual” and “emotional”. Involvement with multinational corporations such as Coca Cola and international organizations such as the United Nations places the Rastafari, in this case, on a different plane than those repatriates who live in Shashemene or other areas of the country.

What connects all of this together, however, is the divide between perceptions. In this document, as with other literature regarding Rastafari, the view of Ethiopia is framed through a distinctive, self-reflexive, post-colonial worldview and framework. There is a gap between this specific Rastafari framework and the dynamic entity that is Ethiopian identity. Through an analysis of reaction—and even protest—created through various media, keeping in mind the method of media anthropology’s tool of thick description—I have revealed the differing views and attitudes towards the Rastafari in the context of the Africa Unite event. However, reaction fell within a certain spectrum. Within the Ethiopian media, when the focus was on the “event”, reaction was neutral to celebratory. Conversely, when the focus was on the Rastafari reaction was neutral to questioning. The media created by the protestant church organization pushed this questioning much further and, through characterizing the Rastafari as drug addled and misled, went so far as to vilify the movement.
The understanding and reception of Rastafari are incredibly varied—what is distinctive here is that there is no specific framework for understanding. Where the Ethiopian mass media is concerned, it reflects (and is perhaps a product of) a sense of Ethiopianness that is layered and lacking specific definition, the Ethiopian news media responds in kind, both questioning and accepting the concert as it makes the most sense—an event that acts primarily for Ethiopia’s benefit.
Chapter Five

Music and Art: Representations of Rastafari

Within Ethiopia, music plays constantly. All bus drivers and taxis play music. The Orthodox Church utilizes chanting and ceremonial drums in all their religious practice and the members of the growing protestant population are an active audience for the huge numbers of popular mazmul, “sacred music,” singers, though they actively spurn all secular music (called zefen in Amharic). Streets full of music shops can be found in the market district of Addis Ababa, each selling a wide range of popular Ethiopian music on cassette and CD. Certainly, some American popular music is available, but the majority of music heard in the streets and available in the shops is Ethiopian. One exception, of course, is Bob Marley. In watching Stephanie Black’s 2007 Africa Unite, a film that documents the concert itself as well as elements of the related symposium, it is evident that the Ethiopian audience is incredibly excited to watch the concert and knows Bob Marley’s music.

In certain scenes, the camera captures Ethiopian youth on the streets singing Marley’s iconic songs, be it “Get Up, Stand Up” or “One Love”. The audience is seen signing along to renditions of popular Marley hits as performed by various members of the superstar’s family. As a researcher in Ethiopia, I have also been made aware of the reach of Marley’s music. Teaching in a local college in Shashemene, I would often listen to students practicing Bob Marley songs as demonstrations of their English language
knowledge. As Abiyi Ford, Dean of Journalism and Communications at Addis Ababa University, said to me, “Ethiopians respond to the Rastafarians through the phenomenon of Bob Marley. It’s the music. The music has found its way into the core of Ethiopian music. The rhythm is very much there.” In conversation with Fikru Gebrekidan, author of Bond Without Blood, his statement was that one of the major impacts of the Rastafari presence in Ethiopia can be seen in the music—especially recently, specifically since the Africa Unite event.

As mentioned in the previous chapter, though the concert itself was connected to various purposes for various stakeholders—the Ethiopian government, the United Nations and its connected organizations, the Bob and Rita Marley Foundations, and other sponsors—the role of the repatriated Rastafari was minimal. The music of Bob Marley, however, had many purposes for many people as regards this event. The concert therefore not only provides a springboard for analysis of the perception of the Rastafari through the media coverage and reactions of the public, but it also provides a way into looking at how Bob Marley’s music, and the Rastafari by extension, has been circulated, distributed, consumed and reproduced by Ethiopian musicians and artists, creating additional cultural products.

Beyond the story created by the existent journalistic coverage, the concert itself was an artistic and musical event. Given my approach of media anthropology, this obviously requires a consideration of the role of

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1 Abiyi Ford (Dean, Journalism and Communications, Addis Ababa University), interview, 17 July 2007.
2 Phone conversation, February 2009.
music in Rastafari, and then the role of this music in Ethiopia. Through
analysis of lyrics, video, and art as well as through interviews with
musicians and an artist, the description will expand. Religious response will
continue to build context. As Faye Ginsberg writes, the description will
“appreciate the complexity” of how Ethiopians perceive the Rastafari
population.

This section will take a look at recent popular songs in Ethiopia
which make use of both reggae rhythms and Rastafarian and/or Jamaican
tropes. Before beginning, it is imperative to address the general significance
of both music, and Bob Marley’s music in particular. The reach of Marley,
a popularity so large that it stretches from North American college dorm
rooms to Ethiopian music shops, must be considered in reference to
Rastafari. Indeed, it is difficult to disconnect reggae from Rastafari and
Rastafari from reggae. Reggae music as a genre has a strong religious
component because of Rastafari, however the spirituality of reggae music
was, in Africa Unite concert, eclipsed by political, economic and cultural
components related Ethiopian government bodies and other stakeholders.
To return to the music and look at how the music connected with Rastafari
influences the Ethiopian perception of Rastafari will allow for a discussion
from a perspective that is shaped by those involved in fields of artistic
creation. I will present a brief discussion of the role of music in Rastafari
and its worldwide presence through the work of Bob Marley. Then, in order
to address the relationship between the Rastafari and Ethiopians it is also
essential to look at the importance and impact of music—specifically reggae music—in Ethiopia. Turning to Ethiopian music, musicians and a visual artist inspired by reggae, Rastafari and Bob Marley, I will illustrate how the image of the Rastafarian exists in the popular Ethiopian imagination. This will demonstrate how Rastafari influence can be engaged in both its culture and history, but also present itself as totally independent of these elements. It is also possible for Rastafari influence in art to be simply applied as a style—as a surface. Again, this reflects the varied narratives functioning in Ethiopian society. Though, as I will discuss in the following section, reggae and Rastafari are connected, the Ethiopian perception has the ability to disconnect the two.

**Music and Rastafari**

Music and Rastafari are connected. There is a bond between them. Certainly, it is difficult and problematic to insist on or argue for an essential connection between religion and/or spirituality and music. Perhaps the relationship between music and religion might be better understood as a means of communication. If one looks, as Diane Austin-Broos has, at the connection between religion and music, especially within a Jamaican perspective, keeping in mind the origins of the Rastafari faith, one might find “music in the church is a form of religious ‘realization’” (1997, 124). Through her description of the use of music in the Jamaican Pentecostal church, she demonstrates how music acts as a way to become fully aware or gain experience of religious belief. “Jamaican women come to church to
sing and dance for hours,” Austin-Broos explains (124). Music allows for a communion with God, a conduit: “The songs act as vehicles of God’s power, and as a means of experiencing him” (Hopkins, qtd. in Austin-Broos 1997, 125).

This ability of music to be the embodiment of God and carry one closer to awareness and perception is in alignment with Attali’s view of music as “a path to knowledge” (1985, 20). If, as Attali argues, music “is a way of perceiving the world”, its relationship to religion and spirituality can be viewed as that of “a tool of understanding” (4). Taking this as an instruction can allow for the use of music as a means of comprehending spiritual beliefs through the ability of music to be at once a ritual expression as well as experience of faith—the music holds information about these beliefs. Therefore, music can be seen as both able to spread and articulate religious faith.

In order to enter into the symbolic references within music which has come to be known as Rastafari or Rasta-influenced, it is imperative to recall the connection this faith has to Africa. As discussed in chapter one, resistance to oppression and Afro-centricity are cornerstones of Rastafari belief. In Barry Chevannes’s definitive Rastafari: Roots and Ideology, he states the following:

Rastafari, ever since the movement’s rise in the early 1930s, have held to the belief that they and all Africans in the diaspora are but exiles to “Babylon,” destined to be delivered out of captivity by a return to “Zion,”
that is, Africa, the land of our ancestors, or Ethiopia, the seat of Jah, Ras Tafari himself, Emperor Haile Selassie’s pre-coronation name. (1) Rastafari believe in a bond with Africa—a sense of themselves as Africans.

The desire for repatriation is both a “reaction to European slavery and then, following emancipation, in response to the system of social, cultural, and economic oppression on which modern Jamaica was built” (Chevannes 1). The music of the Rastafari speaks to and about these beliefs and through, as the Rastas themselves would argue, “word, sound and power” (Chevannes 1994, 227). It is not only the words spoken, but also the sound of the rhythms that propel the power of the message. Attali’s statement that “the drum and song have long been carriers of linguistic meaning” (1985, 25) seems to reflect this reality.

The Rastafari faith does not necessarily require or articulate a particular musical orientation, but the reverse is true: a particular musical orientation requires and articulates Rastafari—this is reggae. In order to describe this relationship, one must look at the music used in Rastafari worship and then expand to address the important role of this music.

Saturday Sabbath Rastafari services such as those I have witnessed in the neighbourhood of Papine, Kingston, are a combination of reasoning (a practice of discussion, most often biblically based, between Rastafari) and both dancing and chanting to a drum chorus. The name of such ceremonies illustrates the Rastafari belief in a connection to Africa. Leonard Barrett describes his experience of one such ceremony, referred to
as a “Nyabinghi”, as follows: “The drums kept a haunting beat, while the [Rastafari] sang songs . . . one tune continued for an hour . . . another was started and continued on and on” (1997, 123). Campbell and Stolzoff also refer to these musical events as “Nyabinghis” (Barrett 1997, 121; Stolzoff 2000, 80; Campbell 1987, 103).

Barry Chevannes argues that “Nya-binghi” was the name of an African organization described in a 1935 article published by the *Jamaica Times*. The piece claimed that Nya-binghi meant “death to the whites” and had been founded by a Congolese king sometime in the 20s (1994, 43). What Chevannes calls an “unintended” yet “far-reaching” (43) effect of this article is that the word has entered into Rasta parlance to describe both the drumming as well as the “ritual dance” (164). What is important, however, is that the symbolism of such musical ceremonies has grown over time. The use of the word “Nyabinghi” labels the drumming event as African, thereby connecting the Rastafari to the continent of Africa.

In terms of the drumming practice, Barrett describes how Rastafarian music “emerged when Count Ossie introduced his ritual drumming” and how the music itself reflected Rasta understanding: “The down beat of the drummer symbolizes the death of the oppressive society but it is answered by the akette drummers, a resurrection of the society through the power of Ras Tafari . . . it is a call to Africa” (1997, 190).

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3 There is no real agreement on the origins of this organization. Barrett, quoting Robert I. Rotberg, suggested it was a “religio-political cult that resisted colonial domination from the last decade of the nineteenth century to about 1928. There is no agreement as to where the movement began . . . [Rotberg] suggested Ruanda-Urundi or Uganda” (1997, 121).
Scholars of Rastafari and Jamaican music suggest the sound of the drum used to accompany chanting is part of a developmental trajectory for reggae music. Steven Davis and Peter Simon present the same description of the beat, and they connect it to a specific Jamaican musical style: “The basic Rasta rhythm is a sustained two-beat riff that swells and hypnotizes like a heartbeat . . . Rastafarian drumming stems from one of the older Jamaican musical forms, burra . . . the burra and akete drumming shared the same outlaw philosophy and Trench Town stomping ground as reggae, and the two musics are mutually inclusive” (1977, 18-22).

The connection with the burra, does, as Barrett presented, underline the Rastafari connection with Africa, but it also presents a direct, historical connection to slavery and creates a distinct connection between Rastafari and reggae. It also presents a connection to the lyrical content and meaning of the music. In the 1950s, Rastas had been relegated to living in the ghettos of Kingston. At this time, the Rastafari lived amongst the Burru, a group of people who lived in Western Kingston who had taken their name from the word “wicked” taken from West African Yoruba (Lewis 1993, 8)4. As Lewis writes, the Rastafari “learned much about both musical form and social satire . . . from the Burru’s satirical, antisocial and inflammatory music (intended to continue the tradition of protest from the days of

4 The association with West Africa can be seen as incongruous, given that Ethiopia is viewed as the Promised Land and is on the other side of the continent. Or, this association can be viewed as in keeping with the utilization of Ethiopia and Africa as interchangeable terms, as discussed in chapter one.
slavery)” (8). Paul Gilroy’s discussion of the communicative power of black music is instructive here:

Music, the grudging gift that supposedly compensated slaves not only for their exile from the ambiguous legacies of practical reason but for their complete exclusion from modern political society, has been refined and developed so that it provides an enhanced mode of communication beyond the petty power of words—spoken or written. (1993, 76)

The burru rhythms illustrate an “outlaw philosophy” in both sound and word; they also were connected with folk music in Jamaica (Stolzoff 2000, 36). Through their use in Rasta ritual, these songs provide a tie to slave history and Africa, reinforcing religious beliefs and narrative of Rastafari. There is also the view of the music as conduit for commentary—commentary from individuals who would otherwise not have their voices heard.

All of these connections that are presented through these rhythms act as a conscious link to Africa, and they are the basis for Jamaica’s largest cultural export: reggae. Count Ossie and his drumming group, the Mystic Revelation of Rastafari, accompanied the Folke Brothers to create the hit song “Oh Carolina” in 1960 (Stolzoff 60). This event is widely accepted as being the first example of a reggae song (Bradley 62, Campbell 127). Since this moment, “Rastafari has played an important role in the development of Jamaican popular music, vocal and instrumental” (Simpson 290). The
narrative that developed and reinforced Rastafari, as outlined in chapter one, is the same narrative that developed and reinforced this music. The difference here is that the musical connection, is with the music of West Africa—but this makes sense given the substitution of the word Ethiopia for Africa within Rastafari discourse.

In addition, though Rastafari may have been marginalized within Jamaican society, the Rastafari influence on music did not prevent the widespread popularity of reggae: “through [reggae] . . . the Rastafari social movement has distinguished itself in the public’s mind” (Kebede and Knottnerus 1998, 503). The reason for this is the ability of music to disseminate a message, here being the connection to Africa in the rhythm and the narrative of resistance through lyrics. As a result of the involvement of Rastafari in reggae, a popular musical culture “based on the spirit of resistance” (Campbell 1987, 121) was (and still is being) created. In the music’s infancy, songs that had been sung amongst the Rastafari “were now being released on record for all to hear . . . despite the component of idealism and deliverance, the songs were pregnant with criticism of the racial hierarchy of the society” (127). Due to the popularity of reggae in the post-independence period, reggae music helped the status of the Rastafari in Jamaican society by “open[ing] possibilities at the cultural, political and technological level and was an inexhaustible source of courage and moral support” (134).
The marginalized Rastafari, through reggae, were transformed into “the bearers of protest, definers of discontent, and protagonists of rebellion in Jamaican society” (Watson 1974, 339). Songs by Rasta artists like Bob Marley and the Wailers not only presented an alternate political perspective, but also “helped many [Jamaicans] to discover their roots and the richness of their cultural heritage” (Campbell 1987, 135) through making a connection to Africa in both the sound and lyrics of the music. Kebede and Knottnerus suggest that Rastafari “is primarily a political movement with a very strong religious component” (1998, 502). Certainly, through reggae, the religious messages were strongly stated, as was political commentary, thus causing reggae to “poin[t] to a clear option for the poor and the powerless” (Erskine 2005, 180).

The power of reggae and its Rastafari message, however, has not been limited to Jamaica. The movement from the confines of a small island in the Caribbean to the point at which there would be a concert of the very same music that would draw hundreds of thousands of people to a square in Addis Ababa was achieved in the name of Bob Marley. As Horace Campbell has described, Bob Marley is the international face of Rastafari (1987, 140-50).

John Homiak, through research into representations of religious belief has found that “much of what makes specific social actors effective in the sphere of religion—their competence and virtuosity in various forms of performance—places a similar constitutive stamp upon ‘reality’” (2004,
Hence the near universal importance of skills in oratory, dance, music and even “art” in shaping expressions of the sacred” (167). Clearly, Bob Marley falls into this category of a specific actor whose skill in music shaped the articulation of Rastafari. In addition, Marley’s expansive worldwide popularity, along with the migration of Jamaican people\textsuperscript{5}, has both spread and altered the articulation of the faith “from Toronto to Tottenham and from Kingston to Washington, D.C.” (Homiak 1994, 962).

Marley spread this sense of alternative identity and protest through songs like “Get Up, Stand Up”, in which he calls for universal equality, but he reinforced the Rasta belief in Haile Selassie by stating “the mighty God is a living man.” The album *Exodus Movement of Jah People* was a record that dealt both with the issue of mobilisation for freedom as well as a desire for repatriation to Ethiopia (Campbell 1987, 143). The 1978 visit of Marley to the Rasta settlement in Shashemene caused him to recognize “concretely the problems of translating a dream [of repatriation] into reality” (143). His subsequent music addressed topic of African liberation and this “expression linked Rastafari to the advanced struggles for liberation at the front of racism [as can be seen] in [the line] . . . ‘Africans a liberate Zimbabwe’” (144).

Much of the music of Marley does not speak directly of repatriation—or Rastafari, necessarily. The expression of Rastafari through reggae thereby is not solely a communication of the faith in its words and

\textsuperscript{5} Chevannes discusses the role of Jamaican migration in the spread of Rastafari, from the movement of Jamaicans to Britain in the late 1950s and early 1960s, to Canada in the mid 1960s and to the United States in the 1970s (1994, 262-63).
sound, but also a universal “reasoning” session, bringing together different ideas, extending the discussion beyond Jamaica.

Paul Gilroy discusses the recent role of music in black political culture defined as:

. . . liberating music from its status as a mere commodity and by the associated desire to use it to demonstrate the reconciliation of art and life, that is, by exploring its pursuit of artistic and even aesthetic experience not just as a form of compensation, paid as the price of an internal exile from modernity, but as the favoured vehicle for communal self-development. (Gilroy 1993, 124)

One need only look at the music of Rastafari, from its origins in Nyabinghi drumming, use in religious ceremonies to its political consciousness and resonance amongst oppressed worldwide, to see how the strains of what has become one of the most well-known folk musics of the world not only articulates and spreads Rastafari, but also provides options and ideas for the “communal self-development” of which Gilroy speaks. Kenneth Bilby has specifically discussed how music became the most powerful means of spreading Rastafari—as recordings circulate and migrate (along with the Jamaican people):

Although this music [reggae] becomes a primary vehicle for the expression of the movement's ideas, it is a thoroughly "modern" electrically-amplified music, and is performed by an instrumental ensemble which differs little from that employed by American and
European rock bands. The burgeoning local music industry continues to expand, and contributes to the rapid spread of the movement’s influence (1983, 203).6

Teddy Afro, the Ethiopian musician whom I will speak of also presents a sense of discussing these ideas—using the music of Rastafari, reggae music, so as to engage in a conversation about politics, freedom and “communal self-development” in a specifically Ethiopian context.

**Reggae in Ethiopia—The Purpose of the Music**

Of the popular Ethiopian artists who perform reggae music, the most popular is Teddy Afro. Teddy Afro is perhaps the most famous pop singer in Ethiopia today7; his music is primarily Amharic pop music that,

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6 I quote the remainder of Bilby’s description to demonstrate the eventual global reach of reggae and Bob Marley (described here as “a highly talented and ‘charismatic’ musician”), thereby describing the eventual global reach of Rastafari:

Meanwhile, an astute entrepreneur from the local elite realizes the potential appeal and marketability of local popular music abroad, particularly among white middle-class Americans and young Europeans, but also among fellow “sufferers” in other parts of the postcolonial world. A highly talented and “charismatic” musician is selected from the ranks of the movement, cast in a “pop star” mold, and promoted internationally. The timing is right, and the exotic “product” clicks. The way is paved for the acceptance abroad of other cult artists, and the music—which remains largely faithful to local aesthetics and continues to be a primary vehicle for the movement’s ideas—finds significant markets in Europe, North America, Africa, Japan, and other parts of the world. Along with the music travels a rich body of cultic texts and visual symbols, which are interpreted variously by the consumers of the music in different parts of the world, but which nearly everywhere have a similar, more general ideological appeal, based on the movement’s apparent “utopian” thrust and anti-colonialist, anti-capitalist (or more vaguely, rebellious, anti-authority) stance. The movement becomes firmly established within the “world system” and, by the good grace of various interlocking social, economic, and political forces, scores “converts” and sympathizers in every corner of the globe (1983, 203).

7 In 2006, Teddy Afro was arrested on 3 November, “accused of killing 18-year-old Degu Yibelete, a homeless man who came from Gojjam to live with his uncle before becoming a street dweller”. He was tried, found guilty and sentenced to six years imprisonment and a fine of 18,000 Ethiopian birr on 8 December 2008. On 18 February 2009, his sentence was reduced by four years. (All information from the following publication: Alemu, Hilina. “Teddy Afro’s Sentence Reduced Drastically”, *Addis Fortune* Vol. 9, no. 460. 22 February 2009). Afro was released on 14 August 2009. Anecdotal reporting (especially on blogs
like the majority of Amharic pop music, deals with topics to do with love and relationships. He has not only sung about Rastafari—as in his song “Bob Marley,” but he has actually worked with Rastafari musicians, as is evidenced in his video for that very song. Though often referred to as the “Reggae King” of Ethiopia, the reggae music of Teddy Afro is not really comparable to reggae music from Jamaica. It does have the rhythm emblematic of reggae, with the beat falling on the second count as opposed to the first count common to, for example, rock and roll. But the overall sound, however, bears more resemblance to the synthesizer driven Amharic pop music than it does bass driven reggae. The difference in rhythm, however, is important. One learns, in Ethiopia, about the different types of Ethiopian music. Many are based on rhythmic differences. A trip to an Ethiopian cultural restaurant often includes a show in which various ethnic musics and their respective dances are shown. Though a thorough investigation into the wide ranging styles of Ethiopian music is beyond the scope of this project, it can be said that, even for the amateur listener, different types of Ethiopian music have obvious rhythmic patterns.

Outside of Ethiopia—see http://ecadforum.com/blog/2009/08/03/teddy-afro-may-be-jailed-because-of-music/ or http://ethiounity.blogspot.com/2008/04/tplf-throws-teddy-afro-in-jail.html for examples)—suggests that the charges against him were less than legitimate. This is reflected in a BBC report, which reads: “His supporters say he was the victim of a political vendetta as his lyrics were identified with the opposition” (“Ethiopian Pop Star Freed”, BBC News 14 August 2009, http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/8201158.stm).  

8 There are also very specific traditional dances to go with different types of music. Attempting an Amhara dance to a Gurage song, for instance, would in general, in my experience, be viewed as odd by Ethiopians.
“rolling triplet rhythm”\(^9\), for instance, is demonstrative of Amharic folk music, which has been adapted into a pop form by artists like Teddy Afro. Therefore, Ethiopian listeners would notice the tell-tale off beat sound of reggae and recognize the appropriation of the traditionally Jamaican music.

Afro, however, did take more than a musical cue from Rastafari for his most well-known, reggae-tinged song, “Yasteseriyal”, from his 2005 album of the same name. Due to the controversy surrounding the 2005 Ethiopian elections in which “the opposition claimed the voting was rigged, and European Union observers said it was marred by irregularities”\(^{10}\), and the fact that the song criticizes the present EPRDF government, it was banned from radio airwaves immediately and the song remains banned to this day\(^{11}\). With “Yasteseriyal”, we can see the influence of Rastafari in terms of the use of reggae as communicative tool. Just as the relationship with Rastafari has developed the music into something that provides commentary on politics and society, so Teddy Afro has taken up this challenge. Unlike the majority of popular, secular Amharic music, which deals mostly in the topics of love and relationships\(^{12}\), in “Yasteseriyal”, Afro makes use of the reggae mode in a way that aligns with its developed

\(^{11}\) AddisJournal also notes that Kumneger, an Amharic magazine, listed the song as one of those still banned as of December 2008. (http://arefe.wordpress.com/2008/12/06/list-of-songs-banned-from-radio-ethiopia/)
\(^{12}\) A quick perusal of the most popular Amharic pop songs on Youtube demonstrates this focus. Though this is obviously not a thorough sample, it can be said that, of the most popular artists, Afro is quite unique.
function and presents commentary—in this case lyrics opposing the government.

A translation\textsuperscript{13} of the song demonstrates its Rastafarian references and its political content. The song begins with a chanting of “Jah yasteseriyal”, meaning “Jah will make them to be forgiven”. This is a play on the word “Jah”, which means “God” for Rastafarians, but also can be a use of the name “Janhoy”, an alternate name for Haile Selassie. The dual meaning of the lyric then can be “God” or “Haile Selassie”. Given that Teddy Afro, though often seen wearing Haile Selassie t-shirts and Rastafari paraphernalia, has never claimed to be Rastafari, it is unlikely that this lyric is addressing Haile Selassie as God, but rather utilizing a reggae/Rastafarian trope. This aligns Afro to the Rastafari and therefore further legitimizes his political music.

Further underlying his belief in a God that is not Haile Selassie, Afro, in stating that “Revenge/blood is evil and keeps us away from God” demonstrates his sense of Christian, not Rastafari, religious faith. While connecting himself to the Ethiopian population by referencing a Christian faith, he is at the same time making use of the Rastafari notion of music as a site for discussion and negotiation of political and cultural beliefs. If Marley’s music “helped many [Jamaicans] to discover their roots and the richness of their cultural heritage” (Campbell 1987, 135), Afro’s project

\textsuperscript{13} This translation was provided to me by Kristin Orgeret, a scholar who has studied the content of Teddy Afro’s lyrics. It is a variation of the translation used in her paper “When will the daybreak come? Popular music and political processes in Ethiopia” (2008).
seems to be similar. This is made evident when one looks at the following lines:

His Majesty down from the throne
Reduced to an ordinary prisoner taken by a wagen\textsuperscript{14}
Followed a revolution that began by digging
Sixty holes\textsuperscript{15} to bury elder officials
Then fill the entire field with masses of students’ bodies.
Then now, came the rebels all the way
Mending their warrior rags with seventeen needles\textsuperscript{16}
Wearing long hair symbolizing change
They took the seat to bring change
But like the previous leaders they
punished the past leaders.
We only see leaders changing seats/thrones, but no change in its real sense.

Here Afro describes the history of Ethiopia from the imperial regime of Haile Selassie, through the Dergue regime and up to the present EPRDF government. The Emperor was deposed, his government was toppled (and many members were killed, hence the reference to the sixty graves) and the student protests signaled the communist government. The reference to seventeen needles is the time in years taken by the opponents of the Dergue to prepare to overthrow Mengistu’s government. Afro’s

\textsuperscript{14} Referring to the Volkswagen by which Haile Selassie was taken to prison.
\textsuperscript{15} The plus or minus sixty officials of Haile Selassie’s officials killed by the Derg.
\textsuperscript{16} The seventeen years of armed struggle before EPRDF took power.
point here is that each time the government changes, there is actually no
real change—it is all about power. Each of the leaders simply wants an
opportunity to occupy the throne.

The song continues with a call for forgiveness: “Forgive him,”
sings Afro, “but complain about what he abused us with”. Afro then
requests “teaching” and wants to make sure that Ethiopia learns from the
past to grow towards unity: “Teach us mercy, make us one again.” He
then sings “Take something up and forgive each other . . . We need the
person who would tell us not to divide.” Both lines call for unity for the
country. Throughout “Yasteseriyal”, Afro presents a strong message of
not only protest against the Ethiopian government, but a desire to see
Ethiopians come together for peace and unity. Here, the perception of the
Rastafari and their related music is relevant—Afro is not utilizing the
sound and rhythm of reggae, he is utilizing the mode as a political
instrument—a mode that has a history that connects itself to Africa and is
a tool for communication and dissemination of ideas. Afro is known for
both love songs and songs that celebrate Ethiopian heroes (Haile
Gebreselassie, the famed long-distance runner is the topic of one of
Afro’s songs), but with “Yasteseriyal” he is providing the lyrics and
sound of a reggae song. Similar to reggae lyrics sung by the Rastafari, his
lyrics call for social justice, the questioning of power structures and the
development of an Ethiopian national identity in a broad sense. Certainly,
Afro could be seen as simply making use of reggae as a convenient way
to frame dissent. However, based on the following comments from
Ethiopians interviewed on the topic music in Addis Ababa’s record shops
by Kristin Skare Orgeret, it would seem that Afro’s use of reggae is
perhaps more than just convenient:

    Teddy’s songs opened new fields of discussion, and of course it
happened in the period of the elections, so the two events went
hand in hand [Music shop owner, interview 2007].
He [Teddy Afro] provided us with new tools to carve our reality.
He provided us with new images, or rather he opened our eyes to
images that had been right there in front of us all the time . . . He
showed us an alternative way [of] seeing and from there we can
discuss, agree or disagree [Interviewee, 2007]. (237, 2008)

Just as the Rastafari became “the bearers of protest, definers of
discontent, and protagonists of rebellion in Jamaican society” (Watson
1974, 339) through reggae, this also seems to be part of Afro’s project—
a project, that, from the above interviews, seems to be successful. Given
the fact that Bob Marley is the image of reggae (if not Rastafari) in the
popular imagination of Ethiopia, the music of Marley provides a model
for how to present reggae, should one wish to do so. Indeed, among
contemporary popular Ethiopian musicians, Afro seems alone in his use
of reggae in a way that reflects these Rastafari mores.
Reggae and the Style of Rastafari

On the other hand, the influence of reggae, Rastafari and Jamaica, can become completely non-spiritual and non-political in the Ethiopian context—taking up none of the socio-politico-spiritual relevance of a Teddy Afro type interpretation. This disconnects both reggae and Rastafari from any of its political or spiritual roots, thereby further distancing Ethiopians from the narrative of resistance for the Rastafari and the deeply held spiritual beliefs held by the repatriates.

Looking at videos and listening to songs from Jonny Ragga, a popular Ethiopian reggae singer is evidence of this. In his video for the love song “Pick Up Da Phone”, he begins by speaking Jamaican patois: “Wha gwaan?” he says into the phone. The song vacillates back and forth between grammatically incorrect English (“I was pain in the ass, maybe”, as an example) and Amharic. Apart from a reggae-tinged beat, any of the above described reggae elements are minimal. Almost symbolically suggesting this, Ragga is filmed in an upscale house in a room with nothing else but a Jamaican flag and two pictures of Bob Marley. None of this indicates any support for Rastafari or, frankly, even Bob Marley. The style is disconnected from any Rastafarian meaning in the context of Ethiopia and instead seems to present more of an attempt at an imitation of an American hip hop video, perhaps indicating a more general alignment with the west.

Token Jamaican paraphernalia appears again in “The Key”, a video in which Ragga is shown in front of large speaker boxes, emblematic of
Jamaican mobile discos, called “soundsystems”.\textsuperscript{17} He shakes his dreadlocks while again singing a love song. Both of these videos are far more similar to any popular American hip hop or pop music video than a Bob Marley reggae song. The image that Jonny Ragga presents is not that of a spiritually or politically motivated Rastafari, but rather simply utilizing the outward trappings of the Rasta image and combining it with an American hip hop sensibility, reflecting Jamaican dancehall\textsuperscript{18} artists like Sean Paul and Shaggy (very accessible in Ethiopian music shops) instead of Rastafari-affiliated acts such as Luciano, a reggae star who has performed in Addis, yet does not have the name recognition of the aforementioned Sean Paul.

Ragga is utilizing the symbols and images of Rastafari for his own purposes, which seems to be in the interest of constructing a pop sensibility that reflects images beyond the borders of Ethiopia. This could be a reflection of the Ethiopian interest in immigration outside of their home country. This interest is demonstrated, for example, in the Ethiopian popularity of the American Diversity Visa program, which since 1995 has offered 55,000 visas annually to qualified applicants internationally who have been entered into a lottery pool. Worldwide, “Ethiopia (both in number of applicants and in winners,) [ranks] number one over the totality

\textsuperscript{17} For a description and history of the soundsystem see Norman Stolzoff’s \textit{Wake the Town and Tell the People: Dancehall Culture in Jamaica} (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

\textsuperscript{18} Dancehall is both a place where music is played as well as a form of Jamaican music with its roots in reggae. For a broader treatment of dancehall music see again Stolzoff’s \textit{Wake the Town}; Carolyn Cooper’s \textit{SoundClash: Jamaican Dancehall Culture At Large} (London: Palgrave, 2005); and Sonjah Stanley-Niaah’s \textit{Dancehall: From Slave Ship to Ghetto} (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2009).
of the Diversity Visa program”19. Clearly America is attractive to
Ethiopians—and popular music stars, be they hip hop, reggae or dancehall,
are associated with America. In casual conversation with youth in
Shashemene, I was told that the Rastafari dress, look and act like
Americans—this conclusion came from a comparison with hip hop music
and style. They compared the two. One individual even said the following:
“I know that they come from America”20. These conclusions bear no
resemblance to the use of the same symbols and images where the Rastafari
themselves are concerned, not to mention their national origins.

Though Addis Ababa based Henock Mehari21 has no particular
interest in presenting a hip hop image, he, like Jonny Ragga, separates
reggae from any spiritual or political source. Mehari is the band leader of
his family band, the Mahari Brothers, made up of four of his brothers and
three other friends. Also like Jonny Ragga, all members of the band sport
dreadlocks. Though the band plays a number of different types of music,
such as pop, rock and R&B, they are widely known for playing at reggae
nights and in reggae concert events. One of his first statements to me
demonstrated his alignment where Rastafari is concerned: “Me and my
family, we are born again Christians. How we look, our dreadlocks—this is
just a style. We don’t believe in the Rastafarian faith,” he said. For Mehari,
and, as he says, for most Ethiopians, Rastafari is but a style.

20 Name has been changed. (local merchant, Shashemene), interview, 19 June 2007.
21 Mehari, Henock (Musician, Addis Ababa), interview, 9 August 2007. All quotations from
Mehari are from this interview.
Most Ethiopians are not into this faith. People might shout out
‘Rastafari’ on the street, but I can’t say that they are Rastafarian.
People always think that we are Rastafarian and call us Jamaican,
but we tell them that we are not Rastafarian. We are protestant. It is
a bit confusing here. People see everyone as grouped together. It is a
faith, but it is also a style. Because we love reggae music, some
people might follow the faith and through time they might believe in
it, but I don’t know anyone personally. The people I know who have
the style are not Rastafarian.

Mehari is able to separate the “faith” from the “style”.22 His desire to have
dreadlocks comes from a connection with the music, a music that is, as
described above, deeply interconnected with Rastafari, but that he can
separate from Rastafari. As he says:

Concerning music, everybody loves reggae music here. Bob Marley
is famous and well known here. This is one of the influences. And
reggae music and culture is getting bigger worldwide. It is less of a
Rastafarian thing. It is not just Rasta. I see the music as originally
theirs, but many artists have been adapted it to their beliefs . . . I see
it like normal music.

22 Dreadlocks are commensurate with Rastafari belief. The style has been utilized as a marker of
various types of identities and attitudes, political, cultural, individual or otherwise. For a concise
discussion and examples of black hair politics and the aesthetics of resistance as well as identity,
see Paul Dash, “Black Hair culture, politics and change”, International Journal of Inclusive
Education 10, no. 1 (2006): 27-37. For a study that takes the meaning and symbolism of
dreadlocks as its central focus, see M. Bahati Kuumba and Femi Ajanaku, “Dreadlocks: The Hair
Aesthetics of Cultural Resistance and Collective Identity formation” Mobilization: An
Even though Mehari speaks about how reggae is special to him, he is quick to add that he sees it as “normal music”—just another genre, however popular worldwide. Whereas the narrative of reggae is difficult to recount without reference to Rastafari, especially within its Jamaican context, when it is experienced on the world stage—or on an Ethiopian stage, its connection to the “original” owners, as Mahari would say, becomes more distant and less relevant.

This desire to disconnect reggae from Rastafari, and Bob Marley from Rastafari is expressed by Yakob Tafari23, a Harari singer who now lives in Addis. He is quite well known and his posters are often seen in the windows of music shops throughout the city—though, of course, next to posters of international stars like Americans Britney Spears and Jennifer Lopez as well as the Jamaican dancehall artist Sean Paul. Tafari’s ability to imitate Bob Marley was what caused him to enter the music industry: “The first song I sang was a Bob Marley song: ‘No Woman No Cry’. I rehearsed with [a band] and they told me I had a nice voice. Then we had a concert for a small party and the people liked my voice. Your voice is good, they said.”

Though Tafari insists he has “become the top reggae music singer in Ethiopia”, he is clear about his beliefs:

I sing mostly reggae music, but I am not Rastafari. I believe in the Holy Bible and that is my rule. What the Bible says is it. There are

23 Name has been changed. (Singer, Addis Ababa), interview, 13 August 2007. All quotations come from this interview.
some Orthodox, some Protestant, some Catholic, some Rastafari followers—but me, Christian, only Christian. I don’t interfere with the religion, but I very much like their music style—I love the music. Reggae music is real music, revolutionary music. I like the rhythm. Because of these things, this is what impressed me. This is why Bob Marley, especially, impressed me. He inspired me to be a singer. All people when they see you with dreads, they think Rastafari, but Rastafari is a philosophy or religion. I am Christian. When I was a kid, I liked Bob Marley, and when I saw him, I wanted to look like him because he inspired me to be a singer.

Though Tafari refers to “real, revolutionary” music, his connection is more to the “music style” and “the rhythm”. His dreadlock hairstyle is meant to connect him to the music of Bob Marley, but not the faith of the famous Jamaican singer. Beyond the resonance with music and success external to Ethiopia, the Rastafari, and reggae in particular, present an inspiration for Tafari to involve himself in artistic creation. The connection seems to privilege the art of the Rastafari. There is a sense that the Rastafari are artistic, through reggae, but also through art in general.

*Rastafari and Artistic Expression*

Mehari explains his feelings about how the Rastafari population have made an impact on Ethiopia through art in general:

They have made a lot of contribution concerning art. There is an art school in Addis. All the students, if they arrive at the school without
dreads, they will start to dread their hair. I don’t know why, but they do. You can easily tell if someone is going to art school because of this. They relate it to the inspiration behind their art. They make their beards like this too. It never has anything to do with drug use. It is always about the art.

Saying “they relate [dreads] to the inspiration behind their art” indicates that the perception both Mehari and the art students have is that there is something artistic about the Rastafari. Instead of viewing art, or specifically music, as a conduit or catalyst for political or spiritual discussion, it becomes a source of artistic inspiration and, perhaps, authenticity.

Getachew Yossef, a teacher at the Addis Ababa School of Fine Arts has dreadlocks as well and greatly admires the Rastafari. Though not acknowledging the divinity of Haile Selassie, Getachew demonstrates a perception of the Rastafari as artistically inspirational through their focus on African identity and the empowerment of Africans. Interestingly, Getachew came to this realization about Rastafari and Africa while in Germany. In an interview, Getachew recounted a story of being in Germany and being told how lucky he was to be out of Ethiopia. “There was no knowledge about the other world [outside Germany],” he said. Wanting to be proud of his country, he described to the Ethiopian Reporter how he “found solace from reggae music and African brothers whom [he] met in the student solidarity group in school”. As Getachew describes: “Reggae

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24 Getachew Yosef (Teacher, Addis Ababa School for Fine Arts), interview, 20 January 2008. All quotations from Yosef are from this interview.
gave me a winner’s spirit; that is my music, African music, and world
music for those who are oppressed.”25 The title of the article in the
*Ethiopian Reporter* makes obvious the connection between reggae and
Getachew’s art by suggesting he is “singing reggae on canvas”.

Getachew moves beyond a simple appreciation of the style of
Rastafari through his understanding of the oppression of Africa on a world
scale. His experience in Germany led him to understand the narrative of
colonial oppression that has, as mentioned previously in this thesis,
informed the Rastafari conception of identity and specifically Ethiopianness.
Getachew paints images of Rastafari as well as Africa and Ethiopia and
says that his work “‘continue[s the] works . . . of the ‘great brother Bob
Marley’”. Does this mean that there is a Rastafari spiritual component to
Getachew’s work? Yes, if this means “peace, love, freedom and unity for
Africa”. If it means a belief in Haile Selassie as divine or condoning
marijuana usage? No. Getachew feels that Ethiopians should respect the
love the Rastafari have for Selassie, and be “proud” that people “belove”
the former Emperor as a God. However, when pressed, Getachew
mentioned how his “father worked in the palace” and that he “knew the
Emperor”. He then finished his commentary, saying “he is a king. I have
my own outlook . . . there was no African who visited Europe like he did.
He is a gift from God.” As for marijuana, Getachew insisted that he didn’t
like to use it and suggested that young people should not use the drug:

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February 2005, 25.
“Most young people [who use marijuana] in Ethiopia are jobless, even if they have studied. They are spoiled by smoking marijuana. If my kid smokes marijuana, he is killing himself and his family too.”

For Getachew, it is the celebration of Ethiopia and the values of peace, freedom and unity that he respects. The religious element is eschewed as being outside an Ethiopian understanding—here presented as a personal knowledge. Getachew’s experience as well as his father’s in having known Selassie is the reason for concluding that the Emperor was not divine. Getachew, though he does not believe in the Rastafari faith, discussed how the people in Shashemene were “good role models” due to their building of “schools and clinics”. Here, even though Getachew disagrees with the divinity of Rastafari and has issues with the use of drugs, the value he finds in Rastafari stems from art—from the powerful social and political values expressed in the music, which in turn inspires his art.

*Where is the Rastafari in the art and music of Ethiopians?*

Through this chapter, I have attempted to establish the link between art, specifically reggae and Rastafari, and then demonstrate how this relationship and reggae itself is received, reinterpreted, retooled and rethought in different ways by Ethiopians. Some artists will utilize the political thrust of Rastafari, such as Teddy Afro. Others, while acknowledging the fact that Bob Marley is a positive presence, are more interested in the politics of Rastafari style, image and sound, such as Jonny Ragga, Yakob Tafari and Henock Mehari. When turning to Getachew
Yossef, we are presented with an artist who has attempted to integrate Rastafari themes with his own African consciousness, looking to how Rastafari can symbolically connect with the message he wishes to send.

As I move into the final chapter of this work, I hope to extend and expand this approach. There is a gap between the Rastafari and the Ethiopian population. It is a gap of perception and of identity, one that exists on a local level, both conceptually and spatially. It also exists on a wider, more popular level as is seen in the response to the Africa Unite concert and the artistic production of Rastafari as exemplified by Bob Marley. The following chapter will look at how this gap might be narrowed—how the idea of bringing Rastafari values in line with Ethiopian consciousness, as has been achieved by Getachew Yossef in the artistic realm, can be done in another way. Getachew connected himself, his Ethiopian identity, with that of the Rastafari. Alternatives for integration into Ethiopian society and potentially accessing a level of citizenship within the country are possible, but they again must take into account Ethiopianness and connect across the gap between conceptions of identity.
Chapter Six

Development and Cultural Citizenship:

The Rastafari in Ethiopia at the Turn of the Millennium

Over coffee in Addis Ababa, I spoke to Ras Tagas King about the growing numbers of Rastafari in Ethiopia, both in Shashemene and elsewhere. Having moved to Ethiopia in 1988 with his wife and two children, King is a qualified building engineer and his wife is a teacher, working at an English international school. His main focus, however, is with the Ethiopian World Federation. King is dedicated to Ethiopia and “Ethiopia’s progress”, as he explains himself, but laments the lack of citizenship rights for the repatriate Rastafari community. He was passionate about the situation and spoke of the difficulty in dealing with this issue:

It’s the legal recognition that’s lacking in our situation. What country in the world could you go to and spend thirty or forty years and not be a citizen? Have second and third generation children who are not citizens? This is the only one I know. It’s unbelievable—we have children born here who’ve never left Ethiopia and are asked to get Jamaican passports . . . It’s ironic that we should be in such a situation. People like me, professionals who have been here twenty years legally, who have applied for citizenship are just fobbed off, fobbed off, fobbed off. To us it’s ridiculous. We know it’s an issue that has to be addressed and has to be corrected.

Ras Tagas King describes the present situation as regards citizenship for Rastafari repatriates desiring to live in Ethiopia. From King’s perspective, “it’s ridiculous”: 
since Rastafari have been settling in Ethiopia for over forty years, on land
Emperor Haile Selassie “[gave] to [his] foreparents”, why, after all this time, is
citizenship such a problem? Why, as King, himself a professional living with his
family in Addis Ababa, asks, are residents of Ethiopia, residents who contribute to
the economic development of the country, not provided with access to citizenship?
Why are their children denied this right? How do the Rastafari function under
these circumstances?

Certainly, the Rastafari are a unique community in Ethiopia. As has been
established in previous chapters, the relationship between the Rastafari population
and the wider Ethiopian community creates the environment in which the
repatriates live. There are the varying, and perhaps more importantly, conflicting,
perceptions of identity on behalf of the Ethiopia and Rastafari populations. From
the Ethiopian socio-historical perspective, the Rastafari community is primarily
viewed as a separate, alien culture. The spatial orientation of the land has led to,
and is representative of, the disjuncture between the Rastafari and Ethiopian
communities. From a broader, popular point of view, there is a large cultural gap
between the Rastafari and Ethiopians. In this chapter, however, I will look
specifically at the issue of citizenship and the connection (as well as potential for
future connections) between Rastafari initiatives and cultural citizenship within
Ethiopian society.

In 2003, according to Bonacci’s work on the history of the Rastafari
community, the immigration minister analysed the legal situation of 120
repatriates living in the Jamaica sefer—as discussed earlier, this is located in an
area of Melka Oda, a former village that is now a part of the Shashemene woreda. Of these individuals, seventy-seven were in the country under a tourist visa, thirteen a business visa, and thirty-one had residence permits—not one was considered an Ethiopian citizen under the laws of the country.

In Joseph Owens’s 1976 book *Dread: The Rastafarians of Jamaica*, he described the desire of Rastafari to achieve Ethiopian citizenship—it would differentiate the act of repatriation from migration: “There can be no question of their going to Africa simply as Jamaican citizens, as immigrant foreigners. They must be accepted as Africans, as Ethiopians who are simply returning home after a painfully prolonged time abroad” (1976, 232). On 21 November 2007, at the same community development meeting discussed in chapter three, held at the Municipal government offices in Shashemene, Ethiopia over thirty years after the publication of Owens’s book, this very same issue was raised. One of the Rastafari representatives

. . . expressed surprise that there was no classification for the Rastafari Community who have been looking to be accorded the same rights as Ethiopians, since [they] argue as Ethiopians, who have returned after being away for hundreds of years. He made the appeal that [the Rastafari] should not be treated as foreigners, but wished to be classified as Ethiopians returning home, noting that in many countries to which people migrate, classification is attached.”

It is important to note that here, the Rastafari representative makes use of a meaning of ‘Ethiopian’ that does not necessarily connect to the experience of the
recent Ethiopian diaspora, citizens who leave the country for familial, educational, economical or other reasons,\(^1\) returning later in life to settle in their home country. Regardless of the difference in situation for repatriate Rastafari, the representative’s definition of himself in this way, as a homecoming citizen of Ethiopia, rather than an immigrant seeking citizenship status, bears weight in the context of the Rastafari perception of Ethiopia as illustrated in chapter one.

Joshua Smith\(^2\), one of the partners in a tofu factory located within Shashemene, on land designated as being meant for industrial purposes, had a similar comment to make:

One of the things that the Ethiopians and Africans don’t realize that we are Africans. They look at us like we are foreigners. But in our hearts, we are not foreigners. When they say these things it hurts us a lot. When we reach here, it’s not good to hear these things from them. So they should more education about who we are and the purpose of us. They’ve been always talking about the citizenship thing. These initiatives are being made now. The interaction with the people is good. The young people, they like the Rastafarian movement. The older ones, the ones that were here before, they don’t really agree.

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\(^1\) Here I use the term “diaspora” to refer to recent Ethiopian emigrants. In both Akyeampong (2000) and Zeleza (2005), they use the term to describe recent African immigration to countries like Canada, the UK and the United States of America, Zeleza offering that these individuals, along with other dispersed peoples, expand Gilroy’s concept of the “Black Atlantic”. Within Ethiopia, the word “disapora” is used to refer to Ethiopians who have immigrated—some come back to Ethiopia, and those people are commonly referred to as “returnees”.

\(^2\) Name changed by request (Tofu factory partner), interview, 16 January 2008.
Given the belief system of Rastafari, all of these statements demonstrate a desire to be viewed as citizens of Ethiopia. As Smith says, the Rastafari are “Africans” and, moreover, not “foreigners” in Ethiopia.

As regards the Ethiopian government, it would seem that, on first glance, the country does indeed allow for foreigners to become Ethiopians, much like the other countries referenced by the Rastafari representative. This can be viewed, legally, within the present constitution. Article 6.2 of the 1995 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia states the following:

2. Foreign nationals may acquire Ethiopian nationality. (78)

This should effectively mean that foreigners desiring to become Ethiopian should eventually find themselves in possession of an Ethiopian passport. As it presently stands, however, this is simply not the case. In Article 33, the constitution states that “Ethiopian nationality may be conferred upon foreigners in accordance with law enacted and procedures established consistent with international agreements ratified by Ethiopia” (1995, 91-2). What, then, is the problem? There is simply no system in place—there has been no “law enacted and procedures established”. No citizenship process has been developed as yet. Due to the reality of Ethiopian political history, in which there has been a shift from constitutional monarchy, to communist dictatorship, to the form of democracy that exists now, the lack of government movement on issues such as land rights (an issue, as discussed in chapter three, that is relevant to Rastafari as well as many Ethiopians) and citizenship places the Rastafari in a position whereby, in 2008, they have been living in Ethiopia for decades without access to any process
in which citizenship can be gained. As residents, the Rastafari currently have no representation before the government. And as a group of immigrants, they are not a priority for the present regime.

A lack of administrative experience relative to immigration and its concomitant procedures is relevant. And, another part of the reason that there are no political or other processes to help newcomers to integrate is because Ethiopia is not a country for which immigration is a commonly discussed concern. In 2005, only 0.7 per cent of the population was classified as immigrant from an external nation. Of that number, over 90 percent were from neighbouring nations, the huge majority coming from Eritrea and Somalia (Shaw 2007, 5-6). The Rastafari are therefore not only a marginal group within Ethiopia, but also within the very small group of immigrants to the country.

Though in 2002 an Ethiopian Expatriate Affairs General Directorate was established as part of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, with the purpose of “working closely with diaspora Ethiopians and facilitating their activities in Ethiopia” (Belai 2007), there is no similar office to assist the integration of newcomers immigrating to the country. The Ethiopian diaspora has services and support in repatriating to Ethiopia. One need only to walk down Bole Road, the main road leading from the main Ethiopian airport to the centre of Addis Ababa, to see the involvement of repatriated Ethiopian citizens. Businesses are run by Ethiopians who emigrated to America, gained success, and have now returned to their home country in the interest of contributing to the economy. As Tadiwos Bekele, who left his adopted city of Boston to return and run a swanky spa in
Addis—appropriately named the Boston Day Spa—says “Ethiopia is growing, and I want to be part of its development.” Since emigration to the country is so rare, these same services are not available to any other foreigners, including Rastafari.

The point here is that with Ethiopian citizenship comes access to land; without this, it is impossible to acquire or lay claim to a piece of land. As discussed in chapter three, after the Selassie era government fell, the incoming Dergue regime issued proclamation 31, which nationalised all rural lands, and declared them the collective property of Ethiopians (Bonacci 2007, 390). To review, in terms of specific land ownership, the results of this agreement between the communist government and the Rastafari, who were present in Shashemene and living on the granted land, meant that a fraction of the land grant remained the property of the Rastafari who were already there. The land allocation, however, was associated with development potential: Bonacci reports that, along with allowing for the use of the 180 hectares, the government also declared that “No land [would be] available for new arrivals until the provisional military government [was] satisfied that the project had been completely and effectively developed” (qtd. in Bonacci 2007, 393).

When looking at the present situation, it would seem that there might be further loss of land: “Even I don’t think they will keep those ten hectares each

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5 “‘Aucune terre ne sera disponible pour de nouveaux arrivants jusqu’à ce que le gouvernement militaire provisoire soit satisfait que le projet actuel ait été complètement et effectivement développé’.” My translation.
family for reasons I don’t know,” said Jamaican Honorary Consular General Gebre Gebru, “It’s a policy decision. Also at this time the town of Shashemene is spreading. So those who lie on the plan of the city—Ethiopian or otherwise—they lose their land because of the master plan of the city. At this moment, you can’t say anything. You can’t build roads. You can suggest replacements. I can see from experience that these people used to own the land without any certificates.”

This expansion of the town and therefore the alteration of Shashemene’s space was discussed in chapter three. The Rastafari can make “suggestions” about the use of the land, but it will be considered under the rules of the most recent constitution. Also, due to the recent development of the master plan in 2003, it means that certain pieces of land have been dedicated to certain purposes—industry, education, residential and otherwise.

Gebru has seen the results of the struggle for land as it relates to citizenship issues: “Many Jamaicans who settle there have no rights. They have no residence permit so they live illegally. I don’t know the numbers. When I go there I see people I have known for a long time, but I don’t know the newcomers. They don’t want to show themselves because of their status with the country”.

Though some of the residents have legitimate claim to land, as those who received land under the Dergue, there are many who have repatriated since that point and do not have the same status.

Even though the Rastafari cannot buy additional land, they most certainly are not leaving Ethiopia. In fact, more are coming, as Jamaican Consul General Gebre Gebru explains: “Over the past ten years there are more Jamaicans coming

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to Ethiopia. During the Dergue there were few, but over the last decade there have been more coming, even in Addis Ababa, you can not necessarily tell where they are.” Gebru acknowledges the only policy—albeit unofficial—that the government has towards the Rastafari: “There is a policy that Ethiopia follows, but they don’t harass the Jamaicans. I don’t know what will happen next. Because of the relationship they have with Ethiopia, the Ethiopian government is just keeping an eye on them and letting it go for the sake of the relationship, but no one will know what will come later.”

What, then, are the possibilities for the Rastafari? Since legal recognition of citizenship is not immediately forthcoming, if ever possible, how can the Rastafari negotiate this situation? I believe it is possible through gaining cultural citizenship capital: because land rights present a barrier to traditional citizenship, the alternative is cultural citizenship. In the following section I will define cultural citizenship in order to begin to argue this point.

**Cultural Citizenship**

Nick Stevenson argues, in “Cultural Citizenship in the ‘Cultural Society’: A Cosmopolitan approach” that “citizenship should be seen as a social practice ‘in which the emphasis is less on legal rules and more on norms, practices, meanings and identities’” (2003, 331). Jan Pakulski has argued that ‘cultural’ citizenship should be viewed in terms of satisfying demands for full inclusion into the social community (qtd. in Stevenson 2003, 333).

These ideas of cultural citizenship, for Stevenson, are related to the ways in which “transnational spheres of governance, instantaneous news, and global
networks amongst new social movements . . . undermine, or at least call into question, the correspondence that citizenship has traditionally drawn between belonging and the nation-state” (2003, 333). Given the contemporary connections between nations and cultures, through technology as well as new unions and treaties, the sense of national identity has become less related to a specific country of birth. This concept of cultural citizenship has, therefore, been utilized in the context of globalized western societies. The Rastafari experience in Ethiopia demonstrates a way in which this concept can be used in a non-western, supposedly non-globalized environment.

As has been seen through an investigation into Ethiopian identity, interviews with Ethiopians in Shashemene and beyond, as well as analysis of media coverage, there is a wide-ranging sense of what it means, in the third Ethiopian millennium, to be Ethiopian. I have established that Ethiopia is not a homogenous country with a consistent sense of national identity. Though Ethiopians have many different identities, with the advent of the EPRDF’s controversial establishment of specific ethnic regions in 1991, the issue of identity has become all the more fraught.

This may not be a so-called “developed”, western society, but it is a nation for whom cultural citizenship—what Toby Miller suggests “concerns the maintenance and development of cultural lineage through education, custom, language, and religion and the positive acknowledgment of difference in and by the mainstream” (2002, 231)—is of utmost importance. Acknowledging that “ideal citizenship can never quite be attained” (2007, 39), Miller insists that
turning to the cultural version of citizenship is necessary because “citizenship is no longer easily based on soil or blood. And the state is no longer the sole frame of citizenship in the face of new nationalisms and cross-border affinities that no single governmental apparatus can contain” (2002, 242).

This may be true for Western societies, as is evidenced by Miller’s case studies, which all deal with the “multicultural” societies of the West, but it is also true for Ethiopia in which so many different groups co-exist under the banner of Ethiopia. Themselves alone, the Rastafarians within Ethiopia, represent over twenty different nationalities. Ethiopia is negotiating relationships between various cultural groups, especially in environments such as Shashemene. Rather than instantaneous news or transnational governance making nation-state less relevant, it is the reality, as discussed in chapter one, that Ethiopia has always been, and continues to be a nation of nations.

But what is this cultural citizenship exactly? Does it differ from other forms of civic identity? Miller suggests that “citizenship involves membership in a community and therefore political participation in the running of that community. This implies a doctrine of rights that are granted on a broadly based, social level, but, paradoxically, function on an individual level in such areas as freedom of association, speech, information, a personal liaison” (1993, 12). We have seen that the Rastafari have been involved in the management and administration of their own community and also the Shashemene community though meeting with the municipal government as well as the wider population, even if at a popular level, through the Africa Unite concert. Indeed, it is cultural
citizenship that allows Rastafari a more full involvement in the community within Ethiopia.

In Miller’s *Cultural Citizenship: Cosmopolitanism, Consumerism and Television in a Neoliberal Age* he defines three “zones of citizenship”:

- The political (the right to reside and vote)
- The economic (the right to work and prosper)
- The cultural (the right to know and speak) (2007, 35)

As it stands, the Rastafari are denied political citizenship and are offered economic citizenship—as has been described through reference to the municipal government’s requests. Through an engagement with the economic “zone of citizenship”, it would seem, from looking at a number of examples, that the Rastafari are, in fact, working towards cultural citizenship. For Miller, “citizenship has always been cultural” (2007, 51), however, for the Rastafari, it would seem that through development and business initiatives, they are increasingly confronting political, economic and cultural divisions with development and investment into Ethiopia, thereby increasing what I would refer to as cultural citizenship capital.

Through the denial of official citizenship, as a result of the political and legal environment in which the Rastafari live, this community has been, as Stevenson would point out, forced to focus “less on legal rules and more on norms, practices, meanings and identities.” The Rastafari in Ethiopia have been developing and continue to develop various initiatives that are working, in multiple ways, attempting to integrate the Rastafari into the community of
Shashemene and wider Ethiopian society. Rather than fighting against a structure that has denied citizenship for so long, the Rastafari community is working with whatever opportunities are legally available, but focusing more on activities that not only engage with the “economic zone” but also develop this sense of cultural citizenship and belonging. Therefore, the concept of cultural citizenship is an ideal framework for analysis of the ways in which the Rastafari of Ethiopia engage with the experience of being in Ethiopia.

**Business Initiatives and Visibility**

Within Shashemene, one can observe the growth of business initiatives. In addition to small businesses that line the road leading into the town, Rastafari have established two flagship local hotels: the Majestic Rift Valley Hotel and the Lily of the Valley Hotel. These hotels attract tourists to the area, but are also used for various events (I have attended a number of events at the Rastafari owned Rift Valley Hotel) and conferences. The hotels themselves were developed through the financial advice and assistance from the local Dashen Bank—a private bank that has branches throughout Ethiopia.

In an interview, Kebede Asfew, the former manager of the Shashemene Dashen Bank⁷ described how the hotels “presented a feasibility study to the bank.” He then explained the process:

After we went through it we found that the project was viable. And that area is also a tourist area, given that you go from Addis to get to Arba Minch and the south. So tourists can pass by and have rest down there. It’s

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⁷ Asfew, Kebede (Kebede Asfew is now, in 2009, manager of a Dashen Bank in the merkato (market) area of Addis Ababa.
also good for people going to Wondo Genet. The money for the project will be repaid within eight year’s time. This was for both [hotel] projects. They were separate, but equally viable.8

Though the manager said he “would be very happy if they would be given citizenship”, he was quick to explain to me that the owners of the hotels are very much not Ethiopian: “The Lily of the Valley is owned by two Jamaicans, but they claim that they are not Jamaicans, that they are from Trinidad. One of the owners of the Rift Valley resides in Canada, and the other is from England.” This was an important point for him to make, because, as the conversation continued, he explained how the Rastafarians did not seem to be developing the area enough. “The Rastafarians are not involved in any kind of economic discussion with the other people,” he said, “so the development is not as fast as expected, because the people who are in business belong to a different ethnic group.” He then went on to underline the fact that “Gurage people9 own most of the businesses”, although in Shashemene “there are also some other ethnic groups like Amharas and Tigrays involved in the cereal trade because Bale [a nearby town] is a cereal centre.” The Rastafari are outside of this traditional divide of ethnicity—the Gurage are, traditionally, business people. The Rastafari do not share in this tradition; they are not a group for which there are particular ethnic-based traditional views (which one might refer to as stereotypes).

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8 Wondo Genet is a popular hot spring resort located a short drive (thirty minutes) from Shashemene.
9 The Gurage ethnic group is known for being business owners. Of course, this is a generalization, however, in the Addis Ababa Merkato—the largest market district in East Africa—the overwhelming majority of shop owners are Gurage. This would seem to be the case in Shashemene as well.
Therefore, this was the reason, for Asfew, why “they really only have very small businesses.” And though Asfew felt that the relationship between the Shashemene townspeople and the Rastafari was “quite good,” this simply because Rastafari are

. . . not economically powerful, the town does not pay that much attention to the Jamaicans. They are very small in number and they are living through Western Union—money transfer from outside the country, Europe, America. They don’t have effective businesses. They are all closed. You only see the Haile Selassie painted on the side.

For Asfew, the Rastafari are an economic resource when they develop viable projects within the community—not small, independent businesses. Instead of viewing the issue of money transfer in the context of a remittance economy he views the Rastafari as simply reliant on external sources of funds, because they are not part of the economic structure of the country. This, along with the reliance on money sent from other parts of the world underlines the foreignness of the Rastafari themselves. An effective business would engage with the people of the town, and the economic infrastructure of the Ethiopian community at large. Asfew felt that the hotel would be most useful for local business conferences and government functions. His view was that these types of clients were more likely

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than tourists. As someone who is a foreigner, I am aware that the tourist market for Shashemene is reasonable, given the context of Ethiopia’s attractions in the area: the town is often a stopover on the way to the south, but there are also more local destinations beyond those mentioned by Kebede, such as Lake Awassa and the Bale Mountains. People do travel to Shashemene for the purpose of seeing the Rastafari community, but this is, admittedly, a small number and, according to local comments, the majority of these visitors are foreigners. The people that Asfew discusses, those going to Arba Minch or to Wondo Genet, are, as he described, domestic tourists or business traffic. The reliance on the business of the Ethiopian population is what is most likely to make it possible for the Rastafari to be able to pay back the loans of which Asfew speaks as well as generate local acceptance for Rastafari development projects. The use of the hotel for events relating to the Ethiopian Millennium—including a municipal government ball—as well as weddings, which I have witnessed on at least half-a-dozen occasions,\(^\text{11}\) are examples of the economic potential of which Asfew speaks.

Answering the question of what should the Rastas do, Asfew had the following response:

They have to involve themselves through development. They have to invest. They have to attract further Jamaican investors. They also have to make their projects visible. The people need to know about the projects. If, for instance, a school is constructed, it is to the advantage of the

\(^{11}\) During the summer of 2007, I stayed at the Rift Valley Hotel during periods of my fieldwork. There were at least six weddings that were held during this period of time. I was not in attendance at any of these weddings, I simply observed that the receptions were held at the hotel. On a regular basis, it appeared that meetings were held at the hotel as well. As an example, on 6 September 2007, there was a lunch meeting of local mayors convened at the hotel.
population. They have to do those kinds of projects and shift the focus.

Then, the whole opinion will be changed.

This would also allow the Rastas access to land. As Asfew explained, the Rastafari can gain land the “same way as anyone else. They can have ID as residents of Shashemene—as an expatriate resident. Like any other foreign investor, they can have an investment license and a work permit.”

Gebre Gebru agreed with this advice:

[The Rastafari should] stay legally. They will benefit if they become investors. If they invest something, there are requirements in the investment office. If they meet those requirements, they can settle easily here and they will get their resident permit. For sure they should try to do what they have promised to the investment office to do. They have to do it, otherwise when they go to renew their permit, and the office doesn’t see any progress, they will be in trouble. Investment must be a large investment. It is open for you to invest here if you have a lot of money.

Like the people who built the Rift Valley Hotel in Shashemene.

Like Asfew, Gebru views projects like the hotels as viable investments in the country.

Interestingly, when Asfew was explaining his view of the economic potential of the Rastafari population, he highlighted the strong feelings Rastafari have towards Ethiopia, their sense of connection, but, what impressed him the most was their respect for Ethiopian culture and history. “I like the Rastafarians very much,” he explained. “They love our country and claim that they have
ancestors from Ethiopia. They consider Haile Selassie as a saint or divine person. They like our flag. They are, of course, using cannabis and some misbehave in Shashemene.” Asfew then told me of how the owner from Canada has many children, all named after Ethiopian heroes. He also reported that the man had converted to Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity and was very dedicated, underlining the fact that he adheres to the strict fasting regulations of the church. “Wednesday and Friday,” he reported, “he doesn’t even drink water. He is ardent Orthodox.”

This was an important point for Asfew, and an important element of cultural citizenship. To be accepted within Ethiopian society, and specifically Shashemene society, the Rastafari first need to contribute and then they need to demonstrate knowledge of and care for the culture of the people of Ethiopia.

**Tofu and Cultural Knowledge**

A recent business venture seems to address some of the issues discussed by Asfew and outlined by the terms of or criteria for cultural citizenship. Along with larger-scale, visible business initiatives such as the two hotels, the Rastafari have established a tofu factory. The company, called Royal Afrakan Link (or “RALCO”), began as a joint venture between three Rastafari in 2004. This business is of particular interest as it connects the Rasta practice of vegetarianism with the Ethiopian Orthodox practice of fasting. There are 250 fasting days in the Ethiopian Orthodox church calendar. Only 180 of these fasting days are required for those who are not monks, nuns or clergy. The fasting days fall on most Wednesdays and Fridays, except during specific longer periods of fasting. On

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12 Fasting is “strictly observed by all baptized members of the church” and involves abstinence from “meat, egg, butter, milk, and cheese” (Yeshaq 1997, 133). It would seem that the Rastafari in question was taking a more extreme approach.
these days and during these periods, “fast generally implies one meal a day to be taken either in the evening or after 2:45 pm with total abstention from meat, fats, eggs and dairy products.”

Fasting essentially demands a vegan diet, which matches the requirements of certain Rastafari who abide by an Ital diet, which does not include meat or animal products. Tofu factory representative Joshua Smith described the parity between fasting and Rastafari eating restrictions:

We had this dream, this idea, to come and provide fasting food. As Rastas, our true faith and culture is to abstain from eating meat products and animal products and provide for our community. Also, however, we decided to start the company because we are living here and we need to have things within our culture and also for Ethiopians because they have so many fasting days. So it is good for the Rasta community and it is good for the whole country.

Through this explanation, it is evident that the product of the tofu factory can act as a connection between the Rastafari and surrounding Ethiopian community. Attempting to provide for the needs of the Rasta community while recognizing the needs of Orthodox Christians and reaching out to this population, recognizing the needs of Orthodox Christians and reaching out to this population,

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13 There are seven official fasting periods in a year. These periods are as follows:
1. All Wednesdays and Fridays, except for the fifty days after Eatser.
2. Tsome Nevivat, or the Fast of the Prophets.
4. Nenawe (the Niniveh fast of three days).
5. Abye Tsome (the great Lent fast of fifty-five days).
6. Tsome Hawariat (the Fast of the Apostles).
7. Tsome Filseta (Fast of the Assumption). (Yeshaq 1995, 133)
For specific dates of the fasts, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church Calendar can be found online at http://www.ethiopianorthodox.org/english/calendar.html.
14 A basic description of an Ital diet is that it is all natural and vegetarian. For a treatment of Ital history, practices and foods, see Dickerson, Mandy G., I-tal Foodways: Nourishing Rastafarian Bodies. Louisiana State University. Unpublished MA dissertation.
the tofu factory creates a link between the two cultures. In addition, the Soya beans used to make the tofu are purchased locally, thereby engaging with the domestic farming economy. Smith acknowledges that the company is “now providing on a small scale, nothing big, doing tofu, Soya products,” but they are “going into farming programs now looking to grow into other products like Soya milk, ice cream, burgers, a whole range.” As for the product itself, tofu is not a traditional Ethiopian food. It may be the type of food that would be useful for fasting days, but, as Smith explained, “it is not well known to the Ethiopian public, but, instead, to foreigners.”

According to Smith, given that Rastafari are “here to stay in Ethiopia—as Ethiopia is our spiritual home”, there is a need for understanding the relationship between themselves and Ethiopians. Reflecting Asfew’s comments about integration, it would seem that Smith is cognizant of what is necessary to increase the possibility for cultural citizenship. “The response of the Ethiopians to us being here is good,” he said.

We had to be very strong spiritually over the years because of the political or religious influence or impact that we have, so the government and the people at first looked at us very skeptically. But now the people are coming around; the government itself is coming around. They are realizing that we are contributing to the development of the community and the country as well, so we are getting a favourable response. Now we are here showing that we mean to contribute to society. When you are doing
something then people tend to see you more. When you are here not doing anything but struggling over the years, no one notices you. We see here that the concept of visibility is important to Smith, as it is to Asfew.

By making development and business projects visible, this increases the positive perception on behalf of the Ethiopian community, but it also engages with this very same community. There is an acknowledgement of the significance of economics to cultural citizenship. It may be difficult to become a citizen of Ethiopia, but someone who can invest along cultural lines is more quickly thought of as a fellow citizen. It forces both sides into an awareness of the other.

In addition, Smith recognizes the contentious issue of the Oromo perspective, thus demonstrating an understanding of Ethiopian culture and the importance of ethnic identity. “But now with the government even, we are getting a good response,” he explained.

The Oromo people should try and work with us. There have been a lot of political problems over the years because this land grant was given to us, but it was taken away from us. There is some tension between the Rasta and Oromo perspective, but now they are slowly coming around because the central or federal government gave directives to work with us more. But through the love of Ethiopia and our faith, we try our best to really do something here—to let them see that we do something.

Again, there is the focus on visibility, but here combined with the acknowledgement of the Oromo perspective on elements such as Haile Selassie
and land rights. Smith presents a sensibility towards the issues of ethnic identity and development within both Shashemene and wider Ethiopia.

This combined understanding is also available in the company literature, which is available in both English and Amharic, but unfortunately not Afaan Oromoo. Not only does a pamphlet offered by the company suggest that the tofu be used for fasting meals, but the “vision” of RALCO is stated as threefold:

1. Provide its customers with an alternative from animal base foods to a more balanced lifestyle.
2. Provide the best fasting options for protein and nutrition with locally manufactured products.
3. Ensure that premium quality and affordability goes hand in hand.

In addition to a standard statement of the quality of its product, the pamphlet’s first two statements are representative of both Ethiopian and Rastafari culture. Fasting is mentioned four times, and, recognizing the unfamiliarity that Ethiopians might have with the product, RALCO not only explains the health benefits of their product and presents it as a “legitimate meat replacement” that is a “healthy alternative for protein intake at fasting times”, but it also provides three recipes that make use of easily available local ingredients. There is therefore a connection made between Rastafari culture and Ethiopian culture as well as an attempt to integrate their product with other products available within the country. If the company could communicate their products with the Oromo community, this would not only increase the potential growth of their business, but it would also be a statement of connection (or willingness to commune and engage) with
the surrounding Oromo community. It would also recognize the business’s location within Oromia, where the regional language is Afaan Oromoo.

This being said, Smith’s business, was developed according to the rules of external investors in the country, the region of Oromia and the town of Shashemene:

It was really difficult to establish a business. Financially it can be difficult. But with the investment opportunities that the government opened up for foreigners, it made it easy. Before you had to have some ridiculous money to be an investor, you couldn’t trickle in like us and try to build up. They wouldn’t allow you in to build. It is good what the government has done and now they are looking at us with a good eye.

Certainly, they are looking positively on an initiative like the tofu factory, because it has potential for profit, just as in the same way they would look at any other business proposal—like the hotels, it is the issue of financial viability. What is interesting is the fact that the Rasta owners of the tofu business are both adhering to the restrictions of the government and trying to start a business that would be not only financially, but also culturally, viable. Should the business be successful, on top of this, the cultural viability would also connect with Ethiopian culture.

*Humanitarian Initiatives and the Risks of Cultural Citizenship*

Humanitarian initiatives such as the Jamaican Rastafarian Development Community School, are evident as well. The school has over four hundred students—with capacity for even more—the majority of whom are Ethiopian and the education of these youths is subsidized by donors both within the Rastafari
community in Shashemene and worldwide. The JRDC school has been known throughout Shashemene as a high quality institution, specifically because there are native English-speaking teachers. As Wondimu Seba, whose son went to the school, told me: “The reason why [the school] was desired was because they were foreigners.”\(^{15}\) The school, however, presents a case study of conflicting views of the Rastafari.

As Shirlene Hall\(^{16}\), who works with the JRDC, explained,

We needed a school that could offer the children the curriculum of Ethiopia and extend it because in order for Ethiopia to compete in the international market you have to have that level of input . . . Our full mandate is housing, welfare and all the rest of the infrastructure, so we started on the education project . . . what we haven’t been successful with is the Ethiopian authorities . . . and also the Rastafarian community has its own internal problems.

As explained to the mayor in the community development meeting, there were some problems with the administration of the school. The issues had to do with staffing problems and disagreements about how to run the institution. As an organization, the JRDC explained how the problems were as a result of an “individual ego” and not “factions”. At present, according to the minutes of the community development meeting, “a Director from the Jamaican University of the West Indies” has been hired to “assist in the development of the school”.

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\(^{15}\) Wondimu Seba (Volunteer Coordinator, Habitat for Humanity), interview, 31 July 2007.  
\(^{16}\) Hall, Shirlene (JRDC Coordinator, Shashemene), interview, 28 June 2007.
It is difficult to tell whether these difficulties have created a sense of poor management—or poor education. What is evident, however, is that individuals in the Ethiopian community have a sense that the school represents an initiative that is not wholly humanitarian. I spoke to two former teachers\(^\text{17}\) who expressed their disillusionment with the school. The first teacher said the following:

Before I joined the school I had a good opinion of the Rasta community. I still have this opinion of some of them. Most of them are here for the sake of their original identity. According to their belief, here is their original homeland that they have been taken from Africa to the New World for slavery. This movement is repatriation. You know why I appreciate them? Most of them are from the developed world. Ethiopia is developing (laughs). Some scholars say we are the poorest of the poor nations. They are not materialist. It is all about identity. But what is happening right now is not good and doesn’t help Ethiopia. They have lived here for over thirty years. What is their contribution? They have one school. It’s not running properly. There is a big fight among the senior management staff. Not for the sake of the betterment of the children, or Ethiopians. It is always about their business. But I am not saying that everyone is getting involved in the fighting.

Clearly there is some type of standard that has been set for the Rastafari as foreigners. Due to the fact that the Rastafari are seen as coming from the so-called “developed” world, they should therefore have something to offer. The Rastafari problems with the school are directly connected with business—and the fact that

\(^{17}\text{Both teachers requested anonymity, interview, 19 August 2007.}\)
they care about “their business”. Mohammed Tibebu, who had been involved in the school, expressed a similar sense of the Rastafari as well: “[The school] is a good opportunity for Ethiopian students. But when I was there they would hire grade twelve female students for a very low salary. But my aim was a high quality school that we would eventually make a profit from the school and raise its status”. In this statement he not only admits that the school presents a “good opportunity”, but that it is a business. He continued by explaining the connections between the Rastafari in Shashemene and outside of Ethiopia: “The school gets donations from outside,” he explained. “This is shrewd, but they are cheating. They have to be open; they have good potential from abroad . . . In England and in America they have parties where they fundraise. They send us a packet of pencils (laughs).” There is an idea presented here that the fact that the Rastafari are foreigners means that they are held to a higher standard—the school should be better managed, and there should be more monetary support, given the perceived connection to so-called developed countries.

According to the teachers, if the Rastafari are foreigners who stay in Ethiopia, they should contribute, and, if they stay for “thirty years” their contribution should be significant. This was elaborated on by the second teacher:

Their contribution to the country is almost zero. What I would like to say is what they planned to do in Ethiopia was very nice. But they are not implementing it. Every time you go they say they would like to make Shashemene the capital city of Africa and they want to build the town.

Rita Marley even said that she would send money to build the stadium but

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18 Name has been changed. (Teacher, Shashemene), interview, 17 August 2007.
the money still has not arrived. They promise everything because we are
the poorest of the poor. They give us hope—not me of course, but for the
society. They say we will employ you, we are investing, and when you go
and check, after ten years or after twenty years the society is living in the
same standard of life. So my attitude towards them is almost negative.

Having myself visited not only the Rastafari school, but many schools in
the Shashemene area, both government run and private, it is obvious that the
Rastafari school provides a high level of education. Their classes are quite small,
and the students are provided with an education in the English language from
native English speakers, while, from my observation, the majority of English
classes that are taught in Shashemene schools are taught by Ethiopians. My
experience as an English teacher at a local college, where all my colleagues were
Ethiopian provided me with the knowledge that native English speakers are
incredibly valuable. Often students from other classes would pack into my
classroom, with many students telling me after class how while they can learn
English grammar from their Ethiopian teachers, it was important to hear the
pronunciation of a native speaker. The school, therefore, is undoubtedly a
valuable addition to the community, however the commentary surrounding the
school demonstrates the fact that the Rastafari are viewed as an external, foreign
group and are therefore held to a standard based on this understanding.

Water Harvesting and Making Connections

All of the business and humanitarian initiatives discussed here are critical
in developing the relationship between the Rastafari and Ethiopian communities.
However, the Self-Sustainable Water for Life Community Based Rain Water Harvesting Project, undertaken by the EWF, is a project that very plainly offers integrative properties and addresses some of the issues that the school project is dealing with.

This is a project that is particularly important within Shashemene proper in terms of the relationship between the Rastafari and the growing Oromo community—who are the main stakeholders of this project—as well as in terms of the need for clean water. There is a river running through Shashemene, but due to a combination of factors including a decrease of rainfall and the use of river water for agricultural projects outside of the town, the river has decreased in size and is visibly dirty, but people still wash clothing and make use of the water from this source. Access to clean water is becoming increasingly difficult; as recently as May 2008, the Ethiopian government was reporting drought and crop failures in areas near Shashemene19.

For background, the EWF, which is behind this project, has, as its organization’s “major goal” the “desir[e] to do all we can to restore the continent of Ethiopia-Africa to her former state of complete independence and self-reliance thereby effecting a social and economic betterment of race everywhere” (Ethiopian World Federation 2008). Since this goal, as outlined, is for the African diaspora to work together for the development of Ethiopia, “autonomous” groups located all over the world therefore interface with each other and converge on Ethiopia. In the interest of bringing this goal to its fruition, in 2002, sixty-five

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years after it was first established and incorporated in New York, by Dr. Malaku Bayen, the EWF was registered as an international NGO with the Ministry of Justice of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia.

Working alongside the local municipal government, the regional Oromia government and four farmers associations, the EWF’s project has resulted in the construction of 165 water harvesters that serve 3240 people. They are now about to sign a second tri-partite agreement with the Oromo government to provide additional rain water-harvesting systems. The project has also received the support of the German embassy and British Embassy and has three main goals:

1. Improving the availability of water to the community in and around Shashemene.
2. Effectively using members of the community as a major factor in helping to teach the benefits of Rainwater Harvesting
3. Encouraging Educator Teams in the project to set up their own small-scale businesses dealing with Rainwater collection systems\textsuperscript{20}

It is important to juxtapose these goals with the goals of the EWF as stated in the preamble to the organization’s constitution. The political goals of independence and self-reliance are still evident in this humanitarian project. The very name, Self-Sustainable Water for Life Community Based Rain Water Harvesting Project, indicates that these goals are clearly part of the initiative.

\textsuperscript{20} This information and further information about the Self-Sustainable Water for Life project was gleaned from a 2007 report compiled by the EWF, as well as from an interviews with Ras Tagas King and EWF representative in Shashemene, Berthal James Moody (Brother Moody), 5 September 2007.
In addition, the EWF’s project also works to bridge the Rasta and Ethiopian communities. The EWF’s report presents a detailed understanding of Shashemene and acknowledgement of the “melting pot of various nationalities” (as stated in the report) that exist in the area. It details the need for fresh water, in particular the role of women in the procurement of this water. Reading the report of the project’s first two phases, dated June 2007, it is evident that the EWF is functioning according to the results-based management approach often used by non-governmental organizations within Ethiopia and the so-called developing world.  

Clearly describing the expected outcomes and using the results-based-management language of impact—detailing the social impact and underlining specifically the impact on gender equality—the EWF’s report presents a comprehensive depiction of a sustainable development project in line with the mainstream of international development work. At no point in the report is there an indication of the culture of Rastafari, the desire for citizenship or the desire for integration into the community. While this may be viewed as an indirect result of the initiative, it is most certainly a desired result from the perspective of the Rastafari.

Ras Tagas King, manages the project alongside B.J. Moody in Shashemene. He recognizes how this project has improved relations within the community:

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21 Results-based management is described in an article by Brian K. Murphy, entitled “International NGOs and the Challenge of Modernity”, as the system “used to measure and promote ‘progress’ ” (2000, 11). As Murphy writes, results-based management, along with “‘strategic framework analysis’ ”, is “presently imposed on the voluntary sector by public and private funders who are obsessed with ‘inputs’, ‘outcomes’, and ‘indicators’ ” (11). The EWF’s report fits this mold.
As an international NGO, we are the implementing agent and also the forefront of these projects so we seek the funding from various donors and we implement the project in conjunction with local authorities in Shashemene. This is the way that we are trying to improve the relationship with local authorities by humanitarian development—giving them these things and providing orientation with how to maintain them. They have really appreciated it—they have said to us we want to make this as wide as possible meaning that every family that has a tin roof should have a rainwater harvesting system.

This appreciation was demonstrated when I visited some of the families who are involved in the water harvesting program. For these recipients of the water harvesters, support for the project is clear. “The water harvester is a great help,” said one female beneficiary in a January 2008 interview, “I give thanks for the EWF. The eleven people in my household use the water for cooking, cleaning, coffee, and so on and so on. There are many, many uses! I thank God for the Rastafari community. Let God help them. The government cannot do what they are doing.” Another woman described the impact of the water harvester on her own family as well as the wider community. “Before, I had to go far to fetch water. It took a long time. Now it is in my own yard. The neighbours can use the water as well as my family. I give thanks.”

This commentary also sheds light on the way in which the project provides support for women, thereby allowing the EWF to engage with some of the main international development objectives—helping and working alongside women. In
addition to adhering to the United Nations’ Millennium Development Goal of Environmental Stability, the water harvesting project is also in line with the Goals of Gender Equality, Maternal Health and Child Health\textsuperscript{22}—all three relevant to women. Though Rastafari is not known as a very feminist movement—Obiageli Lake’s book \textit{RastafarI Women: Subordination in the Midst of Liberation Theology} (1998)\textsuperscript{23} critiques the movement for the treatment of women—the water harvesting project presents a perspective that demonstrates a different side of Rastafari and adheres to the values of the international development community.

As Ras Tagas King describes:

\begin{quote}
This project also highlights the plight of women. The women are the ones who have to be fetching and carrying this water and it consumes the majority of their time during the working day. By giving them a rainwater harvesting system right there, at their house, it means that time that was spent fetching and carrying can now be dedicated to other things. So it’s a very important project, it’s been well appreciated and it’s helped to improve the relationship.
\end{quote}

On many levels, this project allows the Rastafari to connect with the Ethiopian community on a governmental level and also on a local, interpersonal level, specifically with the Oromo people, who are members of four farmer’s associations affiliated with the project. The fact that the main stakeholders of the


\textsuperscript{23} Lake writes that “[t]he idea that women are polluted, which is embodied in Christian dogma and African traditional beliefs, constitutes the theoretical basis for the subordination of Rastafarian women” (94), but states that “all of this is quite unfortunate since Rastafarians had the potential of leading the most progressive movement of African people since Marcus Garvey. This potential has been thwarted by a number of historical misinterpretations and cultural practices that render true liberation improbable” (141).
project are Oromo farmers is of additional importance to the issue of cultural citizenship. After all, Shashemene is located in the region of Oromia.

As mentioned in the earlier chapter on Ethiopianness and Ethiopian identity, work by individuals such as Asafa Jalata details the narrative of Oromo oppression—a narrative of colonialism by the Amhara, as represented by Emperor Haile Selassie I. Since, according to Jalata, “Oromos . . . have been dominated and exploited by Ethiopian racial and colonial dictatorship respectively since the last decades of the nineteenth century” (2008, 363), this most certainly indicates a lack of admiration for the Ethiopian imperial regime. Specifically addressing the Emperor, Jalata describes how “[t]he Ethiopian colonial state and the Ethiopian settlers in Oromia did not tolerate any manifestation of Oromo consciousness. The Haile Selassie government banned the [Macha-Tulama Self-Help Association] in 1967, and its leaders were imprisoned or killed” (374)24. Dealing specifically with the land issue, for Jalata, the Ethiopian government has always desired to take land from its rightful owners, the Oromo people. “The main reason for [the Ethiopian government’s] colonial expansion,” writes Jalata, “was to obtain commodities such as gold, ivory, coffee, musk, hides and skins, slaves, and land” (366).

The water-harvesting project, however, serves these very same people who have concerns about Rastafari and their involvement in the community. The Rastafari would not wish to appear to be connected with a colonial project, real or perceived, in any way, given that the Rastafari movement arose “in response to

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24 The Macha-Tulama Self-Help Association was an Oromo cultural organization, established in 1963. See Jalata 2008 for details.
European slavery and then, following emancipation, in response to the system of social, cultural, and economic oppression on which modern Jamaica was built” (Chevannes 1994, 1). In a 2008 EWF-produced video meant to showcase the success of the water harvesting project, the EWF makes it clear that their project serves the Oromo community—the presenter, Ras Tagas King, makes a point of telling the viewer when he is talking with Afaan Oromoo speakers as opposed to Amharic speakers. When I interviewed recipients of the water harvesters, there were representatives of both Amharic and Afaan Oromoo speaking communities. While the video was meant designed to promote the project and therefore the positive rhetoric must be contextualized, the water-harvesting project does have a clear aim and demonstrates visual, as well as viable, progress in the form of the harvesters themselves. It does not involve the use of land, however, the project does in fact help to increase the use value of land already available to the farming community. Furthermore, the project presents the Rastafari as local development workers as opposed to a different cultural group with a different belief system and misunderstood cultural practices.

Among primary beneficiaries, the perception is that this particular Rastafari-led humanitarian project is on the same level as that of other NGOs. In Shashemene, NGOs—international and locally based organizations—are both active and visible. For example, the Swedish International Development Agency has opened two youth centres, and Habitat for Humanity also has a locally run affiliate in the Shashemene community.
There is a fundamental difference between the Rastafari and traditional
development workers, however, in that the Rastafari will remain in the
community. The issue of sustainability is a given, for the Rastafari because their
desire is to remain in Ethiopia. Rastafari have been in the country for decades and
plan to stay, because, unlike traditional NGO workers, this is not a commitment of
months or years, but of a lifetime. The desire to remain within Ethiopia allows for
the potential of the Rastafari as humanitarian workers to be quite large. The
politics of development for the Rastafari involve a desire to integrate into the
country themselves—and, based on the fact that the Rastafari faith encourages the
development of Africa, those individuals who choose to make their lives in Africa
are in positions where they can make a difference in the community. In order to
increase their level of acceptance in the community, however, they will wish to
gain approval for their project from the surrounding Ethiopian population. The
personal investment by Rastafari will also need to ensure the viability of projects
over a long period of time, thereby increasing the likelihood of sustainability—
both in terms of the project and integration in the community.

Rastafari humanitarian projects, such as that undertaken by the EWF,
utilize economic capital to engage in development—much like traditional NGO
work—but the economic capital is also converted into symbolic capital: cultural-
citizenship capital. Although the Rastafari are making use of the position of
foreigner in order to get involved in the way that they are—after all, the role of
international NGO is that of an outsider—it is a way of gaining some stock in
cultural citizenship. They are working within the community on a relevant
community project. Within the water-harvesting project itself, there is evidence of an increasing “positive acknowledgement of difference”, a factor of cultural citizenship (Miller 2002, 231). If the Rastafari can be viewed in an increasingly positive light, their level of acceptance in the community will increase, thereby increasing the power of their argument for citizenship.

The potential, therefore, for concurrent Rastafari integration and Ethiopian community development is great. Working within the available systems, the Rastafari, as evidenced by the Self-Sustainable Water for Life project, are generating valuable cultural-citizenship capital. In the face of an as-yet-impossible-to-achieve goal of political citizenship, and ironically through making use of the capital they achieve as foreigners engaging in NGO work, the Rastafari are able to gain access to what is perhaps even more valuable: an increasing level of acceptance within the Ethiopian community.

The Rastafari, however, must ensure that their projects are sustainable. Yes, they have more time, but they have to demonstrate success. As Gebre Gebru said: “They say they are going to do humanitarian projects but they don’t. They have seen them many times. They have got licenses but they didn’t do them. They just promise, promise, promise. I don’t think that part will work properly” Gebru also underlines the fact that businesses must be legitimate: “Instead of doing the investment, Rastafari will use it to get a resident permit. Now the government will not allow that any more. I always advise them to be on the safe side. When the law starts to function, and people are checking, this will be a problem for them.” If the Rastafari follow the rules and follow through, there is great potential for
them. This potential not only includes humanitarian initiatives, but the potential for integration in the community. Certainly, from Gebru’s comments, it can be seen that the motivations for Rastafari actions are more complex than simply a desire to engage in international development work. From the examples provided in this chapter, however, it is demonstrated that the most success is achieved when the Rastafari desire for integration is connected with a successful project within the Ethiopian community.

Demonstrating this reality, in August 2007, Ato Demisse Shito, then mayor of Shashemene, explained in an interview that, because of the great potential of the Rastafari, the Ethiopian community must move to view the people referred to as “Jamaicans” as different than other foreigners. Underlining the constitutional restrictions for foreigners, Shito explained the limitations on Rastafari in Shashemene: “They can invest their money. They can participate in development for the city. They can participate in the city. But there are no rules or regulations regarding these people [as Ethiopians].”

The mayor, however, described the uniqueness of the Rastafari. “They are different from others,” he said. Turning to me, a white, non-Rasta woman, he exclaimed:

They are different from you also! They are mentally, spiritually and have other attachments to Ethiopia. By social relationships and marriage they are related to us; this cannot be changed. Some of them know the languages of the area as well. They are part of our city and part of Ethiopia
even though they come from many parts of the world. But the legal constitution is needed.

Though the mayor is saying that the Rastafari should be viewed as “different” from “regular” foreigners, they are still not Ethiopian. As much as he recognizes their contributions, and validates the “mental” and “spiritual” connection Rastafari have to Ethiopia, his comments demonstrate a lack of potential for Rastafari to be fully accepted without government legitimacy. Thus, beyond the current bureaucratic challenges preventing citizenship, the mayor also presents a perceptual problem created by the lack of categorization for Rastafari. While the efforts of the Rastas to be accepted are being well received, the fact that they must inhabit the position of foreigners in order to engage with the community presents a reality of liminality in which their identities are culturally and politically unstable—from the Rastafari perspective. Maybe the mayor is right, and the only way this can changed is by legal or legislative means.

As a final point, and one dealing with the potential of future citizenship challenges for Rastafari, I would like to turn to the most recent discussions of citizenship in the Rastafarian community. There is an idea circulating that possible legal changes allowing for citizenship are in the works, however these changes might force the Rastafari to be placed in the position of a distinct ethnic minority. After all, the constitution provides rights to “Nations, Nationalities and Peoples” (1995, Article 39, 96) and defines this as . . . a group of people who have or share a large measure of a common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a
common or related identities, a common psychological make-up and who inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory. (97)

Could the Rastafari fit this description? In a comment made by the mayor at the 21 November 2007 Community Development forum, he made a comment, discussing the trouble involved in having to represent the Rastafari. The minutes read as follows:

[The mayor] said he was working with community leaders. But found that he was asked to solve the problems of the EWF, Nyahbinghi, Twelve Tribe and not just “Rasta people”. In [the municipality’s] draft paper on Rasta people, if it included the terminology “Rasta people,” then the problem would be solved.

This statement seems to adhere to this idea of the Rastafari as a group. As mentioned in the first chapter, collecting the Rastafari under one umbrella is difficult—the JRDC’s use of “Jamaican” is problematic, based on the numerous nationalities of Rastafari in Shashemene, not to mention the fact that Rastafari, as a movement, is characterized by variation—as Michael Barnett explains, “the Rastafari movement is a multi-faceted one, and not the uniform, homogenous movement many people conceive it to be” (2005, 77).

Anecdotal discussion through my fieldwork with Rastafari revealed that perhaps there was some communication going on with the government about citizenship. The owner of the Rift Valley Hotel informed me that the Rasta community had been asked to petition the government as an ethnic group. This was also something said by Joseph Smith, at the tofu factory. In this case, this
would mean that the Rastafari would be declared as Ethiopian, but as their own ethnic group, they would still be disconnected from all other ethnic groups in the country. And codifying minority status on the “Rasta people” in Ethiopian society may not necessarily resolve significant gaps in perception, identity and expectation between the two. However, given the view of Ethiopianness as discussed in an earlier chapter, perhaps this is a more “Ethiopian” form of acceptance, or at least in line with the practices of the current regime.

This being said, and in the absence of any possibility of political citizenship actually being achieved, it is clear that the Rastafari will continue to strive for cultural citizenship—an alternate, and perhaps clearly meaningful acceptance.
Conclusion

Perception meets Perception

The week I finished this dissertation, there were arrests made in Addis Ababa of thirty-five individuals suspected of being part of a conspiracy to take power in Ethiopia\textsuperscript{1}. The alleged leader of the coup is said to be Berhanu Nega, a man who was poised to take the position of Addis Ababa Mayor after the 2005 elections, but who, however, ended up in Philadelphia teaching economics after his opposition party was unsuccessful in an election questioned by observers as controversial\textsuperscript{2}. This news demonstrates that Ethiopia’s sense of identity, on the governmental level, is still very much a contentious issue. Perhaps one might say that, in light of these very recent events, that the country is one in which a stable democracy remains elusive. This could in fact be the case. However, the changes and challenges to the Ethiopian government over the past hundred years, beginning with Emperor Haile Selassie in 1928 and ending here (at least for the moment) with an attempted coup, as tracked in this thesis, are emblematic of a country in which there are many different perceptions—many different narratives of what it means to be Ethiopian. The Rastafari entered this contested space and are now firmly engaged in both the changes and the challenges taking place in Ethiopian society, a society in many ways governed by identity.

This thesis project began with the intent of investigating the Ethiopian perception of the repatriated Rastafari. In looking at the available literature, very

little addressed the reception the Rastafari received in the country the Rastafari consider the Promised Land. An investigation into this topic would therefore both begin to fill a gap in the scholarship as well as open new avenues for further research. I was interested in the way that the narrative of Rastafari, a narrative so powerful and empowering that it created a faith strong enough to cause followers to pick up and move themselves and their families to Ethiopia from Jamaica, Canada, America, the United Kingdom and beyond. As I researched, wrote and thought about this narrative, I began to recognize the tension between this narrative, and the way it informs the evolving narrative(s) of Ethiopian identity.

Throughout my fieldwork, it became evident that the most I could do was scratch the surface of the issue. In each interview I completed, I would ask if the interviewee had any suggestions for people I might speak to. The list of potential interviewees grew to an unwieldy length. There were and still remain many more people I could, and perhaps should, interview. My research, like any attempt at ethnographic description, is unable to present a complete and coherent description of the Ethiopian perception of the repatriated Rastafari and its implications, however, there are some distinct points that arise from the research.

First, as discussed in chapters one and two, there are varied narratives that construct notions of Ethiopianness. For Rastafari, their definition of Ethiopia as a country is different from that of Ethiopians, and even within the population of Ethiopia there are groups who view the country in varied ways. The Rastafari conception of Ethiopia has developed from a sense of Ethiopianism which views the country as a symbol of anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism, one which
represents freedom, liberty and justice. Through an analysis of the literature, I argued that there was a specific narrative of Ethiopian identity constructed by and for the Rastafari. Turning to the Ethiopian perspective and looking at the development of Ethiopianness within the country, I argued for the existence of multiple narratives of Ethiopian identity. Some of these narratives co-exist; others are in conflict. Against a backdrop of multiple Ethiopian identity narratives, the Rastafari are not simply a group of immigrants coming to the country, bringing their culture and experience to bear on their new home, they are a group of people who bring their own powerful story of home and origins to the country they believe to be their home and their Promised Land. My arguments demonstrate that Ethiopianness is a layered concept—one which is constructed differently by varied ethnic groups, cultures, classes and experiences—both inside and out of the country. These stories—that of the Rastafari and the myriad Ethiopian—shape the current perception of what it means to be an Ethiopian and are key to understanding the disconnect between Ethiopians and Rastafari.

In chapter three, I turned to Shashemene, the site of the land grant inhabited by Rastafari today in 2009. The ideas and narratives that have informed a spatial understanding of Shashemene have shifted over the years and have led to varied perceptions. It is in the context of space, how it is used and perceived, that Ethiopians and Rastafari act out their separate identities. Consequently, the shared space in which Ethiopians and Rastafari is used differently and understood in different ways, ways that can create conflict. That said, the Rastafari and Ethiopian communities in Shashemene are engaged in a dialogue about the shared
space in which they inhabit and this dialogue sheds light on the developing
perception of self-identity for both groups.

When one moves away from the localized situation in Shashemene and
turns to a wider conception of the Rastafari, here presented in chapter four
through the case study of the Africa Unite concert, it becomes evident that
Rastafari as symbol versus Rastafari as lived experience are dissimilar phenomena.
There seems to be a reciprocal disconnect in terms of perception: Ethiopians
represent Rastafari to themselves; and Rastafarians represent Ethiopian to
themselves.

Through looking at the coverage of the event in the media, I demonstrated
that, as a general rule, Rastafari is not widely understood as a faith by the
Ethiopian public. Unlike in Shashemene, where, due to the sharing of space,
Rastafari and Ethiopian communities are engaged in dialogue, media coverage is
based on a more distant understanding of the Rastafari. On a popular level, the
Rastafari can often elicit both questioning and, at times, derision from groups—
especially in the case of the independent media and growing protestant Christian
population—who see the Rastafari as both a literal and symbolic incursion on
Ethiopian culture. It is interesting to note that at the same time, Bob Marley
possesses a strong resonance amongst Ethiopians, as is evident in coverage of the
Africa Unite event. The perception of Bob Marley is important in so much as it
allowed for the staging of a potentially groundbreaking event in Ethiopia—
groundbreaking in that it helped to create a perception of Ethiopia as a site for
events of importance to world—as well as for the ability of the event to illuminate
the complex negotiation (and contestation) of identity and culture taking place underneath the surface of a major international event promoting local and international unity. Due in part to competing interpretations of the meaning of Rastafari, one the one hand, and Bob Marley, on the other, the reality of Africa Unite took the focus off of the local changes and challenges to the repatriated Rastafarians. Other powerful stakeholders—government, international bodies and sponsors—forced the issue of acceptance of the Rastafari faith or its practitioners to take a back seat as well.

It is therefore no surprise that Bob Marley, and reggae music in general, can be, through the iterations presented by performers such as Teddy Afro and Jonny Ragga, as discussed in chapter five, either connected to Rastafari or completely disconnected. Jonny Ragga’s case demonstrates not only a disconnection of reggae from Rastafari, but rather a surprising link to reggae and America as symbols of wealth and of the West. A deeper understanding of the narrative that has informed the development of the Rastafari faith, i.e. struggle and resistance against oppression, provides another compelling basis for understanding in Ethiopia as in the case of artist Getatchew Haile. While an opportunity for understanding on this level exists, there is still a discernible gap between the Ethiopian conception of Selassie as man versus the Rastafari conception of the former Emperor as divine.

In my final chapter, I return to Shashemene to look at the ways in which Rastafari are attempting to bridge the gap between themselves and the community in which they live and the reception of these efforts within the Ethiopian
community. Through various business and humanitarian initiatives, the Rastafari are gaining cultural citizenship capital, even when official citizenship recognition seems a ways off. These initiatives not only offer important points of connection between the Ethiopian and Rastafari narratives, they also produce sustainable projects and innovative ideas that fit into Ethiopian culture and the space of Shashemene.

My project, as the first to begin a more in depth investigation into the impact, role and perception of Rastafari within Ethiopian society, offers those who study the movement a broader understanding of the implications of repatriation. Repatriation, and the history of the Rastafari experience as described by Giulia Bonacci, is a powerful theme in Rastafari thought and praxis. This dissertation provides another piece to the puzzle. It not only can help increase the understanding of Rastafari’s global reach, but can also in fact aid individual Rastafari wishing to make the move to Ethiopia. This is because my dissertation presents repatriation as a process of negotiation between communities. The dream of the Promised Land becomes juxtaposed with the reality of an Ethiopian trading centre, a dusty crossroads town known for high rates of poverty and drought. Understanding the dream of living in the space is one challenge, navigating the reality of the relationship with the surrounding community is another.

Further research could be done in the area of liminality and Rastafari, specifically the issue of displacement—how does the displacement experienced in Ethiopia compare with the sense of displacement felt in Jamaica, as members of a marginalized religious minority?
But this study is as much, if not more, about Ethiopia and Ethiopians. As a contribution to the study of Ethiopian culture and society—especially since the transition to the EPRDF government in 1991 and the subsequent establishment of ethnic regions—this thesis, through an illustration of the way in which Ethiopians interact with and perceive Rastafari, provides a view of the Ethiopian conception of Ethiopianness. In wishing to present Ethiopian perceptions of the Rastafari, I end up presenting also Ethiopian perceptions of themselves. The ethnic variety of the country complicates the Afrocentric notion of Ethiopianness that is so key to the conception of Rastafari. My research demonstrates that the myriad nationalities and ethnicities intersects with Rastafarian attempts to become Ethiopian citizens. What results is a desire on behalf of Ethiopians for the Rastafari to represent a specific ethnic identity, when in fact the Rastafari represent numerous nationalities themselves. It is difficult for the sense of Ethiopianness developed on behalf of the Rastafari to connect with this concept of multiple nationalities, for it is based on a very different history—one that views Ethiopia as a symbol of unity and solidarity.

The multi-faceted view of Ethiopianness that emerges from an investigation into Ethiopian identity, however, allows for the use of various theories and approaches to nation, nationalism and identity. Through my research and writing, I came to find that thinkers such as Craig Calhoun and Toby Miller, scholars whose subject is the West, were relevant and useful when turning to an analysis of a country such as Ethiopia. I believe that this application presents but an example of the way in which ideas of nationality can and perhaps should be
applied in new and different ways. Especially as Africa experiences new trends in migration, i.e. movement within the continent rather than movement away from the continent, innovative treatments of new forms of migration will be important as this phenomenon becomes more and more prevalent.

This dissertation, as a first attempt at describing the Ethiopian perception of the repatriated Rastafari population, has begun work that could be continued, broadened and expanded. The few connections interviewees made between the Rastafari and other western references, such as the connection to Americans, is one such area that deserves further analysis. Do the Rastafari represent the west to Ethiopians? Given that Rastafari developed in opposition to the west, what would be the impact of such a perception? Alternatively, is it a representation of the black, African west that the Rastafari provide for Ethiopians? Is it a combination of the two?

This thesis could also support a broader analysis of the impact of reggae on Ethiopian popular music. An investigation into the appeal of reggae and the involvement of Rastafari musicians with Ethiopian musicians would present valuable commentary on the way varied perceptions work together as well as questions relative to the ownership of cultural production, i.e. reggae.

Finally, this project has implications in regards to the role that Rastafari can and will take as regards the future of Ethiopia. Given the commitment the Rastafari have to the act of repatriation, it is unlikely that the repatriate community will disappear. Given the Rastafari community’s global reach—from Jamaica, to America, to Canada, to the UK, to Europe, to Africa and beyond—
what will be the relationship between Rastafari and Shashemene, or, more generally, Ethiopia. The anecdotal evidence that recognition and potential citizenship are on the horizon demonstrates that both present and future Rastafari repatriates may need to continue to evaluate how to deal with the multiple narratives of Ethiopianness. A broader understanding of these narratives could work to help establish further humanitarian and business initiatives in the country, so as to accrue further cultural citizenship capital. It could also work to frame the requests for political recognition and citizenship within the context of Ethiopian society. Should both Rastafari and Ethiopians understand each other more fully, there is great potential for a productive relationship and cultural exchange. The Rastafari love Ethiopia and are proud to live in the country. Likewise, the Bob Marley Africa Unite concert was a great public relations strategy for Ethiopia. Rastafari represent a powerful public relations voice and they also represent a dedication to the country and its people. The gap in perceptions between Rastafari and Ethiopians can be decreased with patience, communication and understanding. Connections between the Rastafari and Ethiopians could be mutually beneficial and a great advantage for a town like Shashemene. In as much that these reveal the issues underlying the various gaps in perception between Rastafari and Ethiopian, this thesis also presents an initial description of the various potentials for connection.
Appendix

Research Ethics Board: Copy of Application and Approval Form

Research Ethics Board-I
Application for Ethics Approval for Human Subject Research

(please refer to the Application Guidelines at www.mcgill.ca/rgo/ethics/human before completing this form)

Project Title:
“Moving out of Babylon, into our Father’s Land”: Perceptions of the Rastafari in Ethiopia

Principal Investigator: Erin MacLeod   Dept: Art History and Communication Studies
Phone #: 514-276-5037   Fax #:
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Mailing Address (if different than Dept.):

Status:
Faculty _____   Postdoctoral Fellow _____   Other (specify) ___
Ph.D. Student _X_   Master’s Student ___   Undergraduate ___

Type of Research:
Faculty Research ___   Thesis _X_
Honours Thesis ___   Independent Study Project ___
Course Assignment (specify course name and #)_________
Other (specify)____________

Faculty Supervisor (for student PIs): Jonathan Sterne   Email: jonathan.sterne@mcgill.ca

Co-Investigator(s) (list name/status/affiliation): none

List all funding sources for this project and project titles (if different from the above).
Indicate the Principal Investigator of the award if not yourself.
Awarded: SSHRC Doctoral Fellowship
Pending:

Principal Investigator Statement: I will ensure that this project is conducted in accordance with the policies and procedures governing the ethical conduct of research involving human subjects at McGill University.

Principal Investigator Signature: ______________________________   Date: _____________

Faculty Supervisor Statement: I have read and approved this project and affirm that it has received the appropriate academic approval. I will ensure that the student investigator is aware of the applicable policies and procedures governing the ethical conduct of human subject research at McGill University and I agree to provide all necessary supervision to the student.

Faculty Supervisor Signature: ______________________________   Date: ______________
1. Purpose of the Research

The interviews I propose here are part of a project currently entitled “Moving out of Babylon, into our Father’s Land”: Perceptions of the Rastafari in Ethiopia. The Rastafari have been studied as a religious faith and political movement within Jamaica. There has also been scholarly work on the spread of Rastafari to England, the United States, Canada, and parts of West Africa. Interestingly, very little work has been completed on the Rastafari in Ethiopia, the country identified within the faith as the “promised land.” Ethiopia is also the home to a Rastafarian settlement in Shashemene, 350 kilometres south of Addis Ababa. Even though the role of Ethiopia in Rasta theology has been widely discussed, there has been little research into the role of Rastafari in the country of Ethiopia. I propose that my project will add to the existing scholarship on Rastafari and will provide analysis of a postcolonial faith in the uniquely independent Ethiopia.

2. Recruitment of Subjects/Location of Research

My primary method is that of participant observation alongside documentary research. On previous trips to Ethiopia I have met and spoken to Rastafari as well as members of the wider Ethiopian community. I have introduced myself as a researcher, but have not yet conducted any formal interviews. Although many artifacts regarding the Rastafari in Ethiopia exist, it is imperative to interview members of the Shashemene community, both Rasta and non-Rasta, as well as individuals such as journalists who have documented the Rastafari presence in Ethiopia.

3. Other Approvals

This section is not applicable.

4. Methodology/Procedures

Currently, my plan is to audio-record interviews, which will be transcribed later. Some will require translation, for which I will make use of both my knowledge of Amharic and local translators. The interviews themselves will be largely informal and open ended, though I will have basic sets of questions that will be provided to my subjects ahead of time so they can consider them in advance. These sample questions will be translated into Amharic and Omorifaa. A sample interview guide is attached at the end of this document.

5. Potential Risks

The main concern expressed by potential Rasta interviewees is that their belief system and lifestyle not be exploited for financial gain. I have assured them that my research is not a profit making activity. Beyond this concern, there are no significant risks to the individuals I am interviewing.

6. Privacy and Confidentiality

Given that my research involves a unique and particular community, it is difficult to be completely anonymous. I will, however, ensure anonymity for all participants, unless they wish to be identified. However, as you can see from the consent form, I have indicated that subjects may indicate that they wish certain things they tell me to be kept in confidence and may ask me to turn off the audio-recorder at any time.

When the study is finished, I intend to keep the interview data in my personal archive for future reference and possible use by other researchers. As you can see on the form, subjects will have a chance to indicate that they would like to “opt out” of having their interviews made available to third parties.
7. Informed Consent Process

See attached

8. Other Concerns

There is no conflict of interest in this project, I am not of the Rastafari faith, and I have been open about my research intentions over multiple trips to Ethiopia, to both Rastafari and Ethiopian interlocutors.

I will provide different interview guides for different types of interview subjects: Rastafari, Ethiopians, and documentarians (mostly journalists who have covered Rastafari activities and topics as regards Ethiopia).

Note that the Letter of introduction, Informed consent form and Interview guides will be translated into both Amharic and Omorifaa, the two main languages utilized in Shashemene, the main site of research.

PAGE 4: Letter of introduction

PAGE 5: Informed consent form

PAGE 6: Interview Guide
Letter of Introduction Template:

Dear [Name]:

My name is Erin MacLeod and I am a PhD candidate in communication studies at McGill University.

I am currently working on research that discusses the role of Rastafari in Ethiopian society. I understand that you would have much to offer on this topic and would like to interview you as regards this issue. If you have any documentation that you can share with me, I would be very much in your debt.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,

Erin MacLeod, PhD Candidate
Department of Art History and Communication Studies
McGill University
853 Sherbrooke St. W.
Montreal, QC Canada H3A 2T6
514-276-5037
erinmacleod@gmail.com
Purpose of the Research: To provide an account of the perception and socio-cultural history of Rastafari within Ethiopia. In particular, this study is concerned with the involvement of Rastafari in Ethiopian society, the role of the faith within Ethiopia, and the perception of Ethiopia and Rastafari from various perspectives. While some of my research involves written documents, interviews with individuals such as yourself will provide the most insight into Rastafari in Ethiopia. The interviews I am conducting will be an important part of the source material for my dissertation. Once the study is finished, I intend to retain the recording of our interview for potential future follow-up work I may conduct.

What is involved in participating: I have already provided a preliminary set of questions for the interview, however I am hopeful that we will have an open-ended conversation. With your consent, I will audio-record this interview to provide a substantial record of our conversation for later reference. The timing of the interview is at your convenience and discretion and you may ask me to turn off the recorder at any time. You may choose to be an anonymous participator. This entails anonymity in this study and any future studies I conduct that are based on this research material. Should a participator chose this option, I will make every attempt to not identify him or her in my writings, though one must be aware of the difficulty of remaining anonymous, at least to certain individuals in one’s community.

Your signature below indicates that you agree to participate in the study.

Your participation is entirely voluntary and you can choose to decline to answer any question or even to withdraw at any point from the project.

I have read the above information and I agree to participate in this study

Signature: __________________ Researcher’s signature: ________________

Name: __________________ Date: ____________________________

Please initial here if you wish to remain anonymous: _________

Thank you for your participation.
Interview Guide (Rastafari):

These questions suggest a broad outline for the interview. Depending on your answers, I will ask follow-up questions, we may go on tangents, and we may or may not get to all of the questions on this page.

1. State your name and any other identifying information you desire.

2. Describe your involvement with Rastafari.

3. What is your general opinion of Ethiopia? What do you think of the Shashemene settlement in particular? Could you share with me what you know about the development and history of the settlement?

4. How would you define the relationship between the Rastafari and the wider Ethiopian community?

5. Can you explain to me some of the community development projects the Rastafari community has been involved in?

6. What connection do you have with Rastafari in the United States, Jamaica, Canada, the UK, etc.?

7. Do you have any written documents related to involvement in the Rastafari community, and if so, may I see them and make copies for my research?

8. If you were me, who else would you interview for this project?
Interview Guide (Ethiopian):
To be translated into Amharic and Omorifaa.

These questions suggest a broad outline for the interview. Depending on your answers, I will ask follow-up questions, we may go on tangents, and we may or may not get to all of the questions on this page.

1. State your name and any other identifying information you desire.

2. What is your perception of the Rastafari?

3. What do you think of the Shashemene settlement? Could you share with me what you know about the development and history of the settlement?

4. How would you define the relationship between the Rastafari and the wider Ethiopian community?

5. Can you explain to me some of the community development projects the Rastafari community has been involved in?

6. Describe your involvement with Rastafari.

7. Do you have any written documents related to your relationship with the Rastafari community, and if so, may I see them and make copies for my research?

8. If you were me, who else would you interview for this project?
Interview Guide (Documentarians):
To be translated into Amharic and Omorifaa.

These questions suggest a broad outline for the interview. Depending on your answers, I will ask follow-up questions, we may go on tangents, and we may or may not get to all of the questions on this page.

1. State your name and any other identifying information you desire.

2. What is your perception of the Rastafari?

3. What do you think of the Shashemene settlement? Could you share with me what you know about the development and history of the settlement?

4. How would you define the relationship between the Rastafari and the wider Ethiopian community?

5. Can you describe to me any documentation you have completed on the Rastafari?

6. Describe your involvement with Rastafari.

7. Do you have any written documents related to your relationship with the Rastafari community, and if so, may I see them and make copies for my research?

8. If you were me, who else would you interview for this project?
Research Ethics Board I
Certificate of Ethical Acceptability of Research Involving Humans

REB File #: 217-0507

Project Title: Moving out of Babylon, into our Father’s Land**, Perceptions of the Rastafari in Ethiopia

Principal Investigator: Erin MacLeod

Department: Art History & Communications Studies

Status: Ph.D. student

Supervisor: Prof. J. Sterne

Funding Agency and Title: SSHRC fellowship

Expedited Review _

This project was reviewed on May 14, 2007 by Catherine Lu, Ph.D.
Chair, REB I

Full Review _

Approval Period: June 12, 2007 to June 11, 2008

This project was reviewed and approved in accordance with the requirements of the McGill University Policy on the Ethical Conduct of Research Involving Human Subjects and with the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct For Research Involving Humans

*All research involving human subjects requires review on an annual basis. A Request for Renewal form should be submitted at least one month before the above expiry date.
*If a project has been completed or terminated and ethics approval is no longer required, a Final Report form must be submitted.
*Should any modification or other unanticipated development occur before the next required review, the REB must be informed and any modification can’t be initiated until approval is received.
References

Newspapers

Addis Admas (Amharic)

Addis Zemen (Amharic)

Ethiopian Herald (English)

Ethiopian Reporter (English)

Reporter (Amharic)

Books and Periodicals


Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *The Empire Writes Back:*


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Chamberlin, J. Edward. 2004. *If this is Your Land, where are Your Stories?: Re-imagining Home and Sacred Space*. Toronto: Pilgrim Press.

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