

A photograph of a man sitting on a train car. He is wearing a light-colored suit jacket over a yellow shirt, a light-colored hat, and glasses. He is looking towards the camera. The background shows a train car with several windows, and the scene is lit with the warm, golden light of a sunset or sunrise. In the distance, there are utility poles and a bridge.

Kay Kaufman Shelemay

SING AND SING ON

**Sentinel Musicians and the Making
of the Ethiopian American Diaspora**

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Sing and Sing On

SENTINEL MUSICIANS AND THE
MAKING OF THE ETHIOPIAN
AMERICAN DIASPORA

Kay Kaufman Shelemay

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Communities

PLACES AND POLITICS IN DIASPORA

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Debo

GENERAL MEANING: Communal labor

MUSICAL MEANING: Ethiopian American musical ensemble

As we have seen in chapter 5, the first wave of refugees from the Horn of Africa arrived in the United States in the mid-1970s; more sought asylum during the devastating Red Terror of 1977–78 and the wars with Somalia and Eritrea that broke out around the same time. The upsurge of forced migration beginning in the 1970s from the Horn of Africa and from Southeast Asia sparked the passage of the 1980 US Refugee Act as an amendment to the Immigration and Nationality Act.¹

Processes of forced migration have a number of outcomes, paramount among them the founding of new communities far from the historical homeland, commonly termed diaspora communities. The phenomenon of diaspora is the subject of a substantial literature that has expanded its theoretical orientation and focus as well as its coverage of communities that anchor immigrant lives in new locales.² The great migration from the Horn of Africa to North America provides rich case studies of diaspora, incorporating a number of immigrants with different political, religious, and cultural orientations.³ But if diaspora studies today document subjects ranging from generational differences to return to the homeland, there is no question that "music is central to the diasporic experience, linking homeland and here-land with an intricate network of sound."⁴ This chapter provides an overview of the founding of Ethiopian American diaspora communities, with attention to the sentinel roles of musicians and the range of activities and institutions they initiated in this process.

Some Ethiopians arrived in the United States in the decades before the start of the revolution; they were primarily young adults from elite families

who came to study at US universities. Those already in the United States during the mid-1970s found their lives suddenly disrupted. One was Elias Negash, who arrived in New York from Ethiopia in 1971. He first moved to Boston, where he attended junior college and planned to study jazz at the Berklee College of Music. But in 1974, with family financial support for his studies interrupted by the revolution's onset,⁵ Elias had to relocate to California to live with his brother, then a University of California–Berkeley student. “The plan was really to go for four years and go back home,” Elias said, “but I ended up staying forty years.”⁶ A performer of Ethiopian jazz and world music with the Bay Area Retroz band, Elias worked as a composer and pianist, honing his musical chops by studying music theory at Bay Area colleges and, in the mid-1970s, when the area's first Ethiopian restaurant, the Blue Nile, opened on Telegraph Avenue, by playing the piano regularly there. In the decades to follow, Elias's music circulated in the United States and Ethiopia on solo CDs, and he operated his own recording studio.⁷

The future of Ethiopian refugees was shaped by the traumatic events surrounding their arrival in the United States and the efforts of organizations coordinating their resettlement. Government entities, including the US Office of Refugee Resettlement and private groups such as Catholic Charities USA, initially sponsored the refugees from the Horn of Africa, making decisions about where they would settle. Circumstances required some immigrants to remain in the place of first asylum for only a short time and then move on. The family of musician Danny Mekonnen, for instance, arrived from refugee camps in the Sudan and settled in Fargo, North Dakota; they subsequently moved to Paris, Texas.⁸ Of twenty-seven thousand Ethiopians officially documented as having entered the United States between 1984 and 1986, for example, 25 percent went to California and another 25 percent were divided among Maryland, Washington state, New York, Georgia, Washington, DC, and Illinois. The remaining 50 percent were dispersed across other parts of the United States, seeding Ethiopian communities in many US cities.⁹ Because the majority of the early refugees were single men without family ties in the United States, Catholic Charities created clusters of refugees to avoid a situation in which a non-English speaking Ethiopian would find himself in an area where he could not communicate with anyone.

We [Catholic Charities] try not to place refugees in a vacuum. We either build the community around them or initiate a plan to resettle x number of refugees of a particular ethnic background in a given group.¹⁰

These policies ensured that at least some refugees were placed with those of the same ethnic and linguistic background, giving rise to local communities of descent. But in one notable case, the efforts of a single musician had a striking impact on the future of the new Ethiopian diaspora in the United States, notably that in Washington, DC. As discussed in chapter 5, two years after Amha Eshete's 1975 arrival in Washington, DC, he opened the Blue Nile, the first full-service Ethiopian restaurant in the US capital.¹¹ Even those who were still living in Ethiopia at that time were aware of the musical ferment abroad set into motion by Amha:

There was a restaurant on Georgia Avenue and Amha Eshete was the one who brought them to entertain here in the United States. . . . Singers and musicians came to America.¹²

By 1982 Amha had also opened the IbeX Club, an establishment encompassing three floors of entertainment:

The first floor was live jazz, the second floor was modern band with comedians during the band's recess. The third and top floor was huge and we used to have disc jockeys. It was on Georgia Avenue and its capacity was in excess of eight hundred. Eventually, I had the first floor for an Ethiopian live band. Top class Ethiopian artists like Ephrem Tamiru, Bezawork Asfaw, Shambel Belayneh, Ketema Mekonnen, Aster Aweke, and others including band members like Abegasu Shiota, Henock Temesgen, Hailu Mergia, Moges Habte and a few others have performed. . . . One unique circumstance was that my club was the first [and] largest with three floors in the Washington area. It also lasted for over fifteen years unlike many other clubs whose life span is a maximum of two to three years.¹³

Amha remained in Washington, DC, until 1993, when disability from a chronic illness forced him to return to Ethiopia.¹⁴ He died in Addis Ababa in April 2021. He had hoped to travel back and forth between Washington, DC, and Addis Ababa, but his limited mobility rendered the plan impossible. He decided that "going back and forth will make me lazy, neither here nor there."¹⁵ He marveled at the number of Ethiopian musicians who had settled in Washington, DC: "There are more there [in Washington, DC] than here [Addis Ababa] now."¹⁶

Amha had an early and dramatic impact on many aspects of musical life both at home in Ethiopia and in its North American diaspora. Beyond his extraordinary contributions as a record producer in Ethiopia, whose

oeuvre would decades later reach a global listening public through reissues on the *éthiopiennes* label, he made an institutional impact through founding one of the first Ethiopian restaurants abroad as well as the first Ethiopian nightclub in the United States. Amha was a vital link in the course of events that resulted in the spread of Ethiopian restaurants worldwide, a process that has made Ethiopian cuisine and music a global phenomenon. His Ibex nightclub had a continued presence in the DC area until it closed in February 1997.

As a result of Amha's work in institutionalizing Ethiopian music performance in Washington, DC, at both his restaurant and his nightclub, he became a sentinel for musicians from his homeland seeking a lifeline abroad and helped jump-start the process of chain migration by Ethiopian musicians to the DC metropolitan area. Amha was the first to arrange for Ethiopian musicians to tour in the United States in 1982–83, devoting a great deal of time and effort to bring the Walias Band over, some members of which sought asylum and remained in the United States afterward.¹⁷ That first tour spanned the nation, visiting Los Angeles, Houston, New York, Boston, and, of course, Washington, DC. Soon after, Ethiopian singers began to arrive on their own, hiring keyboardists who had immigrated to the United States to accompany them. Over the years, individual musicians who came as part of concert tours or arrived independently chose to remain in Washington, DC, did so in large part because of the institutional base Amha had built.

Heterolocal Residential Patterns and the Importance of Ethnic Places

Several characteristics are common to the structure of most Ethiopian immigrant communities. First, most of them share heterolocal patterns of residency with immigrants spread across various neighborhoods.¹⁸ Thus, Ethiopian immigrants lived in different neighborhoods rather than in Ethiopian-only areas. Second, one finds that similar institutions and social organizations anchor most Ethiopian diaspora communities, providing a template through which one can gain a comparative perspective. And third, musicians have played important roles in shaping not just musical events, but institutional and cultural life across these communities. They founded institutions that support other musicians and arts activities and sustain venues such as churches that serve many in a locality. Because of its dominant position as the center of Ethiopian American diaspora life, it is worthwhile to explore the Ethiopian community of Washington, DC, and the metropolitan area of which it is a part for insights.

Washington, DC

The large number of Ethiopians in Washington, DC, has made a particularly indelible impression on new arrivals from the Horn of Africa: “You feel like you’re in your own country when you come here,” recalls Tefera Zewdie, owner of Dukem Ethiopian Restaurant, who left Ethiopia as a teenager in the 1980s.¹⁹ No other community has the same density of immigrants from the Horn of Africa as does Washington, DC, with an estimated two hundred fifty thousand Ethiopian residents.²⁰

Although a few Ethiopian refugees arrived in Washington, DC, as early as 1975, including the notable Amha Eshete discussed earlier, Ethiopian institutional development in the area began to intensify around 1980. The Ethiopian Community Center on Georgia Avenue NW was founded that year, with the Ethiopian Community Development Council established in 1983 as an organization to help resettle refugees in the metropolitan area.²¹ Ethiopian musicians arriving in Washington, DC, in the early 1980s noticed the upsurge of Ethiopian-related activity and recall that it directly influenced their decision to settle in the area:

My ticket was Addis Ababa, Milano, Boston, that’s it. . . . Then, when I came to Washington, DC, there were a lot of Ethiopians, Ethiopian restaurants, everything. I changed my mind because I had a lot of friends here, maybe the music business might be here. When the band came here, weddings, show business, restaurants, everything boomed.²²

In the 1980s, most Ethiopian commercial establishments in Washington, DC, were in the Adams Morgan area centered around Columbia Road and 18th Street. By the 1990s, as rental prices for shops skyrocketed in Adams Morgan, Ethiopian commerce shifted to the U Street corridor converging on 9th Street close to Howard University. In the mid-2000s, the Ethiopian community launched an initiative to officially name 9th Street “Little Ethiopia,” a move successfully resisted by African Americans who had long considered that area, the site of the Lincoln Theatre and known as “the Black Broadway” where Duke Ellington performed, to be the heart of Washington’s historical African American community.²³ (See plate 6.1.)

By the 2000s, with the explosion of real estate prices in Washington, DC, many Ethiopians moved to suburbs in Maryland and Virginia and new Ethiopian commercial areas began to open. (See plate 6.2.) Eastern Avenue in Silver Spring, Maryland, became a new center, with Ethiopian shops and restaurants, and a second commercial area emerged in down-



PLATE 6.1 On U Street NW in Washington, DC, a mural of Duke Ellington overlooked Almaz, an Ethiopian restaurant that closed during the pandemic in 2020. Collection of author.

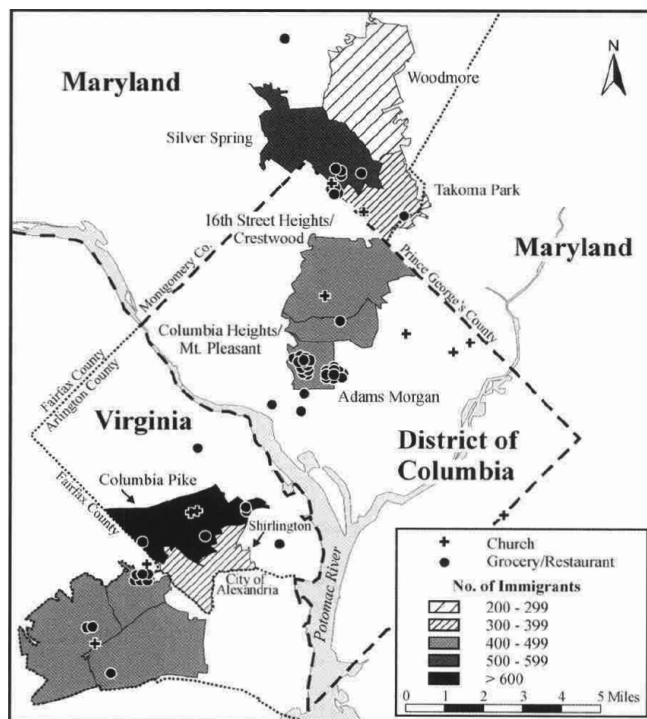


PLATE 6.2 Ethiopian immigrants and establishments in the Washington metropolitan area. From Elizabeth Chacko, "Ethiopian Ethos and the Making of Ethnic Places in the Washington Metropolitan Area," *Journal of Cultural Geography* 20, no. 2 (2003): 23.

town Alexandria, Virginia, and extended into other Virginia suburbs. It has been suggested that Little Ethiopia in Washington, DC, has been displaced by two new Little Ethiopias, one in Silver Spring and nearby Takoma Park, Maryland, the other in Alexandria extending west into Fairfax County, Virginia.²⁴ Houses of worship were among the institutions founded by Ethiopian immigrants: The Debre Selam Kidist Mariam EOT Church was one of the first, established in 1987 in Washington, DC, and given cathedral status as *Re'ese Adbarat* (Head of Churches) in 2001.²⁵

The shaded areas on the map in plate 6.2 identify residential concentrations of Ethiopians in the DC metropolitan area, who constituted less than 20 percent of new African arrivals even in those neighborhoods where they had the greatest concentrations.²⁶ The various residential areas highlighted in plate 6.2 and the relative numbers of Ethiopians in each, indicate that the largest number of Ethiopians dwelled in Virginia, followed by Maryland, with Washington, DC, in a close third place. These data, gathered by cultural geographer Elizabeth Chacko in the early 2000s, correlate with the demographic information provided by musicians I interviewed who were living in the metropolitan area in 2007–8.

TABLE 6.1 **Ethnic place-making in the heterolocal urban setting**

Ethnic institutions	churches, civic and political organizations, etc.
Ethnic sociocommerscapes	ethnic businesses that provide goods and meeting places
Ethnic arenas	spaces used repeatedly by a community but lacking permanent ethnic markers
Intangible ethnic places	internet sites, radio and television stations, musical recordings, etc.

SOURCE: Elizabeth Chacko, "Ethiopian Ethos and the Making of Ethnic Places in the Washington Metropolitan Area," *Journal of Cultural Geography* 20, no. 2 (2003): 29–30.

The DC metropolitan area exemplifies a residential pattern that can be observed in most other Ethiopian diaspora communities across the United States: as has been noted, residential areas do not coincide with the location of important Ethiopian commercial and cultural institutions. The black dots on the map mark the locations of Ethiopian grocery stores and restaurants and the crosses mark locations of Ethiopian churches. These physical sites serve, to borrow terminology from cultural geography, as "ethnic place makers," which hold both real and symbolic meaning in the construction of Ethiopian diaspora communities.²⁷ These important sites, separate from the immigrants' homes and workplaces, are where members of the community gather. Sociologist Ray Oldenburg has referred to such places as the "great good places" or as "third places."²⁸ Oldenburg suggests that the most important function of these places is to unite a neighborhood, but in the case of the Ethiopian diaspora discussed here, third places are most often outside neighborhoods of residence and therefore exercise a very special role in bringing together a dispersed community.

Ethnic Place-Making in the Ethiopian American Diaspora

Chacko argues that urban ethnic identities are not displayed in the residential centers but rather are vested in specific "*places* where community is forged and embodied."²⁹ She also suggests that Ethiopian diaspora place-making serves as a model for understanding the creation and maintenance of an ethnic community by other new immigrant groups.³⁰

Chacko provides a useful taxonomy of the places that generate a sense of community in urban settings characterized by residential scattering, dividing them into four categories she terms ethnic institutions, ethnic sociocommerscapes, ethnic arenas, and intangible ethnic places. (See table 6.1.)

ETHNIC INSTITUTIONS

Ethnic institutions are dominated in the Ethiopian diaspora first and foremost by churches, an indication of the strong stream of Ethiopian Orthodox Christian descent that unites a good number of Ethiopian immigrants. The revolution affected Christian Amhara Ethiopians immediately and, as a result of the many pressures on the homeland Orthodox Church, the majority of the American diaspora Ethiopian refugees during the first years of the revolution were of Orthodox Christian faith. As we have seen, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church has a liturgy that is almost entirely musical, with highly trained musicians singing, playing drums and sistra, and dancing. A musician must be one of the founders of a local church because, without a musician, the liturgy cannot be performed. A notable example we already encountered in chapter 3 is the career of *liqa mezemran* Moges Seyoum, who was trained as both a priest and a musician and who co-founded an Ethiopian Orthodox Church in Dallas, Texas, on his arrival as a refugee in 1982. In 1987 *liqa mezemran* Moges traveled regularly to Washington, DC, to help establish DSK Mariam EOT Church in Washington, DC, which has matured into one of the largest Ethiopian churches in the global Ethiopian diaspora.³¹

Only at large churches in major urban areas such as Mariam EOT Church in Washington, DC, does one find a cohort of musicians performing the liturgy. But one finds many churches scattered across all Ethiopian diaspora locales, the smaller ones often staffed by a clergyman who both chants the liturgy and administers sacraments, sometimes assisted by young deacons from the congregation. Although in early years of the diaspora many Ethiopian churches met in buildings lent by other denominations, such as Riverside Church in New York City, a number have gone on to purchase existing buildings, including Debre Selam St. Michael EOT Church in Boston and St. Mary's EOT Church in Los Angeles. A few have designed and built their own new structures, including St. Gabriel EOT Church in Seattle. Complicating factors related to church governance and membership have arisen, including conflicted relationships between diaspora churches and the church hierarchy in Addis Ababa; an alternative patriarch was recognized in the United States.³² In addition, many churches experienced internal tensions and divided into new, competing congregations. For this reason, it is not unusual to find several Ethiopian and Eritrean Orthodox Churches in most Ethiopian diaspora communities, as well as increasing numbers of Protestant and evangelical institutions.

Other ethnic religious institutions in the Ethiopian American diaspora include mosques. Muslim Ethiopians who migrated initially tended to af-

filiate with existing area mosques wherever they settled. Several communities with a critical mass of Ethiopian Muslims of Oromo descent, including Atlanta, Oakland, and Toronto, have established their own mosques.

As we have already seen, ethnic organizations also include community centers that offer social services and support for their communities in transition. Most communities have social-service institutions of various sizes, often named after the Ethiopian ethnic community that they serve.

ETHNIC SOCIOCOMMERCESCAPES

Sociocommescapes include stores, record shops, and most notably in the case of Ethiopian and Eritrean diaspora, restaurants. Some sociocommescapes are unmarked as ethnic places, such as a Starbucks in downtown Minneapolis that was so packed with Ethiopian, Oromo, and Somali men when I visited one Saturday afternoon in March 2011 that I couldn't squeeze inside.³³

Ethiopian markets are scattered across many diaspora locales, such as the small Maru Grocery on Bissonnet Street in Houston, Texas, the only Ethiopian shop in a diverse and multiethnic shopping center. Ethiopian sociocommescapes, including the markets that sell traditional foodstuffs such as spices and Ethiopia's indigenous *teff* grain (*Eragrostis tef*), are also the main venues through which flyers that advertise concerts and other cultural events are circulated.³⁴ Most of these markets stock sound recordings and DVDs and, on occasion, traditional clothing and a few Ethiopian musical instruments. Only a few Ethiopian shops, such as the California Studio in Minneapolis, marketed only audiovisual materials.³⁵

It has been said that cooking and cuisine represent "aesthetic knowledge of identity" and that "the Ethiopian restaurant is the most visible projection of Ethiopia's diasporic community in the West (whether in Amsterdam, London, or Rome or on 18th Street in Washington, DC)."³⁶ In the diaspora, Ethiopian restaurants provide a sociocommescap where Ethiopians from different neighborhoods gather and where people from the broader American community also come into contact with Ethiopian culinary and cultural worlds.

Ethiopian restaurants are generally among the first public venues to emerge in virtually any and every American city with an Ethiopian resident able to cook and administer it. These places, well marked and known within their respective urban areas, serve as magnets at which Ethiopians (and many others) converge.

The names of Ethiopian restaurants provide insights into diaspora and homeland politics, ethnicity, and religious orientations. Many take names



PLATE 6.3 Addis Ababa Restaurant in Silver Spring, Maryland (named after the Ethiopian capital city), was one of dozens of Ethiopian restaurants scattered across the DC metropolitan area. Collection of author.

that recall places in the owner's native region of Ethiopia or Eritrea, such as Langano (a lake in Oromia south of the Ethiopian capital), Ras Dashen (the highest mountain in northern Ethiopia's Semien Mountains), Dukem (a small town south of Addis Ababa), or Lalibela (site of the famous rock churches in northern Ethiopia). Certain city names (Asmara, Dire Dawa) signal owners and clientele of Eritrean or Oromo ethnicity, respectively. (See plate 6.3.) Many restaurants use Ethiopian words evoking moods, important dates, and objects: Desta (joy or happiness), Meskerem (September, start of the new year), and Kokeb (star). A few take the name of their owners, such as Zenebech or Rahel. Others are named after Ethiopian Christian holidays and important rituals, or objects associated with food and its presentation, including Fasika (Easter), Demera (ritual bonfire for *Masqal*), Bunna (coffee), and Mesob (large table-height basket that holds a communal food tray). An informal commentary about Ethiopian restaurants in a cross section of American locales provides a colorful overview:

I fell in love with my first [Ethiopian restaurant] in Boulder, Colorado, in 1990, but sadly, the Colorado foothills offered only one option, as did

Jacksonville. Conversely, Princeton had none, making Manhattan feel like a windfall with eight. Los Angeles, to its credit, had 10 and a Little Ethiopia district lined with banners and bunting. For those few years in the City of Angels, I felt as if we had hit the East African jackpot.

That was before Dallas. . . . By the time we had been here for a year, I'd mapped out 11 Ethiopian restaurants, one Eritrean restaurant, and at least two Ethiopian grocers. . . . The region surrounding [Interstate] 635 and Greenville, the area that DFW International identifies as Little Ethiopia, isn't going to win any awards for quaintness . . . our Little Ethiopia has no banners, no foot traffic, or signposts, and no defined borders, just a very loose concentration of restaurants and retail that, though not showy, provides an introduction to a North Texas immigration story that, for the last 35 years, has gone largely untold.³⁷

Ethiopian communities are most publicly represented by their restaurants, and few other Ethiopian third places across the diaspora are also so closely tied to musical life. Many restaurants are venues for live Ethiopian musical performance if any Ethiopian musician is available in the area to perform; otherwise, restaurants play recordings imported from Ethiopia, or increasingly, Ethiopian music recorded in the United States. The DC metropolitan area has countless Ethiopian restaurants and is particularly rich in live musical entertainment on weekend and holiday evenings. Some North American Ethiopian restaurants, such as Dukem on U Street in Washington, DC, are so famous internationally for both Ethiopian food and musical performances that they advertise on billboards in downtown Addis Ababa. (See plate 6.4.)

A number of clubs feature Ethiopian musicians who compete for the same audiences. One summer night in 2008, I went to Arlington, Virginia, to hear a joint performance by two DC singers appearing together at a venue that usually features salsa music. Not until around 11 p.m., when neither the accompanying instrumentalists nor more than a few members of the audience had arrived, did the singers find out that the instrumentalists whom they had hired to accompany them had gone instead to perform at an Ethiopian restaurant just down the road.³⁸ The performance was canceled.

ETHNIC ARENAS

Places termed "ethnic arenas" are those taken over occasionally to celebrate ethnic events on special occasions but that lack permanent markers of that ethnic presence. Once again, events held by Ethiopian diaspora



PLATE 6.4 Billboard on Bole Road in Addis Ababa advertising Dukem Ethiopian Restaurant in Washington, DC, and Baltimore, Maryland. Collection of author.

communities in such arenas are heavily associated with musical performance.

On holidays traditionally celebrated with outdoor processions, such as *Masqal*, the Festival of the True Cross observed annually in late September, many Ethiopian churches hold ceremonies in local parks they have reserved for the occasion. New Riverside Park, bordering on Memorial Drive in Cambridge, Massachusetts, adjacent to the Charles River, has regularly hosted a *Masqal* ceremony mounted jointly by several Ethiopian Orthodox churches from various neighborhoods of Boston and its suburbs. The event requires considerable diasporic creativity because the bonfire traditionally lit for homeland *Masqal* observances is prohibited by American fire laws. However, the enterprising congregations have fashioned a bonfire-shaped conical structure covered with gold-flecked cloth that reflects the rays of the setting sun, around which the congregation processes, carrying sparklers and candles, singing hymns.³⁹ (See plate 6.5.)

Other ethnic arenas exist, most prominently the stadiums that host the annual Ethiopian soccer tournaments. In the mid-1970s, small groups of Ethiopians began to gather informally on the weekends in various diaspora locales to play soccer. “We knew each other, somehow we found each other,” musician Elias Negash said of the first soccer sessions in the



PLATE 6.5 New Riverside Park in Cambridge, Massachusetts, is an ethnic arena regularly transformed for community *Masqal* observance. Collection of author.

Oakland Ethiopian community when he arrived there in 1975.⁴⁰ “Since it was a small community, this was our chance to get together and speak our national language.”⁴¹

Local soccer teams were quickly established by most Ethiopian diaspora communities and, in 1984, the Ethiopian Sports Federation in North America (ESFNA) was established. By 2015 there were thirty-one formally constituted Ethiopian soccer clubs from cities across the United States and Canada. For a week each year overlapping the July 4th weekend until its forced cancellation in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ethiopian community came together in a different metropolitan area chosen to host the annual event.⁴²

Games were played at a stadium rented for the occasion, with musicians contracted both from diaspora locales and from Ethiopia to perform at opening and closing tournament ceremonies, as well as at nightly events held at nearby concert venues and restaurants. Each soccer tournament constructed its own temporary sociocommercial center adjacent to the stadium, erecting rows of tents and booths for vendors selling mementos, recordings, and food, with ample space given over to exhibits for philanthropic and public help organizations.⁴³ (See plate 6.6.)

A list of the urban areas that have hosted this annual summer event both provides an overview of the major Ethiopian diaspora communities and demonstrates the manner in which sports and music combine



PLATE 6.6 The ESFNA 2008 sociocommerscape constructed alongside RFK Stadium in Washington, DC. Collection of author.

to bring these new communities together. (See table 6.2.) Major musical events both open and close the games: An opening “Ethiopia Day” concert typically leads off the tournament, and a festive concert with major performers is scheduled for the final evening.⁴⁴

The ongoing life of soccer tournaments also provides a map of ethnic divisions among immigrants from the Horn of Africa. In 1986, twelve years after ESFNA was founded, Eritreans initiated the Eritrean Sports Federation in North America (ERSFNA) with a mission “to promote and facilitate the development of amateur sports and cultural events within the Eritrean and Eritrean-American communities in North America.”⁴⁵ A decade later, in 1996, the Oromo Sports Federation in North America (OSFNA) sponsored its first formal soccer tournament in Toronto, bringing together six participating clubs from several Canadian cities as well as from Minnesota and Seattle.⁴⁶

All the soccer tournaments, whatever their ethnic or political affiliation, are major, if temporary, sites for musical performances. Some Ethiopian restaurants near the games, such as Dukem in Washington, DC, remain open twenty-four hours a day for round-the-clock socializing and performances during the weeklong tournaments in their area.⁴⁷ (See plate 6.7.)

Beyond ESFNA’s focus on soccer and music, the organization also has a social mission as a nonprofit organization dedicated to promoting Ethiopian culture and heritage and to building a positive environment within

TABLE 6.2 Venues for ESFNA, 1997–2020

2020	Minneapolis, MN (canceled because of the COVID-19 pandemic)
2019	Atlanta, GA
2018	Dallas, TX
2017	Seattle, WA
2016	Toronto, Canada
2015	College Park, MD
2014	San Jose, CA
2013	College Park, MD
2012	Dallas, TX
2011	Atlanta, GA
2010	San Jose, CA
2009	Chicago, IL
2008	Washington, DC
2007	Dallas, TX
2006	Los Angeles, CA
2005	Atlanta, GA
2004	Seattle, WA
2003	Houston, TX
2002	Hyattsville, MD
2001	San Francisco, CA
2000	Toronto, Canada
1999	Dallas, TX
1998	Atlanta, GA
1997	Atlanta, GA

Ethiopian American communities in North America. The organization aspires to bring Ethiopians together to network, to support the growing Ethiopian business community, and to empower the young by providing scholarships and mentoring programs. The soccer tournaments, as well as other sports activities and cultural events, are vehicles for an increasingly ambitious social mission.⁴⁸ In 2018 ESFNA donated funds for relief efforts in Ethiopia to mitigate the impact of yet another drought; for this purpose, ESFNA partnered with Catholic Relief Services and local non-governmental organizations in Ethiopia. ESFNA also collected and donated funds for flood victims in the Omo River Region of southern Ethiopia and for HIV/AIDS relief across the country.

The soccer tournaments, like almost all immigrant community ventures and organizations, reveal the complexity of diaspora politics, as well as the deep value placed on collective activities that enhance social bonding. The Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Oromo soccer games continued until the advent of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 as well-attended annual events, with



PLATE 6.7 A banner announcing 24/7 musical entertainment at Dukem Ethiopian Restaurant, Washington, DC, during ESFNA 2008. Courtesy of Itsushi Kawase.

Eritrean and Oromo games both scheduled for dates that do not conflict with ESFNA. But in 2011–12, homeland political conflicts divided ESFNA and led to a split that resulted in a competing tournament. The annual ESFNA soccer tournament took place in Dallas, Texas, from July 1 to 7, 2012, and a rival tournament was mounted by the newly organized All Ethiopian Sports Association One (AESAOONE) during that same week in Washington, DC.⁴⁹ The soccer tournaments bring the *sāmanna wärq* (wax and gold) metaphor to life—what appears on the surface to be merely a sports event on closer scrutiny reveals multiple layers of athletic, musical, and political competition.

INTANGIBLE ETHNIC PLACES

Much of diaspora cultural life is transacted in virtual spaces, most prominently through the internet, but also through engagement with media such as sound recordings. The internet is central to Ethiopian life in diaspora, both forging a sense of community and promoting cultural innovation. “Information and communication technologies (ICTs) have made transnational, extraterritorial Ethiopian culture a reality, rendering com-

monplace diaspora contact with the homeland that was previously impossible.”⁵⁰ By the end of the twentieth century, virtual networks had transformed the experience of diaspora Ethiopians:

Since 2000, I have watched my Ethiopian American children and their friends maintain almost daily contact with Ethiopia. At (Ethiopian owned) 7-11 [7-Eleven] stores, they buy telephone cards to call friends and families in Ethiopia about day-to-day problems. They keep up with Ethiopian news, politics, and music through a plethora of Web sites. . . . Diaspora Ethiopians send remittances in amounts greater than Ethiopia earns from its coffee exports. . . . The advance of information technology is in large measure responsible for those transnational connections.⁵¹

A watershed technological event that occurred in 2000 sparked an explosion in virtual communications by Ethiopians, notably digitization of the Ethiopic script and the acceptance of the Ethiopic character set for inclusion in Unicode 3.0 Standard (Unicode Consortium).⁵² This invention made it possible for Ethiopians and Eritreans, who read and write in Amharic and Tigrinya, to communicate online.⁵³

Ethiopians have been extraordinarily active in posting Ethiopian diaspora recordings and music videos on YouTube, which has become a treasure house for both homeland and Ethiopian diaspora music culture. Many websites stream music and provide discussions of a wide array of Ethiopian musical styles. An informal survey of the online presence of twenty-five diaspora musicians provided insight into three levels of virtual presence. First, nine musicians who perform entirely within the Ethiopian community, but of economic necessity pursue their careers part-time, have no media outlets of their own. In some cases, this is due to less-than-fluent English skills and performances only in Amharic or other vernacular languages of the Horn of Africa. These musicians work largely through personal and community networks and do not have websites, Facebook pages, or Twitter and Instagram accounts. A second group of six perform for Ethiopian audiences internationally and have a presence on websites or Facebook but lack Twitter or Instagram accounts. One of these six has a website only in Amharic and another, only a Twitter account. Third, ten full-time professional musicians or ensembles are active on Facebook and have websites, as well as Twitter or Instagram accounts. Two of this group have their own channels on YouTube. The size and professional preparation of these websites are notable.⁵⁴

A vital source for Ethiopian diaspora communications by the begin-

ning of the twenty-first century was the *Ethiopian Yellow Pages*. Discussed at more length in chapter 9, this publication has morphed from a printed volume for the DC community to an online publication, which, in the words of its founder Yeshimebet “Tutu” Belay, is “more than a book.”⁵⁵ The volume includes a section devoted to musicians, a contribution of the *Ethiopian Yellow Pages* vice president Yehunie Belay, who is a well-known traditional musician.

Ethiopians and Eritreans living abroad depend heavily on the internet, which increasingly serves as the primary conduit for communications in diaspora.⁵⁶ A study of the Eritrean website www.dehai.org, founded during the first years of Eritrean independence (1992–2000), discussed the ways in which the “new forms of technological and geographical mobility are giving rise to new publics and new public spheres that transform the meanings of community, citizenship, and nation.”⁵⁷ On August 1, 2020, a new channel titled Trace Muzika was launched via the online streaming service habeshaview-app, performing “non-stop music” from Ethiopia and its diaspora. The channel ranks the top 10 Ethiopian songs and includes music from “diverse regions in Ethiopia.”⁵⁸

Yet the internet is still not as readily accessible in Ethiopia itself, a result both of an insufficient technological infrastructure and of restrictive government policies. This has particularly been the case since 2005, when many websites and blogs were blocked by the Ethiopian government, restrictions that were relaxed only in spring 2018.⁵⁹

Rounding out the virtual sphere, there are Ethiopian radio and television stations across the diaspora, most started by individual entrepreneurs. We can take as an example Radio DJ Endale Getahun, who in 2016 began the first Ethiopian FM radio station in Aurora, Colorado (KETO 93.9 FM).⁶⁰ Endale works “through music.” He says, even though “I am not a composer or creator . . . I play and distribute both recordings and live shows.”⁶¹

Music is therefore ubiquitous across these intangible ethnic places as Ethiopians attempt to overcome distances from the homeland and to forge new, virtual social networks among far-flung diaspora locales.⁶² Many musicians advertise and distribute their own CDs and DVDs internationally, circulating clips or MP3s on the web.

By the mid-1980s, Ethiopians settled in many cities across the United States and Canada. Although many aspects of diaspora community life that have been noted are shared, a complex interaction of ethnic, cultural, and political factors combine to shape these North American Ethiopian diaspora communities in slightly different ways. Here we will briefly sur-

vey some of the major issues that render each community distinctive; the economic and occupational patterns that shape these centers; and complex issues related to religion and gender.

The Politics of Diaspora Life

A range of political issues are never very far from the surface in most Ethiopian diaspora communities. The Ethiopian government's implementation of the policy of ethnic federalism in 1993, which redrew provincial maps and renamed regions according to their majority ethnic population, has resulted in continuing ethnic conflict both in the homeland and in diaspora.

From the earliest years of the diaspora, there were deep ethnic divisions between Ethiopians and Eritreans, an outgrowth of the bitter civil war that contributed to the fall of the emperor and resulted in Eritrean independence in the early 1990s. But, since 2000, Ethiopian-Eritrean tensions have slowly receded, with a rapprochement officially taking place when Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed negotiated a peace treaty between the two nations on July 9, 2018, accelerating a healing process already underway both at home and abroad.⁶³ This reconciliation was, not surprisingly, celebrated through musical performances in Addis Ababa on July 15, 2018, with the "Declaration of Peace" concert at Addis Ababa's Millennium Hall. There, singer Teddy Afro (Tewodros Kassahun) appeared alongside eight other famous musicians, who performed under giant portraits of the presidents of Ethiopia and Eritrea.⁶⁴

But if Ethiopian-Eritrean tensions have slowly receded in the diaspora, other new tensions have emerged, especially over the growth of Oromo political power in the homeland and efforts toward Oromo autonomy. At the end of the revolution in 1991, forces from northern Tigray province assumed power, with the TPLF (Tigray People's Liberation Front) and EPRDF (Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front) established as the ruling parties. After a yearlong attempt at political cooperation between the TPLF-EPRDF and the OLF (Oromo Liberation Front), the new government was threatened by the OLF's growing nationalism. EPRDF forces attacked Oromo peoples in two southern regions of the country, killing and displacing many. As a result, the OLF left the government, further violence ensued, and many more Oromo migrated abroad.⁶⁵ A number of displaced Oromo sought asylum in existing Oromo communities such as Minneapolis, Atlanta, and Seattle, where, on arrival, they were described by the receiving communities as "traumatized."⁶⁶

Since the revolution as well, ethnic tensions have increased between

Ethiopians and Somalis from both the Ethiopian Ogaden region and adjacent Somalia itself, who departed the Horn of Africa in response to several waves of conflict. In part because of these tensions, refugees of Somali descent have tended to remain within their own social networks.

Diaspora communities have also increasingly taken political action and mounted protests over international events negatively affecting Ethiopia or its diaspora. For example, a sudden deportation of Ethiopian migrants from Saudi Arabia in 2013 caused an outcry among diaspora Ethiopians worldwide, who drew attention to “serious deportation abuses.” Initiatives included a letter to the US State Department delivered to the Dallas federal courthouse by local Ethiopian community leader Mac Mekonnen. “Our immigrants in Saudi Arabia are being robbed and abused,” Mac told the local press.⁶⁷

Economic and Occupational Patterns

There are shared occupational patterns across diaspora communities. First-generation diaspora Ethiopians have tended to cluster professionally in transportation and service industries, taking advantage of ethnic networks to obtain positions driving taxis, staffing parking garages, and working at airports.⁶⁸ According to members of the community, working as a taxi driver enabled immigrants to act as their own bosses and was more lucrative than other available employment. Beyond setting one’s own schedule, drivers placed a high premium on being able to park anywhere and felt that they could balance driving with other commitments such as child-care or attending classes.⁶⁹

Ethiopians continue to be well represented in the hospitality industry, many working in restaurants, hotels, and shops. Although an Ethiopian professional network is growing in business, law, and academia, especially among Ethiopian Americans of the second generation, many older immigrants remain limited by lack of fluency in English and seek positions in sectors such as elder care that can accommodate their linguistic and professional skills.

Issues of Gender

Changing gender relations is a cultural arena characterized by both divisions and concern across the Ethiopian diaspora. Many issues confront women from the Horn of Africa in diaspora communities, including continuing trauma from their journeys to the United States. Marriages made along the migration route often cannot withstand the pressures of reset-

tlement; in many cases, tension has arisen when wives are younger and more adaptable than their husbands, who are accustomed to homeland patriarchal domination. Resettlement in the North American diaspora presents challenges such as spousal abuse, which prove to be of heightened concern when instances of domestic violence lead to deportation of the abuser.⁷⁰ Although a woman in diaspora has the power to call the police, once authorities are involved, a family may be divided and lose a major breadwinner as well. Unlike in Ethiopia, in the diaspora there are no *shāmagāle* (elders) who traditionally mediate family disputes. One therefore finds an immigrant community that both suffers from traumas and anger brought with them from Ethiopia and faces substantial challenges in adjusting to gender equality in diaspora life.

Newly founded social organizations try to address such problems. Groups such as the Adbar Women's Alliance (AWA), founded in 1994 in Cambridge, Massachusetts, emerged from discussions among women attending the annual soccer tournaments in the early 1990s.⁷¹ Local resources can also shape the institutions in a single diaspora community. For instance, a decision was made to establish the AWA in Cambridge, Massachusetts, rather than in Washington, DC, because of the numerous universities and higher educational level in the area that founders thought would encourage acceptance of the organization. Despite this carefully chosen locale, traditional community attitudes and issues of domestic violence have often continued. At the same time, women of the Ethiopian diaspora have made important contributions to the institutional and economic lives of their new communities, initiatives that will be discussed in more detail in chapters 9 and 10.

A number of concerns cross ethnic, gender, and religious affiliations among all the immigrants from the Horn of Africa wherever they have settled. Prominent among them is the question of where they will be buried at the end of their lives. This has been an especially pressing matter for aging first-generation immigrants who retain strong emotional ties to their homelands. As a result, many communities in diaspora maintain an old Ethiopian Christian tradition of founding social welfare organizations known as *mahbār* (*mahber*), as well as more recent neighborhood self-help organizations, *əddər* (*edir*) without religious ties.⁷² In both cases, members make regular payments into a monthly fund and on the occasion of a death, the costs for repatriation and burial in Ethiopia are covered at least in part for a member.⁷³

However, forty years or more of residence in diaspora have resulted in deeper attachments among some first-generation immigrants to the United States, now the homeland of their US children. As a result, there

is an emerging trend for first-generation immigrants, especially Eritreans, to be buried in diaspora.⁷⁴

A Comparative Perspective

Despite the prevalence of heterolocal residences in many metropolitan areas, third spaces such as Little Ethiopia in Los Angeles or the emerging Little Ethiopias in Washington, DC, Silver Spring, and Alexandria, provide a density of Ethiopian cultural life that is as exciting for longtime residents as for new arrivals. Singer Teshome Mitiku recalled that

I came to visit my brother Teddy [in Washington, DC] sometime in the early 90s. When I came here I was shocked. I never thought that such a large number of Ethiopians had migrated to this part of the world. I mean everywhere I went there were Ethiopians. I said to myself, “What am I doing in Sweden? This is where I need to be.” Then I went back to Sweden. . . . I gave my apartment to a friend and I was gone. As soon as I arrived here, I got involved in a lot of Ethiopian activities, including music, fundraising for different causes. I became socially involved with the community. That kept me going.⁷⁵

Yet, although there is Ethiopian musical activity across a full range of ethnic places in most Ethiopian diaspora locales, especially on days of religious, historical, and political significance, there are real logistical and economic challenges to uniting these widely scattered communities.

Most Ethiopian diaspora communities have both significant similarities and some striking differences. Some communities may have slightly more residential clustering that results from their cities' smaller geographical spread than do those of the DC metropolitan area, Los Angeles, or the San Francisco Bay Area, allowing ethnic places and sociocommunes to generate an abiding sense of community in these locales as well. (See appendix for an overview of selected Ethiopian diaspora communities across the United States.) The earlier immigrants, primarily Ethiopian Christians and Eritreans from the highland region, are better institutionalized and are more comfortable with displaying their ethnic identities. In contrast, refugees of Oromo or Somali descent tend to be more recent arrivals and less numerous except in Minneapolis and a few other diaspora locales. They are less inclined to publicly display their identity, both out of ambivalence about their Ethiopian pasts, and, for many, out of concerns related to emphasizing their Muslim identities in the post-9/11 United States.

In part as a result of the dispersed nature of their residences across large

metropolitan areas, Ethiopians in Washington, DC, Los Angeles, and the San Francisco Bay Area tend to have more contact with others across ethnic and racial boundaries than do Ethiopians, Eritreans, and Oromo living in smaller communities in midwestern, southern, and southeastern locales. Similarly, Ethiopians in New York City, for the most part, lack well-defined ethnic places in which they can express their identities. But changing economic and social conditions also reshape relationships within a community and transform local ethnic and class divisions over time, as do both homeland and US domestic politics.

Musicians are present and actively performing in many of the communities surveyed in the appendix, many standing out for the important work they have done on behalf of the traditions they transmit and the communities they represent. But the waves of homeland and diaspora political currents circulating through individual communications and virtual channels are ever volatile, galvanizing political positions that can quickly give rise to disturbing outcomes. Such events have on occasion directly threatened the careers of even the most beloved musicians.

Political controversies can emerge unexpectedly from seemingly innocuous events, with devastating consequences for some individuals. One such diaspora controversy involved a well-known Ethiopian immigrant singer of Gurage descent in Washington DC, Abonesh “Abiti” Adinew. In a diaspora poised to respond to highly charged political issues, a musician became the epicenter of a heated conflict.

Abonesh “Abiti” Adinew

Born in 1970 in a Gurage region about one hundred kilometers southwest of Addis Ababa and a specialist in *bahelawi* (cultural) music, Abonesh has been widely admired for her ability to sing in a variety of Ethiopian languages in addition to her native Guraginya language and to perform in many regional styles. As Abonesh noted,

I can’t talk Somali, but I can sing it. Ethiopia has different ethnicities and they have different cultures, they have different foods, and I like to explain to the people that culture. When you sing Orominya, the dance, the clothes, and everything, the music is different and beautiful. . . . Because if you explain about culture, about life, even about politics, you can explain through music.⁷⁶

During the revolution, just after her ninth-grade year in school, Abonesh was recruited to become a member of the *Kebur Zebenya*, the

Imperial Bodyguard Orchestra in Addis Ababa. She performed with the ensemble until, in 1991, the new government suddenly dissolved the orchestra, arrested some members, and vandalized the ensemble's headquarters, during which many of its recordings were also destroyed. Abonesh then joined the Ras Theatre for two years, moving next to the National Theatre and singing at an Addis Ababa nightclub.

With employment becoming increasingly uncertain, Abonesh followed many other musicians and decided to leave the country. In 1998, while in Washington, DC, on a musical tour arranged by the Ethiopian government, Abonesh sought and received asylum, eventually becoming a US citizen. Well known for her rendition of the song discussed at the beginning of chapter 5, "Harar Dire Dawa," which describes the experience of refugees and the various overland routes they followed to leave Ethiopia, Abonesh quickly established a lively career traveling to perform in various communities. Abonesh and her husband opened a restaurant on 9th Street near Howard University, called after her nickname, Abiti, where she performed regularly for a growing clientele.

Seven years after arriving in the United States, Abonesh returned for the first time to Ethiopia. It was a tense period after disputed 2005 elections, a difficult political moment for Ethiopia and its diaspora.⁷⁷ Ethiopians were excited that Abonesh had returned for a visit, and she received a great deal of media attention. During one radio appearance, Abonesh was asked what she thought about the changes in the country since her departure, and she responded positively, commenting that the changes in Addis Ababa looked very good to her. Word of this interview spread rapidly via the internet, and many in diaspora were infuriated by what they perceived as praise by Abonesh for the Ethiopian government.⁷⁸

Upon her return to the United States, Abonesh received death threats and had to hire guards when she performed. She and her husband struggled to keep their restaurant open but were eventually forced to close it as a result of boycotts by patrons angered by the radio interview. Abonesh could no longer perform safely in the Washington, DC, area and, for a time, traveled to sing in Las Vegas, Seattle, and Atlanta and abroad in Sweden, England, and Germany. The pressures of diaspora rage on the singer and her family were extreme.

Despite the disruptions in her life, Abonesh continued to devote herself to important causes, organizing music for a World Refugee Day in Washington, DC, and participating in a fundraising video released by Washington, DC's Kedus Gabriel EOT Church.⁷⁹ She made recordings on behalf of AIDS relief and to support a fistula clinic in Ethiopia.⁸⁰ "It's like anything she can do to help in her power, she does it," commented her husband.⁸¹

By 2008, however, Abonesh decided to stop singing Ethiopian traditional music and began to focus exclusively on performing Ethiopian gospel music. A Facebook post by Abonesh stated that “In my future life, I will sing only for MY GOD! I wished for a long time to be a gospel singer. GOD allows this now.”⁸²

If Abonesh’s radio interview and diaspora response had a devastating impact on this singer’s life and musical career, other controversies, large and small, have intermittently engaged the growing number of Ethiopian diaspora communities in North America. But, throughout this process of migration and diaspora growth, Ethiopian musicians have continued to make music, their performances suspended between sound worlds of the past and diasporic innovations. The following chapter moves toward a definition of the Ethiopian sound and traces its collective and individual pathways over more than forty years of transformational mobility.

“Communities,” from SING AND SING ON by Kay Kaufman Shelemay. Used by permission of The University of Chicago Press. © 2022 by The University of Chicago. All Rights Reserved.

75. Beniam interview; Munit Mesfin, interview by author, May 21, 2014, Addis Ababa; Hermela Mulatu, interview by author, June 14, 2008, Washington, DC.

76. Abraham Habte Selassie, interview by author, June 12, 2008, Washington, DC; Getahun interview.

77. Ashenafi interview. See also LaDena Schnapper, ed., *Teenage Refugees from Ethiopia Speak Out (in Their Own Voices)* (New York: Rosen, 1997).

78. Mohaammad Ibraahim Xawil, interview by author, June 17, 2008, Washington, DC.

79. Zakki interview.

80. Abebaye Lema, interview by author, April 21, 2008, Cambridge, MA; Mesfin Zeberga Tereda, interview by author, August 18, 2007, Washington, DC. The diversity immigrant visa lottery mandated by the Immigration Act of 1990 (Pub. L. 101–649), which provided for fifty-five thousand “diversity immigrants” annually, was instituted in 1995.

81. Koehn, *Refugees from Revolution*, 150–51. Koehn compares the processes of migration during the Ethiopian and Iranian revolutions, the latter of which began in 1978, resulting in the overthrow of longtime Iranian ruler Mohammad Reza Shah Pahlavi, in early 1979.

82. Koehn, *Refugees from Revolution*, 162.

83. Koehn, *Refugees from Revolution*, 203n147.

84. Koehn, *Refugees from Revolution*, 183.

Chapter Six

1. The US Refugee Act established an Office of Refugee Resettlement in the Department of Health and Human Services and raised the number of refugees admitted from 17,400 to 50,000 annually. Official Ethiopian resettlement numbers, no doubt quite low, totaled 31,182 between 1980 and 1999; the two years with the highest numbers were in 1980–81 at 3,500 and 1991 at 4,085. Migration continued at a high level through 1993, after which it diminished slightly but continued until the present (Solomon, *History of Ethiopian Immigrants*, 103).

2. See William Safran, “Diasporas in Modern Societies: Myths of Homeland and Return,” *Diaspora* 1, no. 1 (1991): 83–99, for a fundamental discussion of diaspora. My approach here draws in a general way on the five variables that Kim D. Butler (“Defining Diaspora, Refining a Discourse,” *Diaspora* 10, no. 2 [2001]: 195) proposed for the purposes of diaspora analysis:

1. Reasons for, and conditions of, the dispersal
2. Relationship with the homeland
3. Relationship with host lands
4. Interrelationships within communities of the diaspora
5. Comparative studies of diasporas

3. For an overview of the Ethiopian diaspora and its study, see Kay Kaufman Shelemay and Steven Kaplan, “Introduction,” *Diaspora* 15, nos. 2–3 (2006 [pub. 2011]): 191–213.

4. Mark Slobin, “Music in Diaspora: The View from Euro-America,” *Diaspora* 3, no. 3 (1994): 243. See also Mette Louise Berg and Susan Eckstein, special issue, “Re-

imagining Diasporas and Generations,” *Diaspora* 18, nos. 1–2 (2009, pub. 2015), and Daniel Fittante, “Connection without Engagement: Paradoxes of North American Armenian Return Migration,” *Diaspora* 19, nos. 2–3 (2010, pub. 2017): 147–60.

5. Ethiopian lives both at home and abroad were dramatically affected by the Derg’s actions, including the adoption of a Marxist-Leninist ideology; a move away from the West toward an alliance with the Soviet Union; and nationalizations of businesses and private enterprise in February 1975, of all rural land in March, and of urban property in July of that same year (H. Marcus, *History of Ethiopia*, 192–96).

6. Elias Negash, interview by author, January 30, 2016, Los Altos, CA. See also Ryan Phillips, “East Africans in Oakland: Sharing Ethiopian Music with the World,” *Oakland North*, April 10, 2012, <https://oaklandnorth.net/2012/04/10/east-africans-in-oakland-sharing-ethiopian-music-with-the-world/>.

7. See Elias’s website, <https://www.eliasnegash.com/>. Another Ethiopian musician who immigrated to Berkeley, California, as a teenager in the late 1980s recalls taking music classes with Elias Negash: “When I came to the States, he was the only one who played jazz” (Kirubel Assefa, personal communication with author, May 14, 2020).

8. Danny, personal communication with author.

9. Solomon, *History of Ethiopian Immigrants*, 114–15.

10. Solomon, *History of Ethiopian Immigrants*, 115.

11. Before that time, only Mama Desta had opened a venue in Washington, DC, that served Ethiopian bread, *injera*, and tea. The efforts by Mama Desta and Amha Eshete were surely among the very first Ethiopian restaurants established outside Ethiopia, presaging what was to become a very successful culinary trend. For a longer discussion of the Ethiopian art of cooking and cuisine, characterized as “the most visible projection of Ethiopia’s diasporic community,” see James McCann, “A Response: *Doro Fänta*: Creativity vs. Adaptation in the Ethiopian Diaspora,” *Diaspora* 15, nos. 2–3 (2006 [pub. 2011]): 385, <https://doi.org/10.1353/dsp.2011.0075>. The first Ethiopian restaurant in the United States, and evidently the first outside Ethiopia worldwide, was opened in Long Beach, California, in 1966 by Beyene Guililat; it operated only for six months before it closed (Harry Kloman, *Mesob across America: Ethiopian Food in the U.S.A.* [New York: iUniverse, 2010], 147 and 150).

12. Tesfaye Lemma, interview by author, August 20, 2007, Washington, DC.

13. Amha Eshete, personal communication with author, June 1, 2015. In my earlier article, “Music in the Ethiopian American Diaspora: A Preliminary Overview,” in *Proceedings of the 16th International Conference of Ethiopian Studies: July 2–6, 2007, Trondheim, Norway*, ed. Svein Ege et al. (Wiesbaden, Ger.: Harrassowitz, 2009), 1153–64, <https://dash.harvard.edu/handle/1/4269154>, I mistakenly gave the name of Amha’s Ibex Club as Kilimanjaro. Kilimanjaro was another Washington, DC, club, founded by Victor and Shirley Kibunja in 1987, who thereafter established Kilimanjaro clubs in New York City and Nairobi, Kenya. I thank Alecia Kibunja of Washington, DC, for contacting me and for sending me the correct information about her parents’ club, which offered music and a variety of African cuisines. I regret my earlier error.

14. When Amha left the United States to return to Ethiopia in 1993 (Falceto, personal communication, August 31, 2020), he sold the first floor of his club to saxophonist Moges Habte, who had long played at the club and who reopened it as the Adey Ethiopian Club and Restaurant. The club had a difficult financial time, and the new owners changed the name to Soukous African Club to attract other Africans. The club

was shut down by police and its liquor license revoked after the fatal shooting of a DC policeman on its doorstep in 1997 (Moges H. interview; Vincent Morriss, “City Moves to Shut Down Go-Go Club,” *Washington Times*, February 7, 1997). Moges remembers gratefully the kindness of the building’s owner, who did not hold him to the fourteen years remaining on his lease.

15. Amha’s former wife remained in Washington, DC; his children live in New York City and Los Angeles (Amha interview, June 19, 2006).

16. Amha interview, June 19, 2006.

17. There was an earlier, brief American tour arranged for the Nile Ethiopian Ensemble, which performed on the Ed Sullivan Show in 1969. This subject will be discussed in chapter 8.

18. Wilbur Zelinsky and Barrett A. Lee, “Heterolocalism: An Alternative Model of the Sociospatial Behaviour of Immigrant Ethnic Communities,” *International Journal of Population Geography* 4, no. 4 (1998): 281–98, [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1099-1220\(199812\)4:4<281::AID-IJPG108>3.0.CO;2-O](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1099-1220(199812)4:4<281::AID-IJPG108>3.0.CO;2-O). However, in some of the cities, apartment complexes attracted a significant number of Ethiopian immigrants, such as the Telegraph Avenue housing division known as Keller Plaza largely occupied by Ethiopians in Oakland, California, and the large concentration of Somalis living in a group of high-rises known as the Cedars, which stand along Cedar Avenue in Minneapolis, Minnesota (Shelemay, field notes, October 31, 2015, Oakland, CA; and March 12, 2011, Minneapolis, MN).

19. Associated Press, “Little Ethiopia Taking Root in D.C. Area,” *Deseret News*, November 6, 2005, <https://www.deseret.com/2005/11/6/19920410/little-ethiopia-taking-root-in-d-c-area>.

20. Estimates for the Ethiopian population in the DC metropolitan area vary widely and depend on their dates, the separate records kept for Eritrean immigrants after the country’s 1993 independence, and the difficulty of counting the many Ethiopians who moved to the city from their documented arrival elsewhere in the United States. In “Ethiopian Ethos and the Making of Ethnic Places in the Washington Metropolitan Area,” *Journal of Cultural Geography* 20, no. 2 (2003): 21–42, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08873630309478274>, Elizabeth Chacko provides figures gathered in 2001 that estimate forty-five to fifty thousand Ethiopians in Washington, DC. However, by the turn of the Ethiopian millennium in September 2007, most in the community offered informal estimates as high as two hundred fifty thousand, a figure also cited by the press in 2010 (Misty Showalter, “Inside Washington D.C.’s ‘Little Ethiopia,’” *CNN World: Marketplace Africa*, October 22, 2010, <http://edition.cnn.com/2010/WORLD/africa/10/22/little.ethiopia.washington/>).

21. Associated Press, “Little Ethiopia Taking Root in D.C. Area.” See also <http://www.ethiopiancommunitydc.org> and <https://www.ecdcus.org/>. One can track the organization of the various diaspora communities from the founding dates of community organizations. For instance, see the Ethiopian Community in Seattle agency, incorporated in 1987 by immigrants who sought to help others, <http://ecseattle.org>.

22. Moges H. interview.

23. Associated Press, “Little Ethiopia Taking Root in D.C. Area.”

24. Dan Reed, “DC’s ‘Little Ethiopia’ Has Moved to Silver Spring and Alexandria,” *Greater Greater Washington*, September 14, 2015, <https://gwwash.org/view/39188/dcs-little-ethiopia-has-moved-to-silver-spring-and-alexandria>.

25. In Ge’ez the word *Tāwahādo*, popularly spelled *Tewahedo* (Kane, *Dictionary*,

994), means unified and is included in the formal title of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Some large diaspora churches today take the title *däbr* (*debre*), literally mount or mountain, a traditional designation in Ethiopia for a large monastic church built on land given by the emperor (Kaplan, “Däbr,” *EAE*, 2:6–7). Ethiopian churches tend to be named after saints or the Virgin Mary.

26. Chacko, “Ethiopian Ethos,” 29.

27. Chacko, “Ethiopian Ethos,” 25.

28. Ray Oldenburg, *The Great Good Place: Cafés, Coffee Shops, Community Centers, Beauty Parlors, General Stores, Bars, Hangouts, and How They Get You through the Day* (New York: Paragon House, 1989), xvii; and Ray Oldenburg, *Celebrating the Third Place: Inspiring Stories about the “Great Good Places” at the Heart of Our Communities* (New York: Marlowe, 2001).

29. Chacko, “Ethiopian Ethos,” 25.

30. Chacko, “Ethiopian Ethos,” 28. Chacko builds on the notion of heterolocalism in Zelinsky and Lee, “Heterolocalism,” and Joseph Wood’s concept of place making in “Vietnamese American Place Making in Northern Virginia,” *Geographical Review* 87, no. 1 (1997): 58–72, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1931-0846.1997.tb00060.x>. In “Ethiopian Ethos,” 24, Chacko suggests that “ethnic place-making in metropolitan areas has been loosened from its traditional central city moorings,” and it differs from one immigrant community to another.

31. While still living in Dallas, in 1987 Moges Seyoum made trips to officiate at DSK Mariam EOT Church in Washington, DC, at the time of its founding, finally relocating from Dallas to Washington, DC, in 1989 (Moges Seyoum, personal communication with author, August 8, 2020).

32. See Walle Engedayehu, “The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church in the Diaspora: Expansion in the Midst of Division,” *African Social Science Review* 6, no. 1 (2014): 115–33.

33. Shelemay, field notes, March 12, 2011, Minneapolis, MN.

34. The internet has in part, but not completely, replaced the longtime mode of advertising through posters and flyers displayed and distributed by local shops.

35. Chris Roberts, “Somali Music Is Here, but Hard to Find,” *MPR News*, August 30, 2006, <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2006/08/21/ethnicmusicsomalian>.

36. McCann, “Response: *Doro Fänta*,” 385. The expression of personhood through taste-based metaphors characterizes other traditions such as the Anatolian Greek diaspora in the United States as explicated in Panayotis League, “Grooving Heavy, Dancing Drunk: Gustemic Metaphor and Mimetic Polytemporality in Anatolian Greek Music,” *Ethnomusicology* 63, no. 3 (2019): 393–417.

37. Sarah Reiss, “How Dallas Got So Many Ethiopian Restaurants,” *D Magazine*, June 2011, <https://www.dmagazine.com/publications/d-magazine/2011/june/how-dallas-got-so-many-ethiopian-restaurants/>.

38. The concert featured Yehunie Belay and Mohaammad Xawil (Shelemay, field notes, July 3, 2008, Arlington, VA).

39. Shelemay, field notes, September 26, 2009, Cambridge, MA.

40. Elias interview.

41. Phillips, “East Africans in Oakland.”

42. “ESFNA 2015 in the DC-Maryland-Virginia Area,” *Ethiopian Sports Federation in North America*, February 3, 2015, https://www.esfna.net/news_article/show/474279-esfna-2015-in-the-dc-maryland-virginia-area.

43. Shelemay, field notes, June 29–July 5, 2008, Washington, DC.

44. Kirubel Assefa, personal communication with author. Kirubel, a well-known jazz musician who lives in southern California, oversaw planning of musical events for ESFNA between 2008 and 2015.

45. Eritrean Sports Federation in North America (ERSFNA), <https://www.eritreansports.com/>.

46. Oromo games in late July and early August 2009 in Atlanta were quite parallel to the ESFNA events (Shelemay, field notes, July 30–August 3, 2009, Atlanta, GA). The 2009 soccer tournament was held at James R. Hallford Stadium in Clarkston, Georgia, a football stadium often used for soccer that holds fifteen thousand. Many Oromo musicians arrived to perform during the week, including Abdi Nuressa, Ali Birra, Kemer Yusuf, Mohammed Sheba, Muktar Usman, Habtamu Lamu, Elemo Ali, and the Oz. Concerts were held at various sites in the adjacent area, including the Lions of Judah Event Center and the Atrium Nightclub (both on Memorial Drive in Stone Mountain, Georgia) and Studio 72 (Tucker, Georgia). Concerts began at midnight or later after the end of evening competitions and dinner.

47. Indeed, the OSFNA website <http://www.osfna.org/news/> has a note on its home page that anyone trying to host concerts during OSFNA week should contact OSFNA to partner with them. For a payment of 10% percent of the profits, OSFNA will advertise the concert in the field, on their website, and on their Facebook page.

48. <https://esfna.org/about/>.

49. AESAONE, All Ethiopian Sports Association One, June 9, 2017, www.aesaone.org. This website is no longer available.

50. Hafkin, “‘Whatsupoch’ on the Net,” 222.

51. Hafkin, “‘Whatsupoch’ on the Net,” 223–24. In 1987 Hafkin facilitated the Economic Commission for Africa’s African Information Society Initiative that established the first email connectivity in more than ten African countries (Internet Hall of Fame, “Timeline,” <http://www.internethalloffame.org/internet-history/timeline>).

52. Hafkin, “‘Whatsupoch’ on the Net,” 232–33.

53. *Afaan Oromo* does not use the Ethiopic syllabary but is written in the Latin alphabet.

54. I thank Samantha Heinle, who researched Ethiopian musicians online as my research assistant during summer 2014, for compiling this information under the auspices of the Harvard SHARP Program.

55. Yehunie Belay and Yeshimebet “Tutu” Belay, interviews by author, August 30, 2007, Washington, DC; Steven Kaplan, “Vital Information at Your Fingertips: The *Ethiopian Yellow Pages* as a Cultural Document,” *Diaspora* 15, nos. 2–3 (2006 [pub. 2011]): 247–63, <https://doi.org/10.1353/dsp.2011.0074>. The book includes sections on accountants, advertising, airlines, bank, beauty, chiropractors, computer and communication technology, construction, education, groceries, health and doctors, lawyers, money transfer, music and entertainment, printing and publishing, real estate, restaurants and hotels, shops, and travel, shipping, and moving (<https://ethiopianyellowpages.com/>).

56. Hafkin, “‘Whatsupoch’ on the Net,” 221–45. See also Victoria Bernal, “Eritrea On-Line: Diaspora, Cyberspace, and the Public Sphere,” *American Ethnologist* 32, no. 4 (2005): 660–75, <https://doi.org/10.1525/ae.2005.32.4.660>; Bernal, “Eritrea Goes Global: Reflections on Nationalism in a Transnational Era,” *Cultural Anthropology* 19, no. 1 (2004): 3–25, <https://doi.org/10.1525/can.2004.19.1.3>.

57. Bernal, “Eritrea On-Line,” 660. Bernal notes that conflict is a central dynamic of discussions in Eritrean cyberspace, likely because the diaspora and Eritrea itself “were formed through violence” (662). The site www.dehai.org discussed by Bernal thus served as “an arena of nonviolent conflict in a violent world but also as a multiplier of outrage and as a vehicle for mobilizing action in situations of conflict” (662). Dehai was created and maintained by Eritreans in Washington, DC, who jokingly referred to the city as “the capital of Eritrea” (664). There were yearly Dehai retreats in the United States that brought users face to face, although there was no access to the internet within Eritrea until the year 2000. After the Eritrean–Ethiopian 1998–2000 border war, Dehai fragmented into multiple other sites. Dehai is a transliteration of the Tigrinya word that literally means “voice” but that is also used to mean “news.” The site, officially in English, aimed to provide an independent public forum for discussion and debate about Eritrea separate from Ethiopians and not under an official organization such as the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (663–65).

58. *Tadias* staff, “Spotlight: Trace Muzika, a New Channel from Ethiopia and Diaspora,” *Tadias*, July 31, 2020, <http://www.tadias.com/07/31/2020/spotlight-trace-muzika-a-channel-dedicated-to-music-from-ethiopia-diaspora/>. See also Habeshaview, <https://www.habeshaview.com/hv/about/>.

59. Protests after contested Ethiopian elections in 2005 led the government to crack down on print media and gave rise to blogging efforts online. The government next blocked many blogs and arrested bloggers, action that gained international attention and criticism (Hafkin, “‘Whatsupoch’ on the Net,” 240–41). The appointment of new prime minister Abiy Ahmed in April 2018 resulted in a relaxation of government policy restricting journalists and bloggers, after the resolution of several notorious cases of governmental action in February 2018. Most prominent was the pardoning of a group of journalists known as Zone 9 bloggers, who spent one and a half years in prison accused of campaigns against the government. See “The Zone 9 Bloggers, Update,” *Electronic Frontier Foundation*, September 20, 2015, <https://www.eff.org/offline/zone-9-bloggers>. However, after the murder of Oromo musician Hachalu Hundessa at the end of June 2020, violent protests ensued and internet service across the country was shut down for weeks (Abdi Latif Dahir, “Hachalu Hundessa, Ethiopian Singer and Activist, Is Shot Dead,” *New York Times*, June 30, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/30/world/africa/ethiopia-hachalu-hundessa-dead.html>).

60. Endale Getahun, telephone interview by author, December 10, 2019. Endale broadcasts in Amharic and presents twelve shows in different languages by immigrant producers who speak their own languages ranging from Somali to Spanish. Previously he produced an Ethiopian television show and Ethiopian music program in Washington, DC.

61. Endale telephone interview. Endale also reports drawing on recordings from YouTube, characterizing himself as an “end user.” “I tend to play what they like—the old, traditional musicians such as Aster [Aweke] and Tilahun [Gessesse]. . . . They request songs and even the younger ones like the old songs. The old music is most enjoyed by my audience.”

62. Hafkin, “‘Whatsupoch’ on the Net,” 224–25.

63. Selam Gebrekidan, “Ethiopia and Eritrea Declare an End to Their War,” *New York Times*, July 9, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/07/09/world/africa/ethiopia-eritrea-war.html>; Elias Meseret, “Ethiopia and Eritrea Restore Relations after Ending 20-Year Border War,” *Christian Science Monitor*, July 9, 2018, <https://www>

.csmonitor.com/World/Africa/2018/0709/Ethiopia-and-Eritrea-restore-relations-after-ending-20-year-border-war.

64. Aaron Maasho, “At Concert, Ethiopia, Eritrea Leaders Preach Peace, Love, Unity,” *Reuters*, July 15, 2018, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ethiopia-eritrea-idUSKBN1K50ZB>. In addition to Ali Birra, musicians performing were Hachalu Hundessa, Ittiqaa Tafarii, Galaanaa Gaaromsaa, Kemer Yusuf, Tadele Gemechu, Getachew H. Mariam, and Tadele Roba.

65. Asafa, *Oromia and Ethiopia*, 210–17. The relationship between the Oromo, who are the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia but were long on the margins of power, and the Amhara, who long controlled the monarchy, had also been quite strained for decades. But during late spring of 2018, the installation of Abiy Ahmed as the first prime minister of partial Oromo descent brought about changes accomplished in part with the cooperation of Amhara factions long opposed to Tigrayan rule. This political rapprochement between Oromo and Amhara against the Tigrayan-dominated government in power since 1991 began to shift longtime antagonisms as well between Oromo and Amhara communities in diaspora. However, deep-seated political divides and historical discrimination against Oromo left a variety of disgruntled factions, including those from diaspora who returned to Ethiopia to participate in the 2018 transition.

66. Donna Stefanik, “Refugee Alliance Gets New Digs: Women’s Agency Expects to Boost Service by 500 Clients a Year,” *Skanner* 10, no. 111, Seattle edition, June 25, 2003, 1.

67. “Ethiopian Group Stages Protest in Downtown Dallas,” *Dallas Morning News*, November 20, 2013, <https://www.dallasnews.com/news/2013/11/21/ethiopian-group-stages-protest-in-downtown-dallas/>. A number of Ethiopian Americans are entering the US political arena at local, state, and, increasingly, national levels. They include Joe Neguse, of Eritrean descent, who was elected by Colorado’s Second District to the House of Representatives in 2018 (see <https://neguse.house.gov/about>), and Yohannes Abraham, who was selected to oversee Joe Biden’s presidential transition team (Samuel Getachew, “Ethiopian-American to run Biden’s Transition Team,” *Reporter*, June 27, 2020, <https://www.thereporterethiopia.com/article/ethiopian-american-run-bidens-transition-team>). In 2018 the Ethiopian American magazine *Tadias* headlined the election of Ethiopian American Alex Assefa as a state legislator in the Nevada State Assembly; of Eritrean American Joe Neguse to Congress; and of Ilhan Omar of Minnesota as the first Somali American to be elected to the US Congress (Tadias staff, “Alex Assefa, Joe Neguse and Ilhan Omar: Ethiopian, Eritrean and Somali Make History,” *Tadias*, November 8, 2018, <http://www.tadias.com/11/08/2018/alex-assefa-joe-neguse-lhan-omar-ethiopian-eritrean-somali-make-history-us-election/>).

68. The emergence of corporations such as Uber and Lyft have adversely affected the burgeoning Ethiopian taxi industry, reducing clientele as well as the value of taxi medallions (Roger Lowenstein, “Uber, Lyft and the Hard Economics of Taxi Cab Medallions,” *Washington Post*, May 24, 2019, https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/economy/uber-lyft-and-the-hard-economics-of-taxi-cab-medallions/2019/05/24/cf1b56f4-7cda-11e9-a5b3-34f3edf1351e_story.html).

69. Moges Seyoum and Kahele Wondaferaw, interview by author and Steven Kaplan, January 27, 2007, Washington, DC.

70. Seble W. Argaw, interview by Steven Kaplan and author, October 5, 2007, Cambridge, MA. Also see the discussion of domestic violence among Ethiopian immigrant couples in Israel and North America, especially notes 49–52, in Steven Kaplan, “Ethi-

opian Immigrants in the United States and Israel: A Preliminary Comparison,” *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies* 5, no. 1 (Spring–Summer 2010): 79–80.

71. Seble interview. *Adbar* is defined in the organization’s website as an Ethiopian word for a female goddess (<https://www.ethiopianwomen.org/who-we-are-1>), but the word is more usually glossed as “protective spirit” (Kane, *Dictionary*, 1307). Other Ethiopian women’s organizations have been established in the United States, including the Ethiopian Women’s Organization for All Women, founded in Dallas, Texas, in 2004, <https://www.ethiowomen.org/>.

72. Charles Schaefer, “*Mahbär*,” *EAE*, 3:650; Dirk Bustorf and Charles Schaefer, “*Əddər*,” *EAE*, 2:225–27. For example, in August 2008, the Dallas Ethiopian community established the Ethiopian Community EDIR. This traditional organization, <http://www.edirdfw.org/page/about-us/>, assists participants in covering funeral expenses.

73. When flying on Ethiopian Airlines to Addis Ababa for a visit in December 2017, I witnessed an elderly, grief-stricken Ethiopian woman returning to her homeland to bury a relative who had died in diaspora. She accidentally left the cash given to her by her *mahber* in one of the plane’s bathrooms, from which it had disappeared by the time she realized the loss and returned to retrieve it, a devastating upset for the woman and her accompanying family. I do not know if the money was ever returned.

74. Kaplan, “Ethiopian Yellow Pages,” 257–58.

75. Martha Z. Tegegn, “Part Three Exclusive: Teshome Mitiku Plans to Return to Ethiopia,” *Tadias*, August 19, 2010, <http://www.tadias.com/08/19/2010/part-three-exclusive-teshame-mitiku-plans-to-return-to-ethiopia/>.

76. Abonesh interview.

77. Terrence Lyons, “Transnational Politics in Ethiopia: Diasporas and the 2005 Elections,” *Diaspora* 15, nos. 2–3 (2006 [pub. 2011]): 265–84, <https://doi.org/10.1353/dsp.2011.0076>.

78. The events were described in detail by Abonesh and her husband, Negash Shifrew, in a joint interview. Both gave permission for details of this experience to be shared in print.

79. The DVD is *Yäqəddus yared mätasäbiya bä’əwəq yäkinä-təbäb säwoch* [Reflections of Holy Yared, the Best-Known Artistic Person] (Washington, DC: Kedus Gabriel EOT Cathedral, n.d.).

80. The Hamlin Fistula Clinic in Ethiopia, <https://hamlinfistula.org/>, is renowned for its innovative and free treatment of fistula, a common and disabling complication during pregnancy and delivery among Ethiopian women.

81. Negash interview.

82. Posted on Ethio Entertainment Facebook page on September 8, 2012; the post is no longer available. Abonesh has since returned to live in Ethiopia.

Chapter Seven

1. Kane, *Dictionary*, 18.

2. Nina Sun Eidsheim, *Sensing Sound: Singing and Listening as Vibrational Practice* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), 12. Other points raised by Eidsheim are quite congruent with directions I take in this chapter. She suggests transferring “the privilege of authorship to the listener” and that “to focus analytically on the listener allows us to read and interrogate the impact of a piece of music as it is experienced by a listener who is encultured in a given way” (5). Here I pay ample attention to inter-