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"Who minus who": suicide in Boston's Ethiopian community

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Thesis

"WHO MINUS WHO":

SUICIDE IN BOSTON'S ETHIOPIAN COMMUNITY

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines suicide in Boston's Ethiopian Community. The act of suicide and individual cases are explored through participant narratives. Narratives from family members and acquaintances of those who died by suicide are examined. I rely on in-depth (N=8) and follow-up interviews (N=7). Drawing heavily on culturally constructed notions of self, this thesis explores what it has meant for persons of the Ethiopian community to lose fellow members to suicide. Intersections of emotions, constructions of choice and agency, and idealized notions of self emerge as central themes. The body, in life and death, is situated as a vehicle for communicating dis-eased social relationships and unrealistic cultural expectations. Participants position their perceptions of the deceased in relation to popular preconceived notions of life in the United States and stresses encountered during and after the immigration process. Memory of Ethiopia, the United States, immigration, and the suicide are significant for understanding the rigidity of culturally authoritative truths.

This thesis emphasizes the progressive and beneficial methodology of an anthropological investigation into suicide. Understanding the reasons and acquiring specific knowledge about Ethiopian suicide in the United States can contribute to current

conversations regarding immigrant suicide. Ultimately, this study aims to contribute to

comprehensive prevention measures, which support every individual.

PREFACE

I climb into my freezing car following my evening meeting with Berihun[1]. I toss my red notebook and backpack onto the seat next to me. I am in possession of my first set of field notes relevant to my research topic. I am excited about my accomplishment and I bounce slightly in my seat. I organized this meeting on my own and it transpired flawlessly. Berihun did tell me to send my questions to him before hand, but I will take that as constructive criticism. More importantly, I did not make a fool of myself, and the three gentlemen at the meeting appeared to take an interest in my research. All three lost someone to suicide and wanted to make sure it never happened again.

As I make my way back to my tiny, city apartment I repeat key points in my head, "Timid, shy, explain why you are doing this research. Tell them you know Berihun." My initial excitement allows my brain to momentarily mute the more emotional parts of the conversation. I continue to focus on the highlights: Berihun and his colleagues gave enthusiastic feedback, suggestions regarding interview techniques, and offers to help recruit. However, my excitement is soon quelled, as my mind can no longer silence the sadder parts of the conversation. The two young men there this evening, close to my own age, are some of the community members who lost a close friend to suicide. I am forced to refocus my attention on a central research question. Why are Ethiopians in Boston committing suicide?

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[1] To protect their privacy, the names of people in this study and the names of organizations are replaced with pseudonyms. This is a suggested guideline from the American Anthropological Association.

I feel guilty for my excitement. I wrestle with the happiness brought on by my own success and the sadness of knowing that I am working with individuals who lost people close to them, unexpectedly and tragically. But I received such rich data, new themes, and surprising answers to questions, I reason to myself. With a gust of cold air, I shudder out of my haze of happiness. I feel as if I should not allow myself to bask in the gloriousness of "good" research findings. My project focuses on people who committed suicide, a somber subject. I ask myself, if the topic is somber am I to remain somber too? The people I anticipate interviewing will have suffered real pain. The pain at times can be raw, a wound not yet healed and vulnerable to further agony. At times the pain is unbearable and a person cannot help but ask themselves over and over again, why did this happen? Will others look at me for answers? What solace can I provide them? All these questions ring in my head as I drift back in to my own painful memories, memories reminding me why I do this work.

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On Saturday October 14th, year of the second millennium, I received a phone call that would change my life forever. It was a typical Northern Michigan autumn morning. The sky was its usual soft gray hue. The ground was damp from the melting of the previous night's frost. The burnt orange and crimson leaves scattered the back deck as they left their wind whipped, barren branches for more tranquil locations. The familiar soft murmur of the television was in the background as I stared blankly at the computer screen, waiting for a friend to sign online. I sat in a black, armless, wooden chair, with my knees pulled up to my chest, as to keep warm in the cold kitchen. My mom stood

behind me washing dishes or making breakfast, I struggle to recall. The jarring ring of

the telephone broke the silence. I leapt up and hopped over to the phone, eager to see

who was calling. The CallerID read "Franklin, Laura." It was my friend Jacob; I was

thrilled he was calling!

We were friends since the fourth grade and started calling each other at the age

when "cooties" no longer mattered. We held hands in the fifth grade, kissed in the

seventh, became best friends in junior high, and sent playful emails since the day we

created our accounts. We remained the dearest of friends through the unforgiving middle

school years; when you had to step lightly, make the "cool" decisions, and sit at the right

lunch table. Our relationship was unshakable, no matter what was thrown our way.

I answer the phone cheerfully, "Hello!" An unfamiliar voice spoke back. "Is Eva

there?" The words were shaky and forced. "This is," I responded tensely. "Jacob's

dead." The voice breaks and the pain flows through her trembling voice and through the

receiver. I hear her tears patter against the phone. "What?" I say. I feel the blood rush

from my face, my heart starts pounding, I am frozen, facing the wall, phone pressed

against my ear. "He killed himself last night," the young woman continues. I finally

figure it out; the young woman's voice was Sam, his older sister. She was four years

ahead of me, I had never met her, just knew her as an unapproachable senior.

I will never be able to describe the feeling I felt when I heard her speak those

words into the phone and through my ear. I will never again experience a tragedy

parallel to this. All I can say to her is, "Thank you. Bye." I hang up the phone and stare

at the wall. I am frozen, unable to move. By this time my mother stopped doing

whatever it was she was doing. The fright in my voice alerted her to the terror rushing

through the mind and body of her fourteen-year-old daughter.

"What is it Eva?" She inquires firmly. I startle. I look up and put the phone on the

hook. I slide onto the barstool, still silent. "Mom, someone just called and told me Jacob

is dead. I think it is a joke. I think it was his sister. They must be playing a joke. God,

that is so like him."

My mother turns pale. It could not have been more than eight years since his father

committed suicide. However, that thought was absent from my mind.

"Eva, I don't think it was a joke."

"No, no, Mom, call them back! Call them back right now. I can't. Just call them back.

Seriously! Call!" By this time I am panicking. I can't remember if I am standing or

sitting or running or pacing or crying or getting sick.

She hesitates to pick up the phone, fearing she will confirm our worst nightmares.

She calls. Busy tone. She turns to me and tries to hug me. I shrug her away. I do not

know what to do. I am launched into an unfamiliar world of panic and pain and

uncertainty and sickness. I cannot call anyone because no one is awake yet. I am the only

teenager who wakes up before eleven. I run upstairs. I run downstairs. My mom is on the

phone at this point. She is calling my father or maybe the school. She is a school board

member and needs an answer, not just for herself but also for her frantic, adolescent

daughter whose world just exploded into a million pieces.

I cannot take the uncertainty any longer. I received the call at 10:14 am; it was

nearly ten-thirty. I call my best friend Allie. I run upstairs to talk; I did not want my

mom seeing me find out the truth.

Her brother, Shane, answers the phone. "Hello, is Allison there." I wait; she gets on the

other line.

"Hi, it's me." She says hello back and starts laughing. I am relieved it is a joke, but she is

not laughing. She is crying hysterically. I collapse into my closet, lay down on a bed of

discarded "unflattering" clothes from the night before. I sob endlessly. I tell Allie my

mom and I will come get her, since her parents, as usual, are not at home. I climb in the

cold car, my mom is driving; it is dead silent. We pick up Allie and head back to my

house.

By noon everyone is on the phone or chatting online. My mom is calling parents

to check in. The horrific news is true. Our dearest friend Jacob is dead at fourteen. I invite

my classmates and their parents to my house. My mother invites two of her friends, both

psychologists, to join our gathering. The parents stay upstairs, undoubtedly discussing

how best to sooth their children's broken hearts. I do not know who is worse, the

teenagers or the parents. I remember the adults crying just as much as their children.

Fortunately, we had our memories of Jacob to bring us moments of relief. Our spells of

crying are often interrupted with moments of laughter, spurred by recollections of Jacob's

sense of humor.

The day ends with our parents ushering us away to our homes. From this

seemingly typical October morning my view of the world changed forever. It was the

longest day of my life. I cannot imagine ever again experiencing such confusion, hate,

denial, and sadness. Today, I am able to remind myself that these are the feelings that

bind me to my project and to my participants. Maybe they will find some comfort in our

shared experiences. We can share in our grief and share in our passion for change.

Nonetheless, I cannot help but wonder, if there *is* excitement after each interview or

joyful feelings of accomplishment, am I always going to stop and ask myself, is it OK to

feel this way?

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CBPR .... Community Based Participatory Research

DV .... Diversity Visa

EPRP .... Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party

UN .... United Nations

U.S. .... United States

WHO .... World Health Organization

Chapter One

Introduction

I began this study nearly fifteen years ago. While the exactness did not come to fruition until graduate school, my familiarity with and sentiment for the subject matter originated during childhood. A classmate of mine, Jacob, was the son of a single mother. This was not unusual in itself, but the story surrounding his father's absence had an aura of mystery. The ambiguity of his story stood out to me even as a young child. As an adult it maintains a powerful position of influence, insight, and motivation.

Jacob was only six when he lost his father. While cleaning his gun, it discharged. Growing up, Jacob told us it had been an accident. Our own parents told us it was an accident. Even as children we recognized the tragedy of the story and did not prod the issue. However, as I grew with Jacob, the aura of mystery surrounding his father's death thickened. The stories classmates told, relayed from their parents, did not always match. I do not remember who eventually told me the truth—maybe Jacob, my next-door neighbor, or my mother. The true story was that Jacob's dad had committed suicide.

While the mystery of his father's death dissolved in one way it became more complicated and enigmatic in another. Why had this happened? Where? When? Did Jacob remember? Did my parents remember? As a generation came and went, the story of Jacob's father subsided. Instead, it was replaced by Jacob's own story—the event of his own suicide. With Jacob's death came a new, but now familiar narrative. Moreover, his story changed with each retelling. New narrators and listeners rewrote, edited, and

disseminated it across space and time—myself included. It is Jacob's story that led me to this study.

The impact of Jacob's story in my life collided with the experiences of Berihun, an Ethiopian immigrant devoted to helping his fellow countrymen in Boston. Berihun, too, had lost a friend to suicide. Yet despite the many distances between our stories—a thousand miles, fifteen years, and cultures from opposite sides of the world—they also shared commonalities, leading us both to seek answers to why Ethiopians in Boston were committing suicide. Berihun, like other study participants, regularly noted that suicide had not been an issue prior to immigration. Now, he tells me, he often consults with people in the Boston Ethiopian community about such concerns. These experiences left him wanting solutions. He wanted a sustainable plan to prevent more deaths, and to provide a support system.

Berihun asked that my study make suicide stop (Personal Communication, 2/12/13). I knew he did not literally think my work could accomplish this end. But what it might provide were answers, which, in turn, could contribute to prevention models—even though Berihun also told me that no one in the Ethiopian immigrant community had mental health issues, and that they would never tell me their secrets (ibid.) My research, therefore, sought to understand why Ethiopians in Boston were committing suicide. I headed out into the community in search of answers.

Suicide Across Cultures

There is a long history of suicide studies in anthropology, with a recent renewal of scholarly interest (Jeffreys, 1952; Bohannan, 1969; Firth, 1967; Minayo, Cavalcante, & de Souza, 2006; La Fontaine, 2012; Staples and Widger, 2012). Questions of psychiatry, familial relationships, psychosocial functioning, and cultural variations have been shown to contribute to culturally informed suicide assessment and prevention efforts (Chu, Goldblum, Floyd, & Bongar, 2010). However, little research appears to have addressed suicide in Ethiopia, and none has examined suicide among Ethiopian immigrants in the United States. A few studies have focused on the psychological well-being of Ethiopian *refugees* in the United States (McSpadden 1987, 1991), but none have concentrated on those Ethiopians who voluntarily chose to immigrate to the United States. Yet all of the participants in this study—those interviewed and those remembered—came to the United States voluntarily, by way of the Diversity Visa.

Additionally, the relatively sparse literature on immigrant suicide in the United States tends to compare rates *between* immigrant groups, or to focus on suicide ideation and attempts (Hussey & Leland, 2013; Rutenberg, 2013; Borges et. al, 2011; Wadsworth & Kubrin, 2007; Kliewer, 1991; Trovato & Jarvis, 1986; Smith et al, 1985; Kushner, 1984). Such studies generally separate foreign-born and native-born participants by *race/ethnicity* (e.g., "Black"), and provide little information about the cultural diversity within a given study population. Participants in this study made it clear that Ethiopians had a distinct cultural and social history, which held great importance for them. They assigned little value to generalizations made about a group based on phenotype.

Study Objectives

The central goal of this study is to understand the causalities and consequences of suicidality in the Ethiopian community of Boston. I aim to contribute to the scholarship on suicide, particularly with respect to suicide in immigrant populations. I hope my findings will enhance—as well as challenge—existing paradigms used to investigate suicide, as well as discussions of suicide precipitants and prevention strategies.

One of the many challenges researchers face when deconstructing suicidal acts, is the inability to engage with the individual in question. Instead, the researcher is forced to interpret meanings through the narratives of others. Such narratives provide a window into cultural values and social relationships, as well as aid in understanding the idiosyncrasies of each culture. For this study, individual narratives provide an explanatory model of the cultural understanding of suicide—how it is situated in the context of culture, the body, and immigration.

My investigation applies a phenomenological approach to local Ethiopian immigrant experiences of suicide, in an effort to understand the impact it has on individuals and the community. Phenomenological methods require the researcher to bracket her "natural attitude"—her assumptions about the world (Desjarlais and Throop, 2011, p. 88). This bracketing allows for a more accurate understanding of cultural and experiential phenomena (ibid, p. 89). I also examine how the act of suicide itself is assigned meaning. Is this meaning situated in a religious context or a social one? Is it seen as a reflection of morality, of responsibilities, or of selfhood—the quality that

constitutes one's individuality, the state of having an individual identity (LaFontaine, 1985)?

In the process of deconstructing the suicide story through an anthropological lens, the reader becomes privy to a sophisticated grassroots analysis of an action often dominated by reductionist assumptions. Although participants used emotion-laden words like, "lonely," "worthless," and "hopeless," these were not identified as the sole motivations leading to suicide. Their narratives go beyond the final moments of the individual's life—those moments that may unmask the emotions tormenting the deceased individual. Instead, they include a whole story, with a beginning, a middle, and an end—between the deceased individual and the interviewee. It is the whole that takes on value.

The Art of Investigating

Tape-recorded, semi-structured interviews provide the primary material for this study. These interviews took place in everyday spaces that included cafes, restaurants, local parks dowsed in summer sunshine, and the hustle and bustle of elite university campuses. I engaged, too, in extended participant observation, taking nearly a hundred pages of field notes over the winter, spring, and summer of my fieldwork. I wrote about places I visited and conversations I had with Ethiopians living in Boston. I spent the vast majority of this time in public spaces. I participated in hours-long weekly church services. I gorged regularly on made-to-order Ethiopian food and rich coffee. My clothes

became saturated with the scents of *berbere* and *mitmita*,[2] carrying the aromas of Lalibela Restaurant long after my departure. The cook of this restaurant became so accustomed to my presence that, one day, when she was overwhelmed with orders, she put me to work.

I took pictures of the inside and outside of these locations. It was over food or coffee and in car rides that my participants and I talked about everyday life and experiences of immigration and resettlement. I also collected pieces of material culture, given to me by participants, an unexpected contribution to this study. In the end, when I arranged everything before me—my field notes, interviews, pictures, and pamphlets—I had a story of suicide situated within a dynamic culture. Central to these conversations were the study participants' cultural conceptions of the person and the suicide, both of which they situated within moral interpretive frames.

Outcomes

At the core of our conversations, I discovered an understanding that differed markedly from contemporary Western discourse concerning suicide. Ethiopian narrators portrayed their culture as prohibiting the recognition and discussion of failure, depression, or mental illness. Positioned as a consequence of failed achievements, in the context of a "too proud" culture, the act of suicide and the memory of the person who

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[2] *Berbere* is a blend of spices containing coriander seed, fenugreek seed, black peppercorns, whole allspice, white cardamom pods, cloves, dried onion flakes, coriander seeds, chiles de árbol, paprika, kosher salt, nutmeg, ginger, and cinnamon. Ethiopian-born Chef Marcus Samuelsson equates *berbere* with North Americans' use of salt and pepper (Samuelsson, 2012). *Mitmita* is another Ethiopian spice mixture, blending dried piri-piri chilies, whole cloves, korarima (Ethiopian cardamom) seeds, sea salt, ground cinnamon, cumin seeds, and ground ginger (Celtnet, 2014).

died become core symbolic systems through which people express the relation of the self to society. Narratives in this Ethiopian community position the act of suicide as a reflection of the greater social relationship between the deceased and his or her community.

In Chapter Four I discuss the implications of participant understandings of pride. As the most frequently mentioned Ethiopian characteristic, pride is viewed as a distinct Ethiopian quality. Pride is embedded in the collective memory. It is comprised of past people, events, and institution. Stories of pride can privilege the interest of contemporary societies (Funkenstein, 1989, p. 9, 11; Kansteiner, 2002, p.180). Participants retell the history of Ethiopia, referencing national leaders and resistance to colonization as the basis for their pride. In turn, pride is positioned as the foundation of their strength and the reason for shielded borders as well as emotions.

Chapter Five addresses the importance of maintaining one's pride, dignity and honor by way of remittances sent to family back "home" in Ethiopia. Participants explore the immense pressure they feel to send these gifts. The process of immigration, they explain, transforms the self from being a receiver to a provider. Their narratives assign major attention to issues of familial appeasement and monetary contribution. Complex identities emerge as expectations reach from Ethiopians abroad, as well as from within local communities. The absence of a sanctioned space in which to discuss these issues accompanies a culture of silence, which emerges as the central precipitant to suicidality.

Chapter Six builds upon the theories laid out in the preceding two chapters, and highlights the meaning participants derive from the suicides. Unmaking and remaking

their memories of the suicide, as well as their own experiences with the deceased, illuminates how participants recompose their memories in light of morality and judgment. They employ notions of openness and closeness to differentiate Ethiopian from American culture, leaving participants longing for a hybrid integration of the two. I then turn to discussions about the body, building upon existing anthropological theories, in which the living and dead body becomes a vehicle for understanding agency and social relationships.

In closing, I discuss how participants situate their perceptions of the deceased in relation to popular, preconceived notions of life in the United States and to the stresses they actually encounter during and after the immigration process. Participants recall personal experiences and memories of the deceased. Indeed, remembrance is the most prominent theme throughout this study, threading together diverse discussions of pride, remittance, and morality. It encompasses notions of individual memory, collective memory, and cultural memory, all socially determined and manifested through texts, actions, and statements (Kansteiner, 2002; Assmann, 1995; Funkenstein, 1985). Related to memory, notions of selfhood and society tie together Chapters Four, Five, and Six, and lead to a return to the influential works of G.H. Mead and Irving Hallowell. I review how identification with others aids in the construction of our own selves (Mead, 1934). Through the development of self-consciousness, the individual develops an identity and standards reflective of the larger social milieu (Hallowell, 1963).

Throughout this study I make a conscious effort to avoid terms often found in biomedical and psychological literature, staying true, instead, to the participant's own

words. I avoid psychological assumptions about suicides, like signs of depression and tendency toward decrease functioning, which match nicely with Western psychological diagnosis. In the end it becomes clear that suicide is understood as a cultural construction, not disordered brain biology—a conclusion contradicting recently published studies that have garnered a lot of media attention (Randall et al., 2013; Nock MK, 2013; Tingley, 2013).

This study contributes to discussions of immigrant suicide and Ethiopian ethnography by describing, in their own words, the meanings of suicide in a major Ethiopian community in the United States. This study broadens the understanding of suicide to include specific notions of expectations, in a simultaneously rigid and changing culture. Ideas of self shift in light of changing geography and time, resulting in tensions between understandings of who they are in light of events. Participants made their way from Ethiopia to the United States, encountering challenges that transformed their being in the world.

Chapter Two

Background

A Brief History of Modern Ethiopia

The Café as a Classroom

Ethiopians in this study draw tremendous pride from both their ancient and modern history. The Ethiopian establishments I visited exhibited material culture that embodied such elation. Objects pertaining to archaeological evidence of the first human, alongside portraits of great modern day Emperors, dotted the walls of local Ethiopian restaurants, churches, and shops. One of my participants reminded me that geologists discovered the "first human" in Ethiopia and therefore we were "all descendants of Ethiopians" (Personal Communication, 7/13/13). Foreigners know this "first human" as "Lucy". Ethiopians call her "Denqenash" (You are Marvelous) (Zewde, 1991, p.7). This marvelous hominid, unearthed in 1974, provides evidence that our ancestors walked the earth (upright) at least 3 million years ago (Johnson, 1981).

An artistic replica of her petite skeletal imprint hangs on the front wall of a local Ethiopian café, named in her honor. Her figure is more than an artistic piece; it is a quick referential talking point, which allows the café owner and visitors to engage in conversation about the significance of Ethiopia. More recent history also supports conversations regarding Ethiopian pride. In another local Ethiopian restaurant a portrait of Haile Selassie I hangs in the main dining area. One participant, Solomon, links Emperor Selassie's significance to his unequivocal power to help people, even those

outside of Ethiopia (Personal Communication, 7/15/13). Solomon specifically refers to

the Emperor's importance for Rastafarians, who view him as the returned Messiah

(Barrett, 1988). According to Solomon, when Selassie arrived to Jamaica he ended the

years-long drought: "as soon as his foot touched the ground, it began to rain" (Personal

Communication, 7/15/13). A film documenting Emperor Selassie's arrival to Jamaica

supports Solomon's claim. The films commentator mentions the ceasing of "driving

rain," upon Selassie's coming (Emperor Haile Selassie's 1966 Visit to Jamaica, His

Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I Visit to Jamaica April 1966, 2012). While the accuracy

of Solomon's recollection may not be exact, there is support for his interpretation.

Solomon's story exemplifies the symbolic importance of Emperor Selassie for outsiders;

for Ethiopians, Selassie's power and prominence is an extension of his compatriots.

Among study participants, the most commonly discussed historical event was the

encounters between Italians and Ethiopians. The narratives concentrated on Ethiopia's

history of resistance and its cultural significances.

> **Solomon:** *Ethiopia you see the people, the people are different. The* [outside] *people never colony Ethiopia... They tried, Italian, to colony the people. So, you see the differences, the people, like the Ethiopian people compared to the other countries, you see the differences. It's all, so much proud, kind of like that. So, I don't know. It's completely different.*

Defending Independence

By 1889-1890, Ethiopia remained one of the last independent African nations, but

it was not without challenge (Marcus, 2002). In 1884, in cooperation with the British

Empire, the Italians undertook the task of safeguarding the northeast region of Africa,

near Ethiopia's Red Sea coast. Ethiopia quickly recognized the Italians as an enemy who

desired their profitable highlands (Marcus, 2002, p. 83). The Ethiopians refused to cede

land to the Italians and attempted to maintain a large military presence at the borderland.

However, Ethiopian regiments quickly retreated due to the depletion of supplies and the

onset of illness. Following this encounter, troublesome political negotiations between

Italy and Ethiopia continued for decades to come.

The back and forth of insurgence and retreat grew to a head when in late 1895

Ethiopian forces attacked and overran the Italians who had pushed too far into Ethiopia's

land. Known as the *Battle of Adwa*, a victorious Ethiopia destroyed over 70 percent of the

Italian forces on March 2, 1896; "Menilek's[3] 100,000-man army moved forward to

confront an Italian force of 14,500 soldiers" (Menilek II, 2014; Marcus, 2002, p.

99). Thereafter Ethiopia improved its international standing and recognition. The major

colonial powers now recognized Ethiopia's sovereignty and independence, but racism

and positions of cultural superiority continued to color diplomatic relations. For example,

prior to defeating the Italians, Western powers noted that Ethiopians, "shared sloth,

ignorance, and degradation with their African brothers" (Marcus 2002, p. 100-103).

Following Ethiopia's military success, Europeans explained their victory by suggesting

that Ethiopians are in fact, "Caucasians darkened by exposure to the equatorial sun" (ibid,

p. 100). Now contrasted with their African brothers, Ethiopians suddenly became

"enlightened and progressive" (ibid, p. 100).

Relations between Ethiopia and Italy remained tense during the early 1900s.

Ethiopia's economic and military growth did not sit well with the European nation, which

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[3] Menilek, sometimes spelled Menelek, was the Emperor of Ethiopia from 1889 until his death in 1913.

sought to establish control over Ethiopian territory. However, Ethiopia's economic and political expansion facilitated a stronger relationship with the United States. The United States sent an American trade mission, an emissary of President Theodore Roosevelt, to Ethiopia to build rapport (Getahun, 2007). The two nations established a relationship, as the United States offered financial and material support to the nation. Arguably, this investment contributed considerably to an optimistic view of the United States. Perhaps in efforts to maintain positive diplomatic relations (as their relationship was still young and developing), during their "isolationist" foreign policy period, the American government granted 100 Ethiopian immigrants entry, while denying the same to Northern and Western Europe (Getahun, 2007, p. 19). Throughout the early twentieth century, Ethiopia continued to build strong economic and political relationships with the United States. Motivated by a desire for less European influence and a confidence that the United States posed no threat, Ethiopia granted the U.S. privileges to build principle infrastructures throughout the country (ibid, p. 15).

At the same time, the nation continued to wage a defense against persistent Italian forces. Displeased with Italy's failure to adhere to agreed-upon borderlands, Ethiopian forces arrived at Italian-occupied Ethiopian outposts in early 1934 (Marcus, 2002, p. 129). However, during this conflict, Ethiopians met sophisticated weaponry for the first time. They succumbed to defeat and Italy's Mussolini resolved to seize the country.

In late 1935, Italian forces bombarded Ethiopian troops with poisonous gas, causing mass casualties (Marcus, 2002, p. 144). In March of 1936, Ethiopia launched its last organized effort, a disaster from the start. On May 9th of the same year, Mussolini

proclaimed Ethiopia part of the Italian Empire. A series of slaughters ensued, in which

Ethiopians were burned alive, stoned to death, and crushed by armored vehicles (Marcus,

2002, p. 149). Refusing defeat and colonization, Ethiopian patriots continued to fight

back by local guerilla warfare. In 1940, after Italy declared war on the Allies and

following four years of requests for assistance from exiled Emperor Haile Selassie, the

British government recognized Ethiopia as an ally and promised support. The banding of

European, Sudanese, and Ethiopian forces helped drive Italian soldiers into their Eritrean

fortresses. Shortly thereafter, the Italians surrendered and the exiled Emperor Haile

Selassie returned to the capital city, Addis Ababa, on May 5th, 1941.

Subjected yet again to Western colonialist ideology, the British government

refused to recognize Ethiopia as a free and independent nation (Getahun, 2007, p. 24).

The European superpower thought it best to control Ethiopia's finances as well as deny

Emperor Selassie the right to independently appoint his own advisers. Ethiopian leaders

looked to the United States for support, astutely recognizing the powerful position the

U.S. occupied in a post-World War II setting. Within a year, and with the signing of the

Addis Ababa Agreement on January 31st, 1942, Ethiopia internationally confirmed its

freedom (Marcus, 2002, p. 152/3).

The partnership between Ethiopia and the United States was arguably a public

demonstration of America's increasing position as a world superpower. Nonetheless, the

Ethiopian nation embraced the support. Both countries saw potential to strengthen

economic, political, and educational ties. In fact, following World War II African

Americans moved to Ethiopia as a sign of solidarity. They saw the independence and

sovereignty of Ethiopia as a sign of hope for freedom and equality (Getahun, 2007).

Coming to America[4]

The 1920s awakened an exchange of Ethiopian students and American diplomats.

Consequently, relationships between Ethiopian and American individuals and

governments strengthened. The first Ethiopian students arrived to Muskingum College in

Ohio in 1922, four men from prominent Ethiopian families. Throughout the 1930s

increasing numbers of Ethiopian students began attending prestigious East Coast

universities; one eventually became the first American-educated Ethiopian doctor

(Getahun, 2007, p.17).

The development of African American organizations aimed at aiding Ethiopia

coincided with the increase in Ethiopians pursuing college and graduate education in the

United States. Throughout the 1930s Ethiopian delegates continued to seek African

Americans for work in Ethiopia, enlisting them in both governmental and educational

positions. The bond was so strong that when the Italian forces infiltrated Ethiopia—as

described above—African Americans mobilized material donations as well as war

volunteers (Getahun, 2007, p. 24).

The United States not only played a significant role in affirming Ethiopia's

position as an independent nation, but also contributed to the development of the nation's

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[4] Solomon Addis Getahun (2007) wrote extensively on the history of Ethiopian immigrants in the United States. I rely heavily on his work. He is the foremost expert on the subject. Having lived in both Ethiopia and America, he uses archival, oral, and secondary sources for his publications. Additional publications pertaining to Ethiopian-American relations also rely heavily on his work.

educational system. Following World War II, Emperor Selassie sought to build modern

schools throughout the capital city, Addis Ababa (Getahun, 2007, p. 27/34). American

organizations, like the Peace Corps and Ford Foundation, contributed significant financial

aid toward developing and maintaining educational institutions. This is further evidence

of the United States' hand in building and improving Ethiopian-American relationships.

Additionally, the United States opened their doors to Ethiopians who desired an

American education. The United States built and maintained a position of good through

the introduction and expansion of financial and social capital. Such occurrences can help

explain how and why Ethiopians constructed an idealized notion of the United States.

As this study will demonstrate, the concept of obtaining the best possible

education is a fundamental part of Ethiopian identity. In Ethiopian culture, education is

viewed as an extension of personal worth; it can impact one's social position

(McSpadden, 1991). Likewise, Ethiopians previously educated in the United States

played a central role in enhancing the positive image of the American system, an image

that persists today. Nearly all study participants mentioned the social and economic value

of education. Half of the participants specifically pointed to promise of a superior

education as a central motive for immigrating to the United States. One young man noted,

> *The greater goal is that I get a better education because wherever you*
> *learn here, whether it's a community college or like a whole big*
> *university, it's much better than Ethiopia.*

Similarly, participants reiterated the numerous opportunities and resources people have

for bettering their education (McSpadden, 1991, p. 23). Participants acknowledged the

diversity of educational avenues, recognizing, public and private universities, community

colleges, and trade schools. Four participants also appreciated the "freedom" Americans have in deciding which subject matter and subsequent vocational endeavors they pursue.

The Ethiopian Immigrant

There are over 40 million immigrants in the United States, and Ethiopians comprise a small percent. Data pertaining to African immigration patterns are scant. To my knowledge no documentation of Ethiopian immigration to the United States exists prior to the 1900s. Furthermore, what does exist, regarding Ethiopian immigration patterns to the United States, is very limited. There appears to be a particular dearth of knowledge concerning the decades following WWI until the 1970s. What does exist are statistics that categorize all African immigrants together into one group—representing an entire continent.

The limited data presented in the literature shows an estimated range of 5,000 to 30,000 Ethiopian immigrants residing in the United States prior to the violent 1974 *Derg* Revolution. Another report suggests 9,306 Ethiopian immigrants lived in the United States prior to 1980 (Getahun, 2007; Bentley, 1986; Metaferia and Shifferawm, 1991; Camarota, 2007).

Those who came before the military coup were generally well-educated and affluent, equipped with the necessary means to establish themselves in the United States (Getahun, 2007). Likewise, many of the Ethiopian students studying at American universities had familial ties to those in government, who often determined scholarship recipients. A significant portion of pre-*Derg* immigrants settled in large metropolitan

cities like Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, and Dallas (Kiflu, 1993). Today, these cities continue to house and draw large numbers of Ethiopians. Washington, D.C. reportedly has the largest number of Ethiopians living outside of Ethiopia (Nicholls, 2005). Participants in this study frequently traveled to Washington, D.C. to visit friends and relatives who immigrated with the last twenty years.

Perhaps the most well-known period of Ethiopian immigration to the United States is that of the 1980s and 1990s. Marked by the surge of refugee and asylum seekers, the United States received more than 18,000 Ethiopians from 1981-1990 (Getahun, 2007). During the 1974 *Derg* Socialist revolution, or "Red Terror," thousands of Ethiopians experienced mass detentions and executions. Any assumed anti-revolutionary tendencies resulted in jail or death. As political unrest increased, opposing parties took action against each other. The Ethiopian Peoples Revolutionary Party (EPRP) established military bases in northern Ethiopia and conducted attacks against the *Derg* as well as raids against local peasants (ibid). At the same time, issues of famine and drought displaced hundreds of thousands to nearby neighboring countries as well as European and American nations.

After nearly two decades of political turmoil more than 30,000 Ethiopians found refuge in the United States, constituting the largest group of African refugees and asylees at that time. During this period, and arguably for later decades, "refugeeism" became synonymous with Ethiopia (Getahun, 2007, p. 42/103). Since the 1980s a constant flow of Ethiopian refugees and immigrants have made their home in the United States. Thousands arrive yearly, doubling the population each decade from 1980 to present day.

Most recently, an estimated 173,600 Ethiopians reside in the United States (Center for Immigration Studies, 2010). However, unofficial statistics claim a population closer to half a million (Nicholls, 2005). A percent of the half a million or so Ethiopians did not come to the United States as a refugee or asylum seeker and it is important to acknowledge the difference. The difference between those who arrived to escape political persecution and those who arrived in pursuit of a better life vary greatly.

The present study focuses on a group of Ethiopian immigrants who sought "the good life" (Personal Communication, 6/23/13). To illustrate the difference, I rely on definitions provided by the United Nations (UN). A refugee is considered someone who:

> Owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to, or owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country (1951).

Immigrants, on the other hand, are categorized as "migrants," which the UN defines as persons who:

> Choose to move in order to improve the future prospects of themselves and their families" usually for permanent residence (2013).

It can be argued that this definition of "refugee" does not address the pressure of socio-economic factors contributing to problems in everyday life, which often force individuals to leave their country of origin. Likewise, the word "choose" in the UN definition of migrant assumes a high level of agency. A significant number, if not all, of the study participants did immigrate to the United States for greater economic prospects due to a lack of opportunity in Ethiopia. However, not one participant expressed a fear or

unwillingness to return to their birth country. In reality, half of the participants visited Ethiopia in the past few years while the other half mentioned saving money for a future return trip.

Thus, all of those who participated in this study were self-motivated to immigrate to the United States. None fled Ethiopia due to a fear of persecution, despite continued political and social unrest during the early 2000s, the decade when seven of the eight participants immigrated. Two came as part of a family unit and acknowledged that they had no choice in the matter. They emigrated with their families as children. They were both 13 years old and fall within the "generation 1.5"—a group including those who immigrated before or during their early teens, especially between the ages of six and twelve (Waters and Jiménez, 2005). Both show the quintessential characteristics of 1.5-generation immigrants, combining cultural elements of both new and old countries.

Participants in this study immigrated to the United States during the first decade of the year 2000, the earliest arriving in 2003 on a Diversity Visa (DV). The DV is a congressionally mandated program established in the 1990s that "randomly selects persons who meet strict eligibility requirements from countries with low rates of immigration to the United States" (Bureau of Consular Affairs, 2013). This program allows immigrants to enter the country with employment visas and provides further opportunities for family members to join them.

Arriving to the United States at different ages and by different means, participants acknowledged similar difficulties in adjusting to their new life. Many mentioned missing their friends and family back home. They described the social life in Ethiopia as "better,"

implying that it was ever-present and always available. Two participants reminisced, saying:

> *There* [in Ethiopia]*, it's like your neighbor's also your family. Everyone is so close together. We all, I don't know... you tend to see your friends and family and everything every single day. And do a lot of things and if you're in trouble or something happens you always have someone to talk to. Where, here, this American lifestyle, everything is on the own, everyone is on their own.*

Whether male or female, participants expressed a longing for the social life of Ethiopia. Positioned as one of the most challenging adjustments to immigrant life, participants sought community through more structured avenues.

Role of Religion

In this study, the Christian church, specifically Protestant, provided an individual with the opportunity to connect with friends and family in the Ethiopian community. The church is one religious space where community members spend hours together. Participants in this study worshiped, socialized, and established supportive connections with one another at church, all of which aided in the adjustment to American life. Support from a religious community may mean members of the church community provide financial, legal, or social (e.g. housing) assistance to those in need. For participants, it was nearly impossible to discuss "religion" or church as a distinct entity, because it was an integral part of their—and as participants said, "all"—Ethiopian identity:

> *We talked about how religion was a part of Ethiopian culture so much so that they felt they could not separate some traditions from religion and did not know if they did them* [traditions, rituals] *because they were Ethiopian or because they were Christian. (Field notes, 7/15/13).*

Perhaps one participant put it perfectly, "Everything's fixed with Holy Water" (Personal Communication, 2013). For most in this study, religion was an important part of their life. Most acknowledge the everyday role religion played, whether it was the acknowledgement of God on a daily basis or prayer.

Religion and politics deeply interconnect and make for a convoluted history of Christian establishments. Christianity came to Ethiopia by way of the Roman Empire occupation of the Red Sea in the fourth century and remained a strong presence (Marcus, 2002, p. 7). The Orthodox Christian Church is one of the oldest Christian churches in the world with the largest following, around 35 million Ethiopians (Taddesse, 1972). Divergent from Russian and Greek Orthodox churches, the Ethiopian Orthodox church is largely influenced by Judaism and indigenous elements (Getahun, 2007, p.178). It is estimated that between 40 and 45 percent of Ethiopians identify as Orthodox Christians. Historically, the Ethiopian Orthodox Church fell under the direction of the Coptic Orthodox Church of Alexandria in Egypt. However, in 1959 The Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church separated from the Egyptian church. Thereafter, Ethiopians maintained the power to nominate and appoint their own bishops and archbishops (Hāymānot, 1982).

In New York City, in 1959, Ethiopian-Americans established the first Ethiopian Orthodox church in the United States. Additional congregations followed; Los Angeles, Seattle, Washington, D.C., and Detroit soon built their own Ethiopian Orthodox churches. In Boston, where this study takes place, the Ethiopian Orthodox community established St. Michaels in 1989. The church later split into two, due to political

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differences regarding the interference of the *Derg* in religious matters. Supporters and opponents frequently disrupted church services, making it impossible to continue (Getahun, 2007). In Boston, the two Orthodox churches draw up to five hundred parishioners from in and around Boston on high holidays, holding services up to four hours.

The Protestant church is another church gaining prominence in the Ethiopian community. While the actual breakdown of religious identity is unknown among Ethiopian immigrants in the United States, it is estimated that nearly nineteen percent of Ethiopians identify as Protestant (CIA World Factbook, 2007). Following the entry of American and European Evangelical missionaries to Ethiopia—first during the 1840s, then again in the 1930s—Protestantism made its way into Ethiopian villages and spread throughout the country. In 1959 Ethiopia had its first official Evangelical church, *Mekane Yesus* (The House of Jesus) (Martínez d'Alòs-Moner, cited in Böll, 2005).

While identifying as Christian, Protestant Ethiopians in this study differentiate themselves from the Orthodox. "For Ethiopians, Orthodox Christianity is something that they inherited from their forefathers. As a result it becomes more than a religion..." (Getahun, 2007, p. 178). Participants echoed the same sentiment, recognizing the familial foundations of Orthodox Christianity, noting that it gets passed down from generation to generation. Two participants said, Orthodox Christians used this "inherent" quality to their advantage. One stated there was a "laziness" of faith and that Orthodox Christian merely went to church out of habit. This kind of polarized comparison, allowed a number

of participants in this study to identify themselves, in contrast, as strong and committed *Protestant* believers.

One participant, who identified as Protestant, suggested that Orthodox Christians focused on outward appearance of religiosity, but not necessarily inner or real religious commitment. For this participant, inward knowledge of Christ as Savior achieves true faithfulness. A report by the Christian Science Monitor (2010) claims that Evangelism is quickly spreading throughout Ethiopia and consequently within the Ethiopian immigrant population of the United States (Useem, 2000). In this study, more than half of the participants identified as Protestant, while none identified as Orthodox. For those who did not attend church regularly, they made it clear that they believed in God and were "Christian."

It should also be noted that roughly 33 percent of Ethiopians are Muslim (CIA World Factbook, 2007). Again, I did not interview nor encounter any Muslim Ethiopians during my fieldwork. (This is not to say they do not live in Boston.) A significant number of Ethiopian Muslims live in metropolitan Minneapolis, along with the largest population of Somalis in the United States. As mentioned by multiple participants, Ethiopians find a tremendous amount of comfort within their religious communities and this may encourage settlement patterns based on religious identity.

A small minority of Ethiopians practice traditional religions and Judaism (Beta Israel). While these two groups comprise a fraction of the population, they are two of the most well-studied and reported-on Ethiopian communities (Bar-Yosef 2001; Chehata, 2012; Fenster, 1998; Finklestein, Laufer, & Solomon, 2012; Kershner, 2012; Mendlinger

& Cwikel, 2006). The Ethiopian Jewish community has followed Jewish customs since the twelfth century (Ben-eliexer, 2004). The Beta Israel lived primarily in the Ethiopian Highlands of the Tigray and Amhara regions. Scholars of Ethiopian Jews determined they were most likely descended from the Tribe of Dan, one of Lost Tribes captured and exiled during the eighth century B.C.E. (Weinstein, 1985; Kessler, 1985). However, other explanations suggest that they may be descendants of followers of Moses, who traveled South during the exodus from Egypt, or that they may be descendants of Jews who accompanied the Queen of Sheba back to Ethiopia after her visit to King Solomon (Kessler, 1985). With no entirely agreed upon explanation, the debate endures about the authenticity of their *Jewishness* by way of historians, anthropologists, and religious scholars, coupled with modern day geneticists in search of the biological key to Jewish citizenship (Lucotte & Smets, 1999; Campbell et al., 2012).

In 1973, the formal recognition of the Ethiopian Jewish community by Israel led to a large-scale exodus to Israel in 1984 and 1991. Massive airlift operations, known as "Operation Moses" and "Operation Solomon," transported over 25,000 Ethiopians Jews to Israel (Ben-David and Ben-Ari, 1997; Walsh et al., 2012). While there are no official estimates on the number of Ethiopian Jews in the United States, one figure estimates around one thousand, most of whom reside primarily in Chicago and New York (Mozgovaya, 2009). Participants in this study were not aware that there were Ethiopian Jews in either the United States or abroad. Study participants tended to divide Ethiopian people into three religious groups, Orthodox, Protestant, and Muslim.

Review of Suicide

This brief review of historical and contemporary events in Ethiopia allows us to construct a framework with which to view Ethiopian understandings' of emotion, choice, agency, and concepts of self. One observation regarding the anthropological investigation of illnesses is the tendency for researchers to focus on that which appears to be odd and outside the observer's frame of reference (Kleinman, 1981). However, suicide is arguably an illness category that is not odd or outside the observers frame of reference. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), every year nearly one million people across the globe commit suicide, about one occurring every forty seconds (Suicide Prevention, 2014). It is found throughout the world touching countless lives. Anthropological investigations of suicide have focused on such diverse societies as the Philippines, Malawi, Botswana, Palestine, Spain, and Mexico (MacDonald, 2006; Vaughan, 2012; Livingston, 2009; Dabbagh, 2012; Cátedra-Tomás, 1992; Imberton, 2012).

The motivations for suicide are as diverse and complex as these different cultures. Current hegemonic discourse tends to situate it within a mental health paradigm, drawing attention to the emotional and behavioral idiosyncrasies of suicide. However, it is important not to confine the discussion to this domain. Modernity, genetics, stress, social regulation, and social integration all contribute to the various understandings of suicide. For example, during initial conversations with members of the Ethiopian community, they flagged the role of stress during and after immigration. They understood that some community members experience loneliness and difficulty finding jobs, but astutely recognized that the issue went deeper than individual isolation and frustration.

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The best known exploration of suicide is the sociological approach promoted by French sociologist Émile Durkheim. "Suicide" (1897) is considered a foundational text by sociologists precisely because he took a behavior that people understood as a solitary, individual phenomenon and showed that it is a social phenomenon with social forces driving it. By looking at a society and the way an individual was or was not integrated, Durkheim demonstrated how social structures influenced individuals. Durkheim's identification of four suicide types—egoistic, altruistic, fatalistic, and anomic—were an attempt to add depth to a human behavior that was otherwise presented statistically.

Durkheim emphasized several distinctions between social groups, and consequently, sociocultural factors occupied a prominent place in understanding suicide causality. His often-criticized perspective of suicide precipitants is best understood in a historical context. Durkheim did not so much disregard larger structural influences, as view them as means of arriving at the real causes of suicide.

Coinciding with Durkheim's research was an increasingly importance placed on *science.* Statistics provided a readily available interpretation of a highly individual and complicated act. The counting of bodies, as Charles MacDonald (2007) describes, led researchers to focus on various facts and figures corresponding to individuals who took their own lives. Risk-taking behavior, drug use, fire arm availability, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and sex remain among the most common variables used to predict those most susceptible to suicidality.

Criticism followed Durkheim's *Suicide,* with fellow sociologists targeting his omission of an operational definition of social regulation as well as the vague distinction

between "anomie" and "egoism"[5] (Gibbs and Martin, 1966; Johnson, 1965). Additional theories proposed by sociologist Andrew F. Henry and James F. Short (1954) focused on suicide and homicide, highlighting the aggression-frustration hypothesis by examining acts of inward and outward violence. Suicides, they argue, are aggressive reactions to frustration. They sought to bring together the behavioral and social sciences by examining determinants of choice within both sociological and psychological paradigms. Their work argued that violence and suicide correlated with socioeconomic position—a theory that did not garner much support (Dollard et. al., 1939).

Psychological investigations of suicide tend to focus on the individual forces and interpersonal relationships that shape a person. Psychology sought to explain an individual's feelings and behaviors primarily from the orientation of unconscious motivation (Stengel, 1964, p. 45). Explanations of suicide and suicidality focus on theories of unconscious, maladaptive, irrational, or impulsive acts. Furthermore, related research suggests that suicides result from family dysfunction, psychiatric conditions, economic hardship, dysregulated impulse control, or intense psychiatric pain.

Sociologists claimed to adhere to an objective investigation of suicide by focusing on quantifiable social agents and demographics, which made for models of predictability and rate comparison. Psychology and psychiatry, on the other hand, considered the

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[5] Egoistic suicide results when "the individual ego asserts itself to excess in the face of the social ego and at its expense, we may call egoistic the special type of suicide that springs from excessive individualism" (Durkheim, 1951, p. 209). Anomie is defined as the social condition of unregulated persons; as normlessness, resulting from the absence of regulation (Bearman, 1991, p. 502, 513).

individual, along with his or her intentions, motives and morality. Psychologists often aim to find the "real" reason behind a suicide, assuming an unconscious motivation.

Additionally, some evidence frames suicide as a learned behavior, particularly in relation to depression (Lewinsohn, 1974). If an individual suffers a loss, such as employment, divorce, or death, they may find themselves in a situation where their day-to-day actions are no longer positively rewarded. They may become passive or withdrawn and, if such losses are followed by a number of similar negative events, may feel growing helplessness or depression.

Psychologists frequently emphasize the relationship between suicides in social networks. Studies cite increased prevalence of suicide in some families as evidence of a biological component to suicide (Kreitman et al., 1969; Corder et al., 1974; Diekstra, 1974; Egeland and Sussex, 1985; Brodsky et al., 2008). A significant number of studies predominantly rely on sociological, psychological or biological frameworks to determine causes of suicide (Coryell and Schlesser, 2007; Joiner et al., 2005; Van Heeringen, 2003; Arango et al., 2001; Beck, 2006, 1985, 1975). Yet by framing suicide in relation to mental health or heredity understood in Eurocentric ways, investigators may overlook the possibility of other explanatory models, and other culturally normative understandings of suicide.

Anthropology of Suicide

The advantages of anthropological methodology in this are gaining currency (Lester, 2007; Werlang and Botega, 2003; Zhang et al., 2002; Clark, 1992). Most noted is

the success of retrospective analysis with members of the deceased person's social circle. Researchers who utilize this approach often refer to it as a "psychological autopsy," which relies "on the direct and indirect clues related to the lethal behavior which was to occur, clarifying the intention and the role of the deceased regarding his/her own death" (Werlang and Botega, 2003; Shneidman, 1998). The psychological autopsy aims to answer four questions: What? Where? From what (lethality/method)? And How? The semi-structured interview serves as an exceptional tool for eliciting answers to such questions (Werlang and Botega, 2003).

Yet even after such questions are addressed the puzzle can still remain unsolved. An anthropological approach can expand and improve upon the questions that remain by asking epistemological and ontological questions such as, "Why is it happening to this person at this time, in this place? What does it mean for those touched by it? How are communities members understanding the suicide—the action and the person?" A focus on the radiant effects of suicide permits an examination of idiosyncratic understandings of suicide and the *act* of self-accomplished death within individual cultures.

The American Association of Suicidology, along with other organizations (e.g., WHO, the American Psychological Association, and the American Foundation for Suicide Prevention), regularly published statistics pertaining to rates of suicide, focusing on rates of depression and comparable mental health disorders. Race and other demographic features are frequently broken down statistically as predictors for suicidality. This approach is reminiscent of the sociological emphasis on statistics used to

compare and predict rates. Again, it silences the voices of those affected, while bypassing the value of evaluating the discourse surrounding death.

Researchers must interrogate the value of using demographic measures as a means to predict suicidality, especially in an ever-changing world with increasingly fluid ethnic categories. How valuable is identifying and diagnosing depression in adolescents if those same adolescents do not understand what it means when someone asks them if they feel depressed? How are we to help an individual or prevent suicide among a population that does not provide openings in which the discussion of such feelings might take place? The apparent absence of "blue," "down," and "sad" feelings may reflect not the absence of such feelings, but rather of a vocabulary or body of experience unrecognized by those writing the prevention models. It is imperative to understand that not all persons share a highly individualist mind-body paradigm as understood in tradition Western institutions.

A systematic and synthetic system of explanations is superimposed upon individuals who commit suicide (Friedrich, Reams, & Jacobs, 1982). As a result, cultural influences are often overlooked in theoretical models of suicide, but it is in relation to socio-cultural context that suicide becomes meaningful. This may explain the recurrence of anthropological investigations of suicide, which although rare, appear throughout the history of the scholarly investigation. Additionally, an anthropological investigation of suicide, and the secrecy and mystery that surrounds it, provides an opportunity for others to narrate their own vision of the disappointments and, at times, unbearable pressures of modern life, not just for the individual in question, but for the individual answering (Livingston, 2009).

Anthropologists comment on the ontological power of suicides—why they exist, their relationship with the world around them—their representation of broader patterns of social dissolution, meaning making agents of cultural change or "agency of dead bodies to speak" (Kral, 2013; Chua, 2012; Briggs, 2007). MacDonald argues (2006) that the anthropological theories of suicide fall into two broad categories, socio-psychology and ethno-psychiatry (p. 9). He suggests that socio-psychological situations only validate specific categories of individuals, passing as explanations for the overall rate of suicide (ibid). Ethno-psychiatry, on the other hand, concerns itself with the previously mentioned aggression-frustration theory, or the redirection of violence and aggression. MacDonald's study, which took place over twenty years, determined that the majority of cases arise either from tensions existing in a narrow circle of closely related people or from thwarted and/or unrequited love (p. 17). More simply put, high, perhaps unattainable, expectations when met with failed outcomes may lead to suicidal behavior, less dramatically it may lead to an escape of self (Baumeister, 1991; Kral, 1998).

The different understandings of self may also be important when investigating suicide among immigrant populations. In general, the two understandings of self are often referred to as "ego-centric" and "socio-centric," cultural division used to distinguish between two particular ethno-psychologies (Shweder & Bourne, 1992). The ego-centric philosophy bases itself on the Weber philosophy that the self can be developed and refined through personal action, while the socio-centric self is fixed at birth and partially determined by related others. Thus, if an individual immigrates to a country where notions of self are largely ego-centric, and they come from predominantly socio-centric

culture, issues of identity may arise particularly in light of any discontinuity of self understanding. The dis-ease in question is largely placed on the individual in ego-centric cultures and the individual is responsible for its development and progression. If dis-ease or failure arises it is the consequence of individual action and it is only individual action that can mend it. It is also important to note that these stark divisions between selves— Western verses non-Western—are generalizations. Lindholm (1996) among others argue against this dichotomy.

Anthropologists have written extensively on notions of self and viewed its construction as "inherently cultural" (Shweder, 2003; Guarnaccia, 1996; Spiro, 1993; Holland, 1992; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Rosaldo, 1984; Hallowell, 1955). Individuals develop and adjust conceptions of self in relation to those around them and those they interact with. The self is one part of the investigation of suicide. Within the self are conscious and self-conscious guiding principles, constructed from learning and socialization (Kral, 1998). For example, Ethiopians in Boston may embody notions of self, cultural expectations, and self-consciousness mismatched to that of United States ideologies. Western thought is saturated with ideas of discipline and self-control, consistent with political and social traditions of individualism and self-responsibility, which may not be consistent with Ethiopian tradition (Lindholm, 2007, p. 366-393). Ethiopian immigrants may find themselves in a contentious position between two different cultures, resulting in a sort of existential crisis, as two cosmological worlds collide.

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Suicide in Immigrant Populations

As mentioned, anthropological studies of suicide are sporadic, and those pertaining to suicide among immigrant populations are even scarcer. The existing studies compare suicide rates of immigrant populations living in countries such as the United States, England, and Canada (Trovato and Jarvis, 1986; Kliewer, 1991; Kushner, 1984; Wodsworth, 2007). One article reviewing attempted suicide among immigrants living in 11 European counties found that 27 of the 56 immigrant groups studied had significantly higher rates of suicide attempts than their host countries (Bursztein-Lipsicas et al., 2010). Interestingly, suicide attempt rates across immigrant groups were similar.

In another study that examined suicidality and immigration in the United States focused solely on suicide ideation and attempts, not completions (Borges et al., 2011). Similar to other psychological and sociological reviews of suicidality, this study separated foreign-born and native-born participants by *race/ethnicity* and thus provided little information about the cultural diversity of their study population. Researchers do note that suicidality is less common among Hispanic and Asian groups (p. 1179). Another US based study examined suicide trends in California on the previous assertion that foreign-born persons were generally at lower risk of suicide in the United States (Sorenson and Shen, 1996). Researchers found that foreign-born non-Hispanic Whites and foreign-born Hispanics had lower rates of suicide than US-born non-Hispanic Whites and Hispanics.

Additionally, there is little attention given to specific immigrant groups and rates of suicide. Despite being the largest immigrant group in the United States Latino/a

immigrant suicide received only slight attention in the literature and popular news

sources (Hussey and Leland 2013; Rutenberg 2013; Wadsworth and Kubrin 2007; Smith

et al 1985). "Generally, studies on Latino adolescents conducted in the past 2 decades in

the United States find higher prevalence of suicidal ideation and attempts for Latino,

compared with Anglo-American and African-American, but quite similar to Asian-

American youth." (Bursztein-Lipsicas & Mäkinen., 2010:276). Such studies highlight

issues of integrating into the larger social network, particularly within the context of

adolescent suicide, as well as issues of socioeconomics and racial inequality.

Suicide Among African Immigrants

  To my knowledge there is scant literature on suicide among African immigrants

in the United States. Data that does exist explores attitudes toward suicide, opposed to the

physical act and completions (Eshun, 2006). There is research on suicide in African

nations, but it still remains limited. Studies that do exist are spontaneous and appear in

anthropological literature from the twentieth century on ward. One of the first and most

notable is Bohannan from the 1960s. More recent anthropological studies of suicide in

African countries, concentrate on populations in the countries of Botswana, Malawi, and

Ethiopia (Livingston, 2009; Alem, Kebede, Jacobsson, & Kullgren, 1999; Kebede and

Alem, 1999). In an earlier review of Suicide in Africa, Collomb and Collignon (1974)

found that in many African communities suicide was a form of death that brought

dishonor and shame on to a family. Arguably, this view exists today as only one of my

participants had heard of suicide in Ethiopia. Two participants mentioned the practice of

"hiding" a suicide, suggesting a family member died by food poisoning or another accident (Personal Communication, 2013).

Suicide Among Ethiopians U.S. and Abroad

A study by Vaughan (2012) illustrates that, in general, "African societies have been assumed to have very low rates of suicide" (p. 235). While this may be true, Vaughan points out that there is no way of verifying this claim. There are currently no reliable historical data on suicide rates on the African continent, including Ethiopia, and for the most part this lack of data persists today (Vaughan, 2010, 2012). As mentioned previously, study participants report a high level of personal and cultural religiosity, which some studies suggests results in a lower tolerance for suicide (Dervice et al., 2004; Pescosolido and Georgianna, 1989; Stacks, 1983). However, this does not seem to be the case with this study population. None of the study's participants expressed negative attitudes toward the deceased even within a religious context. Some of the participants did mention that it was considered a sin, but they did not directly say *they* themselves considered it a sin. This is an interesting difference that will be discussed later.

In regards to reported suicide, to my knowledge, there are no studies that address this issue in Ethiopia. There are some studies that address suicide attempts, ideation, and attitude towards suicide in Ethiopia (Alem, Jacobsson, Kebede, & Kullgren, 1999; Alem, Jacobsson, Kebede, & Kullgren, 1999; Kebede & Alem, 1999; Walsh, Edelstein, & Vota, 2012). Such research suggests Ethiopians' attitudes toward suicide are largely embedded with religious notions. While the data is very limited in understanding those beliefs,

researchers found that participants thought people who committed suicide were "cruel and feared, untrustworthy, sinners, foolish, mad, hasty, faithless, and had no place in society" (Alem et al., 1999). In general, it was also suggested that Ethiopians believe those who commit suicide did so because of either frustration (*bisichit*) or issues related to poverty. This report is consistent with this study's findings and Chapter Five will address a similar concept of frustration, specifically as it relates to cultural expectations. The participants in this study did not use the word frustration, but instead discussed discrepancies in anticipations about life in the United States.

Studies of suicide among Ethiopian Jewish immigrants have been conducted in Israel (Shoval, Schoen, Vardi, & Zalsman, 2007; Arieli, Gilat, & Aycheh, 1994, 1996). The studies tend to focus on a comparison of the suicide rate between Ethiopian immigrants and the general Israeli population—the number of suicides for every 100,000 persons. Every year, with the exception of 1989, the disparity between the two rates ranged between 137% and 667% and this was still the case ten years after immigration." (Arieli et al., 1995: 317). Another report suggested the suicide rate for Ethiopian Jews in Israel is five times higher than that of the general population (Blumenfeld, 2011).

In light of the scant research available on the topic of Ethiopian suicide, both in the United States and abroad, it is important to direct research efforts toward specific populations. In addition, the research that is available, suggests a dramatic increase in suicide rates following immigration. Therefore, it is important to continue to examine the issue of Ethiopian suicide, and emotional well-being, in efforts to add to the limited, but important, research.

Chapter Three

Methods and Results

The focus of this research project was to identify local understandings of suicide in Boston's Ethiopian community. My interest in this project grew from a personal interaction with a local Ethiopian Elder, Berihun, who brought this social issue to my attention. He was saddened and overwhelmed by this tremendously complex phenomenon. Similar to Berihun, I had a personal desire to help his community and contribute to sustainable prevention models. Additionally, I wanted to continue my previous work and interests in understanding and exploring how suicide is influenced by, and influences, individual and group psycho-socio-cultural function. An anthropological investigation allows for a multidimensional analysis by investigating human activity without assumption.

In the late winter of 2013, following multiple conversations with Berihun, I decided to begin a research project concerned with suicide among Boston's Ethiopian community. I wanted to gain a better understanding of why community members were committing suicide at alarming rates and what prevention paradigms would best fit this group.

There is a lack of official quantitative data pertaining to the rates of Ethiopian suicide in Boston, but unofficially no less than five individuals from the Ethiopian community in Boston committed suicide in the last two years. For a population between 10,000 and 12,000 people, this rate is almost three times that of the general

Massachusetts[6] population and almost double that of the general U.S. population (Massachusetts Department of Public Health, 2014). Ethiopians of Boston acknowledge that the suicide rate for Ethiopian immigrants in the United States is higher than that in Ethiopia (Personal Communication, 2/12/13; 6/11/13; 7/15/13; 8/6/13). Public commentary also supports this claim (Kifle, 2012).

Research Design

The initial design of my research was subject to significant critique from the Boston University Medical Campus Institutional Review Board. My application received Full Board review and I had the opportunity to attend the initial board review. The 19-member panel initially expressed concern with my proposed study. The panel articulated their apprehension about whether or not I was sufficiently trained in conducting interviews pertinent to sensitive issues. There was also concern about the abilities of my participants to speak English sufficiently. I addressed these concerns citing the voluntary nature of my research as well as prior personal experience in working on sensitive topics.

The Review Board requested a number of changes. I was prohibited from conducting focus group interviews. I was required to submit a list of predetermined questions, both for initial and follow up interviews. I also needed to provide a script detailing how I would approach and recruit potential participants. In addition, I included

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[6] The rate of suicide in Massachusetts for 2011 was 8.9/100,000 or 588 (Department of Public Health, 2014). For more information of suicide and self-injury in the state of Massachusetts please see the Massachusetts Department of Public Health website and the reports on suicide and self-inflicted injuries. Or: http://www.mass.gov/eohhs/docs/dph/injury-surveillance/suicide/suicide-update-spring2013.pdf

a document listing available suicide prevention organizations and emergency response teams and personnel. In June of 2013, my research project was granted full board approval.

Research Methods

Guided by phenomenology, I sought to extract local understandings of suicide through in-depth interviews. A phenomenological paradigm in anthropology takes an experience-near approach to suicide (Kleinman & Kleinman, 1991; Geertz, 1983). This anthropological approach takes the individual's actions at their apparent value, without superimposing external systems of explanation. Each person's individual experience of suffering contributes to his or her stock of knowledge (Schutz, 1970). By constructing the lived experiences of the interviewee and individual remembering, the research can understand the nature of social, cultural, and moral influences on individuals and culture. Robert Desjarlais (1994) underlines the complexity of experience, arguing that its subtleties and illusiveness are best understood through phenomenological assessments (p. 162). The phenomenological method allows for an engagement with suicide from the informants' own points of view (Staples and Widger, 2012, p. 185).

Through person-centered ethnography, I sought to present a picture of what people in this community experienced in terms of the self, the body, the mind, emotions, and relationships with others in their community in the United States and in Ethiopia. Topics centered on issues of personal and national history, immigration, emotional wellness, constructions of identity, self-maintenance, the act of suicide, and memories

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about the suicide. By using ontological and epistemological style questions, I intended to identify and examine what it means to be part of a close-knit community affected by suicide and how they understand this phenomenon. By using grounded theory, I could add to and adjust my questions as themes emerged. The lengthy and in-depth interviews given by participants facilitated an almost immediate opportunity to identify themes and how they were linked to each other and larger theories (Bernard, 2011).

The third method involved in this study was participant observation at local Ethiopian establishments. Participant observation permitted me to collect data about people and from people in comfortable and familiar settings. Through participant observation I intended to immerse myself in the Ethiopian culture and participate in their everyday activities (Bernard, 2011). I sought to gain a richer understanding of the Ethiopian population in Boston by attending their religious services, hearing their music, experiencing their cuisine, and just hanging out. This also helped to establish rapport within the larger community.

Getting Started

My initial aim sought to use community based participatory research (CBPR) methods to gain an insider perspective of why Ethiopians in Boston thought their local community members were committing suicide. Additionally, I anticipated a close working relationship with the Ethiopian Elder I met previously on several occasions. However, during the actual data collection period this individual was at times difficult to contact as well as moderately aloof in recruitment processes and community activities. I

anticipated him playing a more active role in aiding in the recruitment procedure especially as it pertained to persons who had lost relatives to suicide. However, past research acknowledges "one of the greatest challenges of early stage CBPR lies in establishing trust" (Mosavel, 2005, p. 2578).

Initially, he indicated that he had a large resource of potential participants. Following IRB study approval and during our own first formal interview, he informed me that he would prefer it if I had an Amharic translator so I could access more individuals in the community. He informed me that he knew someone who could translate, but it would cost a fee. Unfortunately, I had to tell him I was unable to secure funds for a translator and had limited my recruitment to those who could speak proficient English. This may have prevented me from interviewing a certain sect of the population, but overall I found that a majority of the Ethiopians I met in church and in the community spoke English well.

In the following weeks, after several requests to the Elder for introductions, I was introduced to two women from a local Ethiopian church. These women provided me with great insight as well as a warm welcome into their community. After asking the Elder if he knew of any additional persons in the Ethiopian community who may have lost someone to suicide, he provided me with the contact information for a gentleman who lost his son to suicide the year prior. I was grateful for his help and efforts in providing me this information, as the interview was unique compared to my others, proving to be the most challenging and rewarding. I thanked the Elder profoundly for his assistance and our relationship remained constant and pleasant throughout the research process.

Recruitment & Participants

Recruitment for this study took place from June to September 2013. Participants who qualified for this study were told of the study during an encounter at a community space, such as a church or café. Participants also heard of the study through those who had previously participated. Additionally, flyers were given to members of a local Ethiopian church. A copy of the informed consent was given to the potential participant either before or during the first in-depth interview. Those who agreed received written and verbal information about the study and were asked for written consent.

I recruited individuals who identified as Ethiopian and/or Ethiopian-American. This included participants who were either born in America or Ethiopia. Elders from a local Ethiopian church and an Ethiopian business owner partook as well as referred potential participants to this study. Eligibility criteria included the additional stipulations: must be able to speak proficient English and must have known someone to have died by suicide. I felt that the stipulation "to have known someone to die by suicide," allowed for the greatest number of potential informants. This stipulation therefore included family, friends, and acquaintances whom previously had a relationship with someone who died by suicide. The total number of participants was eight, four men and four women. Participants ranged in age from early twenties to middle-sixties. All study participants were born in Ethiopia and immigrated to the United States at various life stages, from teenage to late middle-age. The mean number of years a participant had been in the United States was 7 years (range: 2-10 years). To my knowledge all participant immigrated to the United States by way of the Diversity Visa. It is also my understanding

that three participants came with members of their nuclear family; another joined his previously emigrated middle-aged son, while one came for an academic position, and two arrived on their own.

The participant interviews took place in several different settings in the Boston area. More times than not, this made it rather challenging to record the participants and recordings were mediocre at best. I initially set out to recruit 30 participants for both formal and informal interviews. This was an ambitious goal, but I wanted to have the option to recruit a large number in case I found myself at a particular social event where such an opportunity might present itself. I recruited eight participants and gathered eight in-depth interviews ranging from one to three hours. All but one in-depth interview was digital-voice recorded and transcribed.

In addition to the eight in-depth interviews, I had seven unstructured and informal follow-up interviews, which lasted from twenty minutes to an hour. Having long initial in-depth interview provided study participants with the opportunity to become comfortable with my questions and me. Participants were very open and welcoming to me during all future interactions allowing me to ask any questions I had about the issues of immigration, emotional wellness, and mental health, as well as details about the suicides they were familiar with. Field notes captured the majority of these interviews, while the rest were digital-voice recorded and transcribed.

Additionally, several brief informal interactions took place with people at a popular church and local Ethiopian café. Individuals at church were often curious about who I was and what I was doing there. I told the inquisitive churchgoers that I was an

acquaintance of one of the Elders. We were working with each other to understand and explore the issue of suicide in the community. Unable to sit down and formally interview individuals during these interactions, our brief conversations nonetheless indicated that there was a community awareness as well as deep concern over the issue of community suicide. All exchanges and resulting conversations were recorded in field notes following the interactions. Data from formal and informal interviews, participant observation, and material culture were collected using an amalgamation of digital-voice recorders, field notes, and community contribution (i.e. material culture).

Interviews

The initial interview with a community Elder took place in a public center dedicated to advancing the well-being of local African immigrants. This interview lasted more than two hours. To confirm the participant's well-being, I asked him if he would like to continue the interview or conclude for the day and arrange a follow-up meeting. Ensuring his comfort, the interview continued. After nearly three hours we finished our conversation and I ensured him I would see him again at his church.

The second set of interviews took place in an open space. During a weekend evening, the three of us met in a central location in downtown Boston. As we located a U-shaped, brick bench to settle into, a live band started playing in the park adjacent. The entertainment and warm, summer evening created an environment conducive to conversation. Like that last interview, this meeting lasted nearly two hours. I again inquired about the participants' time and comfort level, ensuring the pair that my time

was flexible and we could arrange a follow up meeting if they felt tired or pressed for time. Both interviewees insisted that they were in good spirits and we continued our interview, which was cut due to the loss of daylight and fall of night.

The third interview also consisted of a pair. While I had originally arranged the interview with a local café owner, when I arrived for the interview he had invited a young lady to join us. She was one of his waitresses, also Ethiopian and willing to do the interview. This interview in particular was long, lasting nearly seven hours. That time was not entirely dedicated to the discussion of suicide. We enjoyed a cup of coffee, two meals, and the simple process of getting to know each other. The interviewees had the opportunity to inquire about my research and personal life. I shared my own stories of family, migration (from the Middle-West to the East Coast), and suicide (the loss of a friend, a classmate, and a few acquaintances). It set the foundation for a fundamental research setting and rewarding friendship.

Following the lengthy interview, I decided that it was appropriate to anticipate future interviews taking longer than expected. Thus, time became a central issue in determining when to schedule interviews. This was certainly true for the interview with my seventh participant. Marcus and I had arranged to meet at a local café outside the city of Boston. I boarded the local train line and made my way to his neighborhood, only to discover his nonappearance. Unable to make the interview that day we reschedule for the following day. I boarded the train back to the city only to do the same journey the following morning.

My last interview took place in a municipal adjacent to the city of Boston. The

brick and ivy towers of this legendary city contrasted the steel and glass steeples waiting just beyond the rivers edge. I met the participant, Azeb, in a conventional sandwich shop, uncharacteristic of its surroundings. Like all the interviews before, our conversation went well into the evening. It ended only because the staff of the shop kindly asked us to leave.

My interviews took place in a variety of settings in Boston. This gave me a better sense of how and where community members like to spend their time. Food and coffee was present at every interview by way of the participant's choice. This suggests that my participants find comfort in spaces occupied by other people as well as the comforts of food and coffee. Social relationships and the role of coffee in Ethiopian culture came up in almost all interviews.

I spent the majority of my time between a local Ethiopian church and a popular Ethiopian café. The church is located in a family friendly neighborhood in the city of Boston. Like many areas of the city, new construction speaks to the rapid gentrification of this area. The church itself is a well-maintained single story building, absent of any structure deficiencies or concerns. The inside has several rooms; some used as classrooms, others as offices. The church service takes place in the largest room, which has seating for more than two-hundred parishioners. The front of the church is adorned in gold fabrics, fashioned into fan-shaped drapery. Adorned with a brick red sash, a large wooden cross (four to five feet tall) hangs above the middle wall. On opposite sides of the stage, an Ethiopian and an American flag hang limply from their poles.

I attended this particular church five Sundays between June and August of 2013. Services took place Sunday late mornings until early afternoons. I typically spent three to

four hours listening to Christian sermons and talking to congregants. Conducted in

Amharic[7], two study participants offered to translate for me. I listened to traditional songs

of worship and partook in and observed traditional modes of behavior central to this

Ethiopian religion. The young women translating for me often confirmed the ordinariness

of such behaviors—shouting and crying. More often than not, before asking, they would

reassure me that everything was "okay." That particular individual was simply feeling the

overwhelming power of The (Holy) Spirit. Unable to take field notes or recordings of the

services, I frequently dashed home to write brief overviews of sermon, the spiritual

messages, and personal interactions.

Three out of the five times I attended church, one of the women who translated

for me offered me a ride home. At first I hesitantly accepted this invitation, not knowing

whether or not this was simply a polite gesture or a sincere offering. I accepted the

invitation only after she assured me numerous times that my apartment was on her way

home. I joyfully discovered that this brief ten-minute ride home allowed for a momentary

interaction outside of church, often precipitating a reflection of the day's sermon. I

believe this provided me the opportunity to hear her honest opinion about the sermon as

well as how she was fairing outside of church in her work or home setting.

The other local setting where I spent a majority of my time was a popular

Ethiopian café and restaurant. This café is located in a central Boston area not far from

my residence. This provided me with an opportunity to frequent the establishment eight

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[7] *Amharic* is one of more than 80 languages spoken in Ethiopia. It is the most widely spoken
language. It is the language of the capital city Addis Ababa and the second largest ethnic group—
Amhara, about 27 percent of the population (CIA, 2007).

times between the months of June 2013 and September 2013. The storefront is outlined in Ethiopia's national colors—green, yellow, and red—and occupies a commercial space on the first level of residential building. The entrance is adorned with corporate stickers indicative of the cafés favorable reviews from customers. It is bright inside and smells of cumin and pepper.

During my time at the café, interactions were rarely brief and often involved coffee and food. On two occasions, an observation lasted seven hours, but frequently lasted around three hours. Most of my time was spent interacting with the owner and waitress, both completed interviews with me. Both participants were warm and extremely hospitable. Sitting at a two person table, enjoying the music, conversation, and food, I was able to observe the two interacting with customers and other Ethiopians who would stop in to chat or to drop off bi-weekly deliveries of injera[8]. By making myself a relatively constant visitor, the owner and other staff became comfortable with my presence. It was not uncommon for me to sit, sip coffee, and write field notes as the owner and staff attended to customers. When finished with a task, they would come sit beside me and talk. This was an exceptional opportunity to ask any follow up question I had as well as listen to missives about their lives. Topics included the history of Ethiopia, personal histories, current life happenings, family dynamics, discussion of suicide and depression, and the progress of my research. By the end of August, the staff of the café became so comfortable with my presences that I aided in small tasks around the café.

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[8] *Injera* is a yeasty flatbread made from *teff* seeds. It is the main utensil used to scoop up food.

An unexpected, but useful consequence of my frequent presence in the café was the acquisition of material culture. Material culture "refers to the corporeal, tangible object constructed by humans" (O'Toole and Were, 2008, p. 617). Material culture was not a method I formally anticipated using, but I now have in my possession a few brochures about Ethiopian culture and history, handwritten notes about important films, and photographs. The proud display and sharing of such culturally significant events and objects provided further support about the importance of a number of thematic insights uncovered in my research, such as the deep impression of pride on everyday life and the profound significance of ancient and recent historical events.

Data Analysis

All digital-recorded interviews were transcribed using a combination of audio playing programs including, *ExpressScribe*, *Livescribe*, and *GarageBand*. All field notes were recorded by hand and transferred into a Microsoft Word Document or *Livescribe* document. All transcriptions and electronic versions of field notes were later transferred to *Dedoose*. *Dedoose* is a cloud-based, web application that manages, analyzes and presents qualitative and mixed method research data (*Dedoose* Version 4.5, 2013)

During the first round of coding I analyzed texts, including field notes, transcriptions, still images, and physical object. My analysis used a number of coding methods most frequently utilized in studies addressing epistemological (knowing and understanding of the phenomenon in question) and ontological (pertaining to the nature of participants' realities) questions. Additionally, I gravitated toward Grounded Theory

accompanied coding methods. Several coding methods were experimented with, including Attribute Coding, Subcoding, Simultaneous Coding, Structural Coding, Descriptive Coding, Process Coding, Initial Coding, and Verse Coding. However, there were 5 particularly beneficial coding methods.

The first was Structural Coding, which applies a conceptual phrase representing a topic of inquiry to a segment of data that relates to a specific research question (Saldane, 2013, p. 267). Second, In Vivo Coding, which uses words or short phrases from the participant's own language. This type of coding captures behaviors or processes, helping to preserve participants' meanings of their views and actions in the coding itself (ibid, p. 264). Initial Coding was also used, which seeks to break down qualitative data into discrete parts, closely examine them, and compare them for similarities and differences. Fourth, Emotion Coding, was important to this data analysis process. This coding method labels the emotions recalled and/or experienced by the participant (ibid, p. 263). Lastly, Values Coding became the most important coding method. This method reflects a participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his/her perspectives or worldviews. (ibid, p. 268). This particular coding method illuminated several important themes, which will be discussed in the following chapters.

Chapters Four, Five, and Six will discuss several important cultural values and systems of meaning necessary for contextualizing suicide in Boston's Ethiopian community. Each chapter will discuss the moral meanings of culturally prescribed attitudes and beliefs. Complex identity construction emerges as a central component to

understanding the presentation of Self in Ethiopian culture. Skewed interpretations of life in the United States serve to perpetuate unrealistic expectations from both immigrants and their family and friends back "home" in Ethiopia. The transferring of judgment, knowledge, and agency take place in life and following the suicide. A surplus of meaning spills over the original definitions of pride, expectations, and suicide, contributing to the making and remaking of meaning of lived experiences.

Chapter Four

"Who Minus Who":
"It Makes More Sense in Amharic!"

People listen to him (Haile Selassie) and he was such a great person that, I do believe

half our pride is because we were not colonized. We're independent; we're always 'been

on our own' kind of thing. We have our own calendar, our own everything. So we're very

proud of that, but at the same time I think our pride gets in the way. Sometimes we're too

proud to ask for help. We're too proud to be like 'I can't do this,' or 'I can't do that,' or

anything else. We're always, you know how the guy said, "Ke man Aneshe"—either way

if I'm poor, I'm still proud, I'll still do whatever I want and everything else. It's

just...there should always be a limit to how proud you can be. Just know that you need to

ask for help and that it's okay to be like—know that you are wrong or to know that you're

*feeling something different. (*Elshadaie, 8/28/2013).

Elshadaie's Story

   It was a stifling mid-summer day and I sought refuge from the heat in a local

Ethiopian teashop. As I entered Elshadaie walked toward me with her natural gentle

grace. She moves like a ballerina as she negotiates the tight passage from behind the

counter to the dining area. She silently places one foot in front of the other as she walks

toward me with open arms. We embrace. We exchange our usual greetings and

pleasantries. I practice the Amharic greeting she wrote down for me the week before,

"Sälam, Denanesh?" She smiles and laughs affectionately, "Good! You do it just right!" I know she is being kind. She occasionally attempts to teach me a little Amharic when I stop in to see her. I always ask her to slow down her pronunciation so I can get a handle on the language, one I have never heard before.

Extending her arm in the direction of a table, she instructs me to take a seat. "Coffee?" She asks. I replied, "Yes, please." She strolls back toward the large, steel and glass, espresso machine, her navy blue, polka dot dress swaying as she walks. Already slight, Elshadaie looks particularly delicate today, as her dress is fashioned tightly around her petite waist. Her jet-black hair is pulled firmly and neatly on the top of her head, further accentuating her long neck. When the coffee is ready she places two red cups and indented saucers on an oval serving tray, naturally not making a sound as she does so. She brings the tray over and I warn her that I have some more formal questions today. I recently interviewed a gentleman who used an Ethiopian phrase to help explain pride to me. "I would like to talk more about pride, if that is ok?" She sits across from me, and gives a consenting nod. She immediately starts to talk about pride, in the context of where this feeling comes from, despite having told me a very similar history the week before.

Elshadaie's description conveys the virtues and the vices of Ethiopian pride. She explains to me that this aspect of her culture she finds both frustrating, yet empowering. Pride is spoken about as both a barrier and as a resource, as an obstacle to reaching out and as the cornerstone to success. The meaning of pride is shaped by context, fluctuating with the ebb and flow of the conditions of human life. The majority of participants in this

study acknowledge the challenging quality of this trait, describing it as both the key to their "greatness" and as a trigger to the demise of those lost to suicide. In attempts to explain why suicide is plaguing the Ethiopian community in Boston, the contradictory nature of this model Ethiopian trait leaves a dark inscription across participant stories.

In the informal and formal discussions I had with Elshadaie, her comments pointed to three main explanatory models of suicide. For example, when reflecting on her impressions of suicide in the Boston Ethiopian community, she spoke about her understanding of Western psychology and depression. Her considerations included stories about an individual's integration into the Ethiopian community and the challenges and benefits of its being close-knit. She made little mention of assimilating into the larger American community, as ties to the Ethiopian community seemed more important. The third explanatory model that received attention, not just from Elshadaie, but also from the other participants was the challenge of Ethiopian cultural[9] expectations. Within this frame of reference, suicide functioned as a social message—a response to the challenges confronted by the juxtaposition of continual cultural expectations against the reality of immigrant life.

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[9] At its most basic, "culture" is understood as a "learning device for uncovering meaning in social life" (Monaghan & Just, 2000, p.48). I use the word culture because it is the term study participants used most often in conversation. Culture referred to the values, beliefs, ontologies, and worldviews of "general" or the "majority" of Ethiopians as stated by study participants.

Recent anthropological scholarship calls for a more socio-cultural approach to studies of suicide (Chua 2012; Imberton 2012; Staples and Widger, 2012; Minayo, Cavalcante, and de Souza 2006). Public attention, particularly from <u>The New York Times</u>, has also raised questions about the vulnerability of immigrants and concerns of suicidality in the United States (Hussey & Leland 2013; Parker-Pope, 2013; Rutenberg, 2013; Yee, 2012). The intent of this study is not to render psychological, biological, or sociological explanations irrelevant, but instead add to the current paradigms and limit the tendency toward monocausal explanations.

The effort to isolate a cause of suicide has resulted from one of the nineteenth- and twentieth century's greatest contributions to the study of suicide. In 1897, Émile Durkheim released his examination of suicide. Thereafter the sociological explanation of suicide gained prominence, directing scholarly focus to the integration and regulation of the individual into society. Durkheim argues that society provides ultimate meaning for human beings. An interpretation of the relationship between an individual and his or her society informs Durkhiem's typology of suicide: egoistic, altruistic, anomic, and fatalistic

Egoistic suicide results when "the individual ego asserts itself to excess in the face of the social ego and at its expense, we may call egoistic the special type of suicide that springs from excessive individualism" (Durkheim, 1951, p. 209). *Altruistic suicide* occurs when an individual is too integrated into a population. "[The] person has so little value that attacks upon it by individuals receive only relatively weak restraint. It is thus natural for him to be yet less protected against collective necessities and that society

should not hesitate, for the very slightest reason, to bid him end a life it values so little" (ibid, p. 221). *Anomic suicide* is often brought on by dramatic changes, economically or socially, occurring when the social norms or rules governing society neither correspond with the life goals of the individual, nor do they identify with the norms of society. *Fatalistic suicide* is the least discussed, which Durkheim positions as the opposite of anomic suicide. "It is the suicide deriving from excessive regulation, that of persons with futures pitilessly blocked and passions violently checked by oppressive discipline" (ibid, p. 276).

Durkheim's work ignited and maintained a steady stream of scholarship on suicide, including critiques of his theory. One of the primary critiques questions the framing of suicide as mutually exclusive types. Moreover, Durkheim discusses a direct relationship between a single cause and a single effect, overlooking the important role of individual values and dynamic cultural beliefs (Hamlin & Brym, 2006). Challenging Durkheim's limited model anthropologists argue the use of a cultural and social-psychological lens allows for the suicide to be interpreted in light of larger trends in the community (Chua, 2012). The suicide can tell the story of a community in motion. It can ignite a conversation about what is and is not working for group members. For participants involved directly and indirectly in this study, the transformations required by relocating from life in Ethiopia to life in Boston precipitate new challenges resulting from the blending of two local moral worlds.

By "moral worlds," I rely on Veena Das's (2001) fleshing out of Kleinman's

original notion of "local moral worlds," which Das explains as essentially signaling the

importance of how we come to invest in relations.

> Traditions and customs are neither a matter of following pure
> habits, nor indeed of constant self-interrogation about how we make
> meaning of culture. Rather, it is Kleinman's thought that the making of
> moral beings depends upon the way we place ourselves within local
> worlds and relationships. "Local," then, does not have an exclusively
> spatial reference—it relates rather to the quality of relationships. Kleinman
> also speaks of the tension between the *moral*, shaped in local worlds and
> the *ethical* as allegiance to abstract principles. As I understand him,
> ethical principles become grounded only when they become entangled in
> the discourse of local worlds (Das, 2001).

Therefore for participants in this study there existed an ongoing process of negotiating

the tensions between prior and current, still evolving understandings of social

relationships and social morality.

Participants discussed individuals who died by suicide, and the transformations

they underwent, in relation to a sense of agency in life and in death. The suicides' agency

in life is compounded by a number of cultural traditions, while the action to die by

suicide is viewed as their own doing. In all but one interview, discussions of suicide

seemed, spontaneously, to prompt talk of pride—where the quality comes from, how it

reflects and affects personhood and Ethiopian culture, and what it means to each

individual. I began to understand that, whether or not pride takes the form of a noun,

verb, or adjective, the term exists as a dynamic meaning. When spoken about in

conversation as an asset, pride invokes a feeling of "a high or inordinate opinion of one's

own dignity, importance, merit, or superiority, whether as cherished in the mind or as

displayed in conduct" (dictionary.com, 2013). When spoken about as both

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simultaneously positive and negative, pride is best understood as "having or showing self-respect or self-esteem"—a feeling and behavior of self-worth that supports Ethiopians in hard times, but also prevents someone from asking for help (ibid).

The darker side of pride, however, is related to a third definition, "pleasure or satisfaction taken in something *done by* or *belonging to* oneself or believed to *reflect* credit upon oneself" (ibid). More plainly put, pride comes from a belief that something done or belonging to oneself is a reflection of one's abilities or self-worth. Therefore, if pride inspires a recent Ethiopian immigrant to pursue higher education or establish their own business, the act of doing so is a reflection of their proud character and their self-worth. On the other hand, as Lidiya and Tina told to me, if an Ethiopian immigrant fails to get a job beyond that of a parking garage attendant, he may be subjected to feelings of shame or disgrace, whose failure to do better reflects his lack of abilities and self-respect.

Lost and Found in Translation

When I asked participants directly about the Amharic word or phrase they used for suicide, they said, *"Eras Matefate."* The meaning of the word is nuanced by context, but always remains profound. As Lidiya explained, it "essentially means 'he took his own life. It's a tough word. It is a heavy, heavy, term. You don't joke around." In addition, both Lidiya and Tina told me, judgment follows the suicide.

> **Lidiya**: *I feel like "Eras Matefate," pause me if you don't wanna hear*
> *this, I feel like it kind of blames the guy. I know a lot of times I hear these*
> *stories, oh my God he killed himself. Ahhh, what's wrong with him.*
> *There's judgment.*
> **Tina**: *yeah. He did it too himself.*

He or she does not receive "pity all the way," because it is assumed there must have been something wrong with him or her. The conclusion is often, "he failed."

Study participants also explained another shadow side of their pride, *Ke man Aneshe*—a phrase used to summarize the competitive force, the experience of being driven by pride, which impacts the everyday lives of Ethiopians. As Azeb scribbles this phrase in my notebook, he says, "Pride. That is the problem." Discussing the pressures it can place on an individual, he tells me that pride can persuade an individual to "outdo" or better another person. Sitting across from the table, in his crisp, linen dress shirt and pressed khaki's, he explains that *Ke man Aneshe* translates literally as "Who minus who." At its most basic, this means "I am no less good than you," or "I am not lower than anyone." It is described as a feeling of being intimidated by what others succeed in doing. It may also be understood as the internal berating of oneself resulting from the belief that they cannot do the same. As a result, a person can internalize considerable pressure to look happy—to create the impression that they are doing just as well as everyone else. It can lead, as well, to an individual's trying to prove they *can* do the same, without consideration of the differences in their own circumstances.

When I asked two other participants about the expression, they provided similar answers. One told me that, depending on the region (of Ethiopia) from which a person comes, the phrase can mean something slightly different. For her, *Ke man Aneshe* means:

> *I am not lower than anyone else. "Ke man Aneshe" means the feeling of being intimidated by what others do. And people try to prove to themselves that 'I am no less good than you are,' without any consideration of the circumstances. There is also a saying to those people who go crazy over this 'You live as your household permits but not as what the neighbor does.' It sound much more sensible in Amharic!*

The difficulty in translating *Ke man Aneshe* into English is significant. It is related to pride, but also encompasses all the ins and outs of a culturally authoritative term that affects the daily lives of Ethiopians. This understanding of pride invokes the notion that pride is not simply an emotion. It is also an action, a means to an end. With its foundation in pride, *Ke man Aneshe* motivates an individual to perform at their highest level and to showcase that performance. The end result of this on going performance, for example, is success either in economic or educational terms. Additionally, because pride is positioned as inherent to being Ethiopian, and understood to be essential to being in the world, as demonstrated through the grand history of Ethiopia and its people, there is no excuse to not succeed.

Elshadaie's narrative at the beginning of the chapter conveys the good and the bad aspects of pride, along with its dynamic quality. Her narrative also demonstrates the importance of history in constructing and preserving pride as part of one's identity. The story of Haile Selassie and Ethiopian independence are metonymic of larger cultural texts. Her citizens understand the country's history to be a compelling demonstration of their uniqueness as a people. At the same time, they hold that very history as primary factor that, in turn, shapes their uniqueness, making it the foundation of their profound sense of pride (Geertz, 1973).

I heard stories similar to Elshadaie's during church gatherings, informal meetings, and formal interviews. I listened repeatedly to descriptions regarding the distinct history of Ethiopia. Almost everyone had something to say about their never-colonized country, about Emperor Selassie, and about the function of the nation's history in building

Ethiopian character. For example, narratives about Haile Selassie, the Ethiopian Emperor who reigned from 1930 until his overthrow in 1974 by a Marxist coup, were among the most frequently repeated. Selassie died in 1975, the year following the coup, from uncertain causes—the possibilities ranging from medical complications following a minor operation, to an assassination. Yet participants made no mention of either during our conversations. Nor did they ever mention Selassie's exile to Europe. Instead, his legacy is shrouded in layers of reiterated stories of leadership and divinity—for the Rastafarians he is God reincarnated. They tell a story of greatness, in which Selassie remains a central figure for Ethiopian identity, used to illustrate and corroborate the uniqueness of Ethiopian character and history. Long after such a historical figure's life ends, his memory lives on, touching the minds of each person by way of language. For subsequent generations parents and grandparents tell stories about the greatness of their country, past leaders, and the pride one must take in their history. The discourse of pride becomes a source of knowledge.

Foundations of Ethiopian Self

The construction of identity—of one's essential being in the world—grows out of one's experiences, and interchanges with the past and present world (Schutz, 1970). These interactions with the world around oneself can take either direct or indirect form, generating experience which, in turn, produces knowledge. Individuals may also pass certain experiences along to others, helping to construct a shared knowledge of being in

the world (Schutz, 1970). The whole of these experiences make up a "stock of knowledge," which help to interpret the world.

Elshadaie's comments about Haile Selassie and his relationship to Ethiopian pride demonstrate which statements matter in the construction of her sense of being in the world. Understanding how her truths are generated, reproduced, and transferred by language is important, as an example of how knowledge construction occurs for both individuals and groups. Central themes arising from my conversations with other participants further illustrate the development and persistence of pride as a core element of Ethiopian identity, and of a shared sense of collective affiliation between Ethiopians across space and time. Pride as an identity connects Ethiopians here, in the United States, back to their country of origin—Ethiopia—and the people. It also connects Ethiopians to their past, to the great leaders and dedicated countryman who fought and maintained independence. Celebrating pride, is celebrating Ethiopia.

What is important about the past is the present day perception of it (Bestor, 2004, p. 16). For Ethiopians in this study it was evident that memories of a successful and powerful Ethiopia were important. As narratives development over time certain ideas or beliefs are marked as symbolic of what it is to be Ethiopian. *What* is spoken and *who* communicates it determine what is considered "true." Elshadaie never experienced Selassie's administration firsthand; nor did she witness the defeat of colonial invaders. Instead, members of her social world passed down the knowledge of those events to her, helping to construct her understanding of the world. It is likely that she is part of a group that supported Selassie and opposed the actions of the military coup that overthrew him

in 1974. Consequently, her knowledge of Ethiopian political history is with limited notions of instability.

Her understanding of Ethiopians as unique expresses itself through the prominence she assigns to particular anecdotes rather than others. Stories of the past help her understand herself in the present. She is to feel pride because of the history of Ethiopia; in turn, her very *Ethiopianness* confers pride upon her. This bidirectional relationship repeatedly affirms not only how she should *be* her-self, and but also see her-Self both in the world and in comparison to Others. Conversations she heard as a child are now embedded in her knowledge set, accessed whenever she needs to explain aspects of her-self to an inquisitive researcher. The language she uses reaffirms to her why she feels the way she does and why *I* should see her Ethiopian self as unique from Others. Elshadaie's presentation of self, like the others in this study, is invested in performing a desired impression (Goffman, 1959).

> The expressiveness of the individual... involves verbal symbols or their substitutes which...convey the information that he and the others are known to attach to these symbols...[Expressiveness also] involves a wide range of action that the others can treat as symptomatic of the actor (ibid, p. 2).

Verbally, participants in this study point to historical narratives to invoke and evoke Ethiopian pride. Pride in action that suggest idealized *Ethiopianness* and self-respect is evident in the educational, vocational, and economic successes of Ethiopian both in the United States and Ethiopia. Both verbal and performed—or *actioned*—successes establish in an Ethiopian an understanding about who they are to themselves and who they ought to be to others.

By acknowledging how an individual's "stock of knowledge" helps him or her to understand the world, we can take another step in analyzing the discourse surrounding the cultural construction of Ethiopian pride. A *code of knowledge*—a linguistic structure for understanding or interpreting the world—uses certain words to convey concepts and ideas, constructed from established relations between ideas and meaning (Foucault, 1973). Discourse, or language, helps to orient an individual to the surrounding world, making it possible to differentiate between what has been constructed as "true," "false," and/or part of an understanding of the self. The showcasing of Haile Selassie's grandeur, and the repeated recitation of colonial defeat, provide models for understanding what is spoken as true, and what is considered important in the construction of pride. The positioning of Selassie and the reiterating of national independence thereby contribute to the composition of a hegemonic history.

The code embedded within Selassie's story of greatness translates into the greatness of the Ethiopian people. Just a few words—Selassie, independence, "our own"—convert a long and complicated history into an abridged version of matchless governance, freedom, and power. Together, the words position Ethiopians in opposition to other nations that were colonized, that follow the Georgian Calendar, that never had a leader on the world stage, and therefore that do not have the grounds for pride that Ethiopians do. These historical anecdotes become synonymous with prominence, uniqueness, dignity, status, and self-worth. There very repetition becomes the signs and qualities of *Ethiopianness*. They become, in their own right, the signs and symptoms of pride.

These signs—dignity, importance, and self worth—are also part of a language of action. Pride, in other words, is not only understood as an aspect of who one *is*, but also as an ingredient for the action one can be expected to take. More specifically, such action implies that one should defeat, succeed, and flourish, all of which position one as different from Others who are *not* Ethiopian.

> **Solomon:** *So, you see the differences, the people, like the Ethiopian people compared to the other countries, so much proud [pride], kind of like that. I don't know, it's completely different.*

Thus, when participants make comments like that of Solomon's, an entrepreneur in his middle forties, we are to understand the seemingly tangential relationship between Ethiopia and pride, as a code of historical greatness embedded in language. Moreover, academic journals and books on Ethiopian culture reinscribe this relationship, often mentioning the proud character of Ethiopians, without evidence or elaboration. For example, in its overview of "the principle aspects of country and people," Edward Ullendorff's well-known book The Ethiopians (1972) notes that Ethiopians are "proud people," with a strong sense of honor and justice (p. 44). However, Ullendorff says nothing about the specific foundations or origins of these feelings of pride, justice or honor. As a result, a direct relationship is drawn between Ethiopians and pride.

As a researcher I find myself actively participating in this knowledge production as well. Elshadaie's choice to share with me her understanding of Ethiopian pride set in motion a continuation of a historic understanding of Ethiopian Self. In turn, my own analysis inevitably transmits a version of this knowledge about Ethiopian culture. It

follows the course of ethnographers before me, in discursively reasserting the relationship between Ethiopians and pride.

Whether consciously or not, the hegemonic discourse reproduced in everyday conversations creates an individualization of past events (Foucault, 1969). Elshadaie, Solomon, Tina, and Lidiya each explained to me the profound pride Ethiopians have, and the history of this characteristic. Pride emerged as a central theme in over eighty percent of our conversations. In each instance, participants spoke about it in relation to a "we," "us," as an Ethiopian trait, versus "them." Most striking were the unrehearsed similarities between participants' descriptions of pride. Each one explained the challenges and attributes of being a prideful culture. Pride set Ethiopians apart from other African nations, Western nations, and immigrant populations.

Points of Departure

Social anthropologist Anthony Cohen (1985) observes that certain elements of history are adjusted and readjusted by groups in a " a collective quest for meaning and community" (Nagel, 1994). When participants spoke about Ethiopia's history, they omitted the unwelcomed or disappointing portions, while concentrating on the unifying and meaningful instances related to success. Doing so was not an attempt to fictionalize the past, but instead a means of constructing a collective history.

Pride is a unifying factor and, when retelling the story of those who died by suicide, it became the point of departure. For the Ethiopians in this study, the very history that supports and produces prideful persons also helps to explain why that same pride

could damage a person profoundly. They were not naive to the fact that other nations or

persons are proud. However, for them, it was not pride that drove an American to kill

him- or herself, as it did an Ethiopian. Participants were aware of the signs and symptoms

of suicidality as represented by the numerous public health campaigns across Boston. It

was explained to me, however, that Ethiopian experience was different: Having

depression, feeling sadness, and seeking help were not options for Ethiopians. Such

things did not exist. Solomon said:

> *Ya know I never even seen depression, even the word. Over there* [in
> Ethiopia] *nobody have money, they're so happy, laughing. He has too
> much pride. Even you see the difference. You go to Kenya or the other
> country and after that going to Ethiopia you see the people, the people are
> different. The people never colony* [colonize] *Ethiopia, they tried, Italian,
> to colony the people. So, you see the differences, the people, like the
> Ethiopian people compared to the other countries, so much proud* [pride]*,
> kind of like that. So, I don't know, it's completely different.*

For Solomon, and others in this study, it could not be "depression" that drove an

Ethiopian to suicide, particularly given that it did not even exist in the minds of some of

my participants. Instead, it was pride, an emotion, and a fundamental component of

identity readily identifiable and possessed by every Ethiopian.

The word "kurat" (Amharic for "pride") becomes as symbolic of Ethiopian

ethnicity as traditional dress, or an item of food like *injera*.[10] It helps to orient an

individual to his or her experiences, as well as to make meaning out of those experiences.

This "model of reality" may even explain suicide, in particular—something that might

otherwise seem inexplicable by all other accounts (Geertz, 1966). The experiences

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[10] A yeast-risen flatbread made using a sourdough-like starter. It is traditionally eaten at every
meal.

discussed by study participants showed that the signs and symptoms of suicidality, as framed by Western public health institutions, were not normally recognized in Ethiopian experience. In two of the cases of suicide discussed by participants in this study, friends and family members denied any identifiable warning signs or abnormal behaviors they would have recognized as indicative of suicidality.

It is at this juncture that pride often entered the conversation, as an explanation of the otherwise unexplainable. Yet the explanations of pride appeared initially contradictory. On the one hand, being too proud was pinpointed as a reason for not talking about what was going on "inside." Solomon argued that Ethiopian people have too much pride to be unhappy, even when penniless. However, upon further explanation it appeared that nobody "*had*" depression, because no one could *show* depression. Showing depression becomes equivalent to showing a lack of pride, and people in Ethiopia do not permit themselves to exhibit this type of deviance.

The participants in this study often seemed to understand pride as the central aspect of their Ethiopian self that is most visible to the outside world. Asking for help, Elshadaie explains, is a visible representation of *not* having pride, which is why, in general, Ethiopians will not ask for help. She goes on to say that, if Ethiopians have made it on their own before, they can certainly make it on their own now. Although she had, on another occasion, described the benefits of being a "too proud" culture, she was not unaware of the related limitations.

She told the following story: Having arrived in the United States as a young child, she remembers her mother working outside the home for the first time.

I remember when I moved here and I've never seen my mom work and she's working two jobs. But still we're so proud. Somehow, like, I don't know, you feel like you're gonna get through it and you'll get through it eventually. And at least with my mom I've never seen her complain about it, I've never seen that affecting her. So of course like, deep down inside I think we all get affected and everything is different and instead we're always like "ok, we can handle this" and we can go with it and if you even offered us help, I think sometimes we would be too proud to accept it.

Her introspective reminiscing about her mother underscores her understanding of the strength that pride lent the family. It could not have been easy for an immigrant woman, who had never before worked outside the house, to find herself in a new country having to work two different jobs. At the same time, Elshadaie's insightful speculations about her mother's feelings highlight the hidden, but present, nature of "deep down inside" feelings.

A relationship between hidden "inside feelings" and pride surfaced in several conversations. It was important to present a happy and well-balanced person to outsiders, to indicate that everything is alright and that you are no less than anyone else. Having pride, "You shouldn't have any problems of any kind." The person who has a problem or feels sad has something "wrong with them" (Personal Communication, 7/13/2013). Therefore, one must show pleasure and satisfaction in oneself at all times, in order to preserve one's dignity and honor. Different participants explained that one manifested one's strength and self-respect by exhibiting a positive disposition. It was not that people did not *feel* negative emotions, but that they should not provide space for a negative emotion to grow and become detectable. Ethiopians must therefore walk a fine line between detectable and undetectable *abnormality*—sadness—because, once detected, an individual may face stigmatization.

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Erving Goffman (1963) discusses two types of stigmatized individuals—those with identities that are *discredited*, and those with identities that are *discreditable* (Lindholm, 2007, p. 311). A discredited identity usually consists of an evident divergence from the mainstream society. This may take the form of a physical, behavioral, or mental difference. A discreditable identity is usually a discrete "ab-normality"—that is, something different from the established norm, and easily concealed. A discreditable ab-normality can be related to an undesirable moral characteristic, which is why the characteristic is kept hidden.

Study participants made it clear that sadness was considered ab-normal, particularly since it was understood as related to (a lack of) pride. This is consistent with research that suggests in East Africa stigma attached to mental illness is as present in relation to depressive conditions and suicide (Vaughan, 2012). Thus, sadness or depression comprises a discreditable identity. If revealed, it can only have a negative moral connotation. The participants in this study described feelings like sadness as "not a normal thing" and a reflection of a person's inability to sustain his or her own happiness. Azeb explains that whatever the "truth" of an individual's unacceptable inner condition— whether one's state of mind, bodily well-being, or economic condition—it must stay inside. "You don't tell the truth," he says, "otherwise you look weak."

Looking weak reflects damaged pride which, in turn, gets repositioned as shame—another feeling an individual should not have if he or she has any value or affection for their self (Personal Communication, February 12; August 4, 2013). Shame, and weakness—the negative of pride—are also responsible for *Othering* the individual.

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Goffman (1963) explains that a "group of individuals who share values and adhere to a set of social norms regarding conduct and regarding personal attributes" can reclassify a nonadherent member as a deviator, and his or her peculiarity as a deviation (p. 141). In this study, sadness or depression are the deviations, while the individual who displays signs and symptoms of either is the deviator.

Culture of Silence

When explaining why she thinks members of her community have committed suicide, Lidiya references the culture of silence that surrounds issues of mental health:

> *That's why they kill themselves here too, they keep it to themselves.*
> *Ethiopian have pride, there is, you should... OK, there is an expectation*
> *you never, you should NOT, have any problems of any kind. What?!*
> *Problems?! There must be something wrong with you!*

Likewise, the potential of being labeled a deviant for having "not normal" feelings prevents participants in seemingly close kinship relationships from discussing issues related to mental health. For example, participants stated that they did not, or would not, tell their family or closest friends if they suffered depression or sadness. When asked why not, the two main reasons were confidentiality and judgment.

Goffman argues that, traditionally, the discredible person handles his risk of exposure—"information management"—by dividing the world into two categories: a large group to whom he tells nothing, and a small group to whom he tells everything (Goffman, 1986, p. 95). However, I found that the Ethiopian immigrants with whom I worked do not divide their social world into a larger and a smaller group. Instead, they clump everyone together. Everyone in this single group has the potential to expose the

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discreditable individual. Indeed, the inability to establish a small group to whom one can tell anything, and upon whom one can rely, seem to be the most damaging aspects of the linking of pride and identity.

The observed exchanged between Lidiya and Tina epitomize the culture of silence:

> **Tina**: *Yeah as much close as we are, we are not OPEN about things.*
> **Lidiya**: *They will tell you the happy stories but nobody tells you about the sad stories. And I think that's horrible because people feel lonely. Not to your close friends. I don't say my problems to my close friends, I've stopped. At least not the Ethiopian ones. Because I know they would judge me...*
> **Tina**: *Oh yes!*
> **Lidiya**: *...and they always tell people about it.*
> **Tina**: *Yeah.*
> **Lidiya**: *Yeah! That is so Ethiopian! I swear to God!*

In another exchange with Solomon, regarding the recent suicide of an acquaintance, he too mentions the culture of silence. His comment followed a remark made by Elshadaie who said that, even if offered help, Ethiopians would be too proud to accept it.

> **Solomon:** *My people, the majority of everyone, just...ya know, inside. That's a secret. So he had some problem, he didn't tell anyone. He didn't say anything, just everything inside.*

To Solomon's knowledge, his friend had never spoken to anyone about any emotional, social, or financial problems. Nor would Solomon have expected him to do so. Later in the conversation, he described the Ethiopian community as "weak"—a "weakness" characterized by intolerance toward the open discussion of mental illness. There was no culturally constructed way to speak safely—that is, without fear of judgment—about issues of sadness, depression or the possibility of suicide. Solomon understood open-

mindedness as strength. Whether or not he view open discussions of mental illness as strength is yet to be determined.

Stigma regarding mental illness in Ethiopian culture is not unique to the Boston community. In general, East African psychiatry professionals believe that stigma attached to mental illness prevails in cases of depressive conditions and suicide. Yet given increasing suicide rates in East Africa, psychiatry professionals are advocating for a more open dialogue regarding depressive disorders and related subjects, in efforts to prevent suicide (Vaughan, 2012). Similarly, the younger study participants spoke of hoping for a change in their community's mindset regarding discussions of mental illness. Nevertheless, the study participants acknowledged the difficulty in seeing such a change come about. Five said outright that they did not understand depression, or that "Ethiopians do not believe in depression" (Personal Communication, July 13, 14, and August 6, 2013). When I asked how they thought an individual might ignite this change, not one could produce a solution. Still, they all expressed a wish to help if they could.

The experience and expression of certain feelings in Ethiopian culture do not find an exact parallel in American culture. This is not surprising. As Michelle Z. Rosaldo argues, "emotions are not things but processes that are best understood with reference to the cultural scenarios and associations they evoke" (1984, p. 141). Additionally, she notes, "Selves and feelings may be understood in turn as the creation of particular sorts of polities" (ibid). Emotions, like personalities, she argues, are not to be classified into a set of universal kinds (ibid, 143). Therefore, for Ethiopians in this study it was implied that depression could not exist because the notion is not understood as we understand it. For

example, it is not that feelings characterized as depression by American mental professionals [11] do not exist for Ethiopian immigrants, but the *exact* word and the culturally constructed Western concept are not necessarily recognized, discussed, or understood by the members of the community with whom I spoke. David Harley's (1999) discussion of Thomas Kuhn's use of incommensurability identifies the lack of translatability between two paradigms. In this study, the way of classifying depression or unwellness informs participant own narratives and the narratives about the deceased. Harley notes, "the untranslatable remainder which defies structural analysis is what makes a culture or sub-culture distinctive and significant" (1999, p. 410). It is important to recognize the "differing styles of reasoning and knowing" in understanding how different cultures understand and recognize (or not) unwellness (ibid).

The same can be said for the feeling of pride, which operates differently in Ethiopian culture from its role American culture. This is not to say there are no underlying similarities, but the minute differences are equally essential in understanding the dramatic effect a culture of pride can take on individuals. In American culture, the average person may have a hard time understanding how pride could motivate someone to commit suicide. It may be assumed instead that some underlying psychopathology, indiscernible to the casual observer, must have been the *real* cause of suicidality.

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[11]In an attempt to synthesis the subjective experience of depression, Richard Shweder (1985) used the term "soul loss." Soul lost is understood as emptiness, a loss of interests in things, vulnerability to death. Motivated by several questions concerning whether or not people are alike or different in their emotional functioning his inquiry focused on the type of feelings people feel, the situations that elicit those feelings, the perceived implications and the vehicles for expressing those feelings, the appropriateness of certain feelings being felt or displayed, and the techniques or strategies utilized to deal with feelings that cannot be directly expressed.

However, a more detailed understanding of how pride functions in everyday behavior, infused as it is with significance and morality, highlights the weight of this deeply valued trait.

If we look at pride as a *process*—an organized series of actions directed toward some end—rather than as an emotion, we can see how it functions as a cluster of behaviors, beliefs, and values integrated within a given cultural worldview. Earlier in the chapter I mentioned *Ke man Aneshe,* and pride as a motivating force to success and perseverance, what are examples of pride as a process. The transposition to a new social environment—whether due to immigration or dislocation—can result in a lack of fit in instigating pride in action.

Table 1. Pride

Pride	Expressions of Pride
Pride as an Emotion[12]	Positive Self Evaluation, Happiness, Smile, Upright posture, *Ke man Anshe*
Pride as a Process	Steps taken to build confidence and Self-assurance, actions related to persevering in difficult situations, and maintaining one's determination toward betterment/improvement
Pride as Culture	An aspect of identity: everyone *should* have pride; a moral construct fostering competition in all forms of capital (economical, social, cultural, symbolic). Encourages a culture of silence *and* boasting, along with pressure to maintain positive appearances

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[12] Psychologist Jessica Tracy, PhD (2009) suggests that a prideful expression includes the "happy" smile and a unique posture: head tilts back, chest puffed out, and hands rest on the hips or raised in the air. Tracy also suggests pride is a basic a human emotion that evolved to serve a social role, which results in both positive and negative outcomes.

Preserving Pride

Research indicates that Ethiopians tend to have a stronger tie to their regional affiliation—Oromo, Amhara, Tigrayan—than to the state (Sorenson, 1992; Getahun, 2006). The acknowledgment of pride as a cultural trait allows the individual to circumvent potentially contentious regional relationships by identifying with a valued "national" trait. For Ethiopian immigrants, it also helps to maintain ties with their country and culture of origin. In fact, the immigration experience may actually intensify pride as a part of one's identity, strengthening affiliation across geographic and ethnic boundaries (Sorenson, 1992). The participants in this study discuss how, like any cultural system, the meanings of pride move and change with the tides of immigration, literally signifying different things for those on both sides of the ocean.

Study participants were clear about how important it is for an Ethiopian to be in the world *as* an Ethiopian. "The whole Ethiopian community, we tend to stick with our own people, we tend to think only that way," Elshadaie tells me. She emphasizes the importance of maintaining cultural identity, even though doing so reinforces a tendency to remain separate from outsiders. She explains how different she is in having chosen to attend a university hours away from her parents. Her older brother still lives at home.

The family serves as the central unit for transmitting the knowledge of how to be in the world *as* an Ethiopian. Traditionally, an Ethiopian household has a patriarchal structure, and includes multiple generations (Kacen, 2006).[13] The family elders are most

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[13] As the head of the household, the male is traditionally the most respected and financially responsible for the family. Women's primary role is to take care of the household, performing all the chores, cooking, and raising the children. Lowest in the family hierarchy are the children,

responsible for transmitting knowledge to the children who, in turn, are not permitted to question their guidance. This type of socializations takes place inside multiple intimate settings, such as the home or church—what Urie Bronfenbrenner (1978) calls a *microsystem*.[14] This is the zone in which the culture of pride is most directly transmitted.

Beyond the microsystem is the *mesosystem*, where the culture of pride can be either solidified or dismantled, depending on the environment. The *mesosystem* "comprises the interrelations among two or more settings in which the developing person actively participates" (ibid, p. 25). Most often these environments include school systems, religious organizations, and neighborhoods. The interactions within this system can often influence the value of pride—that it is essential to being Ethiopian—and pride in action—constructing behaviors and actions indicative of one's pride. For Ethiopian immigrants the *microsystem* and *mesosytem* may come in conflict more than they did in Ethiopia, creating a disharmonious relationship among generations or genders.

Anthropologist Rebecca Lester and psychologist-social worker Luis Zayas examine the competition between *microsystem* and *mesosystem*, and the implications for Latina suicide attempts in the United States. They demonstrate how sociocultural processes can influence suicidality by way of challenges to cultural norms (Zayas et al. 2005). More specifically, the researchers concentrate on the cultural value of familism— the family assumes a position of predominance over individual interests (Lugo Steidel &

who are taught to show the utmost respect for their elders (Freund, 2001). Berihun once told me that (Ethiopian) men were a "supreme power" and that "women are simply there to take care"[of others]. (Personal Communication, 5/28/13)

[14]Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, also known as the Human Ecology Theory, concentrates on human development, illustrating how it can be influenced by the different facets of an environment.

Contreras, 2003; Sabogal, Marín, Otero-Sabogal, VanOss Marín, &Perez-Stable, 1987; Zayas & Pallena, 1988).

A version of familism, as a value, is present in Ethiopian culture as well. Both Ethiopian and Latino cultures emphasize the maintenance of family cohesion, a sense of obligation and intense attachment to relatives, as well as the prioritizing of family in the individual's self identity and social world (Zayas et al., 2005, p. 277). Ethiopian study participants characterize such familism as often manifesting in an authoritative parenting style which, in turn, can conflict with countervailing pressures from the broader social-cultural environment. In Hispanic contexts, for example, conflicts can arise in relation to adolescent (female) autonomy, which comes in direct conflict with traditional socialization of passive, demure and hyperresponsible woman (p. 279). Lester and Zayas identify how, in a Latina context, it can result in poor family functioning, taking a toll on parent-daughter relationships and psychological vulnerability. According to study participants, a similar outcome occurs between "old" and "new" generations of Ethiopians in the United States. After church one Sunday afternoon, Tina nudged me and nodded her head in the direction of a middle-aged woman. Tina suggested I meet this woman's daughter, who could provide personal experience dealing with intergenerational conflict. For Tina, the relationships between Ethiopian teenagers and parents, who attended her church, exemplified the ongoing—and sometimes damaging—negotiations between "old" and "new" traditions.

Lester and Zayas demonstrate how the microsystem dynamic of familism can compete with *mesosystem* dynamics, contributing to the potential for suicidality. A

similar phenomenon appears to have occurred in my study population. While the issue of familial conflict was not central to this study, several participants alluded to it. Additional *microsystem* dynamics like pride and remittance (an issue I will discuss in the following chapter) further influenced intrafamily conflict. Although all three facets interact with *mesosystemic* forces, they influence members differently. In the stories following those who died by suicide, it does appear that intra-family crises may have been at least partial precipitants, a theory also demonstrated by Lester and Zayas (2005).

For example, Marcus, who lost his son to suicide just eleven months before our interview, told me he knew of no reason that might have led his son to commit suicide— except that he did have some conflict with his wife. There had been a misunderstanding and he "was not in a good condition with his wife and her family." Otherwise, everything else appeared to be in harmony. His son was always happy. His son was "smart, could go anywhere, higher and higher levels." He sent remittances (money) to family and friends back in Ethiopia. He exhibited "no shame," and used to say "I am the luckiest man in the world." For Marcus, all the culturally important values appeared to have been in order. Since western psychopathological precipitates to suicide do not exist as a culturally recognized issue, he could not have seen it as figuring in the situation. The next logical precipitant must, therefore, have been familial conflict, which he assumed had caused some upset for his son.

Marcus does acknowledgement that some sort of dis-ease accompanies difficult, unfamiliar or uncomfortable situations. By acknowledging a feeling of sadness or depression, the affected relinquishes a piece of their agency. For example, when one participant tried to explain her understanding of depression to another, she could only come up with persisting feelings of sadness and loneliness. The listener struggled to understand how someone could feel that way for such a long time, and whether it always resulted in suicide. For some study participants the recognition of sadness or emotional unwellness may have position the affected as an individual without the means for a better life.

Elshadaie confides in me that she did believe in depression, but does not see the good in treating it with Western psychotherapy:

> *I do believe that depression does exist. I don't believe in a lot of methods that people use to try and get over depression. I don't believe in medication. I still believe if you give it space in your life that it will consume you in away, so I do recognize that it exists. But at the same time when you sit down and you're like "I'm depressed" it will consume your life. So in a way like, focus on the good in the world and ya know when you get tired, when everything is too overwhelming, take a break, go home, sleep, refreshed ya know. Whatever you have to do that will make your day, (laughter). I know and its—like I said, we never talk about this, we don't talk about this, these things don't exist, ya know?*

In a captivating discursive process, she verbally works through the realization that her understandings of self correspond with those of two societies—one in which she once lived, and the one in which she now lives—Ethiopia and the United States (Rosaldo, 1984). She explains that she "learned" depression exists because she had gone to college *not* with the Ethiopian community. The "we" she uses in conversation refers to

Ethiopians. She uses "I" and "they" to differentiate herself from other Ethiopians; she

uses "we" to align her-self with them. Elshadaie acknowledges the process of coping.

Taking a break, refreshing and not sitting down to think about that "bad" stuff are viewed

as methods to coping with challenging times.

> *Everyone just thinks that basically if you think about it, if you think like you're sad, and you think that you're lonely and all, you're basically encouraging that feeling to grow in a way. So, we tend to suppress everything down; eventually we'll think happy thoughts (laughs) and move on and it works. Like half the time, I think 90% of the time for me it works.*

Elshadaie's explanation of how she coped with her father's death and with her

own depression reveals one of three coping mechanisms previously identified in the

literature. Nordanger (2007) recognized similar coping strategies in post-war Ethiopian

populations: diverted thinking, distraction, and future investment. Elshadaie's decision to

"suppress" her depression represents a form of diverted thinking. Additionally, both she

and Solomon explain the benefits of living with a large family, and the distraction

provided by the closeness of family and friends. They talk about the ritual of having

family and friend live in the house following the death of a loved one.

> ***Solomon***: *You wake up every day and you're not alone, and you don't wake just you in bed. So you always have someone to talk to and someone to distract you. I think the majority, a lot of people in your house, so people they come; they talk, they laughing.*
> ***Elshadaie***: *Yeah and you completely forget about it for awhile, so in a way it's like that, but at the same time nobody would actually sit down with you and actually be like, "How are you feeling?" and have that (intense) discussion with you, but everyone is there.*

When dealing with personal challenges, diverted thinking seemed to be the most common

coping mechanism among participants. I suggest that this is a consequence of the culture

of silence. Diverting thinking, by way of interacting with others or a focus on maintaining

face is engaged to forget sorrow (Nordanger, 2007). It also a process used in efforts to not look or act sad or ab-normal, it helps in maintaining one's self-admiration, pride.

Pride is Individual and Communal

In my conversations with members of the Ethiopian community, pride took the form of a communal mantra—an inner chant to be repeated in times of adversity and spoken in acknowledgment of the goodness in life—whether current or hoped for. To recognize that pride is a part of Ethiopian character does well to barricade the psyche from the infiltrating forces often encountered in new immigrant life. Ethiopians have pride because they are strong and they have strength because of their pride.

A consequence of this deep sense of pride is also, however, a culture of silence. Participants spoke about the inability to discuss hardships with friends and family. Speaking on such matters makes a person look "weak." Sadness or depression in particular are considered "not a normal thing" and that there must be "something wrong with you" if an individual feels such emotions. However, participants spoke about the damaging quality of this practice. Understood as a precipitate to suicide, yet the culture of silence remains persistent because of the culture of pride. The two systems feed each other, reinforcing a biased dialogue about the realities of life and the common hardships following immigration.

This chapter positions pride as both an emotion and as a process. It is a deeply felt Ethiopian trait in "lives, minds, hearts, stomachs, and skin" (Rosaldo, 1984). It is also an action; a lifestyle forming everyday practices of life, what one might call habitus

(Samuelsen and Steffen, 2004). As the next chapter will demonstrate, the dimensions of "organizing principle of action" takes another shape similar to that of *Ke man Aneshe*. Remittance serving to exemplify the success of the Ethiopian immigrant to those back in Ethiopia, is also a communal representation of pride. For families and neighbors, the successful (and wealthy) Ethiopian relative or friend in the United States is an extension of their community. Pride in action is therefore just as important for a community to maintain self-admiration as it is for an individual.

Chapter Five

Give-and-Give: Expecting Compensation

As Tina and I started discussing the issue of suicide, she describes the high expectations

that Ethiopians both here and abroad—both immigrated and those waiting to

immigrate—hold about America and the life it promises. Before coming, they sell

everything they own. They take all their money and come to America, but when they get

here and find that it is not at all what they imagined, they are frustrated, depressed,

upset. She says they cannot go back home—it is shameful, because people will think "You

are a useless guy who can't do anything." She tells me people in Ethiopia believe you

have a good life here, but then you don't and you "feel trapped" because you cannot go

home, but you can't make it here in America. Also, she tells me, you are expected to send

money back home and people are counting on you. (Field notes, 6/23/13)

Coming to America

The persisting reputation of America as the land of opportunity resonates

throughout the Ethiopian community. The American Dream is vivid and thriving within

the exchange of information, inspirations, and expectations of Ethiopians at home and in

the United States. This favorable estimation of what America offers its citizens permeates

my conversations with the participants in this study. No matter their age, gender,

occupation, or upbringing, they acknowledge an undeniably optimistic picture about life

in the United States prior to immigration. Material culture exported from Hollywood is

perhaps the most frequently acknowledged source, with American films operating more as a form of communication, and less as an entertaining illusion. The experience with such communication is idiosyncratic, individual. However, shared themes emerge in conversation about the glorious image movies depict about life in America. Certain films pervade the minds and imaginations of the general society, often leaving a person with the taste of a better life. At the cinema, one momentarily encounters a life beyond the boundaries of one's own. The false walls of cinematic sets create impressions that persist, imprinting grandiose expectations about life abroad.

One particular story, told to me by Tina, illustrates such a process. Eddie Murphy's 1980s cinematic rendition of an African prince coming to America provided an entertaining storyline for audiences across the globe. The comedic cast may have left little more than a smile across the faces of American moviegoers, but for some in Ethiopia it left a lasting promise of American opportunity. With laughter, and a slight hint of embarrassment, Tina exclaims, "*Coming to America*. The African king making a living as an ordinary man! [Movies] display amazing lifestyle and ease of life in the US, not to mention happy endings."

Tina is in her middle thirties and works in a local law firm. She arrived in the United States in 2006 by way of the Diversity Visa, and what she describes as "not a proper way." She is always dressed in what look like a freshly ironed t-shirt and jeans. No matter what I wear when I meet her, I always feel somehow underdressed. She stands 5 foot 5 inches, with curly black hair pulled up into a bun or held back by a muted headband. Delicate freckles sprinkle her cheeks, giving her a dewy, youthful appearance.

She often thinks carefully before she answers my questions, and does not hesitate to challenge assumptions about Ethiopian and American cultures. Each time I meet her at church or a downtown café she greets me with a smile and a hug. I relax when I am with her, and am always happy to listen to her stories.

Like many Ethiopians before her, and certainly many of those after her, Tina arrived to the United States with hope for a better life. Her short history about like in the United States contains a certain aura of morality, pausing ever so often to say what was "right" or "wrong" about her personal modification to life here. The first time she positioned elements of her life with a moral framework was when she briefly revealed her immigration history. To have immigrated in a manner deemed "improper" by her own words, reveals that there are "right" and "wrong" ways to immigrate. Tina married someone solely because he had a Diversity Visa. After arriving in the United States, she immediately divorced him. For her this storyline is merely a footnote to her overall narrative. She mentions it once; in later conversations about her immigration experiences, but it holds little relevance to her overall adjustment.

Tina's expectations about the American Dream are not unique to Ethiopians or other immigrants; they find parallels among native-born Americans as well. While some researchers dispute that the American Dream will persist within a nation of increasing diversity (Huntington, 2004), others show that, even in a diversifying nation, the Dream lives. In fact, it is arguably revitalized, thanks in part to foreign-born persons believing that they have achieved it more readily than their American-born counterparts (Cohen-Marks and Stout, 2011). Ethiopians who arrive with aspirations for "the ideals of

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freedom, equality, and opportunity traditionally available to every American and a life of

personal happiness and material comfort" are merely embracing a centuries-old American

promise (Random House Dictionary, 2013).

To pursue the social and economic ideal—as shown in film, for example—

Ethiopian immigrants sometimes take extreme measures. Tina saw herself as having done

so, but her method of immigrating was no more or less riskier than that of her peers.

Motivated by the belief that America will provide everything for those she houses,

Ethiopian immigrants—individuals and families—will sell their house, their car, and their

business with the expectation that it will all come back with ease once in America.

> **Tina:** *It's like um,* (pause) *America's got everything best to offer and everything seems easier and you come here and then it's like everything is all set up for you. So, it's like the heaven on earth that's the perception you still find back home this day. People die. I mean people do awfully a lot of things to, to get here.*

Sitting outside a popular coffee shop and city music venue, Lidiya listens intently to Tina,

nodding in agreement. Acknowledging the role Hollywood plotlines play in constructing

a view of the Untied States. The two women agree on the ease with which financial and

material wealth seem to come to people in America:

> **Lidiya:** *[Be]cause there are the movies and the things that they hear that America is like, that life in America is just entering heaven, where you don't have to do anything and everything is provided to you.*

Indeed, the majority of study participants articulated similar "heaven on earth" imagery.

The heavenly image of the United States is persistent. So much so that when Tina tries to

tell friends and family in Ethiopia about the reality of America, tell deny her claims,

insisting she must not *really* know America. Tina is not surprised by such strong

reactions. She admits she would have denied similar claims if she never experience

America first hand.

Lidiya hesitates to talk about her own pre-migration expectations. By the middle

of the interview, however, she shares a memory from when she was a young child:

> *Yeah, I have a funny story because I didn't hear many from people, but my*
> *dad used to kind of like come here, stay for a while, come back, visit us*
> *and his smell, ya know, and the towels and the detergents that he used was*
> *fantastic! I used to just like smell it all the time because it was just so good*
> *and I was like "Ey, America was smell so good!" And they—they jokingly,*
> *people have, might have told me, "Oh there are trees that have money,*
> *they bear money, they don't bear fruit." So, I literally thought I was going*
> *to see that. Then, I came here and it was like April, like early April and*
> *then like it, it didn't, the branches, they didn't start growing yet and in*
> *Amer-in Ethiopia the trees don't go like dry and dead looking as here. So,*
> *I was like, "OH MY GOD, are these tree like the ones that bring*
> *money?!"*

However charming this story may be to Americans who recall hearing statements like,

"Money doesn't grow on trees," the reality for some Ethiopian children was that money

did grow on trees in America. Not only were perceptions of infinite wealth apparently

true; they were within reach. Yet the moment a child realizes the green buds of an April

tree are nothing more than tiny leaves, or the instant an adult discovers that not

everything is so easy in America, it can damage his or her sense of the surrounding

world. Furthermore, requests from relatives back home, for money and material goods—

which they expect come easily to the new immigrant—can not always be remitted.

Causing an inner crisis for the new immigrant.

Financing the Good Life

The expectation of remittance—funds and goods sent by migrants to their

countries of origin—is strongly integrated into the contemporary mindset of Ethiopians

inside and outside their country of origin (Garip, 2012; Ratha and Xu, 2008). One study

participant, who can afford to go back and forth between Boston and Ethiopia every

year—sometimes more than once—set up a business of taking money from Ethiopians

living in America to their families in Ethiopia. People give him between a hundred to a

thousands dollars for their families back home. This sense of obligation is so ingrained in

the culture that—although Solomon himself does not need to provide for his family back

home, as they are economically secure—he nonetheless makes sure to deliver gifts to his

former employees in Ethiopia.

> *People they expecting, the money, depends your family. So I go there, so I*
> *bring some stuff, but not for my sister, [or] brother, for my worker.*
> *Because I like my workers, Ya know, they grow up, they work for me like*
> *six, seven years. So ya know, I do, ya, for outsider people, not like, not*
> *like family people, for the neighborhood or friend or kind of like that, so it*
> *depends on your family.*

Different motives underlie remittances, including improving a household's

welfare, securing future inheritance, or repaying loans (Lucas and Stark, 1985;

Hoddinott, 1994; Agarwal and Horowitz, 2002; Ahlburg & Brown, 1998). In this study,

no mentions of loan repayment or future inheritance were revealed. Virtually all of the

participants who did discuss sending money back home did so to improve the welfare of

their relative's households. (One man, instead, had sent for his family, who were arriving

the day following are interview.) One woman said that she, along with her brother who

lives in Texas, sent money back to their mother, helping her to build a fence as well as to

"buy her the shoes she wanted." Azeb, a brilliant and successful young professional,

regularly sends money back home to help with educational costs for his eleven brothers

and sisters. He received financial support from his siblings to attend college and—even

though his family does not ask for money—says it is now his turn to do the same.

> *Azeb: I send money for my sister to go to school. She went to nursing school, she graduated and she had a job now. The same thing with my brother. He went to engineering, he was was, brilliant, kid. And eh, because of this lottery system he was forced to study some thing he didn't like. He graduate from that with a very good grade and then he wasn't happy. And I said, 'Ok, ya know what? I'm going to support you to go to school, go back to school.' He graduate and he's, he's ya know, happy and he's helping others now.*

In addition to the responsibility for helping one's family, Azeb's statement also invokes

the concept of choice as it relates to happiness and a better life.

Choice, understood as the freedom to decide the direction of one's life, is

noticeably present throughout my conversations with study participants. They

characterize America as the place where one can choose to do whatever one wishes,

thanks in part to the (assumed) abundance of material wealth and vocational opportunity.

However, having the choice to do what one desires is affected by the social structure of

where one lives. Social structures take many forms, such as social class, religion, gender,

ethnicity, and in this particular study, culturally prescribed behaviors and values. While

cultural behaviors and practices generate several beneficial traditions (maintaining

political and economical alliance through marriage practices, reinforcing strong kinship

bonds), they can also limit one's opportunities to choose freely.

The appreciation of this freedom is apparent in Lidiya's discussion of the good

life. For her, expectations and (lack of) choice are strongly embedded in family

dynamics, which will be addressed below. Family pressure and influence in deciding

where one puts their efforts or the direction one's life turns, can have a profound impact

on the youth. Especially since a youth's identity is strongly determined by, and a reflection of, their related other. This arrangement can prove to be quite difficult for a young man trying to make his way in the world.

Family pressure to succeed is powerful and pervasive throughout my study population. For one young man, whose father came to this country and spent decades rebuilding his status in the community, it was vital that he and his brothers maintain the familial social position as well as improve it. There was intense pressure to do well in school, academically and athletically. As one friend of the deceased son—who died by suicide—told me, "the kids were expected to meet the expectations of the family, they were expected to do well." For a child of an immigrant who came to the United States to seek freedom of choice, his own choice was limited by parental expectations and tendencies of socio-centric perceptions of self come to the foreground.

The Value of Education

Consistent with past research, this study found that education is the most important value in the Ethiopian community and is strongly linked to social and economic status (Levin, 1965; McSpadden, 1991). When I posed the question of what does a better life mean to participants, Tina put it simply, "Better education, and a lot of [more] job opportunities here, than back home. So that was the reason I moved." Lidiya, elaborated a bit further:

> *Lidiya: I was 13 when I moved her. So, I had barely any decision making in my life, I still don't have any, ya know, like because I live under my parent's control. But uh, they moved here, my dad was here- so like we kind of join him and I guess the greater goal is that I get a better*

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*education because wherever you learn here, whether it's a community
college or like a whole big university it's much better than Ethiopia.*

When I asked Solomon and Elshadaie what defines success they both said "Education,"

"For a family, education." As it appears, there exists a very narrow category of success.

> **Elshadaie:** *I guess at the end of the day they* [parents] *want you to be
> successful, they don't want to worry about you I want to say. That it is
> always engineering, doctor, anything with science. They're really into that
> for some reason. So, it's very expect-like, they expected you, like, to go full
> on with that and it's for the good of you.*

Education is strongly linked to employment and employment is strongly linked to self-

efficiency by way of money. McSpadden (1987) notes,

> Ethiopians understand jobs and schooling in a different way from
> Americans. Theirs is a status-by-ascription society in which the role of
> education is to prepare a person to move into a basically guaranteed social
> status level in Ethiopian society—the one who is served, the thinker, the
> policy-maker, the upper class/educated elite (816).

Therefore, for Ethiopian immigrants who moved here to make a better life for

themselves, the next logical step is to pursue education to guarantee one a higher social

status. For children who move here with their parents, it is positioned as the only

acceptable option. Elshadaie, like Tina, Azeb, and Lidiya, acknowledges the lack of

choice a young adult has in deciding their own pathway.

> *They* [parents] *want you to be successful and happy at the same time, but
> at the end of the day it's too much pressure to do what they want you to
> do. So, if you want to be a singer, an actor, anything related to that, ya
> know, it's kind of difficult because most likely you're not going to make
> something out of yourself, they don't want it, they don't support it. So, it's
> always uh, ya know what's the right thing to do and what's not kind of
> thing.*

Parents may have the best intentions in mind, but Elshadaie's quote indicates that

parental intentions may do more harm than good. "Too much pressure" becomes

synonymous with restricted choice. For Elshadaie, this pressure and the tensions between "right" and "wrong" decisions are positioned as harmful to a young person's well-being. Leaving an adult feeling limited in an environment that was constructed with promises of choice can, at times, confuse and upset this individual. As a result, the immigrant often contends with unforeseen restricted choice both in opportunities for himself and in providing choice to kinship networks.

In this study, economic and social (by way of education) capital play a central role in whether or not one is permitted to construct their own way in the world. For example, if an Ethiopian is in possession of some monetary capital, they feel a profound sense of responsibility to share it in order to give a family member the best chance for freedom of choice. In turn this may restrict their own choice. When a family member decides to come to America, those back home often intensify the pressure to give, due in large part to misconstrued realities about the wealth of opportunity in the United States. All to often, the looming threat of being identified as a "failed" Ethiopian in America, or what Tina termed a "useless guy," is ever-present in the minds of status conscious and prideful Ethiopians.

Give-and-Give

While the experience and expectation of life in America for Ethiopians differs form person-to-person and family-to-family, there is a general understanding that those who make it to America are expected to send money and gifts back to family members in Ethiopia. Money and gift's are visual representations of one's success and position in the

American society and these representations reflect back on the kinship networks who raised him or her. Rodney Muhumuza's (2011) articulated a similar phenomenon among Ugandans living in America, specifically those making their homes in Boston and New York City. Consistent with this study, a theme of a "better life" in America is discussed in relation to dual responsibilities to oneself and to one's relatives living in Uganda. Ugandans and Ethiopians who arrive to America expect to build a better life and those in the country of origin expect the same and moreover expect to reap the financial benefits of the (perceived) affluent American life.

One participant quantified the expectation of how much one is expected to send, "maybe seventy to eighty percent of their money back." Understandably, this can create a tremendous amount of pressure for anyone. The success or failure of an individual to maintain the social norm of remitting has a direct effect on the "psychological integrity of the individual" (Goffman, 1963, p. 128). The emphasis on sending financial and material goods back home places an individual in a very public position, one which is easily scrutinized as more or less successful to those around him or her. Lidiya and Tina discuss the concept of pressure surrounding remittance:

> **Tina**: *Definite pressure. Not like "oh you need to do this" kind of pressure, but like, you're-expected-to pressure. Meet this social standard.*
> **Eva**: *A weight?*
> **Lidiya**: *Oh yeah it feels like a weight.*
> **Tina**: *Which is why some people can't take it anymore and they take the other route, like they kill themselves.*

Tina assertion that the "pressure" to give is so unbearable that "they" kill themselves is a conclusion drawn from an amalgamation of suicide and other self-harm (in terms of emotional, not physical) stories in her community. She recalls the story of a

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friend who felt too much pressure to remit and produce relics of American success, that

she did not return how to her father's funeral, fearing her family would find out the

"truth" of her situation—low paying job, lack of financial success. Likewise, Azeb told

me that he knows people who will not share with their families in Ethiopia, the reality of

the situation in America. There is a fear that if "found out" individuals would be labeled a

failure or a "useless guy." As it names implies, the individual would be of no use to

anyone and viewed as damaged.

Utilizing Goffman's notions of discredited identity—visible differences—and

discreditable identity—hidden differences—the pressure of remitting can be viewed in a

much richer light. This process becomes a space where an individual's identity can

transform for better or worse. Is the Ethiopian living in America a success story? Or is he

a useless guy unable to meet the expectations of those closest to him? By not becoming a

provider of material goods and funds, one's identity becomes discreditable. By not

sending evidence of one's success, that individual becomes discredited. The act of

remittance that might otherwise be invisible (i.e. the money is simply transfer to

someone's bank account) is not the standard of practice in Ethiopia. For one, their

banking and money transferring system is not as advanced as Western nations. More

importantly, there is a subculture surrounding this process, which values the *visible*

evidence of remittance. The act of remitting and receiving remittance is a social

relationship itself, which speaks of one's familial success by virtue of displayed objects

given by a family member living in America.

If an individual comes to the United States with the expectation that they will

make a lot of money, but instead finds oneself in a situation in which they are unable to

make an income comparable to what they had previously thought, we might call this

failed *hyperoptimism*—the expectation that America is "heaven on earth" meets reality.

This reality may result in a period of heightened distress—one is unable to provide

particular material goods and funds for family back home. They have undergone a failed

transformation of positive self—a giving-self. As a result this person may be identified as

a "useless guy" as Tina stated in her earlier narrative. Likewise he might find himself in a

situation where he feels trapped, he cannot go home, but he cannot make a successful life

here. An identity discredited in the United States, because he is unable to make an eye-

catching living for himself, and an identity discredited back home, because he's unable to

produce material goods that represent his success in the United States, leaves him in a

harmful place.

Solomon tells the story of a friend's brother who committed suicide because, as

he believes, he could not handle the pressure and unkind words from his family regarding

his lack of successful job (i.e. professional job with a high income).

> **Solomon**: *Then, the brothers, supposedly they give a hard time for him*
> *because he is not successful. He is different. He's a nice guy, extremely*
> *nice, so he's different and everybody's successful, he's not successful.*
> *Always they pay for him, ya know kind of like that. So he don't hang out*
> *together* [with his brothers] *because 'do this, this is the right thing.' Ya*
> *know? Kinda like that. They don't like that* [his] *work. So ya know,*
> *finally...(pause).*
> **Eva**: *He took his own life?*
> **Solomon**: *Yeah.*

The seven brothers constantly told the "misfit" brother what to do and how to do

it, often shaming him for his low status, low paying employment. Similarly, the earlier

conversation between Tina and Lidiya provide an insider's understanding as it relates to

this loss in social and material wealth coupled with familial pressure. When discussion

the pressure to remit, Tina and Lidiya immediately jump to the notion of suicide as a

consequence, "*Which is why some people can't take it anymore and they take the other*

route, like they kill themselves." However, their underlying implications also have to do

with the transition of one's self to that of a provider. Undoubtedly, this pressure or weight

has a significant effect on someone's identity: "*you're-expected-to pressure.*" A person

who may not have had the responsibility to take care of their whole family either by

money or by maintaining social position, may now find themselves in a position of

tremendous responsibility. Interestingly, this study found that for those who committed

suicide, participants discussed the stress of meeting the expectations of family members

was most harmful.

Suicide: The Before and After Story

The operating cultural model of expectations (remittance, academic and

vocational success) does not take into consideration the numerous harmful structural

factors at work in the United States that may prevent an immigrant from achieving a

better life. As previously mentioned, social class, religion, gender, ethnicity, and cultural

traditions all affect an individual's chance at a more prosperous life. The above discussion

does well in highlighting the stresses and consequences of a particular cultural tradition,

but there are further avenues to explore.

There is a tendency to frame suicide as a consequence of mental health issues—

the failure is in the individual's mind. However, by doing so, such researchers are

silencing the opportunity for alternative explanations of suicide. Positioning suicide as an

anthropological problem involves looking at the issue as a dis-ease of the body. The body

is responding to the social relationships of everyday life. Reframing the suicide in terms

of culturally salient understandings of self-accomplished death, a different knowledge

emerges. This is particularly true for immigrant groups who may hold a different view of

death and subsequent being (Owens and Lambert, 2012). For a community that identifies

as deeply religious, ending one's life on Earth may be the beginning of a different life in

an alternative space. Despite suicide being viewed as the "deepest sin" one can commit in

the Protestant faith, Tina and Lidiya share a remembered exchanged about a young man

that suggests otherwise. An excerpt from my field notes captures the moment:

> *The young man had apparently gone to his church leader and asked what*
> *happens to those who commit suicide. The church leader responded that it*
> *is a sin, but the man went and killed himself anyway (he jumped of the*
> *bridge, into the Charles River). The girls said they think the leader should*
> *have at least told him that it wasn't a sin or that he would have been*
> *forgiven if he did commit suicide (Field notes: 6/23/13).*

Tina and Lidiya express sadness in relation to the pastor's response and wish he

had simply told the young man that it was not always the case. They understood suicide

is deemed a sin by their religion, but they did not view the deceased as a sinner. Instead,

their empathetic reactions suggest he is held in sympathy. They understood his suffering

on Earth as great enough to motivate him to take his own life. As a result, they felt

sympathy for him and empathy with his situation. This reflection illustrates an example

of a supposed rigid system of meanings that is very much in motion, perhaps reflecting

the incorporation of suicide as a consequence of culturally constructed hardships. The

two young women acknowledge that suicide is a tremendous sin, but later on express sympathy and an absence of moral judgment toward the victim, they themselves did not see the victim as a sinner.

The adjustment of an individual's and group's understanding of the world, including the learned structures, thoughts, and actions, are reminiscent of Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus. The ideas of suicide and how to do it are an organized principle of action. This organized principle is acquired through socialization and can become a basis for regular modes of behavior (Samuelsen and Steffen, 2004, p. 5). This does not mean that one has to abide by these principles on an everyday basis, but instead that they are aware of the principles, and are able to access them at any point and carry out this specific code of knowledge if they feel compelled. Taking Bourdieu's concept of habitus a bit further, I suggest that if a community is experiencing a uniquely high number of suicides, then this action or guiding principle may have imbedded itself slowly over time into the codes of knowledge of this social group. Similarly, the community is able to reflect on the reasons behind the suicides and acknowledge salient cultural precipitants to suicide. Bourdieu acknowledged how these organizing principles of action are internalized and contribute to self-defeating behavior, and suicide may be the ultimate self-defeating behavior, internalized as an option for those who resign oneself to the limited opportunity available (Swartz, 1997, p. 104).

Study participants did not speak of suicide in the framework of disorder brain biology or psychological grievances. Instead, they spoke of it as a learned response to a unique cultural practice encased by notions of pride. Further evidence of time-dependent

internalized understanding of appropriate behavior. Framed another way, the suicide is

the embodiment of one's social positioning, a point I will now discuss.

In the Ethiopian community, there is evidence of a transition in what constitutes

an appropriate means of dealing with a stressful situation. Azeb said,

> *Everybody thinks that committing suicide is being, it's normal, it's being*
> *like an option. Being like an automatic of doing something, instead of*
> *trying to improve or change that situation; instead of just accepting that*
> *and say, "Ok, I don't care, I'm going to change this."*

Here Azeb acknowledges that suicide is not a normative behavior, yet at this particular

moment in time it is *becoming* a normative behavior. It is becoming an option for (not)

dealing with difficulties. Suicide can be internalized as an appropriate response through

cultural salient patterns of behavior. If we view suicide as a learned strategy, as the quote

above illustrates, it arguably internalized over time as an acceptable archetype of distress

(Kleinman, 1991).

Additionally, Kral (1994) who continues to do extensive research on suicide, most

recently among the young Inuit males, proposes that the act of suicide and how to do it

are internalized for some people as a standard behavior, accessed only during heightened

periods of distress (Kral, 1998, p. 226). We can see evidence of this distress when

participants discuss the pressures of expectations from themselves and from family

members both here and abroad. These periods of heightened distress for Ethiopians were

presumably unanticipated consequences of voluntary migration.

Such distress is precipitated by a transition of a personal identity bestowed upon

one as determined by tradition and demands of family networks back home. An Ethiopian

immigrant may transition from that of a receiver (of the Diversity Visa and a chance to

make a better life) to one of a giver (expected provider for family back home). Thus, social relations transform in a way unanticipated. As evidence, those in this study never revealed the intention to immigrate as one based on providing for those back home. Therefore, this disruption of self-identity may play a significant role in the overall wellness of Ethiopian immigrants in America.

Self-continuity—a commitment to one's identity, viewing oneself as an entity that extends temporarily both into the past and into the future—plays a vital role as a protective factor against suicide (Sadeh & Karniol, 2012; Chandler et al., 1994, 2003). While Michael J. Chandler and colleagues' research pertains to First Nation communities in Canada, overlaps do exist.

> With respect to all of the prospective circumstances that are most likely to aggravate the problem of maintaining a sense of self-continuity, two difficulties, in particular, stand out as especially troublesome. One of these is composed of all those often dramatic adolescent changes that make up the usual transition to adulthood. The other is more circumstantial, and arises whenever one's culture, out of which the particulars of one's identity are necessarily composed, is also thrown into serious disarray. In either case the grounds upon which a coherent sense of self is ordinarily made to rest are cut away, life is made cheap, and the prospect of one's own death becomes a matter of indifference (1998, p.193)

Evidence from this study is fitting with Chandler's suggestion that when one's culture—which is tied strongly to one's identity—is thrown into serious disarray a coherent sense of self is lost. However, Chandler proposes that in this instance "life is made cheap, and the prospect of one's own death becomes a matter of indifference," and I suggest this is a point of departure.

This research shows that for the Ethiopians in this study it is one's social body

that became meaningful through death. Thus, ones own death is *not* a matter of indifference, but a final self-interested action. The act of suicide represented an alternative social relationship, but one still representative of larger issues within the community and culture. The suicide, the self-inflicted death, is the embodiment of lived experiences, an action—albeit lifeless—demonstrating the union of known experiences and the cultural representation of lived reality (Csordas, 1994). The dead body becomes an object the community can point to and identify as what is wrong in the larger social structure. Furthermore, the discourse that continues after the person's death creates and recreates larger understandings of certain practices, standards, and relationships established in the community. My exchange with Azeb is an excellent representative example of a central understanding concerning the meaning of suicide in the community.

> *Azeb*: *This is how he was perceived, but the thing is, he wasn't happy, I think he was bullied to some extent....*
> *Eva*: *By whom?*
> *Azeb*: *By, by some extent I think by his cousins or relatives, that's because he wasn't like, um, um, in their, I think he was not successful. And he somehow didn't live up to expectations and um...*
> *Eva*: *He didn't live up to?*
> *Azeb*: *...didn't live up to expectation of the whole family and I think when he came to U.S. he was extremely ambitious person and he has a lot of family back home. This is what I heard. And um, I think he tried his best and at some point I think he just couldn't. And um, yeah. and then finally he took his life.*
> *Eva*: *So his family back home, or even your family or your friend's family who are still back in Ethiopia, what are these expectations?*
> *Azeb*: *That-you know-(pause) uhhh, the expectation is very, very high.*
> *Eva*: *High.*
> *Azeb*: *Its very high.*
> *Eva*: *Just from the family?*
> *Azeb*: *And and-Yeah the family, the whole soc-, the, family, we have extended family. Its not just only your mom or dad or brothers. Everybody expects from you something.*

This excerpt highlights the concurrent influences on a person's decision to take

their own life in this community—personal and familial expectations, an embodiment of metaphorical pressure, unhappiness, and failure to achieve what was sought. It permits the researcher to go beyond the traditional socio-psychological explanation of stress and its relation to suicide, and include the less discussed topic of, to use Goffman's term, spoiled identity.

Again, suicide is not just a consequence of a stressful situation, but also a representation of larger social relationships within the Ethiopian community. Bodies dead from suicide are not interpreted and mourned solely in terms of their own histories, but are read 'up' to fit, and to stand in for, collective trends (Chua, 2012). Thus, the act of suicide in this study represents an embodied action expressive of a larger madness within the Ethiopian community. The shift in perceived identity from those back home is conflicting to the reality of an individual's position in America. The abrupt shift in identity is in response to expectations operating within the Ethiopian cultural model of coming to America and the reality of life in America.

The Good Life: Is It Worth It?

Revisiting the matter of expectations can strengthen the above discussions on remittances, choices, and transitions of self and identity. Presented at the onset of this chapter, I briefly mentioned the expectations of those immigrating to the United States. During my very first discussion with a young Ethiopian woman, inside her local church, the notion of a better life surfaced in relation to expectations. She used the word "better" throughout our conversation of what she hoped her life would be and is like in the United

States. Lucia Ann McSpadden (1987, 1991), in her decade long work with Ethiopian refugees in the Western United States, observed and reported on this concept of "good life" as discussed by her participants. McSpadden's discussion of the good life overlaps with this study's examination of a better life, which includes the good life paradigm.

Similar to McSpadden's participants, most involved in this study were well-educated and spoke English fluently. Likewise, most of the participants came from urban centers versus rural communities. Thus, there were several overlaps in what constitute a good or better life. Firstly, being able to help one's self or be self-sufficient is perhaps the most important aspect of living well in America. As many of the above narratives illustrate having the means, usually financially, to make it in America is vital to sustaining the dream of a better life. Secondly, and by virtue of the already high levels of education within Ethiopian immigrants, they expect to achieve a well-paying and respectable job, parallel to their educational level. Education plays a vital role in Ethiopian identity as showcased in the above discussion. Additionally, an element of pride is closely linked to this form of capital, which I elaborated on earlier.

It is important to understand that the good life and a better life, which are seemingly made possible by simple coming to America, are values that relate to economics, education, and choice.

> *Good life in a sense, just like what we've talked about, if you are able to attend college and then choose study of your interests, that's something good for you. As opposed to being, "Oh ok, you've got this point so you heading to this point." If you're not interested then you're pretty much done. In terms of that, that's good. In terms of working and earning money, you can do just about anything here. And then peace wise, like the government! (Pause) Um, there might be things that you cannot do but that's just for your security, but back home the political system is all*

really, really not good. So, I remember in college there was a riot come,
that happened with the government and students because there was
another political party and the government didn't like it, so I remember
we were, police officer, a lot of, like a truck full of police officers come
into the college and having every student go into their room and, and it's
crazy! It's like things you couldn't imagine to happen, so the good life
here is that you are free. You can do just about anything, you can work as
long as you're willing to put the hours into and you can study anyth- its
like everything is working toward helping you do something that you want
to. So, that's why we say, "Oh it's a good life here."

Having opportunities not only to succeed economically and educationally, but having the *choice* to decide where you want to succeed and under what circumstances success materializes, all hold an equally significant position in establishing a better life. This young woman's elaboration on the good life is an attempt to help an outsider understand an Ethiopian's motivation for coming the America. Having the choice to decide your path, in an environment free of political violence and obligatory vocational endeavors, positions America as "the heaven on earth". However, after arriving to the U.S. and soon realizing that America is not all it is suppose to be, an individual can experience a sense of dis-orientation. The world around that individual is not operating as they imagined. Moreover, that particular individual cannot reveal such information to their friends and family back in Ethiopia. Instead, he or she is forced to send evidence of their (imagined) success, just like those who have gone before.

The relics of one's hard work, self-worth, and *Ke man Aneshe* are expected by those "back home". To give remittance is more than providing choice and opportunity to one's brother, sister, or mother. To signifies that you too are living the American Dream. You too have made the good life for yourself—The Good Life. What about those individuals who are forced to lie because they fear a spoiled identity? What of the

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suicides? Lidiya and Tina suggest that the pressure to give is too much. The two women

propose that when one fails to give or meet the expectations of their family, they remove

themselves from this world. Do those dead bodies act as messengers, carrying with them

the social realities of cultural expectations about idealized self? Is the suicide the relic of

failed good life, the embodied "useless guy"? In the following chapter "In/Complete

His/stories" I focus on the message left by the deceased. The process of recalling the

individual in question requires the narrator to reposition judgment from the individual to

the culture.

CHAPTER SIX

In/Complete His/Stories

Azeb told me about a young man who jumped off a bridge in Boston. "He was not happy," Azeb said to me, describing how this man was not "successful in living here" and became a "victim" of his own culture. The young man never went back to Ethiopia because he did not want his family to know the truth, that he did not have a nice job. Azeb said to me he avoids the bridge the young man jumped from. He does not want to feel that uncomfortable or bad feeling experienced from revisiting the place of this man's death. The stories about this young man—his stories—live on, even after his death. His story is an incomplete narrative, as his memory is recalled and repeated among community members (Field notes, 8/6/13).

Azeb's story, about the young man, is one example of the several continued histories regarding the suicides in Boston's Ethiopian community. For him, the bridge serves as a trigger, recalling memories and feelings about one particular man. It is a physical place with the power to disrupt an individual's normal thought and evoke the story of him—the suicide. For other Ethiopian community suicides, the bridge may take the form of an organization, a plaque, a day, all dedicated to the person's memory. Such material and instances contributed to the incomplete, still evolving narrative of the suicide. Initially, the dead body may be viewed as the end to an individual's story. They are dead, there is nothing more to say, and their story is complete. However, through the

process of story telling and remembrance the suicide is giving new meaning, new life, and new stories. Maybe their memory is recalled to draw attention to larger community issues, to mental health issues, or as a means to connect to someone who shares in one's grief.

Beyond Friendships

During the course of this study I did not find myself talking to participants at any length about my personal experiences with suicide. Study participants never asked directly why I was interested in the impact of suicide on survivors or a community. Instead, they took an interest in why my research focused on *Ethiopians*. They asked questions like, "Why Ethiopians? What did I think of their culture? Did I like the food? Had I ever traveled to Ethiopia?" Their interest in the sources of my interest made for easy and enjoyable conversations as we got to know each other. It served as a platform from which to build friendships that enriched and contextualized my data collection. I regularly had conversations (and meals!) that left me feeling full and comforted. On my travels back to my apartment I would pat myself on the back for getting through the questionnaire, and recording richly descriptive answers to revealing questions.

This friendship-building process also made broaching the subject of community suicide easier. Building a foundation of trust allowed for open and honest conversations about a topic rarely discussed within this Boston Ethiopian community. However, there was one participant who, I initially felt, was not particularly interested in building a

friendship with me. In retrospect, his concentration at that time may have been more focused on rebuilding his own life.

Ethnographic work is unpredictable. The moment a researcher is comfortable with their abilities to extract insightful answers, a situation arises reminding them of their inexperience. I interviewed individuals who not only enjoyed talking for hours, but who also overlooked any awkward pauses or questions. Whether it was good manners or their natural story-telling abilities, they filled our time together with interesting and insightful anecdotes. Marcus, however, did not have much to say to me, let alone demonstrate a desire to ask any personal questions or pass along gossip about church.

My first attempt to meet Marcus took place on a Wednesday morning in late July 2013. As I had no previous interaction with him, an Elder arranged our meeting. I did not know what Marcus looked like or even his last name. All I had were his first name, a street address, and a cell phone number. After sitting outside his apartment building and making half a dozen phone calls to a number that was not working, I finally reached the Ethiopian Elder who had arranged the meeting. It seemed he had given me the wrong number *and* Marcus could not meet that morning, anyway—something had come up.

Sitting alone outside a public housing building in an unfamiliar neighborhood, I started to feel increasingly unsure of my abilities as an anthropologist. My discomfort with being in this unfamiliar neighborhood—fear, even—did not seem like a good trait for someone in my field. I was mad at myself for not being able to communicate with my participants in Amharic—again not a good trait for an anthropologist. I even noticed that I was mad at being mad about being inconvenienced by a participant, while feeling I

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should have just been grateful for his even considering a meeting with me. Lost in thoughts of my own inabilities, my memories of Jacob and others came back to me. My fragmented memories of Jacob, Anna, Brandon, and others, remind me why I do this research. Put together, their stories are part of a larger story, one that connects me to each one of my participants, whether they ever know it or not. We all have memories of someone who died by suicide.

Jacob, my once best friend, committed suicide in 2001 when he was fourteen. His memory, along with a few photographs and handwritten notes, are all I have left of him. What precipitated his suicide I do not know. My memories of him have become less clear with time, and I now mostly rely on guesswork drawn from academic and personal understandings of suicidality. I cannot imagine ever again experiencing such confusion, hatred, denial, and sadness. I remind myself that these are the feelings that bind me to my project and to my participants, and that help me understand and make sense of their similar feelings of loss and confusion following the suicides of people they cared about.

The next morning, at eleven, I meet Marcus. We find a corner booth at a popular neighborhood cafe and sit down, ordering coffee to sip as we speak. He does not want to be recorded and he does not seem comfortable with my note-taking. I am nervous, sweating, tripping over my words, and not asking clear questions. I am flubbing the interview. I ask Marcus about his son who passed. I inquire about his job, soccer, friends and family. I am making a little progress. His one word answers are now one sentence responses.

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I realize that I need to get comfortable before he can feel comfortable. Even if he does not emulate my prior participants' garrulousness, it does not mean he does not seek comfort from our meeting. I remind myself that there can be comfort in our shared experiences. Although he may not know it, we share in our grief and share in hope for change—especially the hope that no one else will have to experience the death of a loved one to suicide.

"My best friend committed suicide when I was fourteen," I say to Marcus. He looks more intensely at me. "That is how I became interested in this topic." I put down my pen and close my computer. I tell Marcus a bit about Jacob. Both Jacob and Marcus's son used the same method to kill themselves.

"Why?" he asks me.

"I don't know," I reply. I repeat the statistics with which I have become familiar regarding suicide methods, age, and gender.

Marcus starts to tell me about his son, Ezera, the eldest of his four children. Ezera's name, which means "the helper," had been well suited to him. Ezera gave advice to his younger siblings, contributed financially to his friends and family, and loved to help people, "All people," Marcus tells me. The last time he spoke to Ezera was ten-thirty on the evening before his death. They discussed Ezera taking a trip back to Ethiopia to relax. Marcus explains to me that his son's behavior "was good, but was not happy." Ezera's wife "nagged him." She did not want him to go to Ethiopia but, instead, wanted them to move to San Francisco.

Marcus disclosed this information to me with a look of anger. He situated the

unwellness between his son and daughter-in-law as one of the triggers to Ezera's suicide.

For me, this meant that Marcus shared more than just the story of his son and his suicide,

but also his speculations about who and what influence the suicide. It also meant Marcus

trusted me at least enough to enter into these details. The stories of suicide, of his son and

my friend, built the beginning foundations of trust. It allowed for us to connect beyond

the roles of interviewer, interviewee. We had something in common, and the rest of our

time together flowed smoothly. Like old friends, we sipped coffee, shared stories about

our families, and ended our interview with a warm handshake and a smile.

The role of the ethnographer in eliciting narratives about such a topic thus

requires great delicacy. There is a time to turn on the recorder, jot down notes, and ask

the tough questions. Likewise, there is a time to remove all technologies and modern

tools of anthropology and trust only in the archaic anthropological tool of one's self as

the research tool. Just as we are anthropologists, we are, hopefully, compassionate human

beings. I suggest that, opening my 'self' up and setting aside my anthropological self—an

amalgamation of academic instruction and professional preparation—led to the elicitation

of a more meaningful narrative (Gardner and Hoffman 2006, p.173).

In the course of the conversation with Marcus, I discover that the considered

disclosure of my own story about John's suicide creates a space in which to discuss

otherwise taboo topics. When I delicately speak about the method John had used to end

his life—a topic not easily broached—Marcus immediately replies, saying that Ezera had

committed suicide in the same way. We share in this memory, rebuilt in a space free of

moral judgment and academic formality. I no longer feel uncomfortable, nor do I fumble my words. Our conversation flows, as Marcus outlines, shapes, and colors a portrait of his son. It is an image of a quality that only a father could create, of his first-born, and now deceased, child.

Marcus' stories about his son weave together a dual understandings of Ezera's life—one of joy and persistent happiness, and one of behavior that was "not good." During our conversation it seems clear that Marcus still holds some suspicion toward Ezera's wife and her possible place in his son's suicide. He does not question whether Ezera had died by suicide. Rather, he is left wondering who might have motivated the apparent unwellness that ultimately led to his son's death.

In retelling the story of Ezera's life and death, Marcus searches for meaning through a process—much like other participants in this study—that brings other actors into the moments of life in the world, leading up to the suicide. This reconstructed narrative often repositions moral judgment onto others. The person who died by suicide, once the object of moral judgment, is now transformed into the object of empathy.

The Social Body Nurtures and Kills

Anthropologists Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Margaret M. Lock (1987) define the social body as the "natural symbol" or the backdrop that embodies nature, society, and culture (p. 7). If the social body is healthy, it exemplifies the nurturing qualities of nature, culture and society. Participants did discuss the nurturing benefits of all three. Weather took center stage in participants' narratives about Nature. Contrasting Boston with

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Ethiopia, the Northeastern winters made for a hard adjustment to American life. Indeed, three participants said they thought the weather was the hardest part of living in America post-immigration. While they often laughed about their stories of their first winter experiences, they acknowledged that weather had deeply impacted not only their health, but also their social relationships. Nobody wants to stand outside talking or sipping coffee in freezing temperatures.

The nurturing qualities of Ethiopian society and culture discussed in the previous two chapters encourage an individual to make a good life for themselves and their families. Doing so often means furthering their education or finding satisfactory employment with compensation indicative of their self-worth. My findings concur with McSpadden's (1991) observations that Ethiopians emphasize the importance of a good job, as an expression of their *goodness* as a person. Professional or economic "failure" therefore becomes an indictment of someone's "goodness," thus precipitating their suicidality.

The practice of remittance both encourages (and obligates) Ethiopians living in the United States to share their accomplishments with their families in Ethiopia. Artifacts of American culture, or equivalent displays of prosperity, confirm the individual's success at accomplishing the American Dream while offering hope, and elevating the aspirations of those back home. This ideal individual is positioned as the norm—the one who a healthy model of living in harmony with the social and cultural world. The inability to achieve this ideal situates a person as a "self-failure," increasing the pressure to elaborate (or even exaggerate) his or her success in America. Participants shared

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stories of friends who sent money and gifts to family in Ethiopia as evidence of their American success, even if it meant they could not afford to eat the following week. By so doing, they created public confirmation of their "goodness."

The Dilemma of "Bad" Culture

Representationally, the sick social body may be experienced as a microcosmic expression of "bad culture," or culture gone bad. I discuss my findings with a participant and invite his feedback, he says:

> *You are digging deep. So deep into this culture. Even I don't look at it this way. That is the bad culture. I love my culture, but this I do not: Keep inside. Everything we keep inside.*

This discourse of "good" and "bad culture" jives with the moral frameworks in which pride and remittance occur, as two facets of the same phenomenon. Pride and remittance served as protective factors against the judgment of others and as functions designed to protect their understanding of selfhood. Similarly, maintaining a closed culture protects individuals from the judgment of others, which has the potential to disrupt their self-perception.

Keeping everything "inside" is one characteristic of "bad" culture. Participants contrast it with the "openness"—or "goodness"—of American culture, their accounts expressive of how they understand the two cultural groups to have been socialized differently. Richard Shweder refers to this dynamic as *social appraisal*, one of seven components he proposes as useful to evaluating emotions cross-culturally. He defines it as occurring when "one asks whether members of different cultural groups are alike or

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different in the extent to which displaying one's emotional state has been socially baptized a vice or virtue, as sign of sickness or health, a signal of deviance or normalcy" (Shweder, 2003, p. 1112). The participants in this study discuss interactions with American colleagues who, to them, exemplify the distinctions they themselves draw between the two cultures' displays of emotional states.

> **Azeb:** *I think they* [American colleagues] *are just open. If they have any problem they would come to me and say the same thing. So, I don't mind. They are not going to judge me.*
> *But I think in, in normal—that's what I want to say, in Ethiopia, we're not open minded. We start to judge you in a way.*
> *I hate that. I really hate that.*
> *And when I'm with Ethiopians, I like them, I really like everybody, but I have to be careful with what I say, how I behave...about everything. You just have to be—we have these unwritten rules where you have to behave in certain way. Ya know?*

The internalizing of traditions understood and accepted by everyone is consistent with the fundamentals of a culture of silence—one that reinforces *being* virtuous (Online Oxford Dictionaries, 2014). The Ethiopian ethos of operating as a closed culture overlaps with concerns about "bad culture." Both are juxtaposed against the backdrop of a sick (social) body. The closed, "bad culture" produces a sick (social) self which, in turn, exacerbates sickness and distress.

A second dimension of "bad" culture relates to judgment. Openly talking about an issue perceived as an expression of weakness—financial, emotional, or familial—exposes the person to another's judgment. Participants spoke about the inclination of individuals to gossip, synonymous with judgment. This social dynamic leads to a fear of discussing problem with family or friends, and a habit of self-censoring. The lack of a confidential

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shared social space, and the presence of a culture closed off to sharing, translates to the individual's private, inner space as well. For example, one woman explains she did not give space—an opening in thought and feeling—for her unhappiness; if she did "it would grow." Ceding inner space to her emotional unwellness put her at increased risk for further suffering. She retells stories of her mother's strength in subduing suffering, following the death of her husband—stories that privileged the memory of the culture of silence for the sake of maintaining a healthy social body (Halbwach, 1992; Assmann & Czaplicka, 1995; Kansteiner, 2002).

She elaborates on how this silence is driven by pride. Even if you are not feeling proud of yourself, you should give the appearance that you are. Similarly, if you do not have enough money to send back to your family, you should not let anyone know. You cannot be yourself, insofar as your "self" does not match that of an ideal Ethiopian. Twice during our interview, Azeb explains this "problem" with Ethiopian culture. The first quote is from the above statement; the second came in regards to our later conversation about the role of pride:

> *Azeb: That's what I want to say; in Ethiopia we're not open-minded. We start to judge you in a way....*
> *Azeb: ...if you just accept what you are and if you just tell your peer your problem openly, or to your family what we have been through, I think the main problem is we are not open, in my opinion...*
> *Everything is stigma; this is very hard to deal with. So you have to be very careful just to be yourself and you basically just can't be yourself.*

Azeb, like others in this study, found that the idealized Ethiopian model prevented friends and family from talking openly and honestly with each other. Those

individuals who did not match the model felt forced to keep silent. The closed-mindedness of Ethiopians, exacerbated stigma already attached to ab-normality.

Warranting Respect

The risks to Ethiopian immigrants resulting from concealing their authentic self evoke Goffman's (1963) examination of spoiled identities and stigma. An individual can have a discreditable or discredited identity; either one can subject them to the possibility of stigmatization from the larger group. The former requires one to hide their socially deviant characteristic from others by maintaining appearances. The latter is inescapably visible and requires an individual to negotiate relationships, through accommodation or rejection, in consideration of their deviation.

As we have seen, participants characterize pride is an integral component of an individual's identity, the absence of which result in an unharmonious relationship with Ethiopian social values, and renders an individual deviant. Failure to exhibit such pride through altruistic or adaptive behaviors like gift giving and achievement diminishes (or even cancels) one's social value (Weiner, 1985; Hart and Matsuba, 2007; Tracy and Robins, 2007). Deviance and social value go hand in hand.

Everyday conversations regularly linked pride in oneself and one's individual worth with the status of one's occupation, and evidence of one's motivation for *betterness*, whether through educational or vocational endeavors. I argue that this multi-directional relationship evidences what past research calls a "function to maintain and promote an individual's social status and group acceptance, which helped to prevent

group rejection" (Leary et al., 1995). My research demonstrates the grave importance of group acceptance for well-being among Ethiopian immigrants, whose connection to values from home may in part buffer them from the effects of chronic stress routinely experienced by immigrant populations. As discussed earlier, pride, expectation, and remittance serve as the most powerful mechanisms with which to achieve such acceptance.

Study participants' narratives of "persons remembered" provide many illustrations of the deceased enduring group rejection *because of* perceived low social value and therefore deviance. Solomon, for example, explains how his friend endured teasing from his brothers, centered on this particular brother's failure to achieve or maintain "good" job.

> **Solomon**: *So he worked, ya know, minimum wage. The whole six, seven brothers they're professionals. Then, the brothers, supposedly they give a hard time for him because he is not successful. He is different. He's a nice guy, extremely nice. He's different and everybody's successful, he's not successful. Always they pay for him, ya know, kind of like that. His brothers. Because do this. This is the right thing. They don't like that* [his] *work.*

Solomon gestures as he tells this story. He taps the table as he says, "Do this" or "This is the right thing." He emphasizes that the man who killed himself faced sibling judgment, pressure, and harassment. Perhaps most striking, however, is the way in which the narrative also demonstrates a shifting of moral judgment, away from the deceased and onto others who had originally sat in judgment.

I listened to a similar account from Azeb. Indeed, the similarities between the two stories were so great that I had to double check, to make sure they were not talking about

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the same individual. Like Solomon's friend, Azeb told of a young man who had suffered harassment from family members. Instead of teasing, Azeb called it "bullying;" instead of brothers, it had been cousins:

> *Azeb: She* [his friend] *told me that he was not happy. She said to me that he was not successful in a way, in living here. So, that means I think, he was like, he didn't go to school or he didn't have very nice job.*

This is the first part of Azeb's story regarding the deceased person. Again, there is a clear association between wellness, success, and (socially) valued occupation and educational pursuits. Azeb then explains the dehumanizing process it was rumored that the young man endured.

> *Azeb: This is how he was perceived, but the thing is, he wasn't happy. I think he was bullied to some extent.... I think by his cousins or relatives. That's because he wasn't like—in their—I think he was not successful. He somehow didn't live up to expectation of the whole family and I think when he came to U.S. he was extremely ambitious person and he has a lot of family back home. This is what I heard. And um, I think he tried his best and at some point I think he just couldn't. And um, yeah. And then finally he took his life.*

Like other study participants, Azeb and Solomon both unconsciously pair a portrait of what a socially valued, respected, individual should look like, with its opposite. In these narratives, teasing, bullying, value judgment, and moral regulation set in motion self-reinforcing processes of dehumanization.

Once pushed down this path, I maintain that socially marginalized individuals within this community see only limited escape routes, with suicide an acceptable "out." Through the processes of story-telling participants reveal the cultural barricades that prevented individuals from opening up *to* help and *for* help. Socially prescribed behaviors

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demand a miming of ideal life, leaving little or no room for deviation. The chatter of imperfection is muted, out of a powerfully conditioned fear of spoiled identity. The unexpected loss of life, the suicide, is the crescendo that allows the immediate sufferer to escape; leaving the witnesses in the pain of its deafening silence.

Repositioning Disapproval

Participant narratives reveal two different reactions to this explosion of silence. Some community members press their hands firmly against their ears, simultaneously trying to quiet the noise from the suicide, and stop the corresponding pain. For example, following the suicide of his father, it was rumored, one son simply refused to believe his father had killed himself. One participant explained that the son had told everyone that— despite the evidence— it had been an accident. Over time, however, he eventually acknowledged the suicide, and now directs his efforts toward suicide prevention.

The second type of reaction, and the one I encountered most often, is one of shock and puzzlement, expressed in such questions as: "What was *that*?" "Why did this happen?" and "*How* did this happen?" It is at this intersection of confusion and shock that retrospective cultural evaluations seem to take place. It is here that the majority of narratives concerning memories of those who died by suicide shift the cluster of moral judgments from the individual to the culture. It is in hindsight that the characteristics of personal identity originally condemned are retroactively redefined as positive attributes. Condemnation is transferred away from the remembered person's "badness," and reassigned instead to aspects of the larger culture.

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I propose that the narrative process creates a space for participants to reframe the negative or "bad" parts of their culture as the work of others. Not a single participant suggested that they themselves had played a role in casting judgment. Instead, they expressed genuine sympathy and comparative anecdotes in efforts to show solidarity with the deceased. Most participants could readily access a memory of their struggles during their time in the United States. One woman recalled her first winter here. Lonely and cold, she called her mother, back in Ethiopia, crying, expressing her pessimism about the United States.

Another form of solidarity took the form of disapproval with overarching cultural norms. An excerpt from my field notes captures such a moment. Tina and Lidiya express sadness and empathy over the suicide of a community member, while suggesting that a particular community leader could have done better in handling the situation.

> *At one point in our conversation Lidiya and Tina discussed a rumor about a man who committed suicide. He had apparently gone to his church leader and asked what happens to those who commit suicide. The leader responded that it is a sin, but the man went and killed himself anyway (jumped off a bridge). The women said they think the leader should have at least told him that it wasn't a sin or that he would have been forgiven if he did commit suicide (Field notes, 7/13/13).*

Tina and Lidiya acknowledge that suicide is a sin in their religion, but nonetheless express sympathy for the deceased. The church leader, though an individual person, becomes representative of larger social and cultural values. Therefore, showing displeasure with him initiates a larger narrative—one that opens a door into the possibility that suicide is a cultural construction, or the logical outcome of other cultural constructions.

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Moreover, retelling the story in one another's presence further makes and remakes the social understanding and reception of suicide. In a sort of social experiment, Tina and Lidiya—even as they retell the story—evaluate each other's stances on the matter. Doing so challenges the pervasive culture of silence and, when their reactions of frustration converge, it unifies their reflections. A story about a culture in trouble begins to emerge in their shared discourse.

Suspending judgment of the deceased person sets a new moral foundation that allows the participants to generate a dialogue between redefined self and Others. It occurs in the context of relationships, in which self—the suicide—and Other—the living—provide some framework for creating meaning (Staples and Widger, 2012). The act of suicide often occurs within a connection of bodies which, I argue, include those of prior suicides in the community. The relationship between the deceased individual and his social circle is also representative of larger community relationships. The body becomes a core symbol system through which people come to understand the relation of selves to society (Scheper-Hughes and Lock, 1987).

When participants examine the actions of family and friends, and the influence those actions had on the suicide, they reassign responsibility for the death to their larger culture. The most telling account of this process came when I asked participants for suicide prevention suggestions:

Solomon: *I need to teach my people, I need to open* [them].

Elshadaie: *First you have to teach them to be open. We have a certain way, the culture, how we are in a way programmed. We're like too proud, depression doesn't exist and everything else. The whole Ethiopian*

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community, we tend to stick with our own people, and we tend to think only that way. So within the Ethiopian community where depression happens, they don't admit it and nobody tells it, nobody see it, because nobody knows that [depression] *actually exists. Everyone just pretends that it doesn't. But if we tend to open up a little and see things from different perspective, maybe compromise with the American culture a little bit more, that way people will probably recognize certain things that actually happen so it's not—it's not his problem, it's not her problem, it's actually is there.*

Lidiya*: I think I would just surgery on every persons head. Make them more open really. I would change Ethiopia's way of thinking. Literally. I would change Eth—because they need to be open, they need to discuss and converse and be their own—be each other's solution.*

These women's prevention paradigm focused on the minds and morals of their fellow Ethiopians. All three suggest that opening up the culture would prevent further loss of life.

Additionally, the bodily experience of remembering the suicide provoked participants to reflect on their own social relationships. Through the process of personalization, participants recreated a bond with the suicide, expressing a knowingness surrounding unharmonious relationships with one's life-world[15] (Schutz, 1970). Tina says:

I can understand why somebody would be like, 'Hey, I've been here 15 years, my bank account is like sss [hisses]—*and I was expected to do this*

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[15]Alfred Schutz conceptualizes the life-world as the everyday life an individuals lives within. The life-world is taken for granted until a problematic situation emerges. The life-world is a constructed by everyday practices and thus continuously changing. It is a source of meaning and knowledge.

and that and that and I'm not married, I haven't accomplished this, I
haven't done that, I don't have anything to give back to my family.' So I'm
like life is worthless, cause society expects me....

As is well-documented throughout this study, any expression of suicidal thoughts or even

depressed thoughts is not socially permitted for Ethiopians. Ironically, it seems that

suicide can only be talked about after it has taken place. Yet the process of perceiving or

imagining the depersonalizing judgments experienced by the deceased person, and the

internalizing of those judgments, allowed study participants to discuss their awareness of

how deep cultural judgments run. I argue that this opportunity allowed them a safe space

to discuss their own "hidden ideations" (Chu et. al, 2011, p. 29).

Participant narratives suggest that the act of suicide is *actioned*; that is, it

represents the actual embodiment of spoiled identity. Participants understood the impact

of failure and the pressures of societal expectations on individuals who committed

suicide. The "useless guy" character Tina spoke of implies an element of social death.

The guy "without use" is disapproved of, dis-integrated, and even avoided by members of

his community. However, the degree to which the spoiled identity becomes intolerable

goes unrecognized by members of the community, because there is no social room for

sufferers to talk about it. It is not until the suicide transpires that individuals in the

community reflect on the impact of preceding moral judgments.

I propose juxtaposing the sick social body with Mary Douglas's (1966) concept of

"matter out of place," to position suicide as an action aimed at "fixing" a social

disharmony. The person who dies by suicide internalizes the belief that their community

does not want them and does not work in harmony with them. It has been made clear to

them—by way of teasing or bullying—that they are a wrench in the social works. In the cases of the suicides in my study, the socially prescribed identity of uselessness or worthlessness assaulted their self-image.[16] This assault was a trigger that ultimately led them to suicide. They take it into their own hands to remove themselves from what they have been taught is an otherwise unpolluted or pure community. For the socially dead individual, actual death may be seen as a last attempt to evade shame and regain agency. He thereby unknowingly transmits the stigma and 'badness' he felt he embodied to the larger community, which is left behind to wrestle with the meaning of the suicide.

The Final Act

In study participants, discussing the act of suicide and those who died by suicide provided vehicles for addressing issues of agency—a complex, tangled, convoluted agency. To examine suicide as a form of agency calls to mind the phenomenon of protest suicides, which are more commonly discussed in relation to suicide-bombers, self-immolation, and hunger strikes (Andriolo, 2006). The common variable linking these actions is the intentional taking of one's life to make a larger point, set in a particular social, cultural, and historical context (Billaud, 2012; Aggarwa, 2009; Vas, 2008). However, there are both differences and similarities among and within such forms of suicide, and the suicides discussed in this study.

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[16] Leading suicidologist Edwin Shneidman (1996) has identified five clusters of psychological needs that reflect different kinds of psychological pain that might precipitate suicide. The five different types include: Thwarted love, acceptance, and belonging; fractured control, predictability, and arrangement; assaulted self-image and avoidance of shame, defeat, humiliation, and disgrace; ruptured key relationships and the attendant grief and bereftness; excessive anger, rage, and hostility (p. 25).

Suicide-bombers, self-immolation, and hunger strikes are often visible to others. Suicide bombers often take the lives of others by taking their own. Self-immolation is deliberately conducted in a public space. Hunger strikes extend over a significant amount of time, often igniting a conversation of morality and justice throughout the process (Andriolo, 2006). On the other hand, the individual act of suicide in the Ethiopian community occurs in relative privacy and does no physical harm to another person.

However, what all four types may have in common—besides the ultimate death of an individual—is their attempt to draw the attention of others to something the suicide perceives as morally unjust (Andriolo, 2006, p. 102). Situating suicide as a protest implies that the act is a form of communication. The social messages of the suicide come in response to economic, political, or moral malaise. In this study, participants situated the suicide as a result of rigid, culturally prescribed behaviors. The remembered suicides become a medium for survivors to recognize, express, and openly talk about dysfunctions of their culture. Their narratives make it clear that the suicides do, indeed, succeed in producing a social message, making the suicide an idiom of distress—albeit a finite one.

It appears that participants in this study had not previously considered that one logical reaction to social pressures and judgment might be such a finite form of self-punishment. However, the extremity of this self-punishment is what seems to negate their moral judgment after the fact. In its place, a social message emerges. The remembered stories about the suicide have the potential to orient the community to possibly causalities, transforming the act into a form of cultural commentary co-constructed by the suicide and the survivors. The self-inflicted death becomes a last-ditch effort on the part

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of the individual to regain control and send a message that is ultimately interpreted and communicated by those who remember him.

Control, in this case, may be viewed as goal-orientated action. Goal-oriented, or interest-oriented, action is an attempt to derive advantage from a situation (Swartz, 1997). Void of resources, the suicide makes use of the one material and symbol over which he has the most control—his body. The act of suicide, in his mind, "maximizes material or symbolic profit" (Bourdieu, 1990, p. 16). While no direct profit or capital actually derives from the situation (unlike Bourdieu's analysis of action and strategy), what the suicide does gain is the negation of judgment. Thus, we must view "capital" in this sense as the power to remove judgment, and as a prompt to (new) conversation and memories about the deceased.

Those who die by a suicide resulting from stigmatization and social marginalization are, nonetheless, now remembered in a positive light, and with sympathy. Their death becomes a platform for community discussions of change, driven by the distress of their survivors. Suicide, as a form of communication, allows the once spoiled identity to regain a nobler status. Moreover, these remembered stories, and speculations about causality, provoke and sustain a progressive conversation regarding suicide prevention in the Ethiopian community in Boston.

It is important to note that the participants in this study did well to honor the victims of suicide. I never heard any negative commentary on the decease. Their narratives de-constructed the actions of the suicides into something meaningful for both the community and for the individuals who had passed. It is all too easy for bystanders to

attribute suicide to a mono-causal circumstance, or to purely internal struggles.

Participants in this study, however, avoided reductionist assumptions about disordered

psychopathology, in favor of a culturally constructed framework. They remained true to

their values of love and solidarity, not blaming a suicide for his actions. To honor the

departed, the undoing and rebuilding of his memory transforms into a collective memory

that returns morality and agency to the departed.

Chapter Seven

Conclusion

From an early age, stories of suicide made their way into my world. I listened to stories about the passing of fathers, brothers, sons, daughters, friends, schoolmates, and colleagues. Some of the stories were veiled in suspicion; others revolved around family histories of depression, school bullying, failed relationships, and risk taking behaviors. I too told stories of suicides, the tragic loss of a friend, a peer, and acquaintances. These stories, and the emotion coupled with them, drove me to investigate why Ethiopians residing in Boston were committing suicide. It was not always easy to discuss the subject of suicide, as it generated feelings of loss, sadness, and loneliness. On the other hand, this investigation created a safe space for participants to divulge personal feelings and opinions about suicide in their culture. At its most challenging moments, this process sustained my passion for inquiry.

My study followed me outside the field as well, making it hard to separate my personal life from my academic endeavors. This investigation brought forth stories from not just Ethiopians in Boston, but also friends and colleagues of my everyday life. Each story shared in their grief. At times it was hard to resist further questioning about suicide stories, as each case seemed like a potential piece to the larger puzzle. Another unanticipated occurrence was the spontaneous descriptions of personal struggle and adversity. These stories were juxtaposed with the histories of the deceased. It was important for some individuals to acknowledge that there are difficulties in life and they

shared in those experiences. Consistent with the literature, I believe that those who took

part in this study found it to be a positive experience. There appears to be therapeutic

comfort in sharing a story (Pollock, 3:2012; Kleinman, 1988, p.xii). A few participants

mentioned wanting to help with suicide prevention in the Ethiopian community,

suggesting that there is a ready and willing group of people to help in prevention efforts.

No Mental Health Issues?

From the beginning, Berihun, a well-known Ethiopian businessman, spoke about

the struggles of those within the Ethiopian community. He made it clear to me that if we

did not come up with a support system for the Ethiopians in Boston the suicide trend

would continue. He wanted to know how I could help create a sustainable plan, but

before I began he warned me about avenues of inquiry. Berihun, and his two colleagues

from the Boston Ethiopians Community Organization, informed me that no one had

mental health issues in the community, which was not to be my focus. Instead, I was to

concentrate on social, educational, and familial concerns (Personal Communication,

2/12/13). With this anecdotal information, semi-contradictory to academic evidence I

previously gathered, I decided to start at the most basic level of inquiry. Why, according

to Ethiopians in Boston, are their community members committing suicide? And why at

rates higher than that of Ethiopians in Ethiopia[17]?

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[17] Again, there are no official statistics pertaining to rates of suicide in Ethiopia, but it was
suggested by participants that the rates were greater than the United States. Studies have
investigated the suicide rates of Ethiopian Jewish immigrants in Israel (Shoval, Schoen, Vardi, &
Zalsman, 2007; Arieli, Gilat, & Aycheh, 1994, 1996). The suicide rate for Ethiopian Jews in
Israel is five times higher than that of the general population (Blumenfeld, 2011).

Of the eight study participants, nearly half had "heard" of incidents of suicide (one or "maybe two") while residing in Ethiopia. During their time in the United States, which ranged from two to eleven years, all participants had heard of or knew someone who died by suicide. All of the suicides discussed during the course of this study were those of young men who ranged in age from mid-twenties to late-thirties. All of those who died by suicide were born in Ethiopia and came to the United States by way of the Diversity Visa. They all had family in the Boston area and were in contact with them during the time of their death. From the participant point of view those who committed suicide did not stand apart from their contemporaries. So what was it then, to their knowledge, that drove these young men to commit suicide?

Despite age and gender differences among participants, understandings of why members of their community committed suicide were remarkably consistent. Participants focused on the idiosyncrasies of culturally prescribed expectations and transformations following immigration. Through the process of immigrating to the United States, an individual's identity is reconstructed. What was expected of the person, from himself and from his social circle, affected several aspects of his everyday life. These qualities included educational and vocational endeavors, emotional well-being, honesty and morality. Compounded by the Ethiopian characteristic of pride and the shielding of negative emotions, the Ethiopian is forced to maintain appearances—physically, materially, and vocally.

For participants, pride was central to an individual's appearance and identity. It served as barrier in three ways. First, pride guarded against negative forces, by serving as

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a mantra to overcome hard times. Second, it prevented enlisting the help of others, and lastly, it prevented individuals from telling the truth about (difficult) experiences in life. Pride stopped people from seeking help or admitting to others that they lacked self-admiration (Personal Communication, 7/15/13; 8/6/13). There was an expectation to be proud. Having, or rather admitting, any sort of problem represented a lack of pride, which encouraged othering, leaving the individual to fear shame and judgment.

> ***Azeb****: You would say, I feel down, I don't feel like doing anything, or I'm not passionate anymore.*
> ***Eva****: Could you say that to your Ethiopian friends?*
> ***Azeb****: (pause) Probably not.*
> ***Eva: Why?***
> ***Azeb****: I don't know, they (pause)... I'm just, I'm afraid just, how they will perceive me.*
> ***Eva****: What is your fear?*
> ***Azeb: Being judged, I guess.***
> ***Eva: Mhm, being judged. Being judged as...?***
> ***Azeb: As a failure I guess.***

Failure is spoken about as a consequence of personal actions. An individual's failure is a reflection of who they are and their capabilities, not as the consequences of outside forces. It becomes part of an individual's identity, a spoiled identity. Does the continued pressure to perform a normative social role, in light of damaged pride, judgment, and hopelessness, precipitate suicide? While feeling such emotions were they obligated to continue with their normal functions unable to divulge personal feelings for fear of further stigma? If an individual recognized their "illness" and desired treatment, but their treatment options were not in agreement with their cultural beliefs, did they lose hope? To a degree these questions can be answered from the knowledge garnered from my

research, which offers the constructive outcomes of an anthropological investigation of suicide.

The Advantages of Anthropological Inquiry

My conversations with participants, and Marcus in particular, reminded me of the importance of qualitative research. If I had simply conducted a quantitative study, Ezera, Marcus' son, would have been reduced to a number, an age cohort, and an ethnicity—albeit an inaccurate one in the opinion of many in this study—and a suicide method. His essence would have been lost, had he been transformed into a data point used to support a statistic. The statistic is not invaluable, but what it omits is Ezera's story and its meaning for his father and community. The quantitative survey fails to give the participant the opportunity to share meanings about the deceased, or about life in general. It does not allow them to step back from the narrative to "derive higher personal meaning or a life lesson" (Blagov & Singer, 2004, 481). In addition, because narratives focus on the memories of a living person about one who has died, the resulting meanings are not limited to those held by the person reminiscing, but extend to the community, and often to the whole of Ethiopian culture. The focus on individual narratives and meaning-making in this study illuminates areas of culture that may appear unrelated to issues of mental health, but their irregular form is still significant to the speakers.

At the intersection of narrative and mental health, I, as an ethnographer, must make my readers aware that the Ezeras of the world cannot be compartmentalized into a neat box labeled "depression." By documenting and honoring participants' perspectives,

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the ethnographer emphasizes and amplifies the meaning(s) of individual stories. Allowing data and meaning to seep beyond the boundaries of the conventional data "box" gives the researcher an opportunity to create dialogue related to less-familiar precipitants of suicide in a given setting or community. Valuing a depersonalized history also allows the story to express something that can be appreciated both intellectually and practically. The ethnographer must appreciate the idiosyncrasy of the particular narrative, while reformulating it into something more representational.[18] Doing so may allow more people to come forth and speak about their issues. The meanings that study participants derive from their narratives surrounding the remembered person are therefore as important to the study of suicide, as are the deceased.

Possessing piles of field notes and transcripts, and recordings of participants' voices, gave me the opportunity to revisit my participants' words over and over again. What this did was open up a new avenue of exploration into not just suicide stories, but the story of Ethiopia. An anthropological investigation into suicide examined the suicide *and* the person, in the context of culture, time, religion, and macro and microlevel institutions. A multidimensional discourse analysis was central to the investigation, and particularly, to the discussion of memory. The memories of Ethiopia, immigration, and personal struggles, became just as important as the memories of the suicide. If I was to understand the suicide accurately, it was important for me to understand the uniqueness

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[18] Recently, anthropologist Paul Stoller (2013) made a public call to social scientists to put forth the power of narrative, by showcasing the reality of social conditions of people living in the world. Anthropologists must strive to connect everyday audiences to their research by learning to curtail " jargon-laden esoteric language" (Stoller 2013). The article in its entirety can be found at: (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/paul-stoller/narrative-and-the-future_b_4377982.html.)

of Ethiopians. If I listened and understood their cultural history then I would understand the suicide in the context of their community.

Explanations of Suicide

In Chapter Four, "Who Minus Who," I concentrated on the discourse of pride, a term used over thirty times in formal interviews, and dozens more in informal conversations. The title of the chapter is a translation of *Ke man Aneshe.* a phrase pervasive in Ethiopia. *Ke man Aneshe* encompasses the authoritative nature pride holds in Ethiopian culture. It encourages neighbors and friends to compete, what Americans might call "keeping up with the Joneses." It is understood in an emotional context, as it motivates people to be matched with their contemporaries.

Pride was also spoken about as an inherent trait of Ethiopians. I repeatedly heard remarks about Ethiopia's history in the role of developing pride as well as historical happenings that demonstrated pride. If then, pride was an innate Ethiopian characteristic, what happened when it was damaged? As this study demonstrates, the results are an un-wellness of personhood. As far as symptomology is concerned, damaged pride may include a negative self-evaluation and assurance, lack of motivation toward "betterment," and misrepresentations about individual capital (economic, cultural, or social). Within this framework, researchers can construct similarities between damaged pride symptomology and mental health disorders.[19] This is an area worthy of further inquiry.

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[19] The American Foundation for Suicide state over ninety percent of completed suicides had one or more mental disorders (2004).

The focus of Chapter Five, "Give-and-Give," extends the conversation of cultural expectations. In addition to meeting emotional expectations of the culture—by maintaining a disposition free of evidenced failure—there is pressure to meet the expectations of economic, social, and capital success upon arrival to the United States. Hyperoptimism plagues the stories of participants; Lidiya's charismatic story about money growing on trees may be the most extreme, but also the most telling. The expectations for better life, the good life—well-paying job, educational opportunities, nice house, and car—are not always met. Consequently, Ethiopian immigrants hid the truth of their struggles from their family in Ethiopia. They are "forced" to gift evidence of their successful achievement of the American Dream. For "1.5 generation" Ethiopian immigrants the pressure is no less[20]. You are expected to give back to you family by way of success, educationally. In this study, participants suggested that a good education was the best representation of a successful self. It's what is expected. High expectations and pressure from family saturate stories of the suicide. Meeting expectations seemed like a never-ending pursuit, especially since the culture of silence quashed any unconventional journeys.

Narratives from Chapters Four and Five also focused on cultural frames of morality and judgment. Judgment in regards to meeting expectations and maintaining appearances was central in constructing the story of an individual in disharmony with their social circle. Chapter Six, "Un/Finished His/Stories," ties together the process of remembering the deceased—before and after the suicide—and the judgment that follows.

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[20] "1.5 generation" refers to those individuals who immigrated before the age of 13 (Waters & Jimenez, 2005, p.108).

Seen as a consequence of closed, or "bad" culture, participants relent on the contradictory nature of their social relationships. Friends and siblings are loved equally and cherished deeply. Two of my participants explained to me that it was a closeness I am probably unfamiliar with, as they have not seen evidence of such relationships in the United States. Despite this closeness, there is a closed-ness. Self-censoring prevented others from revealing their authentic self to even their closest friends and family (Goffman, 1963). However, during the course of this study, three female participants revealed to me moments of personal unwellness (loneliness, deep sadness, grief). The role of these narratives was three-fold, serving as comparative anecdotes, sympathy for the deceased, and most interestingly, as a vehicle for assigning blame for the suicide on the larger culture.

The accounts from these women certainly raise questions about gender. These women all experienced a disrupted being-in-the-world. Their identities were momentarily disrupted, but they regained balance through unique avenues—such as being able to talk with or listen to stories of similar struggle from non-Ethiopian friends (Personal Communication, 7/13/13; 7/15/13; 8/28/13). The gendering of suicide was not the focus of this study, but participants did acknowledge that the transition from life in Ethiopia to life in the United States was harder for men. Why was this? Elshadaie explained to me it is because women are "more resilient" among other things.

> **Elshadaie**: *It's so much easier for the woman to get a job. It might have to do with the fact that we just adjust quickly. Plus there are a lot of skills for us to work in. Like we can work as a cook, as a waitress. For the guys, usually you're stuck working in 7/11, parking lot, and something where, that doesn't involve a lot of running around. And they're so use to, back there* [in Ethiopia*], being the man of the house basically, the provider of*

the house, that when they come here, it just affects them a lot more. That's the thing, once you find a job, at least you're doing something and getting somewhere, you're fine. But imagine coming here and saying "I'm going to make a lot of money, save money and help out my family," and not being able to find a job.

Elshadaie's perception is consistent with literature on changing constructions of masculinities following migration and increased authority among women (Jansen, 2008; Pessar & Mahler, 2003; Pessar, 1999). I also believe Jansen's (2008) notion of remembering gendered subjectivities is worthy of further exploration. There is a strong tradition of remembering and recalling the past in establishing ones identity. Thus, remembering gendered expectations might have a great impact on males who find life in the United States challenging to all of their expectations including that to their masculinity.

Practical Outcomes

The majority of participant narratives focused on the individuality of their culture and the distinctiveness of suicide in their culture. Thus, the approach to preventing suicide in this community must be done with this in mind. Infiltrating the cultural with biomedical concepts of depressive disorders and the benefits of pharmaceuticals and talk therapy are at times conflicting with Ethiopians understanding of suicide. While this may be the ultimate goal for some individuals in the community, it will take considerable time to introduce and disseminate this type of information into an accepting audience.

On a practical level, it would be best to broach the subject of suicide in a safe setting. Church may be one option, but I would suggest an even more public space such

as restaurants, cafés, shops, and community organizations. Additionally, given the gendered nature of the suicides, targeting male groups, such as sport associations and certain vocational environments (i.e. taxi associations) would be a good next step. Something as simple as a pamphlet may be the best first step in ending the culture of silence. Text is safer than conversation as it depersonalizes the speaker. In addition, framing the issue in terms of difficulties such as job acquisition and financial struggles may be a subject easier to discuss. This first step, as participants noted, is opening up the community. Facilitating conversations about the reality of life in the United States will start a conversation about societal pressures and expectations. A conversation must be had about the reality of the rigid boundaries outlining a "normal" Ethiopian self.

A Final Word

What this study demonstrates is the value of an anthropological examination of suicide. Acknowledging both individual cases and the social meaning of suicide creates an interchange amongst three theoretical schools often positioned in conflict. Returning to classic Durkheimian theory, the individual can be seen as a greater expression of the collective, there is a social element to the suicide. Likewise, the interpretation of the suicide may differ according to the person expressing it (La Fontaine, 2012). The acknowledgment of personal interpretations of suicide emphasizes the rigidity in Ethiopian identity and who may be at greatest risk. By contextualizing the suicide within a specific geographic and historical moment, the body provides a structure of thought

related to emotional desires and moral words (Kirmayer, 1992). Consequently, a social message can be deciphered about a community in motion.

I also want to stress the social nature of individual remembering and forgetting (Kansteiner, 2002). This applies to the discourse of historical, social, and individual events. Everyday communication serves in the development of collective memory, which privileges interests of the present-day (ibid; Halbwach, 1950). For the Ethiopians in this study, discourse privileged their individuality, power, and agency and never has this been more important than when you find yourself in a new, unfamiliar, and challenging environment. Participants communicate their agency and the identity through remembering certain Ethiopian events. Likewise, the discourse surrounding immigration experiences serves to communicate a particular conception of the individual and Ethiopian self.

Borrowing from historian Wulf Kansteiner's (2002) conceptualization of collective memory, we can understand the concepts valued in evaluating suicide across cultures. Collective memory is:

> *"The intellectual and cultural traditions that frame all our representations of the past, the memory makers who selectively adopt and manipulate these traditions, and the memory consumers who use, ignore, or transform such artifacts according to their own tradition"(p.180).*

My study has shown how individual transformations of such artifacts leads to both conversations of endurance and success, but also to the demise of disenfranchised individuals who were unable to access an alternative story. This study, and its participants, sought to contribute to the conversation on suicide by accessing individual representations of the past. Memory makers built a collective understanding of

individuals, a community, a culture, and a painful phenomenon. Together they constructed a deep understanding about suicide seldom discussed in the literature. Presented throughout this work are artifacts about particular group traditions, which are offered as essential for understanding and preventing suicides within this community. It is my hope that the celebrated Ethiopian endurance and strength, as demonstrated by these participants, will continue for countless generations to come. It is time for the memory makers to create and share a new collective story that not only encourages, but also inspires every single member of this beautiful community.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Eva Melstrom

Birth Year: 1986

eva.melstrom@gmail.com

EDUCATION

Boston University School of Medicine, Boston, Massachusetts
August 2012-May 2014 (expected)
- ❖ Master of Science in Medical Anthropology and Cross-Cultural Practice
- ❖ Thesis: *"Who Minus Who": Suicide in Boston's Ethiopian Community*

Kalamazoo College, Kalamazoo, Michigan
September 2004-June 2008
- ❖ Bachelor of Arts in Human Development and Social Relations
- ❖ Senior thesis: *Intentional Death: Understanding Adolescent Suicide (A sociological, psychological and biological analysis)*

Universite Marc Blach, Strasbourg, France
September 2006-January 2007
Institut International d' Études Francaise
- ❖ Completed Integrative Cultural Research Project at Centre Socio Culturel Du Fosse Des Treize (SocioCultural Center) *"A Comparison Between French and American Children Centers"*
- ❖ Achieved proficiency in the French Language
- ❖ Studied the European Union and French Culture and Society

RESEARCH INTERESTS

Medical Anthropology, Psychological Anthropology, Applied Anthropology
- ❖ Person-centered ethnography; understanding the cultural context in which mental illness is experienced
- ❖ Examining the ways a culture & society are organized around and impacted by issues of health
- ❖ Evaluating the influences of social and cultural variables in the understanding of certain forms of psychiatric illnesses
- ❖ Immigrant experiences of mental health and well-being

EXPERIENCE

Research Assistant (University of Chicago), Chicago, Illinois
May 2010-July 2012
- ❖ Worked with geriatric and cancer populations in clinical setting
- ❖ Collected routine data in support of research projects
- ❖ Entered and analyzed quantitative and qualitative data
- ❖ Assisted with the preparation of posters, reports, and manuscripts
- ❖ Recruited and scheduled research subjects
- ❖ Transcribed and coded data
- ❖ Assisted with developing data collection tools
- ❖ Assisted with developing research protocols (IRB Applications)

Admin. Asst. (Div. of Hospital Medicine, NMH), Chicago, Illinois
February 2009-April 2010
- ❖ Assistant to Division Administrator
- ❖ Assistant to Co-Directors of Hospital Medicine Service
- ❖ Clerical Duties
- ❖ Calendar Management
- ❖ Coordinated communication between patient and physician
- ❖ Prepared and sent correspondences for physicians

Hospice Volunteer, Chicago, Illinois
January-May 2010

Cadillac Community Clinic, Cadillac, Michigan
June-August 2006/December 2008
- ❖ Completed intake interview and compiled brief medical history
- ❖ Took vitals
- ❖ Screened for eligibility and registered new patients

Centre Socio Culturel Du Fosse Des Treize, Strasbourg, France
September–December 2006
- ❖ Assistant to classroom teachers
- ❖ Supervised and interacted in children's daily activities, including reading, gym, and activity time

Active Minds, Inc. Kalamazoo, Michigan
January-June 2008
Active Minds is an organization working to utilize the student voice to change the stigma about mental health disorders by promoting open, enlightened discussion of mental health.
- ❖ Founding member
- ❖ Organized campus activities

Eastside Neighborhood Project, Kalamazoo, Michigan

March-June 2007
- ❖ Asset assessment and community building project
- ❖ Used SPSS for data entry
- ❖ Open ended and semi-structured interviews (independent and group)
- ❖ Organized neighborhood gathering and presented study results

HONORS

- ❖ Kalamazoo College High Honors 2007-2008
- ❖ Kalamazoo College Deans List
- ❖ MIAA Academic Honor Roll Student-Athlete
- ❖ Merit-Based Scholarship Recipient 2004-2008

ABSTRACTS

1. Hemmerich, J., Ferguson, M.K., Elstein, Gorawara-Bhat, R., Warnes, C., **Melstrom, E.,** Dale, W. Surgical treatment consultations with lung cancer patients: A qualitative and survey-based pilot study. Annual meeting of Society for Medical Decision Making, Chicago, IL. Oct 24, 2011

2. Roggin, K., Hemmerich, J**., Melstrom, E**., Wilson, S., Kamm, A., & Dale, W. (May 2012). Age and Preoperative Geriatric Assessments in Predicting Surgical Outcomes in a Prospective Study of Patients Undergoing Pancreaticoduodenectomy**.** Selected for the *Presidential Poster Session at the 2012 Annual Scientific Meeting of the American Geriatrics Society, 2012 Annual Meeting*, Seattle, Washington.

POSTER PRESENTATIONS

1. **Melstrom, Eva** (March 2014) "Who Minus Who": Suicide in Boston's Ethiopian Community. Annual meeting of the Society for Applied Anthropology, Albuquerque, NM.

2. Josh Hemmerich PhD Rita Gorawara-Bhat PhD, **Eva Melstrom BA**, Kaitlyn Tierney MLIS, William Dale MD, PhD. Physicians' Attitudes and Beliefs About Prostate Cancer Patients' Knowledge. Department of Medicine Research Day, March 13, 2012. The University of Chicago

3. Joshua Hemmerich, PhD, Mark K. Ferguson, MD, Arthur Elstein, PhD, Rita Gorawara-Bhat, PhD, Cynthia Warnes, RN, BSN, **Eva Melstrom, BA** and William Dale, MD, PhD (October 2011) Surgical treatment consultations with lung cancer patients: A qualitative and survey-based pilot study. *Poster presented at **The 33rd Annual Meeting of the Society for Medical Decision Making.***

4. Roggin, K., Hemmerich, J., Wallace, J**., Melstrom, E**., Wilson, S., Kamm, A., Matthews, J., Posner, M., & Dale, W. (May, 2011). Comprehensive Geriatric Assessments May Predict Surgical Outcomes in a Prospective Study of Older Patients Undergoing Pancreaticoduodenectomy. *Paper and poster presented at the 45th Annual Pancreas Club Meeting*, Chicago IL.

5. Roggin, K., Hemmerich, J., Wallace, J., **Melstrom, E**., Wilson, S., Kamm, A., Matthews, J., Posner, M., & Dale, W. (March, 2011). Comprehensive Perioperative Geriatric Assessments May Predict Surgical Outcomes In A Prospective Study Of Older Patients Undergoing Pancreaticoduodenectomy. *Paper presented at Chicago Surgical Society*, Chicago IL.

6. **Melstrom, E.** *Intentional Death: Understanding Adolescent Suicide*. Senior Thesis. Advisors: K. Cunningham, PhD, R. Stauffer, PhD. Presented at the 2008 Hightower Symposium. Kalamazoo College. Department of Human Development and Social Relations.

RESEARCH EXPERIENCE

Section of Geriatrics and Palliative Medicine, University of Chicago
- ❖ SOCARE (Specialized Oncology Care and Research) Project
- ❖ Shared Decision Making Between Older Patients and Their Surgeons for Localized Lung Cancer: A Pilot Study of Patient Participation: IRB #10-536-A
- ❖ Decision Making/ADT Study: IRB #16464A
- ❖ The Impact of a Decision Aid for Hormone Therapy for Prostate Cancer Recurrence on Patients' Anxiety, Decisional Conflict and Knowledge. A Randomized Trial: IRB #09-128-B
- ❖ Prostate Cancer Comorbid Health State Utilities Study: IRB #16796B
- ❖ Understanding African American Patients Prostate Cancer Knowledge at the Time of Biopsy: IRB #11-0185

Department of Surgery
- ❖ Preoperative Predictors of Mortality, Morbidity and Quality of Life in Patients Undergoing Pancreaticoduodenectomy: A Pilot Study: IRB #15634B

SKILLS

- ❖ Computer Software: SPSS, Dedoose (Qualitative Research Data Analysis Software) Express Scribe, Microsoft Suite, Research Electronic Data Capture (REDCap)
- ❖ IRB proficient
- ❖ Experience with in-depth interviewing, semi-structure interviewing
- ❖ Experience with data collection and survey administration
- ❖ Skilled in administering functionality assessments (SPPB, VES-13, Fried's

Frailty)

❖ Skilled in administering memory/orientation exams (MoCA, MMSE, GDS)

CONTINUING EDUCATION

❖ Completed the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants"
❖ Medical Terminology I-Northwestern Memorial Hospital
❖ Psychopathology course Boston University School of Social Work: Course work aimed at acquiring skills and knowledge to identify and diagnose disorders classified in the DSM-IV-TR, including psychotic disorders, mood disorders, anxiety disorders, PTSD, dissociative disorders, personality disorders, sexual disorders, eating disorders, pervasive developmental disorders, and substance related disorders.

MEMBERSHIPS (STUDENT MEMBERSHIPS)

❖ American Anthropological Association
❖ Society for Medical Anthropology
❖ Society for Psychological Anthropology
❖ Society for Applied Anthropology