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Where is my home, where is my homeland: Ethiopian Identity in the Czech Republic

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Abstract:

The purpose of this study is to understand the cultural identity of the Ethiopian diaspora who migrated to the former Czechoslovakia prior to 1989. The theoretical framework was created through secondary sources and interviews were conducted with Ethiopian migrants. By virtue of time the Ethiopian migrants have acquired tools that have integrated them into Czech society successfully, however, regardless of time and experience in the Czech Republic, members of the Ethiopian diaspora still culturally identify with the territory that is defined by Ethiopia.

The Czech Republic is a dominantly inhabited by ethnic Czechs. The homogeneity is a result of historical events that occurred in the 20th century. During the numerous decades of the communist regime the country remained hidden behind the Iron Curtain. The Czechoslovakian government strictly controlled the entry and exit of people, culture, ideas and things creating isolation and monotony. Within the monotonous society there were spurs of ethnic and cultural differences manifested by the international students coming from socialist regimes in Africa, Latin America and Asia. Particularly focusing on Ethiopian students, some made the decision to remain in the Czech Republic because of the political turmoil that was occurring in Ethiopia in the 1990's. In this study I intend to understand how members of the Ethiopian diaspora, who migrated prior to 1989, culturally identify after being in the highly homogenous Czech Republic during integral part of it's history. In doing so, I want to remove the usage of simplified African stereotypes, and help build upon the topics of migration and multiculturalism in the Czech Republic as it experiences a growing number migrants settling in the Czech Republic.

While current research recognizes the presence of African students in Czechoslovakia, it generalizes the entire continent. In-depth reports on the number of students based on countries do not exist, and much less research has been done to analyze the identities of diasporas that sprouted during communism in the former Czechoslovakia and remain in the current Czech Republic today.

Through my research of the existing Ethiopian diaspora I focus on members that migrated pre-1989 to the Czech Republic and remained in the Czech Republic due to conflict in their homeland. I find that the members adapted Czech components of identity to help ease their existence within a distinct society, but do not culturally identify with the

host country because culture is attached to the individuals spatially defined community to which he or she places symbolic value. The subjects interviewed held Ethiopia to still be the territory with symbolic value. The retention of this connection to Ethiopia, and inherently cultural identity, is facilitated in the era of technology, which comprises and interconnects global citizens. As the Czech Republic, and on a larger scale Europe, confront new issues on migration, assimilation into the dominant culture is no longer viable. Understanding the retention of diaspora's cultural identity within the European context is essential for the development of a multicultural country, which is the new reality for Europe, as well as the development of the countries the migrants left behind.

Methodology

To understand the cultural identity of Ethiopian migrants in the Czech Republic, I executed a qualitative study with a sociocultural framework. I initially spoke with Jan Záhořík, Ph.D., an African Studies professor at Western Bohemia University in Plzeň, Czech Republic, and he advised to concentrate on Ethiopia. Dr. Záhořík said that because of the strong diplomatic relationship and history between Ethiopia and Czechoslovakia, I would be more likely to find candidates to interview. I built my theoretical framework, as well as my background knowledge on Ethiopia and its connection with the former Czechoslovakia through secondary sources.

I interviewed Lukaš Radošný, a representative from META- an organization based in Prague that advocates and provides opportunities for migrant youth in education; and Hana Šobáňová, a recent Master's graduate of the Institute of Ethnology at Charles University. Hana completed her graduate thesis on Ethiopians in the Czech Republic and was able to gain insight

on the community. The participants offered a specialized perspective on migration, the Czech environment to cultural differences and the Ethiopian community in the Czech Republic.

In addition, I conducted two interviews with Ethiopian migrants that settled in Czechoslovakia prior to 1989 to analyze whether the historical events that shaped the Czech Republic, and length of their residency impacted their cultural identity. Shiferaw Demeke migrated to Czechoslovakia in 1980 on a student scholarship to attend an agricultural high school. He returned to Ethiopia in 1985, only to come back to Czechoslovakia in 1986 on another scholarship to pursue his Bachelor's and Master's degree at the Czech University of Agriculture, now named the Czech University of Life Sciences. Demeke has not lived outside of Europe since 1986 but he lived a brief period in Germany from 1991-1996. The second Ethiopian migrant interviewed was Dr. Alemayehu Kumsa who came to Czechoslovakia in 1985 to attain his Bachelor's and Master's degree in sociology from Charles University. Upon finishing his two degrees he applied for a Ph.D. program. Dr. Kumsa has lived in the Czech Republic since he initially came in 1985.

While conducting interviews with specialist and Ethiopian migrants, I had to be weary that the Czech Republic does not have a history of migration, as I am accustomed to in the United States. Migration in a homogenized country with a communist past is still a new topic confronting the Czech Republic. My biases on migration and the diasporas they create are produced by having parents that immigrated to the United States and myself being a member of a diaspora. I also needed to be sensitive to asking political questions that may be of private manner to the interviewees and accept the potential to be rejected for an interview because I do not belong to the Ethiopian, or African community.

Literature Review

The word “diaspora,” derives from an Ancient Greek word meaning, “seed sowing” (Půtová, 2012). Social anthropologist, Anthony Cohen says that the term “diaspora” is contemporarily used to denote “ethnic, religious or cultural group of people living as a minority out of their homeland” (As cited in Půtová, 2012). The interaction between the diaspora and the host country in which they reside causes the migrants to adapt cultural components unique to the host society. Barbara Půtová, writes in “From Traditional to Global Diaspora,” within *Adaptability as a Consequence of Ethnomobility*, that members of a diaspora find themselves in an in-between space in which they move within two cultures and countries (2012). The movement between characteristics of the home country is dependent on who the diaspora member is interacting with. Movement between cultures and countries is made easier in the era of globalization where technology has shortened the geographical distance between the diaspora’s host country and the country of origin and allows members of the diaspora to travel between cultures and countries physically, virtually and more frequently.

Some experts argue that the increased access to varying cultures in the age of globalization has detached the individual from a single cultural and territorial identity. Arjun Appdurai says, “the landscapes of group identity- the ethnoscapescapes- around the world are no longer tightly territorialized spatially bounded, historically self-conscious, or culturally homogenous” (As cited in Lyons, 2009, p. 591). This supports Barbara Půtová’s classification of modern diasporas being de-territorial, where as they used to be re-territorial (2012). Re-territorial diasporas are characterized by the migrants connection to the homeland and his or her efforts to return. De-territorial diasporas focus on the accumulation of identities that result from mobility and are not tied to a territorial space. Continuing, Půtová says de-territorial diasporas exist “without showing any interest in the ancestral homeland and instead of taking defining itself

rigidly against majority population they create syncretic and multilayer identities” (Půtová, 2012, p. 111).

In classifying modern diasporas as de-territorial Půtová ignores the cause of the diaspora’s migration and how that factor impacts their effort to return home, as well as the reality of returning. The cause of migration better identifies the feelings towards the territorial and cultural space the migrant is leaving behind, and their decision to retain connections with home or break them. Terrance Lyons highlights in “The Ethiopian Diaspora and Homeland Conflict,” that there is greater sense of solidarity with members of conflict-driven diasporas and the physical space where they have a community (2009). The conflict gives rise to a strong solidarity for the victims in the struggle that all share the same country.

Regardless of whether diaspora members actually return to the homeland, financially invest in the economy, or are politically active in their country of origin, the connection the diaspora members have to the territory is amplified in the host country through collective memory, rituals and practices that are specific to the territorially defined community. The amplification of cultural identity through conversation, music, food, etc. has been facilitated by technology and represents the diaspora members subliminal longing to return to their homeland, thus making conflict-driven diasporas re-territorial.

Historical Background

Ethiopian Students in Czechoslovakia

In 1958 there were only 43 Africans studying in Czechoslovakia. In 1962 the number of African students in the Czech Republic increased to 627 (Sieber, 2004). The increase in African students

in Czechoslovakia was due to the interest of the Soviet Union to expand its ideological and political influence to the decolonizing African continent through political, military, economical and developmental aid. The Soviet Union utilized Czechoslovakia's connections in Africa, which were officially created by business ventures during the early years of the Czechoslovak Republic, to advance its expansion goal into the African continent (Dvořáček, Piknerová, & Záhorský, 2014).

Starting in the mid 1950's, in accordance with the Soviet Union, Czechoslovakia started supporting Marxist-Leninist insurgent and rebellious movements in Africa. By 1960, the "Year of Africa," 17 sub-Saharan African states were created (Sieber, 2004). The Soviet Union used this opportune time to extend its paternal helping hand and infiltrate Marxist-Leninist ideology into the African, as well as Latin American and Asian, youth through education. In 1960, The People's Friendship University was opened (Guillory, 2014). Shortly thereafter in 1961, Czechoslovakia established the "University of the 17th November" (Sieber, 2004). The establishment of the latter university made it possible for more international students to arrive to Czechoslovakia.

Through out this time, the Soviet Union had a cordial relationship with Ethiopia but it did not take particular interest in the country because it was one of two African countries that had never been colonized, aside from temporary Italian invasions and did not see the opportunity to breed Marxist ideologies. Additionally, Emperor Haile Selassie was a strong ally of the United States and the Soviet Union was supporting the neighboring Somalia (Brind, 1983) inhibiting closer diplomatic relationships from fostering.

The relationship between the Soviet Union and Ethiopia changed in the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution when a military coupe brought down Emperor Haile Selassie. A leftist-oriented

military government, under the Provisional Military Administrative Council, also known as the Derg, took power. The relationships with the Soviet Union and the countries in the Soviet Bloc were then strengthened, especially after the rise of the Derg leader- Mengistu Haile Mariam (Brind, 1983). The alliance between the Soviet Union and Ethiopia was made concrete in 1977 when 20,000 Cubans, dozens of Soviet officers and an estimated \$1.5 billion of equipment were sent to Ethiopia to defeat their Somalian enemies (Henze, 1985).

Czechoslovakia had also engaged in moderate diplomacy with Ethiopia during the interwar period and after World War II. In 1959, the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic signed the Treaty on Friendship and Co-operation, and the Agreement on Cultural, Scientific and Technical Co-operation. Czechoslovakia sent an un-quantified amount of experts and educators in a variety of fields (i.e. agriculture, foods, sciences, etc.) to Ethiopia. Ethiopian students were also admitted to study in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic on government and party scholarships. (Embassy of the Czech Republic in Addis Ababa).

The Embassy of the Czech Republic in Addis Ababa does not report the specific amount of students admitted to Czechoslovakia as a result of the treaty signed in 1959. However, from the record of the article "Czechoslovakia's African Adventures" in *New Presence: The Prague Journal Of Central European Affairs*, claiming 43 African students in 1959 and over 600 African students in 1962 after the establishment of the "University of the 17th November," one can see the efforts of Czechoslovakia to expand the Marxist-Leninist ideology to the African continent. When the political relationship between Ethiopia and the Soviet Union strengthened in the late 1970's, consequentially it also did with Czechoslovakia because it was under the Soviet sphere of influence. The international diplomacy that developed between the Soviet Union and the shadow Soviet countries during the 1960's and 1970's is the reason for the presence of

Ethiopian students, as well as other students from 'socialist-friendly' countries, in Czechoslovakia.

Students from Ethiopia and the other 'socialist-friendly' countries enjoyed an uncomplicated process to study in the Soviet Union or its satellite states. Shiferaw Demeke and Dr. Alemayehu Kumsa are naturalized Czech citizens born in Ethiopia. They came to Czechoslovakia on student scholarships, respectively in 1980 and 1985. Both subjects regarded the application and legal process of getting to Czechoslovakia as being relatively hassle-free for the student.

According to Dr. Kumsa, when Ethiopia was given international educational scholarships it was announced in the newspaper, radio and television. Applicants report the countries of preference, which correspond to their academic interest, to the ministry of education. They are evaluated based on a series of national examinations taken each year in secondary school. The ministry of education sends the results of the exams to the allied socialist countries that then select the student and invite them to study in their nation-state (Hernández, personal communication, November 18, 2014). In an interview with Shiferaw Demeke, he says that the process "was between government [*sic*]" (Hernández, personal communication, November 20, 2014). In comparison to Dr. Kumsa's response to the process of attaining a scholarship to study in Czechoslovakia, Demeke's response is significantly brief. Regardless, both subjects acknowledge scholarships from the Soviet Union and its satellite states being available for Ethiopian citizens and accredit their initial arrival to Czechoslovakia to be for academic purposes only. Both Dr. Kumsa and Demeke had academic scholarships to complete their education in Czechoslovakia through a Master's program. Additionally, upon receiving the scholarship

neither detailed troubles with travel and residency legalities, demonstrating the strong relationship between the Soviet Bloc and Ethiopia.

No Return Flight Home

At the end of the 1980's communism was dismantling in Russia, Eastern and Central Europe, as well as in Ethiopia. The political changes that were occurring in Ethiopia in 1991 when Shiferaw Demeke and Dr. Alemayehu Kumsa completed their Master's in the Czechoslovakia prevented both men from returning to their birth country.

Previously, the Soviet Union was the dominant leader in providing Ethiopia with a variety of assistance (economically, politically, technical, etc.). The country retracted its support while concentrating on its domestic issues of dealing with the consequences of communism. Czechoslovakia and the other European states in the Soviet sphere of influence did the same. Meanwhile, Ethiopia was dealing with a civil war. Ethnically based insurgent movements sprung through out the nation and the Derg, led by the dictator Mengistu Haile Mariam, was loosing its authoritarian command of the Ethiopian citizens (Vestal, 1999). As a result of the decline of communism, the Derg had limited international allies to call upon.

In May 1991, the United States responded to a plea for a peace conference by Mengistu and the insurgent groups. The peace conference was held in London. The United States orchestrated a series of agreements between Mengistu and the guerilla leaders. Mengistu surrendered and the United States gave the prevailing forces of the Ethiopian civil war, the Eritrean Popular Liberation Front- de facto sovereignty over Eritrea; and the Ethiopian Popular Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), which was composed of members of the Tigray

ethnicity, the 'blessing' to lead the democratic transformation of Ethiopia that was to follow (Vestal, 1999).

The Ethiopian Popular Revolutionary Democratic Front was initially a Marxist organization but it did not receive attention from the communist states. However, in 1991 to appease its Western, democratic donors it occulted its ideologies and assured the United States the democratization of Ethiopia (Vestal, 1999). In reality the appointed Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) led by President Meles Zenawi, formerly the leader of the Ethiopian Popular Revolutionary Democratic Front, did not execute democracy by the Western definition or by the provisions put in place by the transitional government charter. The rights to pluralist representation, freedom of the media and freedom of assembly were hindered by the EPRDF/TGE.

Acting upon the rights guaranteed in the charter, a multi-ethnic political party, known as the United Democratic Nationals (UDN) was created. It was the greatest opposition to the EPRDF, for it did not believe that Ethiopia should be divided into ethnic regions. The EPRDF infiltrated the party's public meetings, ceased control of the media to taint the image of the UDN and attempted to stop a UDN led demonstration against ethnic fighting. Although the demonstration occurred, the top three leaders of the UDN were imprisoned and detained without charges the next day (Vestal, 1999).

Furthermore, in the 1992 election the EPRDF had an unfair advantage of knowing the election regulations because they had selected the National Election Commission; and they had been predisposed to financial, media, organizational and military resources having been leading the 'democratization' of Ethiopia for the past year. Nonetheless, there were opposing candidacies. The only real oppositions were that of the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and the

All Amhara People's Organization (AAPO). Both groups claim to have been harassed and intimidated by the EPRDF, leading them to withdraw from the elections (Vestal, 1999).

Within one year of Ethiopia's transition into democracy, the EPRDF was evidently not practicing the democratic provisions it had written in the charter. When the party was confronted with an opposition it manipulated the party to exit the political scene.

Vestal writes in, *Ethiopia: A Post Cold War African State* about the group of Ethiopian's who had migrated to North America and Europe during the reign of the Derg and stated,

This group included many of Ethiopia's 'brightest and best' who entered professions, started businesses, and pursued higher education in their new surroundings. [...] All experienced first hand the virtues and problems of democratic governance and free market capitalism. They comprised what never existed before- a critical mass of Ethiopians who understood such concepts as democracy, constitutionalism, and human rights (1999, p.6).

It was this group of Ethiopian intellectuals and entrepreneurs abroad who posed the greatest threat to exposing and critiquing the falsities of the EPRDF's alleged democracy.

Previously, during the Derg's regime the government had taken care of students. The Derg government facilitated the scholarship process, took care of expenses to arrive to the Soviet Union and its satellite states, and provided the students with a stipend. In 1991, with Ethiopia under new "democratic" leadership, there was a sudden severance to the mutual dependence of the students and the government. Where as before the Ethiopian government sought to educate the youth in Marxist-Leninist countries for them to come back and contribute to the sustainment

of the socialist country, at the turn of the decade the students living in countries such as Czechoslovakia witnessed democracy evolve. This exposition to democracy posed a threat to Ethiopia's false democratic government in the making.

“You know when I complete my studies in 1991 they change the government in Ethiopia. There were parties that come from forest. [...] They didn't want students from Europe back. [...] I didn't have chance to come back to home [*sic*]” (Hernández, personal communication, November 20, 2014). Says Shiferaw Demeke. His initial intentions were to return to Ethiopia upon completing his studies. However, the TGE - which was ruled by the EPRDF, didn't send Demeke a return flight home (Hernández, personal communication, November 20, 2014). Demeke found himself abandoned in Czechoslovakia. The abandonment he suffered from his home country created feelings of animosity towards the Ethiopian government, who did not want educated citizens to return. Shiferaw Demeke did not want to go into details about the political situation other than framing the TGE/EPRDF as unjust and victimizing all citizens of Ethiopia, but especially intellectuals (Hernández, personal communication, November 20, 2014).

Dr. Alemayehu Kumsa was more direct and specific about the injustices the TGE committed. “My friends recommended me not to go back to Ethiopia because our representatives were expelled from the government so I will be in danger if I will go back to Ethiopia [*sic*]” (Hernández, personal communication, November 18, 2014). Says Dr. Kumsa who is a member of the Oromo nation. As mentioned above, the Oromo Liberation Front was a strong opponent to the EPRDF. In contrast to Demeke, Dr. Kumsa identifies Oromo nation as the victims of the TGE/EPRDF. In this conflict, it is the Ethiopian government against Oromo people creating the role of Ethiopia as an oppressor and the Oromo nation as the oppressed. While Demeke sympathizes with all citizens of Ethiopia, Dr. Kumsa significantly sympathizes with members of

his ethnicity over all citizens of the country. The perception of who is a victim is important to defining the community the subjects repudiate, and on the other hand the community they relate to and associate as being a part of their home.

Conflict-generated Diaspora in Czechoslovakia

As a result of their involuntary displacement from Ethiopia Dr. Alemayehu Kumsa and Shiferaw Demeke became a part of a conflict-generated diaspora that stretches mostly through North America and Europe. Conflict-generated diaspora members experienced a violent or forced displacement from the home country, as opposed to leaving because of voluntary economic interests (Lyons, 2009). Members of the Ethiopian diaspora in the Czech Republic, who migrated before 1989, did not come by force but stayed involuntarily because of the conflict in the homeland. The Ethiopian diaspora has grown from a multitude of reasons. The political regimes that started in 1974 and in 1991 are just one of the reasons why Ethiopians have left, or stayed out of their home country.

The political turmoil in Ethiopia that prevented Shiferaw Demeke and Dr. Alemayehu Kumsa from returning to Ethiopia did not cause them to renounce their cultural ties in Ethiopia. On the contrary, both Demeke and Dr. Kumsa demonstrate long-distance nationalism. Long-distance nationalism is when a diaspora member displays active interest in the politics, culture, social, and/or economic components of his or her home country (Půtová, 2012).

Benedict Anderson says that long-distance nationalist “play identity politics by participating (via propaganda, money, weapons, any way but voting) in the conflicts of his imagined Heimat [homeland]- now only a fax time away” (As cited in Lyons, 2014, p. 592). In fact, living in a different territory may increase the diaspora members’ critical evaluation of his

or her home country's politics because they are not burdened with potential government persecution. The rejection both interviewees publicly shared towards the Ethiopian government may not have been communicated if they were to be in Ethiopia.

The problem is the government. Everybody loves this country [Ethiopia]. Everyday we call each other talking about situation in Ethiopia, always. Most of the intellectual people is in America- America and Czech lands there is so much. They are not happy to stay there [*sic*] (Hernández, personal communication, November 20, 2014).

Both Shiferaw Demeke and Dr. Kumsa, engage in the political scene of Ethiopia at a distance through the news and conversation with their Ethiopian peers but did not express the funding of any political movements. Demeke expresses in the above quote the high level of interest in the development of Ethiopia he and his Ethiopian diaspora peers share. More importantly, he highlights that although he and other members of the political, conflict-driven diaspora do not agree with the Ethiopian government, their territorial or ethnic loyalty remains. Similarly, Dr. Kumsa when asked whether he planned to go back to Ethiopia, he responds, "Because of political reasons, no. Completely, no" (Hernández, personal communication, November 18, 2014). Although, when asked what was home he responds,

"The Czech people they do have a saying: 'everywhere is good, the best is your home country.' They say in their own language: 'Všude je dobře , že nejlepší je váš domov země.' So until I die, I think about my birthplace, because it is fixed in my mind" (Hernández, personal communication, November 18, 2014).

The fact that Dr. Kumsa still perceives Ethiopia as being home, displays his connection to the territory as being of high value. He remarks it as being the “best” and fixed in his mind until death, displaying his loyalty to Ethiopia as a territory. His disloyalty is directed toward the government in power that leads Ethiopia, not the spatial proximity that defines the country geographically.

The loyalty Dr. Kumsa and Shiferaw Demeke articulate rebuttal the idea that modern diasporas are de-territorial, in which members do not take an interest in their ancestral country, transcend attachments to a physical space and identify as a multilayered individual (Půtová, 2012). Instead, Dr. Kumsa and Demeke exemplify a re-territorial diaspora because if it were not for the Ethiopian government, it can be strongly presumed that conflict-driven diaspora members would return to Ethiopia. The effort to return to the diaspora member’s country of origin is the prime characteristic of re-territorial diaspora (Půtová, 2012). For conflict-driven diasporas their return is based on conflict being resolved but until then they commemorate the collective suffering of their peers inflicted by the oppressor, which in this case is the EPRDF- the governing party in Ethiopia.

The Ethiopian subjects experienced the Czech Republics evolvement since the 1980’s from communism, to revolution and currently into a democracy. Additionally, they have integrated themselves into the Czech community becoming familiar with the language and customs. Altogether they have built components of Czech identity. Yet, they still identify with what they associate as being home. Home is defined by a physical space consisting of a culturally connected community, for example an ethnic nation or a country. They demonstrated a tendency to move fluidly between Ethiopia and the Czech Republic and appropriate components

of Czech identity into the Ethiopian context. It is as if the ‘Czechness’ they have developed over the course of more than two decades is only a layer that is worn to interact with Czech society. They put on and remove these layers of Czech identity like clothing; however, their cultural essence remains attached to their homeland.

The Czech National Identity

According to the 2011 Czech Republic census, approximately 64 percent of the population is of Czech ethnicity. The other minorities are mostly from near by European countries such as Slovakia, Romania, and the Ukraine, with the outlier minority being Vietnamese. The Ethiopian, and overall African, population is still a very small minority that is not documented in the country’s census. Still, this is a significant decrease in the country’s ethnic homogeneity from around the time in which Shiferaw Demeke and Dr. Alemayehu Kumsa first arrived. In 1991 nearly 95 percent of the Czech Republic’s citizens were of Czech ethnicity (Nedomová & Kostelecký, 1997).

“At that time when small child see a black man they run away because they don’t know such kind of human being [*sic*].” Said Dr. Kumsa (Hernández, personal communication, November 18, 2014). The reaction from Czech society to the Ethiopian migrants was expressed not as racist but more as inexperience with people that look different from a native Czech. The Czech Republic does not have a history of colonization, and furthermore was hidden behind the Iron Curtain for nearly four decades that the majority of Czech citizens did not have the opportunity to go beyond the Czech borders and much less the European borders.

Lukaš Radostný, a representative of META- an organization dedicated to providing migrant youth greater opportunities through education, described Czechs to having feelings of

exoticism towards the African community. He accredited the feelings of exoticism to the isolation Czechs experienced during communism.

I think there is some kind of general xenophobia in Czech society and it doesn't really focus on some specific group. But people here they have general problem with accepting difference. How people look or how they behave. So, I wouldn't really call it racism because it's not about different race. It's more of, 'I am afraid of everything that is different from what I know. From my really small area.' Because people couldn't travel, couldn't meet other culture, couldn't meet people that looked different. The isolation was the reason for the fear of people with differences [*sic*] (Hernández, personal communication, November 13, 2014).

The analysis of the Czech society during communism provided by Radostný paints the society to not be discriminatory towards certain ethnicities migrating to the former Czechoslovakia.

Shiferaw Demeke and Dr. Kumsa agree and do not recall any accounts of racism during the communist era. In fact, Dr. Kumsa says, "During socialism, it is even. No one knocks you down because of your color" (Hernández, personal communication, November 18, 2014).

Even though the number of foreign students coming from other continents was a small amount, overall, Czech society accepted foreign students. The acceptance of students like Dr. Kumsa and Demeke helped perpetuate the inclusion of these migrants into Czech society where they could develop components of Czech identity. The ability of Ethiopian migrants to develop Czech characteristics that would facilitate their interaction with one another consequentially

removed the overarching fear of the different that persisted in Czech society due to the years of isolation.

The characteristics developed by Demeke and Dr. Kumsa that resonate among Czechs as hindering to “true Czechness” are analyzed by sociologist Alena Nedomová and Tomáš Kostecký in the results of a 1995 National Survey conducted in the Czech Republic to attempt to pinpoint the Czech identity. Among the most important indicators of being Czech was knowing the language. Of the 1,111 survey participants 94 percent of the respondents said that language was very, to fairly important to “being truly Czech” (Nedomová & Kostecký, 1997). Lukaš Radošný also agreed, “It’s language first” (Hernández, personal communication, November 13, 2014). He expanded and emphasized the importance of having Czech social networks- both personal and professional. Furthermore, Lukaš Radošný says, “When you share the history of your age it’s a strong identity.” Having the experience of the traditions, culture, events and overall memories particular to the Czech nation makes one “feel” Czech. In support, 91 percent of the respondents from the 1995 National Survey said that feeling Czech was very, to fairly important for Czech identity; and the history of the Czech nation is what instills most pride in Czechs (Nedomová & Kostecký, 1997). According to the survey results and reinforced by Lukaš Radošný, the successful knowledge of the Czech language and a shared memory specific to the Czech Republic is suppose to produce an authentic Czech citizen.

Shiferaw Demeke and Dr. Alemayehu Kumsa have developed the aforementioned Czech characteristics. Both of them received Czech language courses, they are in a predominantly Czech environments in both professional and personal spheres, and by virtue of time have had experience that is specific to the Czech nation- such as the Velvet Revolution. Still, they do not see themselves as being Czech. They utilize these tools of Czech identity to interact with Czech

society, but intrinsically live within their ancestral cultural identity. Through language and Czech-specific experiences, the subjects move fluidly between both cultures and often appropriate Czech customs, events and views to fit into the Ethiopian framework.

Language used for Cultural Travel

For members of a diaspora, not having the knowledge of the host country's language will incline the individual to isolate his or herself from communication with the host country's society and increase the feelings of not belonging. The Ethiopian students, along with other international students, who migrated to Czechoslovakia in the 1980's, were required to attend a Czech language school prior to enrolling into their respective Czech universities. By attaining a certain level of Czech proficiency they were equipped with the fundamental tool to function academically, professionally and personally in the Czech environment.

Given that the number of Ethiopians studying in Czechoslovakia was miniscule, members of the Ethiopian community had no other choice but to utilize the Czech language as the means of communication with native Czechs, but also the other international students as well. Ethiopian students did not have a large enough community to separate themselves from Czech society, propelling them to integrate.

More than 25 years later, Shiferaw Demeke and Dr. Alemayehu Kumsa use Czech more than their native tongues (correspondingly Amharic and Oromo). However, when put in a scenario with other Ethiopians it is more likely that they will use at the least Amharic, which is the national language of Ethiopia, to communicate amongst themselves rather than the Czech language. This demonstrates the migrants' desire to connect back to the country of origin through the use of a native language.

A group of approximately nine Ethiopian migrants who currently reside in the Czech Republic and one Czech woman ate lunch at a traditional Czech restaurant to celebrate a young Ethiopians graduation from Charles University in November 2014. The Ethiopian migrants at the table were all speaking in Amharic. They broke out into Czech only when ordering food and sparingly to speak to the Czech woman that was in attendance of the celebration (Hernández, personal observation, November 24, 2014). They utilized the Czech language only to communicate what was necessary and then went back to Amharic- the language that connected them as Ethiopians. Going from speaking Amharic to Czech and back allowed the speakers to travel between two nations instantaneously. When speaking in Amharic it was as if the speakers had created an Ethiopian enclave within the Czech restaurant.

Also, there was a common occurrence between Demeke and Dr. Kumsa appropriating an alleged Czech phrase to describe their notions of home. Dr. Kumsa said, “The Czech people they do have a saying, ‘everywhere is good, the best is your home country.’ They say in their own language ‘Všude je dobře , že nejlepší je váš domov země’” (Hernández, personal communication, November 18, 2014). Similarly, Demeke responded to the same question with, “Everywhere is good, but home is home” (Hernández, personal communication, November 20, 2014). Both men have taken the alleged Czech phrase and used it to express their relationship to Ethiopia as home, not to identify the Czech Republic as being their home, even though they physically live here. Language creates a metaphysical space for Demeke and Dr. Kumsa to connect to territory that they value and binds the members of their community together. Even when speaking Czech they disassociate the Czech language with the territory and apply it to their homeland, connecting their current residential location to what they consider home.

1989 Velvet Revolution Brings No Hope for Ethiopia

Based on the 1995 National Survey questioning the Czech Republic's national identity, Alena Nedomová and Tomáš Kostecký concluded that "feeling Czech" was one of the most important indicators of identifying as Czech. According to the survey results, the prime factor contributing to the feeling of being Czech is the nation's history (1997). Shiferaw Demeke and Dr. Alemayehu were observers of the 1989 Velvet Revolution, which is arguably the most pivotal event in the Czech Republic's contemporary history. To different levels, both acknowledge the unique peacefulness of the revolution but it does not dispose them to identify as Czech.

"It was a problem I suppose one or three days, after that the communist they left" (Hernández, personal communication, November 20, 2014). Said Shiferaw Demeke. Demeke notes that there was not a strong opposition by the communist party to resign their power and thus concluding the revolution rapidly and calmly. While, the revolution lasted about a month and a half, Demeke reduced the conflict to a few days showing the little relevance it had to him and did not recall any event through out the revolution as particularly significant.

When asked why he did not participate he said, "You are a foreigner, you are guest, you have to keep quiet." Demeke did not participate in any of the demonstrations because this was not his fight, it was not his home, the Czechs are not his "people." Demeke continues, "Even now you have to be quiet and I have Czech nationality, but I can't do like Czech what they do. Just keep myself quiet [*sic*]" (Hernández, personal communication, November 20, 2014). Now, with a Czech citizenship Demeke still feels like a foreigner. The historical, political and social events that take place in the Czech Republic did not, and still do not appear to apply to him because he still feels as if he is a stranger in the Czech land and remains attached to Ethiopia.

Dr. Kumsa, on the other hand, is a lot more descriptive about the 1989 revolutionary events. He recalls a specific demonstration.

There was information that saying the tanks are coming to crush the demonstration. I ask my girlfriend at that time, now she is my wife. I said: 'what do you do if they crush you?' She say: 'they cannot crush all of us. If they kill me many of the people will demonstrate.' The unity of the people for me is very important. [sic] (Hernández, personal communication, November 18, 2014).

The unity he witnessed among the demonstrators was something he did not experience in Ethiopia where there is a history of violence among the ethnic tribes. For Dr. Kumsa the unity extends beyond the demonstrators, and on to all the people of the Czech nation. He compares the military of a single nation-state, like the Czech Republic, versus that of a multinational country, such as Ethiopia. "The soldiers count themselves as children of that nation. They don't use their army against their people." Dr. Kumsa drew an example in which 63 student demonstrators belonging to the Oromo nation in Ethiopia were killed by the government to demonstrate the distinction between the Czech and Ethiopian society (Oromos seek justice in Ethiopia, 2013). He perceives Czech society as unbelievably peaceful and Ethiopia as hopelessly violent.

Dr. Kumsa analyzes the Velvet Revolution to a greater extent because of his personal interest. But like Shiferaw Demeke, the happenings of the Velvet Revolution are not relevant to him as a citizen of the Czech Republic. He said, "It is my interest to study what they [Czechs] are practically doing and wishing if we can do it in Africa [sic]" (Hernández, personal communication, November 18, 2014). Dr. Kumsa admires the Czech technique of peaceful

political transformation but more importantly wants to apply it to Ethiopia and the entire African continent.

Dr. Barbara Půtová- professor at Charles University, Institute of Ethnology, theorizes, “Diaspora members feel collective responsibility for preserving or restoring their homeland, for it’s independence, safety and prosperity. They consider their ancestral home a place where they or their descendants will return one day.” Dr. Kumsa’s interest in the reformation of the political environment in Ethiopia shows that the he is still highly connected with his country of origin and idealizes returning upon the appropriate political change.

Shiferaw Demeke and Dr. Alemayehu Kumsa do not view the events of the Velvet Revolution to affecting them as naturalized Czech citizens, but Dr. Kumsa especially, views the events and results of the Velvet Revolution to be impossible for Ethiopia, and in effect remembering the struggle he shares with his Ethiopian peers.

Cultural identity is Home

The relationship between the conflict-generated diaspora and Ethiopia remains regardless of their critique towards the Ethiopian government. Dr. Barbara Půtová writes, “For victim diasporas their homeland is a territory with deep symbolic value” (2012, p.113). Their current physical home cannot eradicate the value of their homeland because it is composed of collective memories that are reenacted individually or in a community. The reenactment of these memories, whether linguistic, historical, religious or artistic is what brings life to the culture of the individual’s homeland. Therefore the homeland is equated with cultural identity.

Dr. Alemayehu Kumsa said, “I cannot identify myself with Ethiopia. [...] I identify myself with Oromo nation. I am part of that nation. It is given to me” (Hernández, personal

communication, November 18, 2014). Although at first this proclamation is surprising, it is necessary to note that Ethiopia, unlike the Czech Republic, is a multinational country and that each nation has a distinct culture. The country is territorially divided among ethnic borders facilitating the separation between nation and the state of Ethiopia. In addition, the Ethiopian government has a history of abusing the Oromo people, causing Dr. Kumsa to reject the Ethiopia government as opposed to Ethiopia as a territory, for the abuse inflicted on his Oromo brothers and sisters. Although Dr. Kumsa does not identify as Ethiopian he acknowledges that within Ethiopia there is a territorial space for Oromo in which he has created memories with his peers that keep him bound to that cultural identity. Also, Dr. Kumsa highlights the fact that being Oromo was bestowed upon him thus concluding that cultural identity is not chosen by the individual but ingrained in him or her.

Shiferaw Demeke upholds Ethiopia and says, “Ethiopia is like a religion for us. It stays inside of you. More than half of my life I live outside of Ethiopia, but always I am thinking inside of me it’s better there [*sic*].” Demeke is both Amhara and Oromo and does not separate both ethnicities but instead unites them under the multinational territory that is Ethiopia (Hernández, personal communication, November 20, 2014). Like Dr. Kumsa, Demeke agrees that cultural identity is inborn. To Demeke, Ethiopia is the territorial homeland in which he practiced hybrid traditions sacred to him, as noted by the metaphor of Ethiopia as a religion.

Continuing with the metaphor of cultural identity being a “religion,” religion can be performed intrinsically in any physical space. Now in the era of globalization, recreating these memories and traditions is facilitated through technology. Dr. Kumsa said,

We are what they call now worldly villages. These villages are interconnected. For example, when I read one news from BBC, or Al-Jazeera, or all African website, if it is interesting for Oromo I send it to our website [*sic*] (Hernández, personal communication, November 18, 2014).

Dr. Kumsa is a part of a transnational Oromo community that exists virtually. The interaction with this community keeps his cultural identity alive because they are discussing and participating in conversations linked to their homeland. When not communicating virtually, he keeps his cultural identity alive independently through music and the recollection of the Oromo struggle, history and personal narratives that occurred within Ethiopia's defined borders. "Only I am physically not in Ethiopia. I am sitting and I am reading my book and I am listening Oromo music from Internet [*sic*]" (Hernández, personal communication, November 18, 2014). Says Dr. Kumsa, depicting an example of while he resides in the Czech Republic, intrinsically he is in Ethiopia.

While there is a greater Ethiopian diaspora existing virtually, there is a small physical community in the Czech Republic that enables members of the Ethiopian diaspora to recreate their cultural traditions in the physical world. Shiferaw Demeke says that they gather occasionally for special events like Christmas, Ethiopian New Years and Easter. Hana Šobáňová supports the latter statement through her research findings and adds that she found the Ethiopian community to come together with soccer and celebrations like birthdays and graduations (Hernández, personal communications, November 27, 2014). When this diaspora community is together it is as if an Ethiopian village was placed within the Czech Republic because they formed a physical space in which they enacted cultural components that are specific to Ethiopia

or its ethnic tribes. This was evident in Nika's graduation where they recreated Ethiopia linguistically with Amharic (Hernández, personal observation, November 24, 2014).

Both Dr. Alemayehu Kumsa and Shiferaw Demeke have Czech citizenships, however it is meaningless to their cultural identity. "For me this is only paper" (Hernández, personal communication, November 20, 2014), remarks Demeke. Hana Šobánová says that she believes the only reason Ethiopian migrants in the Czech Republic apply for Czech citizenship is because it makes it easier for them to live in the Czech Republic but it does not change their identity (Hernández, personal communication, November 27, 2014). Moreover, the majority of native Czechs also regard citizenship as being of lesser importance in composing one's Czech identity. For decades being a Czech citizen was intertwined with Czech nationality because it was a highly homogenous and closed society (Nedomová & Kostelecký, 1997), but now with the presence of migrants living in the Czech Republic, Czech citizenship does not validate Czech citizenship. For example, when "the Czech people" ask Dr. Kumsa where he is from he jokes with them.

'I am from Czech Republic.' And they are looking at me, 'Your origin.' 'Well I am living in Morojani,' a part of Prague. 'I am from Morojani.' They say: 'No, your origin!' I say: 'Do you want to see my identity card? I will show you' (Hernández, personal communications, November 20, 2014).

Czechs do not accept Dr. Kumsa for being a Czech citizen because they are use to foreseeing Czech citizens as being ethnically Czech. The incredulity of native Czechs to accept members of the Ethiopian diaspora as Czech does not offend neither Demeke nor Dr. Kumsa because they

acknowledge that while their physical home at the moment is in the Czech Republic, their cultural identity and internal home is found within the territory known as Ethiopia.

Concluding Notes

As nations engage in domestic and international battles and neglect human rights, conflict-driven diasporas flourish in remote corners of the world longing to return to an improved country that they still classify as home. Contrary to popular belief that the era of globalization has prompted individuals to disengage themselves from cultural identities constructed by spatial proximities, migrants who have been displaced from their ancestral country involuntarily use the technology and community that is readily available to connect back to the home that was left behind. Through the constant connection, members of conflict-driven diasporas are able to retain and amplify their cultural identity within the host country.

The Czech Republic, and Europe at a much larger scale is experiencing an influx of migrants coming from the Middle East, Asia and Africa, and is experiencing difficulty developing multicultural countries that for centuries were dominantly comprised of single nations. While some countries have a history of colonialism- imposing assimilation upon the minority, in the current era of technology full assimilation is not possible. It is necessary to learn how to deal with distinct cultures cohabiting a single country and not let the differences lead to policing of individuals based on physical or cultural difference. Instead it is necessary to utilize the cultural differences for development of the host country and that of the nation-state confined to conflict.

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