

RESEARCH ARTICLE

INTEGRATION DILEMMAS FACED BY ETHIOPIAN IMMIGRANTS IN TORONTO, CANADA

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the difficulties that the Ethiopian immigrants encounter in their attempts to adapt to the Canadian society during the last twenty years. Although the journey of these immigrants seemed adventurous, the completion of their journey was strained by the collision of despair against optimism. Their rosy settlement ventures were dreadfully marred as their hopes were unexpectedly displaced by anguish and frustration. Prevailing social realities curbed their ability to define their identities and eroded their talent in negotiating power relationships. Settling in Toronto came with certain level of disempowering and unsettled blights generated by social and economic despondency but it also has served forced migrants to temporarily feel relieved. Nevertheless, unemployment and low economic status of Ethiopian immigrants has restricted their freedom and compelled them to regularly drift rather than integrating. Consequently, the migratory blushing scenario with its magnetic power has failed these immigrants at their destinations. The loss of social and unique cultural capital as well as the incompatibility of their human capital with that of the host society has triggered the perpetual frustration of their aspirations. The deferred ambitions have strongly affected their emotional well-being in every nook and cranny of Toronto. However, Ethiopian immigrants were not passive spectators of their own plights but they remained active respondents to situations. Hence, they created mahibers, edirs and ekubs in order to overcome despondencies they encountered year after year.

Keywords: Toronto, migration, capitals, identity, community, Ethiopian diaspora, edir, mahiber, ekub.

THE ETHIOPIAN COMMUNITY IN TORONTO

Back in the early 1970s Ethiopia was highly affected by devastating famines, skyrocketing oil prices and huge inflation, which caused massive up-roars. Consequently, the popularity of the late Emperor Hayle Sillase I dwindled and uncontrollable popular pursuing precipitated his downfall (Legum, 1975). The riots led to the deposing of the emperor and exacerbated a high volume of emigration. During the Derg regime (1974-1991), which put into action a regime of military rule all over the country, further migration waves ensued.

According to the World Refugee Survey (1993), in 1993 there were 230,000 Ethiopian refugees in Sudan, Kenya and Djibouti. Many of these refugees got resettlement opportunities in Canada and most of them flocked to Toronto as the preferred destination. Their choice was not at random as To-

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ronto had become one of the preferred destinations for world migrants. Thus, out of 250,000 immigrants that Canada admitted in 2001, 125,062 of them settled in Toronto while only 44 immigrants settled in New Found Land in the same year (Statistics Canada, 2011). It is due to its tolerant social milieu that Toronto hosted the largest number of Ethiopian immigrants. Ethiopians moved to Toronto from regions hit by economic recession, places that host rampant discrimination and a society that does not have appetite for diversity. Hence, in the eyes of the unemployed and discriminated Ethiopians, Toronto, with a high concentration of compatriots was a sanctuary and an ideal place to live.

Currently there are 45,000 to 50,000 Ethiopian immigrants in Toronto and in its vicinity (Fenta, Hyman, Rourke, Moon & Noh, 2010). These immigrants and refugees came under family reunion and convention refugees classes—hence some were forced emigrants while others were those who left Ethiopia voluntarily. Some of these immigrants have come via Europe, Middle East, and Africa. Others have come through other Canadian provinces and cities (Taa, 2003). Again, many others have come from USA—especially after September 11, 2001.

A large number of Ethiopian immigrants in Toronto suffer from lack of employment, shortage of affordable housing and subtle discriminations. As a result, they cannot fulfil their social obligations such as sending money to their families back home. The ensued frustration led to desperation and five people committed suicide only within seven months in the 1990s (Mequanent, 1994). These people died either by drowning in Lake Ontario or throwing themselves before the Toronto subway trains. Existing Canadian institutions could not mitigate the social woes from which the Ethiopian community has suffered, and is still suffering (Gupta, 1996). Accordingly, Ethiopian immigrants ventured to mediate the stressors by forming traditional, religious and community organizations. As the list of the organizations that were created is too long, this study focuses only on organizations that are relevant in mass mobilization and participation.

The purpose of this paper is to critically reassess the—oftentimes too rosy—picture painted by consultants about the splendour of migration. It is the belief of the author that migration should not be always wholeheartedly embraced. Indeed, those who migrate out of fear of persecution shall be encouraged and given support. Yet, the author is also persuaded that those who leave the country for economic reasons should strive to improve their livelihoods by staying in their home countries. No dream land can fare better than the land where one's biblical cord is cut and buried. In this paper it is suggested that leaving one's own country with the wish of attaining a better life somewhere else is not always viable. Among the questions that have been adequately addressed are: What are the obstacles to integration? In what ways have Ethiopian immigrants attempted to overcome the problems? How have they used their indigenous organizations in order to ameliorate their lives in Toronto?

In developing this analysis, the study conducted on the integration *Experience of the Ethiopian Community of Toronto* in 2011 is widely utilized. While

the original mixed method study of the 2011 was huge in size—consisting over five hundred variables, this study picked forty variables amenable for this qualitative reanalysis. Although detailed outlining of the variables that are reanalysed is beyond the scope of this paper, all the variables selected for secondary analysis were very central to the issues of immigrants' integration, indigenous mode of thoughts, informal and informal organizations in solving social problems. The relevance of the variables to triggering or inhibiting discrimination, prejudice as well as their importance for networking purposes was appropriately determined—to the satisfaction of the principles of secondary analysis. All the variables used are broadened through the use of archives, documents and the bylaw of the community associations. Hence, this study is totally based on secondary mode of qualitative inquiry. Moreover, the author was the chair of the board of directors of the Ethiopian community association for over ten years in Toronto. Therefore, the personal insights and cumulative experience alongside his tacit knowledge have played a prominent role in widely articulating the study.

THE ETHIOPIAN ASSOCIATIONS IN THE GREATER TORONTO AREA

Several associations have been established in the Greater Toronto Area to provide different services to the Ethiopians living there. The chief one is the Ethiopian Association in the Greater Toronto Area, which was established in 1980 and it obtained legal personality in 1981 (Ethiopian Association Bylaw, 2009). The association is the strongest of all organizations that help other organizations to flourish and thrive. The current focus of the association is to develop and execute health promotion, provision of affordable housing, and facilitating eased settlement process for newcomers (Bretell, 2000). The association has created senior clubs to overcome loneliness, isolation, and home sickness. In addition, the creation of a youth association proved important to educate about the dangers arising from subsistence abuse, violence and HIV/AIDS spread (Taa, 2009). This association is respected by all religious, ethnic, age and gender groups for equally providing employment, housing, and settlement services for all.

As any other community, the Ethiopian community has internal divisions emanated from ethnicity, politics, and gender. Thus, for instance, the biggest ethnic groups of Ethiopia such as Amhara, Oromo, and Tigray have instituted ethnic organizations that play a divisive and diversionary role from the major Ethiopian community interests. The small ethnic groups such as Harare have also created their own ethnic enclaves. Conversely, other small ethnic groups such as the Gurage have chosen to abolish their ethnic organization. By abolishing their organization, the Gurage gave their property with \$10,000 to the Ethiopian Association in the spirit of unity (Ethiopian Association, 2003). Gender is another social marker in dividing and defining the community. Gender differences are visible even in the tempo of integration (Hymen, Tefera & Tizazu, 2008). Ethiopian immigrant women are willing to start schooling from low level, take entry level jobs, socialize with the mainstream society and face less discrimination. Conversely, immigrant Ethiopian men are slower in integration because the dual household administration has taken away their domestic power and forced them to negotiate with their female counterparts (Taa, 2003). Men

enjoyed of superior social positions in Ethiopia and therefore do not want to start jobs from entry level as doing so is considered as complete failure. Therefore, there are criss-crossing of status between male and female, triggering domestic conflicts. Disagreements, separation, and divorces caused stressful situation in their lives. These stressors were reinforced by the lack of employment and the unacceptability of their social/cultural capitals (Kibour, 2006).

UNEMPLOYMENT/UNDEREMPLOYMENT

Many Ethiopian immigrants in Toronto are de-classified and forced to exist without any job (Ben-Sira, 1997). There is a high level of poverty among newcomers to Canada and the Ethiopian case is not an exception. Poverty among newcomers contributes to mental health risks in Canada (Darwish, Joung, Verhulst, Mackenbach & Rijmen, 2004). One in five recent immigrants of working age was living in poverty compared to one in ten other Canadians in 2004 (Fleury, 2007). Even those immigrants who manage to find work are underpaid and underemployed (Statistics Canada, 2011). This scenario unendingly forced immigrants to concentrate in poor neighbourhoods—whose inhabitants have been marginalized and bound to adopt referent groups from an adversarial subculture rather than taking on mainstream values and skills relevant to eventual civic participation (Kasinitiz et al., 2008).

All employed people are expected to meet their peers, upgrade their skills, and strike new relationships at workplaces. They also have the chance to ameliorate their cultural capital through communicative interactions (Wilson-Folsberg, 2015). Yet, many newcomers are denied the opportunity to enter the workforce for various reasons. The problems of unemployment, underemployment, and poverty persisted infinitely bleeding the Ethiopian community. Matsuoka and Sorenson (2001) argued that whereas some Ethiopian immigrants were selected to come to Canada for their education, experience, and qualification and they were nonetheless unable to practice their professions. Their knowledge, which was recognized for the purpose of immigration, was devalued in the process of integration. Ornstein (2000) revealed that seventy percent of Ethiopian immigrants were either unemployed or underemployed. Neuwrith (1989) tried to justify this unemployment by labelling Ethiopian immigrants as backward whose knowledge and experience are incompatible with the needs of the labour market. Neuwrith argued that most of these immigrants were unable to meet occupational entry requirements due to an inadequate command of English or French. Conversely, Beyene (2000) explained that the Ethiopian immigrants suffered from lack of employment due to structural barriers created by hiring policies. Beyene also advanced that the devaluation of their knowledge rather than the lack of knowledge was the main culprit in their unemployment. This author concludes that the Canadian labour market neither recognizes their credentials nor accepts their innate abilities. Similarly, Yang (2000) argued that the shift from goods to service-producing industries, the increasing segmentation of the labour market, the growth of industrial technology, and the relocation of industries out of Canada made immigrants' prior knowledge useless. Various scholars have tried to explain the

reasons for the immigrants' joblessness as lack of pertinent credential, inadequate command of English and lack of Canadian experience. Improving their social, cultural, and human capital as well as job search techniques are said to be crucial factors to integrate into the Canadian workforce. However, ameliorating their skills and qualification could not land them in jobs. Hence, it is necessary to discuss certain problems relevant to the Ethiopian community in Toronto.

THE PROBLEM OF ACCENT AND THE ROLE OF RESUME

Having thick accent and the inability to write resume are triggered by various factors such as lack of human, cultural and social capital. Human capital is a collection of various resources that aid to systematically accomplish the given tasks. It requires knowledge, talents, skills, abilities, experience, intelligence, training, judgment, and wisdom possessed individually and collectively. Human capital is consistently criticized in several ways. Michael Spence (1973 and 2002) emphatically presented the signaling theory as an alternative to human capital. Also, Pierre Bourdieu (1986) proposed a conceptual alternative to human capital that included cultural capital, social capital, economic capital, and symbolic capital. These critiques emphasized that human capital is a reified concept with no descriptive clout. Many other theorists (Magrassi, 2002; Syeily, 1997) tried to break down human capital into various components for analysis by referring to it as intangibles.

The Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) encouraged governments to embrace policies that help innovation, knowledge production and proper services allocations as a path to prosperity. In recent times, most international policies have commenced to tackle human capital flight to reduce the loss of trained persons from a country that invested in them (Brain, 2007). It is possible to conclude that human capital is the product of schooling to acquire disciplinary knowledge with the objective of gaining valuable returns. In the case of the Ethiopian community, education has not yet assisted well-educated immigrants to realize their aspirations. The return from education and experience is not readily forthcoming. Many newcomers have attended Canadian higher education to acquire knowledge and skills that are needed in the labour market but could not secure jobs. The lack of job had emanated from the lack of relevant social and cultural capital. However, not finding jobs after acquiring social and cultural capital makes the argument for the development of human capital meaningless.

In effect, the return from education declines as the investment in education rises, contradicting the assumption of human capital theory. Hence, human capital theory equates the amount of schooling with economic gains—arguing that more schooling leads to higher productivity, and higher productivity leads to individual success (Becker, 1964). However, only under very specific situations do education and success coincide. The gaining of knowledge itself does not guarantee the acquisition of a job and the ability to gain human capital and the inability to reap its rewards force newcomers to Toronto retreat to their indigenous camps that serve them as sanctuary.

By going to schools and obtaining degrees after degrees, immigrants exacerbated the pre-existing credential inflation in Toronto. Therefore, contrary to human capital theory, collective investment in education constantly increases, while compensations for works that are done regularly decrease. Given these complexities, the Ethiopian immigrants are not only low paid but also forced to dangle without any prospect for jobs.

In recent times, social assistance in Toronto has become tied to work and training. However, welfare payments are not an equivalent compensation for the work people do in the name of workfare. Nonetheless, workfare combines two mutually incompatible objectives: (a) deterrence—making recipients work at jobs that are difficult, stigmatized, and low paid in order to discourage them from choosing welfare over work; and (b) educative—to teach skills, attitudes and inculcate self-esteem (Gewirth, 1996). The latter objective is thwarted by the stereotype that regards work as a deterrent—work as punishment not as reward. Thus, the attempt to develop human capital through workfare does not equip immigrants with relevant host-knowledge

In terms of resume, Ethiopians did not have much acquaintance with it. They are state-led people in all aspects of their lives and the government is still the biggest employer. Until recently, graduating students did not have to write résumés or attend interviews. Therefore, there is a procedural difference between what Ethiopian immigrants know about job search and what they are expected to do in Canada. In Ethiopia, people used to go to school just to become clerks, teachers, or pilots. Very few people aspire to work in more than one field. Also, Ethiopians do not know much about résumé and they tend to pay for someone to write their own résumé upon arrival. However, the problems of résumés prepared by professional writers are that writers use host language that goes beyond the capacities of immigrants to comprehend. When taking their résumés to employers, immigrants cannot explain the content of their résumés (Taa, 2003). Such problems arise from miscommunication between professional writers and service seekers who do not contribute important ideas to résumé writing. Also, the notion of résumés contradicts the beliefs of Ethiopian immigrants. Deeply-rooted cultural norms compel many Ethiopians not to talk about themselves to other people but to expect others to talk about them—talking about one's own accomplishments is considered boasting. Besides, some community members consider the whole exercise of résumé writing inappropriate, because people provide inaccurate information in order to obtain jobs. Consequently, people who honestly provide accurate work experience remain jobless.

In addition, many Ethiopians are shy and rarely exhibit their desires, feelings and motives in public. The courage of advocating one's point of view for personal gain is contrary to most Ethiopians' beliefs. Many of these immigrants choose to listen instead of speaking in strange environments. These taboos slow down the speed of their participation in the mainstream labour market. Yet, an acute deterrence to their integration is the lack of employment that made them professional job seekers. As looking for job in the sluggish labour market becomes useless, they return to their roots. The

re-identification process transpires through forming or joining existing formal/informal Ethiopian institutions.

One of the reasons for their inability to write proper resume is a lack of compatible cultural capital with the Canadian society. The concept of cultural capital originated in the work of Pierre Bourdieu (1979) who defined it as high cultural knowledge that ultimately rebounds to the owner's financial and social advantage. In some cases, cultural capital is prohibitively inconvenient and invisible to tangibly acquire. Most people normally gain cultural capital informally after growing to maturity in a given socioeconomic households/life-span.

Cultural capital can only be acquired by a long-term occupancy on a given space and extensive acquaintance with people and entities at a given location. Ethiopia did not have cultural ties with Canada and thus the incongruence between both the Ethiopian and Canadian culture is justifiable. Bourdieu and Passeron (1979) argued that the cultural codes and cultural capital of some groups lead to success while the cultural incompatibility of others leads to failure. These theorists argue for cultural reproduction to the extent of fixed destiny. Both theorists emphasized culture as static and cultural capital as inherited not learned. They denigrated the modern contours of the knowledge society and the ability of newcomers to learn and adapt to changing social realities. In sharp contrast, immigrants are quick learners who acquire knowledge that enables them to translate their ambitions into reality (Basran, 1998). Nonetheless, the host society could not furnish immigrants with quality relationship in order to realize their aspiration. In fact, not all immigrants are blindly imprisoned by their own cultures but are ready to learn and adopt whenever suitable situations are available.

Most of the properties of cultural capital can be deduced from the fact that, in its fundamental state, it is linked to the body and presupposes embodiment. Bourdieu, (1986) argued that the accumulation of capital is an embodied state in the form of cultivation. The transmission of cultural capital is significantly different from the transmission of economic capital. The transmission operates as a mechanism of social reproduction primarily within the family in both cases. While the transmission of economic capital can be affected through gifts or bequests, the transmission of cultural capital passes through the processes of socialization (Bourdieu 1973). Thus, the transmission of cultural capital takes longer time and language is the pivotal instrument in cultural capital. Bourdieu (1991) argued that linguistic capital serves as a system of sanction and censorship. Here, linguistic capital refers to a capacity to adequately use language with the appropriate vocabulary and proper pauses during conversation. Thus, low-level linguistic capital undoubtedly leads to low-paying jobs. Those with low-level cultural capital may not only fall into low-paying jobs but they may also remain in low paying jobs without promotions if they are lucky enough to get jobs. It seems that most of the Ethiopian immigrants are incessantly trapped and remain at the initial stage of the social ladder remaining either unemployed or underemployed.

Having thick accent deterred smooth integration of the Ethiopian immigrants. The perception of accents involves the categorization of speakers into social groups, entailing judgments about the status and personality of the speakers (Dailey, Giles & Jansma 2005; Ross, 1954). Recent research has investigated the effects of accent on account of eyewitness memory but based on what a person heard rather than saw. The study showed that ear-witnesses were more likely to mistake offenders with a different accent than their own-accent, and that their judgments were less accurate in reporting other-accent offenders compared to those with their own-accent (Stevenage, Clarke, McNeill, 2012). Also, research focusing on the development of ones' own-accent bias in infants and children has shown that both infants and children are unable to differentiate between foreign and native accents (Floccia, Butler, Girard & Goslin, 2009; Girard, Floccia & Goslin, 2008).

Everyone speaks with an accent and accent is the unique way that speech is pronounced. A person's accent depends on many factors and accents are thus usually grouped in three ways. First, regional accent: this is the accent of specific region in a given country. For example, people living in Northern Gondar have different accent from those living in Shoa. Second, foreign accent: this is the accent of different nationalities and it can reflect international boundaries. For example, people raised up speaking Amharic definitely sound different from those raised up speaking English. Third, homogenously qualified accent: this is the language spoken by people of the same phonocentric utterance. For example, English people in the British Islands speak with the same accent and tone.

Derrida (cited in West, 1996) claims that speech (phonocentrism) is a more transparent medium of thought than writing. An accent is a form of local capital that serves as a means of categorizing people into groups. For this reason, many employers think that language is primarily a tool of communication rather than cognition (Binswanger & Peikoff, 1990). The English language has many colours and these colours are mediated by accent. An accent also serves to exclude or include people in participation and socialization. Those people whose accents are deemed different from the mainstream can be labelled as 'others.' Amin (2000) argues that mainstream Canadian labour markets consider "accentified English as substandard English". However, when employers turn down applicants, they refer to immigrants' lack of working knowledge in order to justify their refusals. Also, Lippi-Green, (1997) argued that native English speakers consider that accentified speech destroys the elegance and prestige of the language. They accuse accentuated English of being incommunicable by making thoughts unintelligible. At present, accents have become primary gate-keeping tools in the areas of employment, socialization and integration. Hence, immigrants who acquire knowledge compatible with the Canadian labour markets may not be employed, due to their varying accents.

As fear of discrimination mounts, some Ethiopian immigrants joined accent reduction classes to win acceptance. Nonetheless, they could not even partially mitigate their thick accents. Even if they could have managed to completely eliminate their accent, discrimination might not disappear and their attempts would have remained futile. Instead of learning basic grammar

and pronunciation, they tended to contract English language in order to copy the mainstream accent. However, these immigrants should have focused on the most fundamental elements of English language that could have assisted them to successfully integrate into the host society. In fact, the posturing of de-accentification was forced upon them by labour markets that prefer local accents. Preying on insecurities of non-native speakers and their wishes to fit in, the accent-elimination business promised that immigrants can increase intelligibility, gain confidence, eliminate barriers and even improve professional image through accent reduction therapy and speech pathology. However, the “de-accentification” classes added nothing rather than robbing destitute immigrants. Many employers missed the crucial point that human intelligence grows not by the way people speak but by the way they think. In the eyes of some employers, language is not only the medium of communication for relaying contents but rather it is itself a value laden content for promoting communal loyalties (Coetzee, 1998).

All these problems emanated from the immigrant’s lack of compatible social capital. Social capitals are born out of interactions, networking and socializations. The term social capital emphasizes not just warm and cuddly feelings, but a wide variety of quite specific benefits that flow from trust, reciprocity, and cooperation associated with social networks. In order to create value for the people who are connected (Potapchuk, Crocker & Schechter, 1997). Correlates of high levels of social capital include education (Smith, Beaulieu & Seraphine, 1995; Teachman, Paasch & Carver, 1996), health (Smith, 1997), confidence in political institutions (Brehm & Rahn, 1997), and satisfaction with government (Putnam, 1993). Mentoring, networking, and mutual support associated with high levels of social capital are partial causes of success in education (Coleman, 1988; Loury, 1977). Various mutual supports also are associated with self-reliant economic development without need for government intervention (Fukuyama, 1995; Putnam, 1993). Therefore, social capital refers to the collective value of all “social networks” [who people know] and the inclinations that arise from these networks to do things for each other [“norms of reciprocity”]. A norm of a culture high in social capital is reciprocity because it encourages bargaining, compromise, and pluralistic politics. Another norm in social capital is a belief in the equality of citizens, which promotes the formation of cross-cutting groups. The members of the Ethiopian community could not attain adequate social capital upon arrival at their destination because they did not have networking experience. At the time of their arrival in Toronto, Canada provided them with necessary materials in the first euphoric months. However, social capital was not one of those materials because it is something to be earned not given.

Balantti and Falk (2002) argued that social capital theory emerged in the late twentieth century. Fundamental to this theory is the proposition that relationships are resources that can facilitate access to vital resources. Similarly, Faist (2000) argued that social capital is tied to interests, norms, and expressions that are contained in a web of varying knowledge. Therefore, social capital does not refer to material in the hands of individuals, but, rather, to the quality of relationships experienced by these individuals. The process of sharing social capital permits the establishment of trust

among individuals. Mostly, the Ethiopian immigrants do not openly express their feelings and are not assertive enough although they know more than they express. They remain silent—the silence that leads to disconnection with the larger society. Such disconnection deters the development of social capital—that can only be produced through purposeful and goal oriented participation. Moreover, the process of moving out of the country, separating from family, and coming to Canada has created loneliness and nomadism in the minds of many Ethiopian immigrants. Ironically, some of the loneliest individuals are surrounded by people most of the days. Thus, loneliness is not about a lack of relationships and interactions but rather it is about the lack of quality interactions (Burger 2004) and loneliness occurs when the relationship is less satisfying. Those lonely people also evaluate themselves negatively to the extent of eroding their own self-confidence. The lack of high self-esteem triggers anxiety, anger, and frustration. Thus, members of the Ethiopian community could not foster communicative, interactive, and durable relationships that are out-bounded towards the host society.

Although many acute problems emanate from the lack of useful networking, establishing credible network is extremely laborious for Ethiopian immigrants who have no deep connection with people in the city. Also, some of the Ethiopian immigrants consider networking as nepotism, being sceptical of its relevance. Conversely, according to Aristotle, human being is a social being who is “by nature an animal intended to live in *polis*” (cited in Backer, 1950). Here, networking doctrine exhibits the impossibility for individuals to live in isolation. Networking involves appreciating one another’s views and making decisions on the basis of acquired information. Many Ethiopians who have come to Canada with the support of their networks reasonably pass through transition, which is not the case with those who cannot rely on networks.

FORMAL AND INFORMAL NETWORKS OF ETHIOPIANS IN TORONTO

Religious organizations

There are several Ethiopian religious institutions in Toronto: four Orthodox Christian churches, four Evangelical churches, one Catholic Church, and one mosque. Each of them has thousands of congregants that receive services. Out of the Orthodox churches, the Medihanaalem Church is created and administered by Rastafarians—followers of Emperor Hayle Sillase. These are Jamaicans, Ethiopians or Canadians who believe that Ethiopia is their country and thus Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity is their true religion. All of the Ethiopian churches/mosques conduct individual counselling.

All religious institutions carry social and moral responsibility to support people in time of loss and gain. The churches and mosques are well versed in order to accomplish their humane mission to serve without discrimination. These religious institutions are cornerstones of unity within the Ethiopian community (Ayele, 1998). Also, many of the churches play vital role of alleviating poverty by passing necessary and timely information to Canadian decision-makers. Specifically, churches organize indigenous networks

that involve in employment assistance. These networks rely on dedicated volunteers, who incessantly search for jobs in order to help friends. The primary focus of volunteering is to promote charity work—work whose reward is social prestige and respect. Besides, these religious organizations have an internal capacity to mobilize communities toward employment (Channell, 2000). Alongside economic motives, religious affiliation offers a sense of security, peace of mind and interpersonal gratification during periods of uncertainty and stress (Scott, Scott & Stumpf, 1989). For this reason, Ethiopian Orthodox Christians tend to score higher in psychiatric symptoms than non-Coptic Christians (Noh, Hyman & Fenta, 2001).

Informal organizations

No adequate attention is paid to informal networks of resources exchange and support groups in immigrant/refugee studies (Beiser, et al., 2012). Most of the literatures focus on government and NGO sectors. Informal organizations such as the one found in the Ethiopian community in Toronto are considered “backward and unproductive.” Perceptions and attitudes held by officials about these organizations have always led policy makers to underestimate the viability of grass-root organizations. These informal organizations consist of people who share the same sentiments and perspectives on the basis of common national origin, friendships and family ties. Among the Ethiopian community in Toronto ‘informal’ organizations such as *mahiber*, *edir* and *ekub* play an important role.

Epidemiological study (Noh, Hymean & Fenta, 2001) conducted on the Ethiopian Community in Toronto showed that the extent of estimated lifetime prevalence of depression to be 9.8%. This is three times higher than the rate estimated for southern Ethiopia (Awas, Kebede & Alem, 1999). All researchers were concerned about the impact of post-migration changes on Ethiopian couples and agreed that there was a definite role for community and religious institutions to prevent marital conflict. Moreover, researches on the preadolescent Ethiopians in Toronto reported more internalizing problems than did their counterparts in Ethiopia (Beiser et al., 2012) because they do not possess sufficient resources that enable them to gain quality networks. Many informal organizations such as *mahiber* and *equb* not only provide mutual aid but also enable immigrants to reassert their identities.

Mahiber can be defined as an association of people with common social, cultural, psychological, and religious interests. In the words of Tadesse Tamrat (1972), *mahiber* is a deep-seated social fabric that cherishes peace, unity, and solidarity. Although the Ethiopian culture entertains various kinds of *mahiber*, this paper only focuses on religious *mahiber* that has strong roots in Toronto. The members of *mahiber* can extend from ten to twelve; elect a *muse* who acts as a chairperson. The name *muse* came from a biblical story related to Moses, who led Jewish people to overcome miseries with the help of God. Thus, the *muse* is expected to deliver, like Moses. However, the practical function of the *muse* cannot go beyond leading prayers, arousing traditional Ethiopian sentiments and resolving disputes between members. Thus, *mahiber* operates within the Ethiopian religious spirit relying on orality (Mequanent, 1994). These *mahibers* are social com-

munions established in the name of multitude of angels/saints. These associations have social, ritual and spiritual purposes; they bring people from every ethnic group and socioeconomic status together for festivities and prayers. Members take turns preparing food every month in the name of the angel under whose name the *mahiber* is organized. The drinks prepared for such occasions are called *tsiwa* (holy); the *tsiwa* rotate from one house to another every month (Sable Selassie, 1972). *Mahiber* is also a social setting in which members exchange memorable and educative stories from the past. During the gatherings, members resolve riddles that demand intricate thinking. At other times, they discuss nature, states, societies, and environments. Thus, this association has epistemological relevance beyond emotional and psychological companionship. The members of *mahiber* support those who lag behind the group in social, economic, and educational fields (Taa, 2009). This organization mediates the past and the present of its members in multicultural Toronto. *Mahiber* serves to strengthen their spirituality and indigenouness to fill the voids left by Canadian institutions.

As discussed by Levine (1965) *edir* is a social organization by which people support each other in time of social crises. *Edir* can only be established on good social relationships; it takes responsibility for burying the dead, helping the sick and providing financial support for grieving families. During losses in families, members console each other by providing foods, cleaning houses, announcing losses, and hosting guests that come to pay tribute to the deceased person (Hibret Edir, 2013). Members depend on each other in times of thick and thin. For this reason, some Ethiopian immigrants do not want to engage with insurance companies because companies do not pay attentions to humane activities such as burying the dead or consoling grieving families. Some insurance companies even do not pay the money on the basis of enrolment agreements. People create *edir* to deter strains caused by insurance companies during loses in families. Hence, *edir* is a psychological safety net to uplift the morality of the members (Taa, 2009). The bylaws of *edirs* are based on morality and ethical code of conduct than legality. Because it is a voluntary self help association, the members emphasize morality. Nonetheless, the members are obliged to observe legality, equity, and dignity. Thus, *edir* is inclusive and it does not operate on ethnic, religious, or gender basis.

Ekub is a semi-formal organization that is created for mutual benefits in order to avert financial crises. As an informal social institution, whose formation depends on financial situation of its members, it is highly immersed in trust and cooperation. People establish *ekub* and contribute money to assist each other for marriage, buying house, defending lawsuits, and other important social matters. *Ekub* can be taken either on the basis of needs or *ita* (lottery). For some, it is the forced saving that cannot be withdrawn at ease. Moreover, *ekub* as an organization has elected leaders that are referred to as judge, secretary and vice secretary. These officials are people who have traditional knowledge that enables them to plan the overall functioning of *ekubs*. All *ekub* have rules prescribing that members bring designated amounts of money each week/month in order to contribute to the *ita*. The names or identification numbers of members are placed in a hat or a

pan to be randomly drawn, usually by children or a blindfolded person. After the draw, the money is immediately paid to the winner. Thus, *ekub* can be considered an association that gives loans without interest. If any member has a problem, he or she can report to the judge in order to take money allotted to the *ita* without a formal draw.

The leaders have certain latitude to privately and collectively discuss needs with members and give the *ita* to a person who is facing serious problems. However, the judge cannot simply disburse the money without the consent of the general assembly. If there are enough votes to block giving the *ita* without a formal draw, the person with a problem has a chance to buy the *ita* from the one who wins it. Or, if the one who wins has also a problem, both the members with problem can share the prize. However, if leaders suspect that an individual will default or run away after taking the *ita*, they may force such a person to take it at the end of the round (Mequanent, 1994). This happens because there is a problem of enforcing *ita* rules in Toronto. One form of disciplining members is threatening them with social exclusion and informing their families back home in Ethiopia about their misconducts.

Although people do not carry much cash, *ekub* mostly functions with cash. The taxi drivers extensively utilize these informal social facilities because their job permits them to hold cash every week. Thus, the Canadian monetary habits pose a constraint on the expansion of *ekub*. If participants want to expand their *ekubs*, they will be compelled to utilize cheques than cash. The utilization of cheque transactions may modernize the structures and personalities of the *ekub*. If cheques are introduced, *ekub* leaders have to be people with competence of accounting systems in order to deal with banks. While *ekub* members vow to maintain their indigenous knowledge, the attempt to introduce the use of cheques over cash lands *ekub* in the milieu of Western knowledge – the knowledge that eventually erodes *ekub*'s originality. Most members of *ekub* are frustrated and overstressed by the constant encroachments of checking system on their traditional system. All these challenges expose them to multiple predicaments, affecting members of all ages, socioeconomic and educational levels. These pressures and the depression that often they induce become like the "common cold" for immigrants. Both depression and addiction, therefore, are factors that contribute to the overall problem of intimate partner violence (Kibour, 2006).

Mahiber, edir and ekub are coping mechanisms that bolster informal learning and exchange of ideas. This learning improves qualifications, skills and social knowledge of the community. In reality, informal learning can be accidentally imitated or deliberately designed. This informal learning is too cumbersome to distinguish and measure compared to formal programs. Nonetheless, informal learning will continue to be cherished by some sectors of the society as article of faith.

CONCLUSION

Ethiopian immigrants have come to Canada with clean heart, clear objectives and honesty, embracing Canada with both arms. However, the diffi-

culties they face, the hardships they endure and the constant struggle they encounter make them permanent pariahs and inefficient nomads. The lack of stable outlook, unreliable economic resources, an endless defence of their identity and the unholy decisions of some employers, further push these immigrants back to their roots. Consequently, these immigrants form *mahiber*, *edir* and *ekub* that enabled them to reconstruct the weakened relationships in order to promote their cultural values through the expression of primordial sentiments. Ethiopian immigrants want to stick together as much by choice as not less by force of repulsion from the mainstream society. Integration to the Canadian society has never been easy and the community is totally reeling to meet the end on a daily basis. As a result, the Ethiopian immigrants to Canada have developed the tendency of cohabiting with the mainstream society rather than integrating into it. Thus, integration can only flourish with respect, openness, acceptance, and reciprocal understanding from both sides.

Most of the Ethiopian immigrants are surely unable to deeply reconfigure the imprints of their own footsteps due to messy realities that escorted them upon arrival in Canada. Their inability was condensed into the fear of the unknown that drenched their daily lives by filling every niche and fissure of the social conditions. Sadly enough, the current Canadian social policy has transferred some of its essential obligations to market forces. These market forces have peripheralized thousands of immigrants by deliberately pushing them to sidelines as markets are the antithesis to cultural diversity. At present, therefore, the Ethiopian immigrants in Canada are desperately seeking alternative courtyards to markets where their skills and experience could be gainfully employed and sensibly utilized.

While seeking an alternative remedy to the status quo, Ethiopian immigrants have forged multiple social, community and cultural organizations that at least could enable them to endure in the fluidly-drifting Canadian social milieu. Therefore one can confidently conclude that the Ethiopian formal and informal organizations such as churches, *mahiber*, *edir* and *ekub* have served as the blood-vein of the Ethiopian immigrants' survival in Toronto.

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