ENTREPRENEURSHIP AMONG THE ETHIOPIAN AND ERITREAN MIGRANTS: ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDIES IN THE WASHINGTON, D.C. METROPOLITAN AREA

By

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To my family for their love and determined care throughout my academic endeavor
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<td>Full Form</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECC</td>
<td>Ethiopian Community Center</td>
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<td>ECDC</td>
<td>Ethiopian Community Development Council</td>
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<tr>
<td>EDU</td>
<td>Ethiopian Democratic Union</td>
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<td>EFLNA</td>
<td>Eritrean Liberation Front in North America</td>
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<td>ELF</td>
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<td>EPRDF</td>
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<td>EPRP</td>
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<td>ERA</td>
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<td>INS</td>
<td>Immigration and Naturalization Services</td>
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<td>IRCA</td>
<td>Immigration Reform and Control Act</td>
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<td>UNHCR</td>
<td>United Nations Higher Commission for Refugees</td>
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ENTREPRENEURSHIP AMONG THE ETHIOPIAN AND ERITREAN MIGRANTS: ETHNOGRAPHIC CASE STUDIES IN THE WASHINGTON, D.C. METROPOLITAN AREA
By
Mussa Sultan Idris
December 2013

Chair: Anita Spring
Major: Anthropology

This dissertation examines business experiences among Ethiopian and Eritrean transnational migrants in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. It studies how they establish their businesses (e.g., with limited financial capital, and coming from subsistence agricultural economic systems), and what is different about their migrant business experiences compared to well-established neighborhoods in “ethnic enclaves,” which primarily target their own diasporas, in other areas of the U.S.

Participant observation and in-depth interviews with 20 “successful” Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant entrepreneurs in Adams Morgan, U Street Corridor, and Virginia were conducted during two ethnographic periods: September to December of 2009, and June to August of 2011. Supplementary secondary sources were analyzed to articulate the historical and contemporary patterns of these migrant experiences.

The theoretical framework used is interdisciplinary. It emphasizes transnational migration theory to highlight the importance of home connections to the migrant entrepreneurs. This dissertation utilizes an integrative approach, combining micro-level factors and macro-level ones to better understand transnational entrepreneurship.
Strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threat analyses (SWOT) of the cases are provided.

Findings show that both migrant communities originally come from subsistence cultures where by business (neged) is considered a “socially stigmatized job sector,” but they started to view business as a socially acceptable economic activity after they migrated to the U.S. In the process, they mostly created small- and medium-scale formal businesses, owned either by families or individuals. They primarily depended on family or kin-based networks and personal savings.

Their traditional businesses—restaurants, cafes, and grocery stores—use an “ethnic entrepreneurship niche” model to conduct business with a focus on the recreation of ethnic identities in a specific geographic niche, but with the intention of targeting their migrant communities, host societies, and tourists alike. This business model is different in scale from the one in “ethnic enclaves,” which primarily target their own diaspora (e.g., “Little Italy” in New York and “Little Havana” in Miami).

Their non-traditional and combined types of businesses (e.g., transportation, gas stations, 7-Elevens, real estate, and advertising) are neither “ethnic enclaves” nor “ethnic entrepreneurial niches.” They are scattered around the metropolitan D.C. area without geographic concentration.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

This dissertation focuses on Ethiopian and Eritrean transnational migrants in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area; hereafter termed the metropolitan D.C. area. Having settled in the area since the 1970s, these migrants display some diasporic aspects as they relate to the experiences of dual citizens and second generation migrants. Nonetheless, the author of this dissertation considers it appropriate to use the term transnational migrants rather than diaspora communities to highlight the importance and strength of the home country connections in the experiences of the Ethiopians and Eritreans in the U.S. This research reviews the literature on transnational migration and diaspora, introduces its objectives and its research questions, and discusses the organization of this dissertation in seven chapters.

Statement of the Research Objectives and Questions

This dissertation examines the entrepreneurial and business experiences of the Ethiopian and Eritrean transnational migrants in the metropolitan D.C. area. It studies how migrant entrepreneurs recognize opportunities and take a risk to establish, maintain, and grow a business without having all the resources in advance (e.g., with limited access to financial resources, and without business training, coming from subsistence agricultural economic systems, and with no culture of business in their homelands). Ethiopians and Eritreans come from societies that view business as a stigmatized employment activity. It explores what is different about their entrepreneurial experiences compared to other immigrant nationalities and ethnicities in the U.S. It also explores whether these are “ethnic entrepreneurial niches” that primarily target their own diasporas or if they are “ethnic entrepreneurial niches” whereby transnational
migrant entrepreneurs concentrate in a particular geographic location and
disproportionately focus on some particular types of businesses, such as food-centered,
to recreate ethnic identities to target their own immigrant communities and beyond. The
study explores what we can learned from “successful” or “unsuccessful” Ethiopian
migrant business experience, demographic characteristics, business planning,
leadership style, and behaviors for creating a sustainable business.

On September 1, 2009, I traveled to Washington, D.C., for the purpose of
conducting an ethnographic study for my dissertation among migrants of Ethiopian and
Eritrean origin. Upon arrival at Reagan International Airport, I claimed my baggage and
went out to search for a taxi to go downtown. The taxi driver, who was first in line
waiting for customers, seemed to be in his mid 50s and at his first look at me, he
inquired:

“Are you Habesha?”

I responded in a question format by repeating what I heard from him,
“Habesha?”

He then clarified by saying, “By Habesha, I mean, are you originally from
Ethiopia or Eritrea?”

“Yes, I am originally from Eritrea,” I replied (Taxi driver, personal
communication, Washington, D.C., 2009).

The encounter I had with the Ethiopian migrant taxi driver at the airport as soon as
I landed was soon to be followed by numerous encounters with Ethiopian and Eritrean
taxi drivers during my extended fieldwork stay in the area. It also became common for
me to see and hear Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants speak their home languages while
walking in the streets of the city, passing by through parking lot businesses, 7-Eleven
convenience stores, and hotels. It was not uncommon to read advertisements about
Ethiopian and Eritrean restaurants and cafes in the Washington Post. These encounters, for instance, indicate the strong presence of Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants in Washington D.C., and about the high probability that any traveler in the area looking for a taxi will end up riding in one whose driver is from Ethiopia or Eritrea. For the ethnographer, all these encounters helped deepen the understanding about the dissertation´s topic.

As my days in Washington D.C., progressed, I observed that the term “Habesha” is commonly and widely used by the majority of the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants in the area to address each other. Some Ethiopian and Eritrean ethnic communities in the area, including the Oromo, the largest ethnic group in Ethiopia, do not necessarily self-designate themselves as Habesha. Habecker (2012) argued that the term Habesha refers to an ethno-racial category that is used by the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants of Amhara, Tigrayan, and Tigrinya ethnicities that focuses on their Semitic origin. The researcher realized that the term Habesha does not capture the collective migrant experiences of the Ethiopians and Eritreans and, for that reason, decided to limit its use in this dissertation. There is no consensus on this term´s origin among social scientists (Chacko 2009; Pankhurst 2002; Ullendoff 1971:3-9). Thus, if used in this study, it simply refers to its common use in the research area. This makes sense given that the majority of Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant entrepreneurs in the District of Columbia are of Amhara, Tigrinya, or Tigrayan ethnic origin and they typically address each other as “Habesha” in what they view as transnational space in the Adams Morgan and U Street areas.
Literature Review

The use of the term transnational migrants rather than diaspora members or diaspora is appropriate for this research because it focuses primarily on the family and the social, cultural, economic, and political components and resource flows that happen among migrants in both the host country and the homelands (Anderson 1991; Bash, Glick Schiller, and Szanton 1994; Bernal 2004; Clifford 1997; Foner 1999; Glick Schiller, Bash, and Szanton Blanc 1992; Glick Schiller et al. 1995; Hannerz 1996; Hepner 2008). In contrast, the concept “diaspora” typically refers to wider contributing factors that cause people to move and create settlement elsewhere but with struggles to identify with a homeland (Berlin 2010; Butler 2001; Cohen 1997 and 1995; Du Bois 1907; Gilroy 1993; Herskovits 1938; Mintz 1992). The Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants have settled in the area since the 1970s, and a few elder migrants with long established families there display some diasporic dimensions as they relate to their experiences of dual citizenship and second generation (Clifford 1997; Hannerz 1996; Matsuoko and Sorenson 2001). For the majority of the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants in the D.C., the term transnational migrants defines them better because it refers to the central importance of the home connections in their experience. Transnational migration primarily focuses on family, economic, socio-cultural, and political ties in both host countries and homelands (Glick Schiller, Bash, and Szanton Blanc 1992; Glick Schiller et al. 1995).

The specific focus on the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants and their businesses in this dissertation places emphasis on the entrepreneurial resource flows between the host country and the homeland. For this reason, the author of this dissertation finds the “transnational migrants” framework (Glick Schiller et al. 1995) relevant to examine both
micro-level factors (demography of the entrepreneur, migration experience, and business development), and macro-level ones (economic, political, cultural, and social factors) of both Ethiopian-American and Eritrean-American migrants. This interdisciplinary and integrative approach is meant to analyze individual experiences within both migrant communities by studying cases of entrepreneurs, and by providing a comparative analysis of their respective business environments and contexts.


This research attempts to provide ethnographic examples of entrepreneurs and the business experiences of Ethiopian and Eritrean transnational migrants in the metropolitan D.C. area. This is important because the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants in the U.S. come from predominantly subsistence or pastoral-based cultures, where employment in a business sector, neged, was considered a “socially stigmatized job type.” Once they migrated, these entrepreneurs had to go through a change of attitude and behavior toward the idea of getting involved in business. This research will
articulate why they made those changes of attitude and behavior toward doing business, and how they established and conducted their businesses with limited resources and limited business training. These cases will also allow researchers to make comparisons with other immigrant populations in the U.S. who do not stigmatize business in their culture.

The establishment of “new” African transnational migrant business practices in the U.S. is a relatively new phenomenon. While “new” Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants have lived in various cities of the U.S., as short- or long-term residents, as individuals, families, and communities since the early 1970s, Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant-owned businesses began to form in solid visibility in the Washington, D.C., area in the late 1980s and early 1990s. While there are already numerous academic studies and publications that deal with the broader picture of the “new” African migrants in the U.S. (Arthur 2000; Barone 2001; Benesch and Fabbre 2004; Copeland-Carson 2004; Hume 2002; Koser 2003), studies that go from the general picture to specific topics such as the entrepreneurial experiences and behaviors of these communities, which provide in-depth context and ethnographic fieldwork-informed research, are a useful addition to provide a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of specific aspects of the “new” African transnational migrants from various nationalities and ethnicities (Babou; Bagchi 2001; Diouf 2000; Stoller 2002). It is also helpful to investigate how different or similar they are in their business experiences.

Migration scholars in the U.S. who study diasporas, immigrants, emigrants, and refugees from Africa to the U.S., Europe, and Canada have previously focused their research on topics such as macro-level policy implications of migration for receiving,
transit, and sending communities; directions, causes, and consequences of international migration; migrant identity and racial issues; and processes such as resettlement, adjustment, assimilation, acculturation, integration, and multiculturalism. The major criticism of these previous works is that they emphasize the duality of the home/host in analysis; and they also focus on the study of immigrants (with an emphasis on integration, acculturation, and assimilation into the host countries), compared to the availability of less abundant research focused on emigrants (with a focus on conservative home connections, return views, and creation of ethnic enclaves in host countries) (Al-Ali, Black, and Koser 2001; Apraku 1991; Arthur 2000). In the context of successful ethnic enclaves, the emphasis on dualism in the study of migrants was relevant in terms of its implications on jobs in the receiving and sending countries. Also, with emphasis on how successful ethnic enclave economic activities were embedded in social, cultural, and political relations of host communities (Abrahamson 1996; Portes 2010; Portes and Kenneth 1980).

Recently, however, there has been a growing demand for much more comprehensive research themes that cut across the economic, social, cultural, and political dimensions of migration studies in transnational flows and in a de-territorialized world (Anderson 1991; Appadurai 1996; Basch et al. 1994; Cohen 1997; Copeland-Carson 2004; Ferguson 2006; Foner 1999; Hamilton 2007; Holtzman 2008; Kane and Leedy 2013; Levitt 2001). Transnational migration scholars have put emphasis on the process by which migrants forge and sustain multi-stranded family, social, economic, cultural, and political relations that link together their societies of origin and destination (Basch et al. 1994). Again, the use of the concept “transnational migration” is useful in
my research to understand and explain the experiences of the Eritrean and Ethiopian migrants in the U.S. Both the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants continue to maintain multiple family, social, economic, political, and cultural ties with both their country of origin and the U.S. These transnational migrants keep their minds and hearts tied to those family members, relatives, and friends as well as their way of life left behind. Most of them send remittances to their families. Some own houses and properties in their home countries; others continue to visit and to push their home countries toward development and democratic political processes. These types of migrant connections were debated in the Diaspora literature as a type of dualism that concerns macro-level social, political, and economic factors (Du Bois 1903), but are also pragmatic ways of life for migrants as individuals, families, and business owners (Washington 1907). In the context of transnational migrant businesses experiences from Ethiopia and Eritrea to the U.S. the pragmatic importance of both macro- and micro-level factors are relevant. For instance, the importance of transnational family, kinship, and business connections is very salient in the experiences of the transnational migrants from Ethiopian and Eritrea (and usually missing factors among the African American Diasporas). This could make a difference in terms of success for transnational businesses, even though similar opportunities exist for all communities in the U.S.

The majority of the Ethiopian migrants to the U.S. in the past several decades were attracted to the Washington, D.C., area mainly due to factors like social ties, the presence there of the Ethiopian embassy, the ability to find employment in various service and office jobs, and opportunities for self-employment. Although precise data as to how many Ethiopian migrants live in the U.S. are hard to find, because some are not
documented, there are some statistics and estimates that provide different numbers. For instance, the 2000 U.S. census reported that 69,530 Ethiopian migrants lived in the U.S., which makes them the second largest African migrant community to the U.S. after the Nigerians. By 2004, Tadias, a New York-based magazine for Ethiopian-Americans, estimated the number of Ethiopian migrants living in the U.S. as 750,000, a number that included the American-born children of Ethiopian origin. For the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area, the American Community Survey estimated the number of persons of Ethiopian origin as 28,583, in 2005. The Ethiopian Embassy, however, estimated a higher number in 2005: unofficially, between 120,000 and 200,000. (Chacko 2009; Hepner 2005; Nicholls 2005:105). The new Ethiopian migrant communities to the U.S., similar to the recent African immigrants from countries such as Nigeria, Ghana, and Egypt, are disproportionately young and highly educated. For instance, increased settlements of recent Africans immigrants to Washington, D.C., resulted in the establishment in 2006 of the Office on African Affairs with in the Mayor’s office. The Office on African Affairs estimated African immigrants to make up 17 percent of the foreign-born population of the District of Columbia.

In addition to integrating into the American culture through learning English, going to school, getting formal jobs, becoming American citizens and voting in American elections, and raising their children in America, the Ethiopian-American transnational communities in Washington D.C., also organize themselves in several home-based social networks. These include kinship and family ties; ethnic and regional organizations and associations; and religious institutions, such as Christian orthodox churches and mosques. Christianity and Islam have a great impact on the cultural and social fabrics of
the Ethiopian societies at home and abroad; informal social gatherings of friends usually take place in restaurants, cafes, Starbucks, and bars; in community centers and associations; and in the Ethiopian youth football federation. In addition to English, Ethiopian transnational migrants use several languages (such as Amharic, Oromo, Tigrian, and Gurage) to communicate among themselves and with their relatives in Ethiopia and other parts of the world. They send financial remittances to their family members, relatives, and friends in Ethiopia and elsewhere. Some travel between the U.S. and Ethiopia for family visits and reunions. Others send their children to Ethiopia to learn about their family’s culture and heritage.

Similarly, Eritrean exiles and transnational migrants to Washington, D.C., also have actively participated in the formation of the Eritrean nation-state in various ways, such as sending human and financial support to liberate Eritrea (1961-1991) and voting for the independence of Eritrea from Ethiopia in 1993. Most of the Eritrean migrants in the U.S. have also obtained their Eritrean nationality; at the same time, they have maintained their U.S. nationality. However, the Eritrean government does not recognize dual citizenship. It generally claims persons of Eritrean descent to be Eritrean citizens. Yet, after the independence of their home country in 1993, the Eritrean migrants in the U.S. continued to strengthen their transnational behaviors through active participation in the call for the political democratization process, and through the social, familial, and economic developmental activities and engagements in Eritrea and the U.S.

The Washington, D.C., area is home to the highest number of Ethiopian and Eritrean transnational migrants of any metropolitan area in the United States. The majority of them tend to live in both ethnically diverse and black-majority neighborhoods.
(Bigman 1995). For example, many Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants of the District of Columbia have settled in neighborhoods like Adams Morgan, U Street Corridor, Columbia Heights, and Brightwood. Also, they live in the neighboring cities of Alexandria and Falls Church, and in Arlington and Fairfax Counties in Virginia. In Maryland, they are established in Takoma Park, Silver Spring, and Greenbelt, in Montgomery County, and in Upper Marlboro, District Heights, Oxon Hill, Fort Washington and Clinton, in Prince George’s County. Moreover, because of rising rent prices in D.C., they are settling in distant suburbs like Sterling, in Loudoun County, and Woodbridge, in Prince William County, Virginia (Jones 2010; Levinson 1997).

With regard to their identity in the U.S., some Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants, especially the older generations, identify themselves to a limited extent with the experiences of the African American Diasporas. Some remember the Civil Rights issues and movements of the 1960s as a struggle to become an American citizen with equal responsibilities and rights, and thus identify with the concept at the same time. For instance, Howard University is an important part of the Diaspora dynamic for African Americans, as well as places like U Street and Adams Morgan, which are, at the moment, central locations for Ethiopian and Eritrean entrepreneurs, and they are also the center of this fieldwork.

Among Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant entrepreneurs, questions of race and identity are not as salient as in the African American experience. Hierarchical race relations was so silent in the experiences of the African American experience that institutions such as Howard University were based the belief that dualisms or hierarchies are harmful and that every human being has a right to life without them. For
the majority of the Ethiopian and Eritrean transnational migrants businesses, what is salient is their entrepreneurship, which maintains flows of resources transnationally (Fesshatzion 2005; Getahoun 2007; Hepner 2009). For African Americans, for example, Booker T. Washington (1907) proposed economic progress through self-employment, investment in their own businesses and trade, a focus on learning useful trade skills, and an emphasis on industrial and agricultural training. Washington argued that this would eventually lead to equal political and civil rights, but race relations in the U.S. did not easily permit entrepreneurial thinking among freed people (Harlan 1998).

For the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants in the U.S., some adjustment challenges include language barriers, changing values and roles, especially gender roles, in family relations, and changing socialization patterns of children. Those who belonged to the political, economic, or educational elite groups in Ethiopia and Eritrea also suffer from downward mobility in their social status in the U.S. They also face the challenge of ethnic, regional, political, and religious differences within their own Ethiopian and Eritrean transnational communities.

Such previous migration scholars as Aldrich (1990), Anne (2005), and Bates (1997) addressed the “visibility” of African Diasporas and migrant-run businesses in various metropolitan areas of the U.S. They considered ethnic restaurants, ethnic clothing shops, ethnic food shops, street vendors, art and craft shops, taxis, native language teaching centers, remittance services, and so forth. Only limited anthropological studies have been conducted on this matter (Stoller 2002). The gap in the literature on the entrepreneurship of the recent African transnationals is partly due to the fact that they are recent arrivals. A study by Konadu Agyemang et al. (2006)
showed that in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s, the magnitude of African migration—from Nigeria, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, South Africa, Somalia, Sudan, and Eritrea—to the U.S. began to increase, due to various human and natural factors that are glossed as “push and pull factors,” adding to the ethnic diversity of U.S. societies and economies.

Transnational migrant entrepreneurs and their businesses are key stakeholders in the development of sending and receiving countries. Taking into account the increasing presence and permanent settlement of the new African transnationals in the U.S. after the 1960s, it is timely and imperative to study their entrepreneurial activities, and their greater expectation of permanence in the host country.

In the 1980s and 1990s, there has been a renewed interest in diasporas and transnationalism research that pays attention to the interlink of the economic, political, cultural, social, and historical dimensions of the migration experiences (Barone 2001; Basch et al. 1994; Butler 2001; Glick Schiller 1999; Gordon 1998; Hannerz 1996; Koser 2003; Kwado KonadU Agyemang et al. 2006; Mamdani 1996; Martin and O’Meara 1995). Growing anthropological literature exists on the broader historical, political, economic, cultural, and social aspects of the new migrants from Africa to the U.S., after the 1965 in particular (Al Ali and Koser 2002; Appadurai 1991, 1996; Anderson 1991; Arthur 2000; Ferguson 2006; Kane and Leedy 2013; Levitt 2001; Saskia 1991; Scott 1991). These recent anthropological studies recognize the multidimensionality of the African transnationals. They recognize the importance of ethnographic studies that capture the various histories, identities, experiences, voices, narratives, and contexts of the African transnational communities.
Other than identity construction among African transnationals, such as anthropological ethnographic research on the entrepreneurship of the African transnationals in the U.S., research on specific topics after 1965, is limited (Coopeland-Carson 2004; Stoller 2002). However, entrepreneurial spirits and practices are considered key factors for the socio-economic growth and development of the U.S. and elsewhere, especially after the 1980s (Allen 2009; Aparaku 1991). This is also the case with African transnational entrepreneurs in the U.S., because they include innovators, risk-takers, and value and job creators for themselves and for others. Moreover, the transnational communities are of strategic interest, because they link resources of both sending and receiving countries. Successful entrepreneurs can hope to exploit their position to become important economic, social, and political actors in their host country and their homeland. Entrepreneurs operate at various levels of economic and political organization, including “local,” “national,” “transnational,” and “global” levels. Thus, studying transnational entrepreneurs requires theories that transcend the narrow confinement of any boundary or discipline (Wallerstein 1991).

It is also important to recognize that “success” or “failure” of an entrepreneur or business experience are relative terms, because an entrepreneur’s personal definition of what it means to be a “successful” entrepreneur is really related to the core values and vision that an entrepreneur has for his or her enterprise. Thus, one way of defining “successful” entrepreneurs is to characterize them as those individuals who have achieved the establishment, maintenance, and growth of their enterprise.

The measurement of such “success” or “failure,” therefore, could depend on the relative degree of achievement of an entrepreneur in relation to the experiences of the
establishment, maintenance, and growth of his or her enterprise (which could be measured in terms of surviving and thriving in business for several years, value creation in the forms of revenue earnings, and return on investment). Others might measure the “success” of an entrepreneur in relation to the accomplishment of one’s own economic independence, job creation for others, and control of one’s venture.

Thus, this research uses an interdisciplinary anthropological and entrepreneurial framework with an integrative approach. It views entrepreneurs and businesses as results of continuous dynamics of micro-level and macro-level processes, rather than just individual or structural accidents.

**Research Objectives**

Using anthropological ethnographic research, this dissertation highlights how various Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant entrepreneurs in the research area establish, maintain, and grow their businesses. It adds anthropological case studies with regard to the experiences of African transnational entrepreneurs in the U.S.

Specific objectives in this research endeavor are the following:

1. To describe business experiences among the Ethiopian and Eritrean transnational migrant entrepreneurs in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area.

2. To study the reasons why these entrepreneurs go into establishing their own business in Washington.

3. To assess the family, gender, and kinship networks, and the market channels that are employed in their businesses, and to ascertain if they help or hinder their entrepreneurial success.

4. To analyze the micro-level factors (entrepreneur characteristics, migration experience, and business development) and macro-level factors (economic, social, cultural, and political conditions) that affect the “success” or “failure” of a business among the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants in this area.
Research Questions

For the last several centuries, the U.S. has hosted millions of migrants from all over the world. However, complex issues, such as whether or not the immigrants add value to or are a burden on the economic, political, social, and cultural progress of the U.S. are timely and hotly debated.

Those who view immigration as a hindrance for U.S. progress and competitiveness in the global economy point out that low skilled foreign workers are swamping the American job market, competing with low-skilled American workers, mostly African Americans and U.S.-born Latinos, who comprise a large part of the low-skilled labor force in the U.S. They suggest that immigrants, especially undocumented workers, are willing to work for wages and conditions that many Americans refuse to tolerate. They view this as having negative effects on wages at the low-skilled end of the American labor force (Borjas 1985; Borjas et al. 1997; Lazear 1999). These are mostly dated observations on cheap labor. The reality of the U.S. economy is that it needs job creators as such jobs will not come from multi-national financial or corporate sectors of the global economy. There is an insignificant market incentive for larger global corporations to support small businesses in the U.S. Thus, the regional and downtown U.S. economies need entrepreneurs and many small businesses. This research attempts to account for the contributions of transnational migrant entrepreneurs who are job creators, for themselves and others.

Those who view immigration as a key factor for U.S. progress and competitiveness in the global economy highlight that the economic boom of the U.S. post World-War II has attracted newcomers from across the world in search of economic opportunity, liberty, and freedom. To make their dreams a reality, they
mention that millions of migrants in the U.S. have worked hard, taken risks, and created businesses and jobs that contributed to progress in the U.S. (Aldrich and Waldinger 1990; Apraku 1991; Bagchi 2001; Baron 2001; Light 1972; Portes and Rumbaut 1996).

As indicated earlier, the “new” African migrant entrepreneurs are the less studied cases compared to other migrant populations in the U.S. For comparative purposes, it is useful to understand why and how different transnational migrants from various nationalities and ethnicities go into business in the U.S. This exploratory research, then, attempts to address such questions and limitations.

Using an entrepreneurial integrative approach, this dissertation investigates the following research questions:

1. Why do some Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants in the metropolitan D.C., area establish their own business?

2. How do they establish, maintain, and grow their business?

3. What is different about their entrepreneurial experiences compared to “ethnic enclaves” in other areas? Are these businesses ethnic enclaves ones that primarily target their own Diaspora, or are they ethnic entrepreneurship niches, where-by transnational migrant entrepreneurs concentrate on a particular geographic location and disproportionately focus on particular types of businesses, such as food services, to recreate ethnic identities, and to target both their own immigrant communities and beyond?

4. What key micro-level factors (entrepreneurial characteristic, migration experience, and business development) and macro-level factors (economic, social, cultural, and political) affect the success or failure of a business?

5. What can be learned from these successful and unsuccessful Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant business experiences and behaviors in metropolitan D.C.?

Dissertation Organization

Chapter 2 addresses the literature on the mindset and characteristics of entrepreneurs. It offers a critical assessment of several theories about the origin and perpetuation of international migration, and it relates this to the background literature on
the new African migration, after 1965, to the U.S., in particular. It also articulates why it is important to have an integrative approach, one that combines micro-level and macro-level analyses to study the entrepreneurs and their businesses among the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants in D.C. Chapter 3 provides a descriptive and analytical context of the Ethiopian and Eritrean transnational migrants in the area, including their respective cultural, social, political, economic, and historical realities. It also articulates how the entrepreneurs and their businesses fit into these contexts. Chapter 4 highlights the urban ethnographic fieldwork conducted in the research site and explains the methodology of this research. Chapter 5 provides the entrepreneurial individual, group, and collective SWOT analysis of cases. Chapter 6 sums up the thematic findings and analysis of this dissertation. It relates relevance of this research to transnational migration and entrepreneurship literature. Chapter 7 concludes by examining the research objectives and providing answers to the research questions posed. This final chapter also offers suggestions for future research in the area of the Ethiopian-American and Eritrean-American transnational entrepreneurs in the U.S. and beyond.

**Final Remarks**

Chapter 1 introduced this dissertation’s topic, discussed its research objectives, and presented its research questions. It included a description of the organization of this dissertation into seven chapters. It also articulated this research’s focus on the Ethiopian and Eritrean transnational entrepreneurs and businesses in Washington. In summary, it was made clear that this research examines why and how the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants in Washington, D.C., establish their own businesses with limited financial resources and business training, analyzes what is different about them
compared to other ethnic enclave economies, and describes what key micro- and macro-level factors affect their businesses.
CHAPTER 2
THEORETICAL VIEWS ON ENTREPRENEURSHIP AND MIGRATION

This chapter focuses on the theoretical literature of international migration and entrepreneurship. It highlights an integrative approach that draws from the supply-side and the demand-side perspective is highlighted (Thornton 1999). The supply-side perspective asserts that individuals who have specific attitudes, characteristics, and behaviors are entrepreneurial. It is a micro-level approach that emphasizes the individual qualities of the entrepreneur (e.g., risk taking, economic opportunity recognition, determination, and innovation). The demand-side perspective argues that macro-level contexts (e.g., economic, social, cultural, and political) “push” or “pull” individuals toward business creation. The demand-side perspective also suggests that macro-level factors either hinder or facilitate business formation. Both the supply-side perspective and the demand-side perspective are also discussed in the contexts of Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants in the metropolitan D.C. area.

The second part of this chapter provides a critical assessment of various theoretical views of international migration. The theories discussed are focused on the origins and perpetuation of international migration. Attention is given to the strengths and limitations of each view. An emphasis is given to literature on the origins and continuation of the new African transnational migrants to the U.S. (those who have arrived in the U.S. after 1965). These theoretical views are discussed in relation to their relevance for contextualizing the transnational migration experiences of the Ethiopian and Eritrean communities in the metropolitan D.C. area. Also addressed in this chapter are the reasons why it is important to have an integrative framework for the study of the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants and their businesses in D.C.
The theoretical focus of this study is an integrative approach, combining micro-level and macro-level analyses, in the study of entrepreneurs and businesses. This dissertation documents twenty cases of Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant entrepreneurs who started with an idea and created a business in the metropolitan D.C. area, with a main focus on building a successful venture. The reasons as to why some businesses failed are discussed in the relative context of the successful businesses, rather than having them as separate cases. The theoretical framework in this research combines the supply-side and demand-side perspectives to have a comprehensive and holistic approach to the study of the entrepreneurs and their business endeavors in the metropolitan D.C. area.

Classical entrepreneurship research was pioneered by interdisciplinary scholars (McClelland 1961; Schumpeter 1934; Weber 1930). Drawing from these classical works, contemporary scholars on entrepreneurship employ different theories and focus on different levels of analysis of the entrepreneurship practice. The term “entrepreneur” refers to an innovator and business-minded individual who introduces new ideas and changes the rate at which the wheels of the enterprise go around. An entrepreneur is essentially an “economic opportunist” who can create or change the consumers' taste by introducing something of value, such as new goods or services. Economic opportunity recognition and creation of business opportunity, in this case, refer to the rational expectation that proper application of the factors of production will produce maximum rewards for investors. It also assumes that entrepreneurs are out for gains of
independence, economy, power, or esteem (Aldrich and Waldinger 1990; McClelland 1961; Spring and McDade 1998).

Entrepreneurship, defined as a mindset or a way of thinking that is opportunity-focused, innovative, and growth-oriented (Allen 2009), is not the unique domain of any country or culture. It can be found in some form in every country or culture in the world. The entrepreneurial zeal does not distinguish between national borders, gender, race, age, ethnicity, or socioeconomic factors; in fact, it touches anyone who has the passion to create value and to be self-employed and determined to create economic growth. These are variables that could be systematically studied with a focus on the entrepreneurs and their business experiences (Evans 1942; Light 1972; McDade and Spring 2005). It is equally important to be mindful that economic growth as a goal may not be sustainable at the macro-level and not complementary with micro-level dynamics in a community or downtown area.

For entrepreneurship to thrive in a given country, it is necessary to have a critical mass of individuals and groups who have specific entrepreneurial mindsets, attitudes, and behaviors, including the ability to create a business and economic growth, the ability to innovate, and a persistent determination and passion toward wealth creation. Entrepreneurs have the ability to recognize an opportunity, have the ability to provide different goods and services, are willing to take risks, show innovative behaviors, possess internal locus of control, enjoy teamwork, have the ability to network, have the ability to coordinate, possess the skills to organize, demonstrate a creative style of leadership, and tend to be flexible. Entrepreneurs, as individuals, also accept full accountability for the risks and outcomes of the process. Also, one cannot
underestimate the power of the environment on business organizations, such as the economic context, the political context, the social context, the historical context, the geographical area, the time intervals, and the market fields within which an entrepreneur and his or her business works in helping or hindering the ability of individuals to become effective and thriving entrepreneurs in a given country. The research findings of this dissertation, presented in the analyses of Chapters 5 and 6, show that both the Ethiopian and Eritrean entrepreneurs and business cases highlighted in this research are affected by micro-level factors (e.g., entrepreneurs’ characteristics, skills, and experience) and by macro-level factors (e.g., social and cultural views toward the business sector, the business environment, and the economic policies in their sending countries and in the U.S).

For instance, as mentioned above, Thornton (1999) classified the literature of entrepreneurship into two schools: (1) the supply-side perspective (SSP), and (2) the demand-side perspective (DSP). The SSP asserts that specific types of individuals who have specific mindsets and behaviors create entrepreneurship. While the SSP identifies key factors—individual mindsets and behaviors—in the entrepreneurship process, it is a micro-level analysis. For instance, the SSP does not take into account the role of macro level, structural, and infrastructural factors in the entrepreneurship process. On the other hand, the DSP focuses on the factors of pushing and pulling toward entrepreneurship. The DSP is a macro-level contextual approach that misses the micro-level analysis of the entrepreneurship process. For instance, theoretical work on ethnic enclaves and middlemen focus on the cultural and structural patterns that facilitate or
hinder business success (Abrahamson 1996; Jones, 2010; Light and Gold 2000; Portes 1980; Portes and De Wind 2008).

The Supply-Side Perspective

The SSP argues that entrepreneurship occurs with individuals who have specific mindsets and behaviors. It is a micro-level analysis that measures the dependent variable, that is, the “success” of an entrepreneurship, in relation to various independent individual variables, including risk taking, innovative behavior, internal locus of control, style of leadership, and flexibility, among others (Bird 1989; McClelland 1961).

The SSP does not take into account and does not control for structural factors and their roles in entrepreneurial success. However, making generalizations about a population of entrepreneurs or a culture of entrepreneurship in a given population is problematic when it happens without considering the dynamic structural contexts in the process, including historical, economic, political, cultural, and ecological contexts, under which the entrepreneurs act and under which the entrepreneurships are established, sustained, and grown.

The terms entrepreneur and entrepreneurship were popularized by the pioneer economist and political scientist Joseph Schumpeter (1934), who conceptualized an entrepreneur as a “creative destroyer,” referring to an individual who has the passion and the ability to create a new venture or enterprise, one who accepts full accountability for the risks and outcomes. He defined entrepreneurship as “creative destruction” of a static economic equilibrium system by innovation of new processes, value creation, creation of new ideas, and provision of different goods and services to customers.

McClelland’s work (1961) focused on the psychological dimension of the entrepreneurial personality, including determination and persistent motivation to achieve
and do an excellent job, as the driving forces for the creation of entrepreneurship and economic growth. For instance, through entrepreneurial innovations in various forms of technologies, the global mobility of people, bodies, ideas, practices, and images has been facilitated at lower costs in terms of information, communication, and transportation services.

According to Evans (1942), from economic and business perspectives, an entrepreneurship is conceptualized in the association of three points: (1) the establishment of some new entrepreneurial units in the marketplace (e.g., a new product, service, marketing strategy, style of leadership, or way to deliver a product or service to customers); (2) substantial expansion of established entrepreneurship units (e.g., creating new jobs by finding new niches in the regional, national, or global markets); and (3) persistent efforts to adapt established units to changing environments (e.g., to adapt to market changes, or to adapt to changes in laws and regulations).

As indicated already, an entrepreneur is essentially an “economic opportunist” who can create or change consumers’ taste by introducing something of value, such as new goods or services. Economic opportunity recognition or creation of business opportunity, in this case, refers to the rational expectation that proper application of the factors of production will produce maximum rewards for investors. As explained previously, it is also assumes that entrepreneurs are out for gains of independence, power, or esteem (or both profit and non-profit rewards).

Independent of socio-economic ranking and contextualization of structures in societies, advocates of the individual perspective of entrepreneurship would ask what are the characteristics of entrepreneurs as individuals, and they would focus on the
business establishment and the life cycle of the businesses (Bird 1989). In a free society people are free to acquire the attributes of an entrepreneur. Booker T. Washington (1907) perceived this very same point and he ignored, as much as possible, the "embeddedness" of racism and class in American society, focusing instead on the "disembeddedness" of economic activity, and encouraging blacks to acquire the attributes of an entrepreneur. Like others, he claimed that entrepreneurial success is open to anyone who has an entrepreneurial personality and qualities, including a persistent focus on risk taking, adaptability, flexibility, team work, ability to network, appreciation for newness, uniqueness, ability to coordinate, and skill to organize, while establishing, running, and growing a business. They suggest that entrepreneurship is not unique to any socio-economic rank, gender, race, age, or nationality. As Polanyi (1944, 2011) would put it, they would not focus on the embeddedness of the individual entrepreneur in structural or social contexts. That is, they do not emphasize that economies are embedded in society and culture, a position that came to be known in anthropology as the “substantivist” economic theory (Polanyi 2011). Rather, supply-side economic theory would focus on the individual attributes that lead to the blending of new combinations of factors that help create value and produce economic growth.

Advocates of the individual perspective conceptualize entrepreneurship as a mindset and as a set of behaviors. The mindset of an entrepreneur is focused on opportunity recognition and opportunity creation, which are oriented toward economic innovation and growth. In terms of behavior, an entrepreneur is someone who swiftly collects the necessary resources needed to act on recognized opportunities or on the creation of new opportunities, and he or she is someone who drives the opportunity to
completion in an existing market or in a new market by employing combinations of existing or new products and services. What this perspective does not address well is the question of how does one come to obtain resources needed for creation of a business.

In this globalized and neoliberal era of the twenty-first century, now more than ever before in the history of humankind, the economic, political, cultural, and social dynamics of societies across the globe are intertwined by the persistent dynamic and complex processes of not only individuals but also structural and multi-national and global corporate forces that are very powerful (Morrison 1998; Piore 1977; Sassen 1991). Thus, integrating the structural factors in understanding the processes of entrepreneurship is important, which is the theme of those who subscribe to the demand-side perspective.

**The Demand-Side Perspective**

The DSP focuses on the “push” and “pull” of contexts of entrepreneurship. It examines such factors as opportunity structure, market policies, market environment, and the phenomenon of technological change with regard to entrepreneurship characteristics. The DSP is a macro-level, contextual approach that misses the micro-level analysis of the entrepreneurial process.

Of course, there are personal characteristics that individual entrepreneurs should have in order to perform successful entrepreneurial activities—as argued by the Supply-Side Perspective—, but the characteristics of individuals are also influenced by macro-level cultural, social, political, and historical factors of their communities—as argued by the demand-side perspective. For instance, Granovetter (1985; 2005), in his sociological study of the impact of social structure on economic relations in modern
industrial societies, argued that modern industrial societies’ economic actions are embedded in structures of social relations. He argued that economic relations, either between individuals or firms, happen to be embedded in real social networks and social relations. Thus, he argued that the “rational individual gained calculation” or the “atomized actor” approach to the economic relation, a perspective that came to be known in anthropology as the “formalist” economic theory, is inadequate to explain the impacts of social structures and social relations on individual economic actions.

For entrepreneurship to happen and thrive in a given country, it is necessary to have entrepreneurs with specific mindsets and behaviors. However, we cannot undermine the power of macro-level structural and organizational contexts, such as the macro-economic context, the political context, the social context, the historical context, the environment, and the markets in helping or hindering the ability of individuals to become thriving entrepreneurs in a given place or country.

For example, in the late 1970s in the U.S., the macroeconomic policy of the so-called “Reaganomics,” with its four characteristics, was employed: (1) sound money due to rejecting the gold standard, (2) deregulation, (3) modest tax rates, and (4) limited government spending, creating the environment for the entrepreneurial process in the country (Bartlett 1981). Free markets, free economies, and the reduction of government spending were also put in place in other countries of Europe, such as Britain. These macroeconomic moves were considered a shift from Keynes’ planned economy policy that does not address critical issue of economic sustainability, to Hayek’s free economy policy. As a result, in the U.S. and Europe, during these periods, the economy was dominated by gigantic manufacturing companies, such as the steel industry, that
occupied diverse production-based businesses (Harvey 2005; Nicholas 2011; Sassen 1998) that no longer exist as many of these jobs have been moved overseas.

After the 1970s, speculative shifts in financial institutions and remarkable expansions of information technologies in the hands of corporations helped in the quick creation of diverse entrepreneurship. Some of the key economic policy shifts in U.S. and European countries included, according to neo-liberalization critics, the following four characteristics: (1) increased privatization (private property rights based on contracts, including public utilities and services such as water, health care, housing, education, telecommunications, transportation, and the like), and commodification (including land, water, air, flexible labor, natural and cultural resources, and the like); (2) financialization of the economy (monetization of exchange, speculation on finance, and taxation); (3) the management of crises (the creation and management of the “debt trap”); and (4) the view of the state as an agent of redistribution of wealth through privatization schemes and revision of tax codes to benefit the corporate elite and the like (Harvey 2005; Sassen 1998). The neo-liberal economy, in concept and in practice, recognizes that entrepreneurship is a key driver of economic growth in the U.S. and elsewhere, more so since the early 1980s (referred to, by many, as the decade of entrepreneurship). However, there are some negative impacts of unregulated neo-liberal macro-economic policies that are articulated by its critics, such as various forms of social problems, gender abuse, environmental degradation, and unequal access to and control of freedom and rights across geographical spaces and economic classes. They suggest this is not good for sustainability of growth and ways of life (Sassen 1998; Sorkin 2009). For instance, critics of unregulated neo-liberalism suggest that it created
an economic marginalization of some sectors, mostly the lower socio-economic sectors of society, in both the developed and the developing economies of the world. At the same time, it allowed for job creation and entrepreneurship across the globe. Thus, building on the supply-side perspective and on the demand-side perspective, it is crucial to employ an integrative approach—using both the micro-level analysis and the macro-level analysis—in the study of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship.

The Integrative Perspective

The Integrative Perspective comprises multi-level perspectives that combine the SSP and the DSP in the study of entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship culture. In examining the characteristics and role of migrants, and of transnational entrepreneurs, in the global world, an ethnographer would need to examine the subjects not only at the micro-level, but also at the macro-level (Allen 2009; Anderson 1991; Baber 1987; Seabright 2004; Thornton 1999). An integrative approach would help to understand and analyze individual entrepreneurial characteristics and the types of socio-cultural and macro-environmental dimensions that are conducive for the entrepreneurial practices to thrive, which are also useful to contextualize topics such as the entrepreneurship practices among Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants in the metropolitan D.C. area.

For entrepreneurs and entrepreneurship to grow fast in a given country or culture, the consideration of a macro-level data analysis and a demand-side perspective is required to capture the impact of structural variables such as the characteristics of a convenient environment for entrepreneurship to happen, which consists of all the external variables that affect the process (for instance, the macroeconomic market policies, laws and regulations on markets, the barriers to entry into a business, the infrastructure, both physical and technological, the culture of innovation, and the
characteristics of customers, suppliers, and value chain partners and organizations), which are all relevant for fostering and maintaining a thriving entrepreneurial culture in a location (Timmons and Spinelli 2009).

Articulating the entrepreneurial culture on a broader structural dynamic of global economic relations is not new; however, in the context of recent global challenges (including the global financial downturn since 2008 and the growing unemployment rates in several developed and developing countries), systematically studying the topic of entrepreneurship becomes more pressing to create sustainable economies through the creation of more value, more jobs for people, and inspiring innovations, among other actions, in both developed and developing economies. Certainly, migrant entrepreneurs who came to the U.S. from different cultures and corners of the globe have a role to play in creating constructive global economic and social developments in their host and home communities (Appadurai 1996; Kloosterman 2003; West 2010).

At the end of the twentieth century, there was a capitalist revolution and technological and communication changes such as advancements in communications technology, air transportation, steamships, and railways, among others. Also, political changes and debates over market forces, about whether or not countries should have an economy that is based on prices and deregulated markets have been at the very heart of the political-economic encounters of the last one hundred years. For decades, the ideas of John Maynard Keynes (who argued that the market economy would go to excess and that, when things were in difficulty, the uncontrolled market would not work; so therefore, the government would have to step in to regulate and stimulate the market) dominated the economies of the Western world (Nicholas 2011). For instance,
in the U.S. during the 1930s, in the Great Depression era, the New Deal program was designed by the then President Franklin D. Roosevelt as a mechanism for creating relief, recovery, and reform programs to get people to work by building dams, highways, and national parks. At the same time, this program created mechanisms to regulate the free markets and the capitalism system itself, to prevent falling into another depression (Rauchway 2008).

With lasting and greater global economic, political, social, and cultural impacts, in 1944, the Bretton Woods Conference created the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to bring stability to the world economy through the promotion of international monetary cooperation, exchange rate stability, and the expansion of international trade by serving as lenders of last resort, in case a member country faced an economic predicament (Helleiner 1994). These policies had mixed positive and negative results for the entrepreneurial practices of various countries. For instance, the Marshall Plan (also officially known as the European Recovery Program), developed by the U.S. for war-torn European countries, enabled them to rebuild and reconstruct their economies and emerge successfully, after the economic destruction of World War II, and also encouraged entrepreneurship and democratic systems to expand in Europe. The Marshall Plan encouraged entrepreneurship because it made loans available to European businesses, which repaid them to their respective local governments, which in turn reinvested that income for more infrastructure, such as roads, railways, and ports, that structurally helped more businesses and entrepreneurs to thrive. In addition, the European Recovery Program removed trade barriers, modernized European
industries and, thus, overall made European countries be on a more sound economic position than they found themselves after the war (Eichengreen 2008).

Nevertheless, the Structural Adjustment policies, which were initially designed by the World Bank and IMF to combat economic problems in developing economies, including in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, forced some conditions on governments in developing countries in the 1980s and 1990s, including cutting spending in non-economic public institutions such as health care and social services, focusing on economic outputs, liberalizing trade, balancing budgets, reducing corruption, and laying off public sector workers. Critics of the Structural Adjustment Programs argue that it forced many rural families to shift from a subsistence economy to resource-extraction and cash-based economies (such as mining, cash crop farming, fishing, and animal husbandry), negatively impacting important dimensions of development such as job security and food security (Giles et al. 2008; Kidane and Logan 1995). Thus, one can argue that the imposition of a Structural Adjustment Program, to an extent, helps to explain the high unemployment rates that happened in sub-Saharan African countries that borrowed condition-based money from the World Bank and IMF during the 1980s and 1990s. Kidane and Logan (1995) also pointed out that the absence of democratic governance in most post-colonial countries in Africa, the lack of infrastructure that would encourage business, the rampant corruption, and the lack of good regionally integrated economic structures in sub-Saharan African countries partly contributed to structural adjustment policies that were not working properly and effectively in the region. The lack of democratic governance and economic stability motivated millions of individuals from developing countries to move to the West, including the U.S., to find employment and a
better life for themselves and their families because state-level policies in their home
countries produced not economic growth, but greater poverty and instability. Thus, the
lack of economic growth became a factor for masses of rural and urban Africans to
inadvertently join the world economy (Kidane and Logan 1995).

In the Western world, the decades from the mid 1960s to the 2000s were
characterized by mass mobility, including increased immigration, by an increased
international competition of markets, macroeconomic turmoil, a technological revolution,
and business deregulations (Appadurai 1996; Portes and DeWind 2008; Sassen 1998;
Sorkin 2009). For instance, some argue that the recent economic decline, especially
after 2008, in the U.S. and European Union (EU) is tied to the out-sourcing of primary
production and to consumption and easy credit as the basis of economic growth in the
U.S. and beyond. This borrowing of money gave great power to the financial institutions,
but all of them took on greater business risks than they could afford, in part due to the
repeal in the U.S. of the Glass-Steagall Act in 1999, which separated investment and
commercial banking activities. With the repeal of Glass-Steagall, commercial banks,
insurance companies, and stock companies ignored their distinctions, and having done
so primarily in the housing field, it resulted in the housing market crash of 2008 in the
U.S. (Sassen 2001; Sorkin 2009). At the same time, the shift also occurred in the
economies of many countries, including in China, India, Mexico, Brazil, and several
countries in sub-Saharan Africa, including South Africa, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Tanzania,
Senegal, Ghana, Sierra Leone, Niger, Ivory Coast, and Burkina Faso, where their
economies were growing, expanding the use of mobile technologies, increasing their
GDP, attracting foreign direct investment, and expanding their banking sectors. In 2012,
the African continent was put among the fastest growing economies of the world and was labeled "the hopeful continent," with potential for economic growth and expanding democracies in the coming decade, according to August (2013), in a special report for The Economist newspaper.

Predicting future economic growth in sub-Saharan Africa, various powerful economies of the world such as the U.S., the E.U., China, Japan, India, and Brazil continue to emphasize growing trade and investment opportunities and the importance of increased business engagements and partnerships with sub-Saharan Africa, in various sectors such as agro-business, reliable energy and affordable electricity supply, information technology, telecommunications, security, health, natural resources, infrastructure, capacity building, and finance. Thus, as indicated before, economic, political, cultural, and social dynamics of societies and countries across the globe are intertwined by the persistent dynamic processes of not only individual entrepreneurs but also structural, technological and organizational inventions and entrepreneurship processes (Allen 2009).

**Assessment of Theoretical Views on International Migration**

Various theories have been proposed to explain the origin and perpetuation of international migration. Although each seeks to study migration, they employ different concepts, assumptions, and frames of reference. Prominent theories on the origin of international migration include neoclassical macro- and micro-economic theories; the new economics of migration theory; the dual labor-market theory; and the world system theory (Massey et al 1993; Rumbaut 1994). Theories developed for explaining the continuation of international migration include network theory, institutional theory, and cumulative causation theory (Brettell 2008; Massey et al. 1993; Rumbaut 1994).
However, anthropological works on transnational migration have been critical of the overemphasis on the economic “push” and “pull” factors to explain the dynamics of international migration; rather, they pay attention to the cultural, social, and political asymmetries and the meanings and interconnections of international migration at the local, national, and global levels (Copeland-Carson 2004; Hannerz 1996; Hepner 2009). The same occurs in the context of the study of the “new” African migrations, within countries, between countries, and between continents (Bookman 2002; Castles 2003; Foner 1999; Hahn and Klute; Kane and Leedy 2013).

Similarly, the author of this dissertation argues that it is not sufficient to adopt a single theory that solely emphasizes just one factor (e.g., the economic, political, cultural, social, or historical causes and dimensions of international migration) to explain the cause for the start and continuation of international migration from sub-Saharan Africa to the U.S. Rather, the author suggests that one can better grasp and explain the complexity of contemporary international migration by adopting more comprehensive and broader theoretical positions that go beyond the “push” and “pull” economic models that tend to generalize the conditions at the receiving end as “favorable” and portray the sending communities as “unfavorable”, which may not necessarily be a valid position all the time.

**On the Origin of International Migration**

This section reviews four major theories of international migration that focus on its origin: namely, neoclassical macro- and micro-economic theories, new economics of migration theory, dual labor market theory, and world systems theory.
Neoclassical macro- and micro-economic theory

In neoclassical economics, macro- and micro theories’ proponents argue that international migration is caused by geographic variations in the supply of and demand for labor and wages. This perspective centers on the variations in earnings and employment circumstances between origin and destination countries and on migration costs; it generally imagines movement from the home to the host country as an individual decision for wage maximization. It argues that differentials in pay cause migrants from a low-earning country to move to a higher-earning country. Thus, advocates of this theory simplistically suggest the removal of earning variations between migrants’ sending and migrants’ receiving countries to terminate the mobility of labor, because they assume that migration will not happen in the absence of earning differentials between countries of origin and countries of destination (Peet 2009).

Neoclassic macro-economic theory overlooks involuntary migration due to political instability between the 1970s to the 1990s, which concerned the majority of the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant entrepreneurs in the metropolitan D.C. area. This is also a highly generalizing theory and a one-dimensional one as it relates to the experiences of the majority of the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant communities in the area because many of them came to the U.S. for safety, as refugees, and as asylum seekers.

On the other hand, the neoclassic micro-economic theory argues that individuals, as rational agents, opt to migrate because a cost-benefit calculation leads them to expect a positive net return, usually a financial benefit, from their mobility. Thus, international migration in this theory is conceptualized as a form of investment for the individual migrant. These theorists assume that individuals choose to move to where they get the higher earning associated with greater labor productivity, and they must
make certain investments to migrate, which include material and non-material costs such as costs of mobility, the effort involved in learning a new language and a new culture, and the psychosocial costs of adjusting to new work and a new social environment. Hence, an individual migrant moves if the expected net return is positive and stays in his or her home country if the expected net return is negative. If it is neutral, the individual is indifferent between staying and migrating (Bookman 2002). The neoclassic micro-economic proposition does not address many of the transnational African migration experiences in which migrants maintain multiple ties. As indicated earlier, there are critical studies that show that African transnational migrations are complex processes that require an examination of a multidisciplinary approach that goes beyond the economic dimensions to also include a variety of other critical dimensions of migration such as psychological, socio-cultural, and political dimensions, to provide a more complex reading of the migration processes, decisions, motivations, and multilevel interconnections at the local, national, and global levels (Copeland-Carson 2004; Ferguson 2006; Hahn and Klute 2007; Kane and Leedy 2013:1-14; Koser 2003).

**New economic migration theory**

The new economic migration theory, unlike the neo-classic macro- and micro-economic theories, includes not only the labor market but also other conditions in a variety of markets. It examines migration as a household decision for minimizing the risk of the family. Unlike the former approach, it suggests that migration decisions are made by a larger unit rather than by isolated individual decisions, and the decisions are also made to minimize expected economic failures in the market (Ode and Bloom 1985). For instance, unlike individuals, households are in a position to control risks to their
economic well-being by diversifying the allocation of household resources, such as family labor. While some family members are sent to work in foreign countries, other members of the family stay in the local labor market. This theory also recognizes that households or families send workers abroad not only to improve income in absolute terms, but also to increase income relative to other households, and, hence, to reduce their relative deprivation, compared with some reference group (Stark and Edward 1991). This theory also shares similar criticism in that it focuses on economic dimensions. Political, socio-cultural, and psychological dimensions of migration are not addressed (Hahn and Klute 2007; Kane and Leedy 2013).

**Dual labor market theory**

Scholars of dual labor market theory argue that international migration is caused by a permanent demand for migrant labor that is inherent to the economic structure of developed nations. They argue that international migration is not caused so much by the “push” factors (like high unemployment or low income) in sending countries, but by the structural “pull” factors (like high demand for immigrant workers) of the receiving countries. They argue that this demand for migrant labor in the developed industrial societies originates from factors, including structural and social ones, as well as demographic ones, including the following: (1) structural and social factors, where migrant laborers work not only cheaply but are also concentrated in bottom-level housing and socially stigmatized with low social status and low social prestige jobs. Most migrant labor is demanded in the labor-intensive, secondary-sector jobs, which are usually unstable, unskilled, and with lack of reasonable prospects for mobility, which makes it difficult to attract native workers; (2) demographic factors, such as the growth of an aging population in the developed countries and the young labor supply in the
developing societies, which create a permanent demand for migrant laborers who are willing to work under unpleasant conditions and at low wages. In other words, advocates of the dual labor theory neither imagine nor deny that actors make rational, self-interested decisions, as predicted by the micro-economic models (Piore 1977; Taylor 1992). This view also does not address the cases of highly skilled Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants who enjoy excellent pay and working conditions.

World systems theory

According to the world systems theory, infiltration of capitalist economic relations into peripheral, non-capitalist societies creates a mobile population that is prone to migrate abroad. Making use of ideas from the work of Wallerstein’s world systems theory (1974), various scholars have linked the origin of international migration to the structure of the world market that was developed and has expanded since the sixteenth century. Proponents of this theory suggest that mobility is a reaction to the disorder and reorganizations of world economies that happened in the context of capital expansion and globalization. For instance, they argue that as capitalism expanded in the developed countries of the West in Europe and North America, migration of people, goods, and ideas became more world-wide in a global market economy. In this system of global market economy, land, raw materials, and labor within the developing countries or peripheral regions, such as Africa, came under the influence of markets, generating migration of labor from developing to developed countries or cities (Massey, 1993; 1994). Yet, the initial causes for international migration and the reasons and circumstances of why international migration continues to happen demand additional theoretical views to highlight the roles that migrants themselves play in the immigration process and its dimensions, for instance, through diasporas and transnational ties.
On the Perpetuation of International Migration

Unlike the neo-classic macro- and micro-economic theories, the dual labor, the new economics, and the world systems theories, which focus on what factors instigate migration. Other theories–such as the network, institutional, and cumulative causation theory–highlight factors that perpetuate international migration (Greve and Salaff 2005; Hugo 1981; Massey 1993).

Network theory

Scholars of network theory argue that migrant networks are series of interpersonal knots that attach migrants in receiving communities and non-migrants in sending communities, through bonds including kinship, acquaintanceship, and friendship, as well as shared and imagined common identities. Social networks perpetuate international migration because they lower the expenses and risks associated with mobility, and they increase the expected net return of migration (Portes 1998). Through social networks and social capital, new migrants can draw information and resources from former migrants in the process of migrating and finding employment and documentation after migration to host communities. Networks also make international migration attractive as a strategy for risk diversification. In other words, every new international migrant expands the network and reduces the risk of movement for all those to whom he or she is related, eventually contributing to further continuation of international migration. However, this theory de-emphasizes the impacts of external factors, including immigration policy changes in sending and receiving countries, in the process of facilitating or hindering further migration, or individual variations in their social capital among migrants and their role in the perpetuation of international migration.
Institutional theory

Institutional theory argues that, following initial successful international migration, institutions that perpetuate international migration processes continue to strive to satisfy the demands of increased waves of international migrants. For example, it claims that both for-profit private institutions and voluntary non-profit organizations arise to satisfy the demands created by the imbalance between the large number of people who seek to migrate into industrialized countries and the limited number of legal immigration visas that those developed countries allow. These imbalances create various opportunities for institutional growth dedicated to either benefit from or help international migration (Haddad 2008). In other words, this theory assumes that institutions develop to support, sustain, and promote international mobility of people and, as a result, the international flow of migrants becomes more and more institutionalized and independent on factors that originally caused it (Bariagaber 2006). However, this theory does not address the fact that some institutions are also created to curtail informal international migration (Massey 2010).

Cumulative causation theory

The cumulative causation theory of migration, which is interlinked to the idea and practice of the creation of cultures of migration over time (Hahn and Klute 2007; Portes and Rumbaut 1996), argues that causation of migration is cumulative, in that each act of migration amends the social context within which the following migration decisions are made, typically in ways that perpetuate international migration. For example, migration might initially be due to a search for security and stability, for higher income, and as a means of diversifying the risks for the individual actor, the family, or the household in either the country of origin or the country of settlement or both (Bourdieu 1985; Massey
Continuous social network relations among migrants and non-migrants might also cause ideological shifts that are positive toward migration by the non-migrants. In return, such perception and attitude changes might also cause further migration not only at the individual level but also at the familial household, national, and regional levels.

**The New African Transnational Migrants in the United States**

Although several scholars indicate that migration of Africans to the U.S. during periods of involuntary and voluntary immigration is an old phenomenon and that “new” phases of African immigration came to the U.S. after the 1960s (Arthur 2000; Konadu Agyemang et al. 2006; Koser 2003). Scholars dubbed the newcomers after 1965 as “new African-Americans” (Millman 1997) or “new Americans” (Barone 2001). For instance, in 1974, sub-Saharan Africa accounted for a meager 0.7 percent of total immigration to the U.S. This proportion increased to 2 percent in 1985 (Logan 1987). From 1971 to 2003, immigration from Africa to the U.S. reached approximately 3.3 percent of the overall immigration (I.N.S 2003: 37). The number and percentage of persons born in Africa obtaining legal permanent residence status in the U.S. versus all regions of the world in 2002 was 60,099 (5.7 percent). It increased to 100,374 (9.5 percent) in 2011 (I.N.S. 2011:13). The answer to the question, Why did the “new” African migrants leave Africa and come to the U.S.? is complex and requires examination using a multidisciplinary approach, including economic, psychological, socio-cultural, and political dimensions, to provide a more comprehensive and detailed reading of migration processes, decisions, motivations, and multilevel interconnections at the local, national, and global levels (Kane and Leedy 2013).
Jeffrey (2006) indicates that, since the end of World War II, a dramatic expansion of the global capitalist economy has linked countries of the world together into complex networks and connections of trade, finance, and technology flows. The availability of jobs with better pay, efficient technologies of mass production, and investment capital is primarily located in the rich and highly developed countries of the West. However, the majority of the employment seekers are from the world’s poorest geographical regions. Therefore, people from developing countries migrate to the developed countries because they are attracted by the availability of, or promises of, better paying jobs in those countries. Thus, one could argue that sub-Saharan Africa, like most other developing areas, has been integrated into the global economy primarily as a source of primary goods, natural resources extraction, cheap labor, and intellectual capital for the expanding economies of the Western countries and Asia. Massey et al. (1993) indicate that developed countries have high demand for workers at their industries, both at high- and low level labor hierarchies, which attracts the migration of workers from developing economies. For instance, Harvey (1989) and Sassen (1998) both argue that with the emergence of the neoliberal economic system, and with the central economic role of the U.S. in this phenomenon, the increase in the attraction of immigrants, including Africans, into its “global cities” happened as a result (Sassen 1991).

In addition, both the political and economic failures of the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s in sub-Saharan Africa were among the major “push” factors for the “new” African migrants to the U.S. When most sub-Saharan African countries gained their independence from European colonialism starting mostly in the 1960s, there were great expectations for political stability and brighter economic futures for those decolonized
African countries. But, contrary to such short-lived early optimism, the road to political stability and self-sustained development in sub-Saharan Africa has been long, complicated, and difficult. As a result, the decades of the 1970s and 1980s in post-independent sub-Saharan African countries were marked by volatile military and single-party authoritarian rule, corrupt leaderships, high unemployment rates, poverty, disease, illiteracy, environmental degradations, and high rates of population growth. On top of such challenges, ill-advised structural adjustment policies resulted in high rates of unemployment and the creation of millions of refugees, internal displaced people, and labor migrants within and from the African continent. It is to these compounded economic and political crises that Gordon (1998) refers to as the “volatile cocktails of insecurity” that played a key role in the internal and international migration of Africans as refugees, asylum seekers, and immigrants in the hope of finding safety, security, and a better future elsewhere, including the U.S. (Champers 1997; Ferguson 2006; Gordon1998).

Originally, in the early period of the 1960s, mass migration of Africans was mainly to Europe—including France, the U.K, Belgium, Portugal, Germany, Italy, and Spain—due to historical, political, economic, cultural, and social ties that were developed during colonialism. For example, migration to France was the primary destination for Francophone Africa, including people from Senegal, Ivory Coast, Algeria, and Morocco. Anglophone Ghana and Nigeria was predominantly toward the U.K.; Italy was attracting many refugees and immigrants from Eritrea. After 1965, the U.S. also started to become one of the major destinations for the “new” African immigrants. There are several reasons for the increasing presence of these “new” African migrants, not only due to
“push” factors (such as unemployment, poverty, political instability, ethnic conflict, cold war, structural adjustment programs, famine, drought, desertification, and so forth), but also due to “pull” factors (including better socio-economic and political conditions in the U.S. and other Western countries). Also, in the 1970s and 1980s, restrictive immigration policies in Europe, as well as the rise of racism and xenophobia against African immigrants in European countries (Rasmussen 1997) led thousands of African immigrants to pursue other destinations like the U.S, Canada, and Australia, which were starting to open up their immigration policies for these “new” migrants.

In the context of the U.S., among the key primary “pull” policy factors was the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 (which removed restrictive immigration laws passed in the pre-1960s era that heavily favored Northern and Western Europeans). The change to the 1965 immigration law in the U.S. allowed 170,000 people from the Eastern Hemisphere to be admitted into the U.S. legally. This act gave preference to skilled immigrants and allowed the relatives of those already in the U.S. to join their family, which some scholars argue added, in the later decades, to the phenomenon of “chain migration” (Lobo 2006). Starting the late 1950s and early 1960s, some Africans also came to the U.S. to pursue post-secondary education, as well as to take advantage of better economic opportunities. Various organizations, including the Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation provided scholarships, and grants to African students to conduct their studies in the U.S. For instance, thousands of Ethiopians, Ghanaians, Nigerians, Egyptians, and South Africans came to the U.S. to pursue their higher education in the 1960s through scholarship programs. Although many of those who initially came to the U.S. to pursue their studies returned to Africa, a number of them
remained in the country. Those who stayed in the U.S. later provided a nucleus for those who began to arrive in the U.S. in greater numbers in the late 1970s and early 1980s, mainly as refugees escaping from political instability in their home countries (Arthur 2000).

The 1980 Refugee Act allowed refugees to migrate on a systematic basis for humanitarian reasons. Sec. 101(a) (42) of the Immigration and Nationality Act incorporated the United Nations definition of a refugee and removed previous requirements, which stated that a refugee must have fled from a “communist or communist dominated country.” As a result, thousands of Africans from war-torn countries like Ethiopia, Eritrea, and Somalia were allowed to resettle in the U.S. In 1985, to give opportunities to a large number of refugees, a ceiling of 70,000 refugees, with 270,000 immigrants total and 20,000 from any one country was established in the U.S. (Kwado Konadu Agyemang 2006).

In 1986, the U.S. Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), approved during the Reagan administration, granted amnesty and regularized the status of around 2.7 million undocumented immigrants who had entered the country illegally before 1982, and of those who had overstayed their visas, such as farm workers, by giving them an opportunity for permanent residency in the U.S. through the IRCA program. An estimated 40,000 Africans legally settled in the U.S., and they were later allowed to formally sponsor their families as well for the purpose of family reunion. As a result, although the number of Africans entering with their employment visa to the U.S. declined to 2,000 annually for the period of 1978-1989, due to tight employment
eligibility, the overall entrée increased because many persons used family visas (87 percent) and also came through refugee flows (Lobo 2006).

The State Department Diversity Program (Visa Lottery) was created in the 1990s. This program allowed 55,000 Green Cards to be issued annually for those with minimum high school education or the equivalent who became “lottery winners” and their dependents, who also were admitted to the U.S. legally. This program enabled the U.S. to gain new human power from a diversified pool of immigrants mainly coming from countries that had previously been underrepresented in the immigration flow to the U.S. (Anna 2002). It is estimated that during the decade of 1990-2000 about 20,000 Africans were annual “winners” of the “visa lottery,” accounting for 47 percent of the growth of African immigration to the U.S. during that period (Baum 2002; Konadu Agyemang et al. 2006).

In addition, the Immigration Act of 1990 (IMMAct) was intended to help American businesses hire highly skilled and specially trained personnel to fill increasingly specialized jobs for which domestic personnel could not be found. It also allowed visas through immediate family ties. For instance, the language of instruction in schools and universities of former Anglophone colonies in sub-Saharan Africa like Ghana and Nigeria continues to be English, which in turn makes sub-Saharan African graduates more ready for the global competitive markets of the West. The “new” African immigrants to the U.S. have the third highest educational level among all immigrants to the country. For example, in 2011, 41 percent of the African foreign-born in the U.S. had a bachelor’s degree or higher (U.S. Census Bureau 2011). As a result, scholars such as Kapur (2005) have examined the issue of skilled migration in the context of “brain drain”
from sub-Saharan Africa to the West, with a focus on the relative volume, patterns, trends of migration, and economic implications to the sending and receiving continents. Kapur (2005), like Logan (1987), suggested that historical, educational, socio-cultural, and economic institutional ties of African countries to the developed-world economies of the West have served as convenient bridges for the migration of trained personnel and professionals from Africa. Others scholars such as Patterson (2007), and Yewah and Togunde (2010) focus on the potentials of “brain circulation” and “brain gain” as a relative win-win strategy for both the sending and the receiving communities. However, compared to other transnational migrants from Europe, Asia, and Latin America, the African transnational migrants are still underrepresented in the U.S. (Al-Ali et al. 2001; Arthur 2000). The sub-Saharan African migrants and refugees are scattered all over the U.S., with many settled in major metropolitan areas such as New York City, Washington, D.C., Chicago, Seattle, Los Angeles, Minneapolis-St. Paul, Boston, Dallas, and New Jersey, among others (Arthur 2000). Thus, through their involuntary and voluntary immigration to the U.S., the “new” Africans and their transnational communities continue to contribute to the diversity of the U.S. (Wonkeryor 2013).

Final Remarks

First, an integrative entrepreneurship theoretical view that draws from the SSP and the DSP is found relevant to contextualize and analyze the experiences of Ethiopian and Eritrean transnational migrant entrepreneurs in the metropolitan D.C. area (Thornton 1999). The SSP asserts that individuals who have specific attitudes, characteristics, and behaviors are entrepreneurial. It is useful for a micro-level approach and analysis that emphasis on the individual’s qualities (e.g., risk taking, economic opportunity recognition, determination, and innovation). The DSP is appropriate for the
macro-level context and analysis (e.g., economic, social, cultural, and political factors) that “push” or “pull” individuals toward business creation. The DSP also suggests that macro-level factors either hinder or facilitate business formation. Both the SSP and the DSP are applied in framing and analyzing the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant entrepreneurs and businesses in the Washington area, because they are the results of continuous dynamics of both micro- and macro-level processes, rather than just individual or structural accidents.

Second, the assessment of various economic-focused migration theories attempt to explain the origin and perpetuation of international migration in general and in the context of sub-Saharan African migrants to the U.S. in particular. It was found that each of these economic theories seeks to study international migration by employing different concepts, assumptions, and frames of reference. However, this dissertation is critical of the overemphasis of these views on the micro- and macro-level economic “push” and “pull” factors. This dissertation emphasizes the importance of having comprehensive and multidimensional approaches to the causes of and reasons for the perpetuation of migration. This perspective is relevant to articulate the interconnectedness of economic, political, psychological, social, and cultural dynamics of the “new” transnational migration from sub-Saharan Africa to the U.S.
CHAPTER 3
CONTEXTUALIZING MIGRATION PATTERNS OF ETHIOPIANS AND ERITREANS TO THE UNITED STATES (1960-PRESENT)

This chapter focuses on describing the phases of Ethiopian and Eritrean migration to the U.S., in general, and to the metropolitan D.C. area, in particular. Relevant historical and ethnographic data and analyses are provided because they are necessary to better grasp the past and present circumstances of these transnational migrants in the area. The reasons, patterns, and experiences of the Ethiopian migrants to the U.S. are systematically grouped into three chronological phases: (A) first phase, 1960-1974; (B) second phase, 1974-1991; and (C) third phase, 1991-present.

Part two of this chapter focuses on the reasons, patterns, and experiences of the Eritrean migrants to the U.S., also systematically grouped, but into four chronological phases: (A) first phase of Eritrean migration (1960s-1970s); (B) second phase (early 1980s); (C) third phase (after 1986 and until the early 1990s); and (D) fourth phase (after 1993 to present). To articulate the particular transnational migration experiences of both communities, the author explains what make the Eritrean migration experiences distinct and explains what they share with the Ethiopian migrant experiences.

Ethiopia, a federal republic and a landlocked nation in East Africa, is the only country in this region that was ruled by ancient monarchies and never experienced European colonialism (Getahoun 2007; Marcus 1994; Metaferia 1991). Although the Italians twice attempted to colonize Ethiopia, both attempts failed, except perhaps for a brief occupation of parts of Ethiopia during their second invasion attempt (1936-1941). Earlier, during the Italo-Abyssinian war of 1895-1896, the Italians were defeated by the Ethiopian army forces at the Battle of Adwa on March 1, 1896. Ethiopia was ruled by various leaders since the 1880s: Emperor Menelik II (1889-1913), Empress Zewditu
Emperor Haile Selassie (1930-1974), Mengistu Haile Mariam, the Derg socialist military junta (1974-1991) and the TPLF/EPRDF (1991-2013), which was led by the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, under the principles of “revolutionary democracy” and “developmental state” (Sehen and Tsegaye 2012).

Since September of 2012, TPLF/EPRDF and Ethiopia are led by Prime Minister Hailemariam Desalegn, following the same principles of leadership and the same macro-economic policies of the late Prime Minister Meles Zenawi. The EPRDF is comprised of four ethnically founded political organizations: Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front, Amhara National Democratic Movement, Oromo People’s Democratic Organization, and Southern Ethiopian People’s Democratic Movement (Getahoun 2007; Sehen and Tsegaye 2012). Ethiopia has more than 80 ethnic groups, the largest of which is the Oromo, at around 35 percent of the Ethiopian population. The current ruling party is dominated by Tigrayans; however, the federal system of the country allows major ethnic groups to have some control over the matters of their regional states and local contexts. In particular, the decades between the 1960s and 1990s were very unstable times in Ethiopia, and they led to the internal displacements and migration of millions of Ethiopians inside their country, to neighboring countries, and elsewhere, including to Europe, Canada, and the U.S. (Metaferia 1991; Pankhurst 1992).

Ethiopia has a special historical relation with the U.S. government and society, in general, and with the African American community, in particular. Although many Americans regarded Ethiopia as a mysterious land of ancient monarchies and traditions, for many African Americans, Ethiopia has a historical and symbolic relevance in that it stood strong as a Black African nation that successfully resisted European colonialism.
The concept “Ethiopia” is also often associated with aspirations, independence, and pride and with black people’s sense of culture and identity in Africa and in the African Diasporas alike. In the context of the U.S. black population, Ethiopia was a symbol of inspiration for African Americans’ own struggles and movements toward equal civil rights and against racial injustices at home (Harris 1964). Papers by Cheikh Anta Diop’s (1974) on the African origins of civilizations and St. Clair Drake (1982) on the African diaspora and pan-Africanism have articulated the African American pride in African civilizations. Thus, many African Americans supported the Ethiopians struggle against European colonialism (Getachew 1991; Marcus 1983).

The last dynasty of Ethiopia, that of Emperor Haile Selassie (1930-1974), made efforts to become integrated in the post-World War II global geopolitical and economic system. However, his rule ended in a military and socialist revolution led by Mengistu Haile Mariam (1974-1991). During these decades of the military revolution, Ethiopia was devastated by civil wars with Eritrea, recurring droughts, and famine (Getachew 1991).

In 2012, Ethiopia was a country characterized by a high population growth 2.9 per year. Currently the population of the country is estimated to be around 93 million. The economy has been heavily reliant on subsistence agriculture (Sehen and Tsegaye 2012). Ethiopia has historically ranked low in the Human Development Index (which
Figure 3-1. Geopolitical Map of Eritrea and Ethiopia (2009). Courtesy of the University of Texas Libraries, the University of Texas Austin (http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/africa/eritrea_ethiopia_2009.jpg).

considers three metrics, namely, mortality, education, and decent standard of living). For example, Ethiopia is ranked 173 out of 187 countries in the United Nations Human Development Index (HDI) report of 2013. In the last decade, however, Ethiopia
The developmental state paradigm, with an explicit focus on economic development, eradication of poverty, and making the country move toward a middle-income economy by 2025. There is a big push for commercialization of agriculture and about 20 percent is also land grabs (Sehen and Tsegaye 2012).

The 2010 Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) was spearheaded by the former prime minister Meles Zenawi. It continues to make Ethiopia one of the fastest growing economies in sub-Saharan Africa, with double-digit GDP growth of around 10-11 percent between 2010 and 2012 (Sehen and Tsegaye 2012). In 2012, Ethiopia was one of the 16 African countries that were among the top 30 world countries to be experiencing the highest rates of economic growth (Sehen and Tsegaye 2012). However, more is needed for the structural transformation and the growth in the economy of the country to include the modernization of agriculture, an increase in the ability to generate more energy and electricity, the reduction of youth unemployment, and the expansion of the manufacturing and industrialization sectors (Sehen and Tsegaye 2012; Tesfaye 2010). In what follows, this study systematically looks at the patterns and reasons for Ethiopian migration to the U.S.

Ethiopian Migrants to the United States in Three Phases

This section describes the Ethiopian migration to the U.S. in three phases and analyzes their respective characteristics. The first phase of migration occurred between the 1900s and the 1970s, and it was comprised mostly of elder male Ethiopian elites from Amhara and Tigrinya ethnic backgrounds who came to the U.S. to represent their government or pursue their graduate level studies at U.S. universities. The second phase occurred from 1974 to 1991, especially after 1974, with the coming of the Derg, and because after the 1980s the U.S. began to resettle Ethiopian refugees who were
fleeing from the then Soviet-backed Mengistu Haile Mariam’s brutal socialist military regime. The third began after 1991 and has lasted to the present. It comprises those who migrated to the U.S. after the overthrow of the Mengistu regime in 1991, including those who have come to the country as winners of the diversity visa lottery and then, through family reunification, for graduate studies, H-1B work visa, or as asylum seekers.

**The First Phase of Ethiopian Migration to the U.S., 1960s-1974**

Emperor Haile Selassie ruled Ethiopia for more than four decades of the twentieth century (from 1930 to 1974). This was also the time when the U.S. was transforming itself from a republic into a global power, and more so in the post-World War II period. Although diplomatic relationships between the U.S. and Ethiopia had existed for a long time, for example, during the Menelik II rule of Ethiopia (1889-1913), and during Empress Zewditu’s rule (1916-1930), it was after the 1930s (the second Italo-Abyssinian war of 1935-1936), and later after WW II, that the diplomatic ties between the two countries strengthened (Skinner 1969). For example, trade in coffee and leather from Ethiopia to the U.S., and American textiles and construction technologies from the U.S. to Ethiopia was conducted as back as the 1920s (Marcus 1983). Prior to the 1930s, Ethiopia had historically better ties with European countries and, by then, many Ethiopians had migrated to various European countries, such as France, England, and Germany, to obtain their higher-level studies. A change occurred, however, mainly due to the Italian fascist invasion of Ethiopian sovereign territory in 1935-1936.

In the 1930s Ethiopia was a member of the League of Nations. The principal mission of the League of Nations included maintaining world peace. In 1935-1936, Emperor Haile Selassie appealed to the League of Nations and requested world support for the Ethiopian cause against Italian colonialism forces. During this time Ethiopia also
needed a powerful non-colonial ally like the U.S. against European colonial forces in the Horn of Africa. During the same period, the U.S. needed to tackle the threats of communism in Africa, the Middle East, and elsewhere, which made Ethiopia a good strategic choice for alliance with the U.S. Thus, leaders of both countries took further initiatives to strengthen their diplomatic ties, address such challenges, and further cooperate in efforts to promote political stability and economic development in East Africa (Spencer 1984).

The act of sending a few Ethiopian students to the U.S. started while Empress Zawditu (1916-1930) was in power. However, it was during Emperor Haile Selassie’s rule that the U.S. gave more scholarship opportunities to Ethiopians to come to the U.S. for training in various developmental fields. For instance, after the 1930s, the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Bureau started allocating a quota of 100 visas for individuals from African countries, including Ethiopia, to come to the U.S. (King 2000). In addition, between the 1930s and 1940s, hundreds of African Americans went to Ethiopia to support educational and development efforts in the country (Harris 1964).

After WW II, to combat the influence of the then U.S.S.R in the Red Sea and the Middle East, the U.S. increased its ties and helped Ethiopia in various development sectors, including education, agriculture, health, and defense. In return, during 1953-1978, the U.S. maintained a communication base in the Qagnaw station in Asmara (Getahun 2007; Marcus 1994).

With regard to immigration laws, especially after 1965, the U.S. made some major reforms that allowed immigrants not only from North and Western Europe but also from Africa, including Ethiopians, to come and settle in the country legally. Also, the
immigration reform of 1965 also allowed legal Ethiopian-Americans to petition for family reunification visas (Getahun 2007; Portes and Rumbaut 1996). In addition, by the 1970s, thousands of Ethiopians arrived in the U.S. for their educational training at various American universities. Most of these newcomers were elder men from either political elites or the upper-economic class of Ethiopia. Mostly were from the Shoa region and of Amhara ethnic background. Some of them got scholarship opportunities either from the Ethiopian or the U.S. governments. Others were men and a few women from the upper-economic class whose parents were able to cover their educational and living expenses in the U.S. Only a minority of them were from low-income families and with no political ties, but they were able to secure scholarships from the U.S. government because of their scholastic achievements and potential. American institutions such as Fulbright, USAID, Point Four Program, African American Institute, and the African Graduate Fellowship Program provided the scholarships to the Ethiopian students. As a result, although the number of Ethiopians who were studying in the U.S. in the 1930s had been less than a handful, it reached thousands in the 1970s, making Ethiopia the third largest sender of African students for higher studies to the U.S. after Nigeria and Egypt (Wagaw 1990).

In addition, the U.S. collaborated with Ethiopia in building institutions of higher learning, including the College of Agriculture in Harar and the Public Health College in Gonder. Hundreds of American professors were also sent to Ethiopia to teach, assist with curriculum development, and work in the administration of various institutions of higher learning like the Haile Selassie I University. Hundreds of African Americans and thousands of American Peace Corps Volunteers also went to help in various
educational and developmental efforts in Ethiopia. As a result, the number of Ethiopian students from all economic classes and rural and urban backgrounds came to know the culture, educational system, and the educational opportunities in the U.S. started to increase (Wagaw 1990).

During Emperor Haile Selassie's rule, people of the Shoa region, most of Amhara ethnicity, had better education facilities and became a privileged group able to obtain government jobs and scholarship opportunities compared to other regions and ethnicities in the country. However, a few outstanding Ethiopian students of different ethnicities and socio-economic backgrounds were also given scholarship opportunities to pursue their studies abroad. With regard to their settlement patterns in the U.S, the first-phase migrants were living dispersed in various institutions of higher learning situated in different parts of the country, including in Washington, D.C., (such as Howard, a historically black university), Los Angeles, New York, and Dallas (Wagaw 1990).

A few years later, many of these early immigrants from Ethiopia started to cluster in and around Washington for various reasons, including (1) the Ethiopian embassy was located there and many of those who were representatives of their government in the U.S. lived around the area; (2) family, kinship, friendship, and nationality ties further attracted more Ethiopian migrants here; (3) some of the migrants started to create their own businesses, such as Ethiopian restaurants, transportation services, parking lots, grocery shops, and coffee shops, especially around Adams Morgan, and later in the U Street North West and other parts; and (4) this area had and has various service-sector jobs, and vibrant social and cultural environments, and such kinds of environments
attracted Ethiopian migrants. Also, the metropolitan D.C. area has attracted a disproportionately higher share of African migrants in general (U.S. Census, ACS 2005).

These first-phase Ethiopians stayed in the U.S. only for a temporary period on student visas until they completed their studies. The majority returned and contributed to the modernization and nation-building of Ethiopia. Those who preferred to remain in the U.S. to seek future opportunities were rare (Marcus 1983). This was because the majority of them had initially a “sojourner mindset” and, due to such a mindset, they did not spend much time or effort to establish long-term, locally based community organizations in the U.S. Rather, they supported each other through informal social and cultural kinships, and they hung out around Ethiopian immigrant-owned restaurants, bars, cafes, and shops. In addition, there were thousands more Ethiopians who came to the U.S. as tourists and by 1974 the number of Ethiopians in the U.S. was estimated to have reached around 30,000 (Getachew and Maigenet 1991).

The Second Phase of Ethiopian Migration to the U.S., 1974-1991

In 1974, a military led Marxist revolution overthrew Emperor Haile Selassie. Lieutenant Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam immediately assumed and held power in the country between 1974-1991 via the Derg, a socialist military committee that started by propagating with the promise of a better life for the majority of agrarian cultural groups in Ethiopia. In reality, however, the Derg regime proved to be notoriously intolerant and tyrannical. The Derg not only destroyed the traditional monarchy that had stayed in power for several hundred years, but also hampered the subsequent diplomatic relationship between Ethiopia and the U.S. The Derg regime created political instability, civil wars, and human rights abuses that were the core causes for the second phase of
refugees, asylum seekers, and migration of Ethiopians to various countries, including the U.S. (Kohen 1991).

Mengistu Haile Mariam’s oppressive Derg regime is most known for its infamous campaign of qay-shibr ("red terror"), a campaign of repression. It was against all opponents of the Derg. During these times, thousands of intellectuals, students, government workers, and members of civil societies were abused, jailed, and killed, most without any proper legal process. These persecutions included the extrajudicial executions of high ranking government officials, mostly due to ideological differences of governance and power contests (Getachew and Maigenet 1991, Koehn 1991).

In reaction to the Derg’s campaign of “red terror” and to the oppressive leadership, the majority of the young educated elites who had come to the U.S. for graduate-level studies during Haile Selassie’s rule, started to settle permanently in various areas of the U.S. (Koehn 1991). In addition, the red terror campaign also pushed thousands to flee the country in search of security, freedom, and a better life. Although they initially fled to neighboring countries, mainly Sudan and Kenya, they were eventually either resettled in a third country, such as to the U.S., by international refugee agencies or they continued their second migration to the West by themselves, with finance, information and moral support from family members abroad.

The second-phase migrants started with senior government officials and diplomats, intellectuals, students, and laborers from various urban areas. During this early 1980s period, Ethiopian migrants to the U.S. were mostly highly educated (Getachew and Maigenet 1991). These people were politically active and, jointly with the first-phase Ethiopian migrants who had remained in the U.S., they established
various political and civic organizations such as the Ethiopian Students Union in North America (ESUNA), a student- and intellectuals-led organization that was active in the U.S. in opposing *Derg* rule.

Another important non-profit community-based organization, the Ethiopian Community Development Council (ECDC), was established in 1983. It offered a wide range of cultural, economic, and social services to new refugees and asylum seekers from East African countries to the metropolitan D.C. area, who were given training opportunities to improve their English language skills, through the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) program, which included support on how to find and use transportation, medical and accommodation facilities, and jobs in the private and public sectors. They also gave them legal advice on how to fill various immigration forms and immigration petitions to sponsor other family members to rejoin them from Ethiopia to the U.S.

Programs such as the Ethiopian Community Development Council were necessary because the initial migrants of the second phase were soon followed by more refugees and asylum seekers from various regions, ethnicities, and class backgrounds. Many farmers came from the rural regions of Ethiopia, not only individuals but also entire families, also escaping from the *Derg* military dictatorship. The *Derg* regime, once in power, introduced *Kebele* (local association) and *Kefetegna* (higher association) organizations in Ethiopia, both in the rural and urban areas. The *Kebele* and *Kefetegna* organizations kept demographic records of the people who lived in their respective localities. The records were then used as a mechanism of controlling the local population, including forcing their adult male members to be conscripted into the
Ethiopian army. In addition, the *Derg* conducted occasional *affessa* (mass detentions) to forcefully recruit people into the army.

In addition, various political parties, such as the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), and the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Party (EPRP), opposed to the *Derg* regime were waging not only war against the *Derg* but also fighting due to ideological differences and were recruiting peasants to their respective camps. Their aspirations to seek safety and freedom in the West was also reinforced by the continuing wars between the Ethiopian army and the Eritrean war of independence of 1961-1991, and between the Ethiopian army and the Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF) during 1974-1991 (Metaferia 1991; Pankhurst 1992, 2002). In addition to the human-made problems of wars and political factions, there were also various forms of natural problems such as drought, desertification, and famine in the 1980s. Especially, the 1984 famine in Ethiopia caught the attention of the world as photos and plights of millions of starving children, women, and the elderly were shown on major global news media outlets and charity organizations, pleading with their viewers for donations and food aid for its victims (Pankhurst 1992; Ungar 1995).

The results of both man-made wars and natural disasters were the destruction of villages, mass displacements, and dislocations of people from their homes, death of civilians (especially women, the old, and children), robbing of livestock, serious reductions in agricultural productivity, higher spending in non-productive sectors, such as the military, and so forth. Such complex problems resulted in the creation of Ethiopian refugees, mainly to the Sudan, Somalia, and Kenya. In 1991 there were around 1.7 million Ethiopian refugees and a majority of them, 66 percent, asked for
refugee status in the Sudan, 33 percent asked for refugee status in Somalia, and the remaining went to Kenya and Djibouti (Tekle 1995: 54).

From 1970 to 1990, thousands from the Horn of Africa, including Ethiopia, Somalia, and Sudan, were also resettled in the U.S. By 1988, the Horn of Africa, which produced and hosted refugees, was known as the land of 1.3 million refugees, including 430,000 Ethiopians in Somalia; 677,000 Ethiopians in the Sudan; 205,000 Sudanese in Ethiopia; and 15,000 Somalis in Ethiopia, among others. After the 1980s, most of these refugees sought refugee status or became asylum seekers in the U.S. The Refugee Act of 1980 allowed the legal basis for thousands of Ethiopian political, religious, racial, and ethnic refugees fleeing communism and a repressive regime in their home country (U.S. Committee for Refugees 1988).

What distinguishes this second phase of Ethiopian migrants from the first phase is the way they entered the U.S. The second phase did not migrate from Ethiopia to the U.S. directly. They came from both urban and rural settings. They were of diverse backgrounds in terms of gender, age, ethnicity, religion, socio-economic status, and education. They were comprised of both families and individuals. They stayed in refugee camps in Sudan, Kenya, or other neighboring countries from several months to several years. They were later resettled to the U.S., mostly through the help of institutions like the U.S. Government Office of Refugee Resettlement (ORR), and through international and national humanitarian and charity organizations in the U.S. A few came through family sponsors, family reunion visas, and as children, spouses, or parents of U.S. citizens or permanent residents.
It can be argued that the apparent relaxation of the U.S. immigration policy was also a contributing pull factor. Specifically, the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA) made it easier for undocumented immigrants who came to the U.S. before 1982 from different parts of the world, including Ethiopia, to become permanent legal residents (Kloman 2010). Those who came to the U.S. through sponsorship, mostly by family or relatives, were required to have their respective sponsors provide a financial and personal affidavit to the U.S. immigration officials to demonstrate that they would be assistance free until they would stand on their own feet in the U.S. Since most of the refugees knew little or no English before their arrival in the U.S., various humanitarian organizations gave them English lessons either in the refugee camps or immediately after their arrival in the U.S. The first phase of Ethiopian migrants in the U.S. helped in these processes by working and volunteering for those organizations.

The second phase of Ethiopian migrants were attracted mostly to the Washington area. Today, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, African immigrants in the District of Columbia make up 17 percent of the foreign-born population. Ethiopia is among the top countries of origin (http://oaa.dc.gov/node/111192, accessed on April 12, 2013). Other cities and metropolitan areas they migrated to, includes Los Angeles, Dallas, Saint Paul, Atlanta, Seattle, Chicago, and New York (Kloman 2010:141; Levinson and Ember 1997).

With regard to gender proportions, historically Ethiopian male migrants outnumbered Ethiopian female migrants. However, during the second phase of migration, many women of all ages were also able to migrate to the U.S. where they gained more opportunities and rights, after coming from the male-dominated, patrilineal
culture of Ethiopia. For example, they were able to go to universities, open their
traditional and non-traditional businesses, improve their economic status by working in
paying jobs, form social and cultural self-help mechanisms, and work in various sectors
in the U.S. In their homes, they demanded the sharing of domestic responsibilities,
including the sharing of the kitchen work with their male partners. This meant that the
Ethiopian male migrants were able to find partners and establish families, but they also
had to learn to adjust to new gender roles, more in tune with U.S. customs (Getahoun
2007; Woldemikael 1996)

The Third Phase of Ethiopian Migration to the U.S., 1991 to the Present

The Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front (TPLF), also known as the Ethiopian
People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), came to power in May 1991. This
post-Cold War period coincided with better U.S.-Ethiopian diplomatic relations, a
promise of stability, and a transition toward democracy in Ethiopia. The number of
Ethiopians who were admitted to the U.S. as refugees and asylum seekers then started
to decline. However, there were many Ethiopian immigrants who were admitted into the
U.S. after 1991 in various ways, including through the diversity lottery, family reunion, to
seek university-level education, and through H1B work visas. Many of them eventually
found ways to change their immigration status to that of permanent residents in the
U.S., augmenting the growing Ethiopian transnational communities in the U.S.

In particular, an immigration policy that made it easier for Ethiopians to migrate
legally to the U.S. starting in the 1990s was the Diversity Visa Program (D.V lottery).
Ethiopia was granted about 5,000 immigration slots per year, in accordance with United
States policy (Kloman 2010). Most of these Ethiopian who came through the D.V. lottery
had completed high-school or higher before they migrated to the U.S. The third phase
also included hundreds of medical doctors and professionals. As this skilled manpower coming from Ethiopia to the U.S. become U.S. citizens, they are eventually qualified to sponsor their families and parents for permanent residency in the U.S.

Another organization that helps build social networks is the Ethiopian Sports and Cultural Federation in North America (ESFNA), a non-profit that has been conducting annual sport and cultural competitions among the Ethiopian transnational communities in various U.S. and Canadian cities since 1984. It creates a positive and empowering environment, using soccer tournaments and supplementary cultural events (music, dance, and guest speakers) for fundraising missions to help with famine relief and to contribute toward combating the spread of HIV/AIDS. Its goal is for the Ethiopian-American youth to network and create friendships, and to empower students by providing scholarships and mentoring. The ESFNA events are usually held in the summer to encourage the participation of as many Ethiopian-American migrants as possible. The Ethiopian-owned businesses use these ESFNA events to advertise their services. The entrepreneurs also encourage such positive initiatives by financing them to help bring positive changes in their communities.

The missions, objectives, and functions of these social networking groups among the Ethiopian migrants in the U.S. vary significantly. Yet, they all serve as mechanisms for national identity reconstruction, and for reinforcing social networks among the Ethiopian migrants. In earlier studies of migrants to the U.S., Robert Park (1967) stressed that they created ethnic organizations to help ease their adjustment needs in the new American society, in their search of housing, employment, finance, and other
areas (Park 1967). Membership in a kin-based community and in an ethnic group also provides opportunity for job connections (Aldrich and Wagner 1990).

Transnational migrants also create ethnic-media outlets in various communication forms, including newspapers, magazines, websites, television shows, and radio programs (Ndubuike 2002). The Ethiopian migrants in the metropolitan D.C. area have created mass communication institutions that address various issues of relevance to them. The topics they cover in their programs include economic, social, cultural, and political issues. They are covered from various perspectives and voices. These media outlets give the Ethiopian migrants alternative opportunities to express themselves in a democratic environment (Chacko 2009).

Ethiopian Community TV (ECTV), for example, was created in 1991 as an independent, non-profit, community-based media resource that serves the Ethiopian migrants in the area. At the end of April 2010, Ethiopian Satellite Television (ESAT) was launched in Washington as an independent Ethiopian, migrant-based, alternative media service that broadcasts in Amharic to Ethiopia and the world. ESAT provides current local, national, and international news, as well as entertainment (music, films, sports, and cultural shows) created for and by Ethiopian migrants.

Radio Abisinia is a Washington-based non-profit online radio station established in 2004 to cover radio services in Amharic on various topics, including social, economic, traditional, and cultural aspects of Ethiopia and of Ethiopian migrants in the area. All these media outlets have gained some popularity, and they get financial support from advertisements and financial contributions from their listeners. In return, they provide Ethiopian migrants with information about current political and economic developments
in their home countries, Ethiopian-owned businesses advertise on them in their local languages (Amharic and Tigrinya) and in English (e.g., through ads about real estate developers, restaurants, cafes, remittance businesses, travel agencies, calling cards sales, home rentals, law and medical offices, hair salons, and the like.).

Ethiopian migrants in the metropolitan D.C. area also organize cultural shows, music recitals, and dance performances to highlight their homeland’s cultures and to help them teach their American-born children about their Ethiopian heritage. For instance, the Center for the Ethiopian Arts and Culture (CEAC), based in Columbia Heights, fosters knowledge about the rich cultural traditions of Ethiopia and promotes its art, music, dance, sports, and scholarly works by organizing communal celebrations such as the Ethiopian New Year (Inqutatash). It is a unique organization established in 1993. It is the first Ethiopian arts organization for the Ethiopian migrants living in the U.S. It provides online information dissemination and collaboration with various well-known cultural institutions in the mainstream society, such as the Smithsonian Institution’s yearly folk festivals. Such collaborative work helps increase the historical and cultural knowledge of the growing Ethiopian migrant communities in the area.

Eritrea, located north of Ethiopia in the Horn of Africa, is one of the newest countries in sub-Saharan Africa. Its total area is estimated at 117,600 square kilometers. The total population of the country is about 6,086,495, comprised of nine recognized ethno-linguistic groups (July 2012 estimate, the World Fact book), and its population growth rate per year is 2.4 percent (2012 est). Eritrea is small but, unlike Ethiopia, it has the coastal area of the Red Sea (2,234 km total) as well as minerals like gold. At present, however, mainly due to long years of wars, displacements, and
authoritarian governance, Eritrean people are desperately poor, with a per capita income of $800 (2012 est, the World Fact book). Nearly 80 percent of the Eritrean population depends on subsistence agriculture and pastoralism that is not mechanized and has low output. Remittances from Eritrean migrants comprised 26.6 percent of the per capita income of Eritreans in 2002 (Fessehatzion, 2005).

The foundation of the state of Eritrea came into being during the Italian colonial period that started in 1890 (Iyob 1995). Between 1890 and 1941 the country was an Italian settler colony and the Italians made substantial economic investments, including in infrastructure, electric power stations, telephone lines, manufacturing, light industrial development, and commercial agriculture. Investments were also made in small and medium food-processing industries, including pasta, fishing, and breweries.

The Italians invested in Eritrea for their own economic and political benefits, which included the strategic access to the Red Sea. With the opening of the Suez Canal in 1869, the place became a major source of trade, a route linking Europe with the East. The Italians also used Eritrea for further colonial expansion into Ethiopia and Libya (Pateman 1998; Rena 2006). After the defeat of Italy by the allied powers during World War II, between 1941 and 1952, Eritrea was a British protectorate. Educational opportunities improved during the British administration compared to the Italian colonialism. The Italians had a restrictive education policy against the native population. Eritreans were not allowed to study beyond grade four. The British allowed Eritreans to go to high school and beyond. However, during the British protectorate period, the economic investment in Eritrea declined. Many factories were dismantled and sold on the international market (Gebre-Hiwet 1993; Gebre-Medhin 1989; Rena 2006).
In 1952, the United Nations adopted a federal arrangement under which Eritrea was federated with Ethiopia. In 1962, after ten years of federation, the Ethiopian Emperor Haile Selassie I unilaterally abrogated the federal arrangement and declared Eritrea as the fourteenth province of Ethiopia. This triggered a long and bloody war in which the Eritreans fought for self-determination, a fight that culminated in 1991 with a de facto independence, when Eritrea was fully liberated under the leadership of the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF). The period between 1952 and 1991 was politically, economically, and socially devastating for both Eritrea and Ethiopia. Both communities had waged severe wars against each other for decades. It was also during these turbulent times that the majority of the Eritreans and Ethiopians migrated to the U.S. and elsewhere (Gebre-Medhin 1989, Woldemikael 1996).

The Ethiopian imperial government under Emperor Haile Selassie (1930–1974) did not encourage economic investments in Eritrea. During his leadership, many factories in Eritrea were either closed or transferred to other parts of Ethiopia. In 1958, an estimated 165 factories existed in Eritrea. Three years later, the number dropped to 83 (Rena 2006). By then the Eritreans had waged wars against the Ethiopian occupation, resulting in displacements of civilian population from their homes, and this conflict started the refugee crisis with many fleeing to Sudan and elsewhere (Iyob 1995, Pateman 1998).

The economic and political situation in Eritrea went from bad to worse when the *Derg* came to power between 1974 and 1991. That regime continued to wage major wars against Eritreans who were fighting for independence. The *Derg* also nationalized several factories in Eritrea. Land, major housing developments, banks, hotels, and
restaurants were also nationalized. Private business investors were discouraged and heavily taxed by the *Derg* (Gebre-Medhin 1989). By the time Eritrea was liberated in 1991, there were only 46 factories left in the country (Rena 2006; World Bank 1994). These key historical events, wars, instabilities, military rules, and human rights violations resulted in the migration of people from their homes in Eritrea to the U.S. They also impacted the living conditions (economic, social, cultural, and political) of those migrants who had made it to the U.S.

On May 24, 1993, after a national referendum that resulted in an overwhelming 99.8 percent vote of “yes” for independence of Eritrea from Ethiopia, Eritrea was officially recognized as an independent state. As a result of several decades of wars and political instability in Eritrea, as well as the recurrences of droughts and famines, more than 100,000 persons died, the economies of families and communities was ruined, and people of Eritrean origin migrated to where they were safer. By Independence in 1993, Eritrea had inherited weak institutions, limited professional and skilled personnel, dilapidated infrastructures, war torn and traumatized communities, and a displaced society (Iyob 1995; Pateman 1998).

The new phase of nation building in Eritrea has proven to be difficult. It remains a long-term vision yet to be achieved even after 22 years of independence. Although the Eritrean economy started to recover slowly from decades of lost economic growth, a devastating border conflict with Ethiopia occurred between May 1998 and June 2000. These wars killed more than 19,000 Eritrean soldiers, and more than 70,000 civilians on both sides. It also displaced thousands more from their homes and agriculture fields. Hundreds of millions of dollars were spent on war and militarization efforts on both
sides. At the same time, it was estimated that around one million Eritreans faced starvation (PBS May 30, 2000).

The border conflict between Ethiopia and Eritrea was brought to the attention of the International Border Commission, known as the Eritrean-Ethiopian Boundary Commission (EEBC), which gave its verdict, based on the Algiers Agreement that was signed by both Eritrea and Ethiopia on December 12, 2000. The EEBC provided decisions on a final and binding border delimitation in 2002, and a border demarcation in 2007. However, the actual physical demarcation of the border and the normalization of the relationship between Eritrea and Ethiopia are yet to be achieved. This means that although the EEBC decided on the “virtual demarcation” by remotely demarcating the border between the two countries by coordinates, and it ended its job in November 16, 2007, both countries remain in a no-war and no-peace situation. Both countries remain heavily militarized, tensely facing each other in the border trenches (1998 to present). Yet, both countries have to agree on how to go about making the actual demarcation on the ground happen (EEBC, 2007; Hepner 2009; O’Kane and Hepner 2009).

On the Eritrean side, under the Proclamation of National Service (No. 82/1995), men aged 18 to 54 and women aged 18 to 47 are required to undergo a mandatory national service program, for a total period of 18 months. It is comprised of 6 months of military training, followed by 12 months of military or non-military service assigned by the government. After the border dispute with Ethiopia, in 1998 the national service program in Eritrea was extended for an indefinite period, with many people required to serve longer periods in harsh living conditions. The official justification for the indefinite extension is that the country is in a no-war and no-peace situation, and political leaders
claim that it is necessary for national security purposes, until the border demarcation with Ethiopia is finalized (Kibreab 2009; Nicole and Abdulkader 2013).

Also, Eritrea’s ratified Constitution of 1997 has yet to be implemented. Since 2001, there has been no credible independent press—national, regional, or international—allowed to work in Eritrea and no official opposition political party. As a result, in 2012 the United Nations Human Rights Council (HRC) appointed a special rapporteur on Eritrea, due to its concern about the human rights situation. The Human Rights Watch report on Eritrea (2013) indicated that national service conscripts in Eritrea were poorly paid (less than $30 per month), were poorly fed, and received inadequate medical care. Eritrean youth who see no end to this indefinite national service program and oppose the oppressive dictatorship rule in Eritrea continue to try to leave their home country in droves (Kibreab 2009; Nicole and Abdulkader 2013).

The Human Rights report on Eritrea (2013) also reveals that Eritrean conscripts had to provide forced labor from 2009 to 2011 to Segen Construction, a sub-contractor owned by the only ruling front in Eritrea, during the building of the Bisha Gold Mine Company, a company owned jointly by the Eritrean ruling government and Canada’s Nevsun Resources Ltd. Arbitrary detention, severe restrictions on freedom of expression, and restrictions on civic association and religious freedom remain routine in Eritrea (Human Rights Watch 2013). Some scholars, international journalists, and international human rights activists refer to Eritrea as an “open-air prison” and as “Africa’s North Korea” (Myers 2010), or as a “low-tech surveillance and despotic state” (David 2011). In its 2010 Press Freedom Index, Reporters Without Borders ranks the
media environment in Eritrea as 178 out of 178, the worst possible rating for media

To escape from an indefinite national service program, Eritrean youth continue to
flee their homeland by the thousands. Many attempt to obtain recognition as refugees,
or asylum seekers, in various Middle-Eastern, European, and Asian countries, including
Israel, Norway, Sweden, Italy, France, Spain, Australia, Canada, and the U.S. However,
before they reach their final destination, they have to pass through life-challenging
processes, including a shoot-to-kill policy on the Eritrean borders, and human trafficking
networks on the Eritrean-Sudanese-Egyptian borders and the Sinai Peninsula along the
route to Israel. They have to bribe corrupt officials along the way. If in fact they reach
their destination, many Eritrean migrants pressure family members abroad and at home
to help them pay thousands of dollars to smugglers for illegal passages and fake travel
documents, and for bribing officials so that they help them cross several countries
before they reach their final destination in Israel, Europe, Canada, Australia, or the U.S.

Since 2006 and more so following the Egyptian revolution of 2011 and the
subsequent lawlessness along the Sinai Peninsula, human trafficking, rape, and torture
of Eritrean migrants by the Bedouin, mainly by the Rashaida gang groups of smugglers
along the Eritrean, Sudanese, and Egyptian borders, are becoming common. These
cruel human-trafficking networks of Bedouin smugglers include extreme forms of
violence in the middle of the Sinai desert, including allegations of organ harvest,
smuggler-to-smuggler sale of Eritrean refugees kidnapped from the Sudanese and
Egyptian borders and along the Sinai desert, rape, beating, suspension from ceilings,
burning with heated plastic and metal, and electric shocks. All this has continued to happen unabated (Human Rights Watch 2012).

Eritrean refugees who are kidnapped in Sudan or Egypt and transferred to the Sinai desert are asked to contact their relatives abroad and at home via mobile phones to ask them to pay $30,000 to $40,000 to ransom them. It has been reported that over 4,000 Eritrean migrants have been killed in Egypt’s Sinai desert attempting to cross to Israel in the last two years, according to a recent press report by Amnesty International (2013).

An estimated 35,000 Eritreans have managed to migrate to Israel. Once they get there, most are not considered refugees, but illegal “infiltrators” (IRIN 2013). Only a lucky few Eritrean migrants are able to make their journey to safe places like Israel, and even fewer of those are able to make it to the U.S., usually after passing through several continents (Africa, Europe, and Latin America) and several countries (South Africa, Libya, Egypt, Brazil, and Mexico, just to mention a few of the most common transit places).

In 2012, an estimated 2,000 Eritrean youth escaped monthly from Eritrea and sought refuge in neighboring countries (Sudan and Ethiopia). According to the 2013 UNHCR Country Operations Profile Report (2013), an estimate of more than 100,000 Eritrean refugees live in northern Sudan. However, this number is an underrepresentation. For example, between the 1960s to the late 1980s, there were about half a million Eritreans who fled to Sudan, most of whom, nearly 400,000, have not returned after independence, since the infrastructure in Eritrea cannot accommodate them (Kibreab 1996; 2000). The new Eritrean refugees in Sudan are
relatively young, well educated, and mostly come from the highlands. They plan to use Sudan as a transit country to the West, including to the U.S. (UNHCR 2013).

Ethiopia was host to 370,000 refugees from neighboring countries, of which 17 percent were Eritreans. According to the UNHCR (2013), around 1,000 new Eritrean asylum seekers arrive every month, including unaccompanied children. New refugee camps in Shimbela, My Ayni, and Adi Harush were established to accommodate increasing Eritrean refugees in Ethiopia. After their arrival in Ethiopia, thousands of Eritreans have conducted a secondary migration out of Ethiopia mainly through Sudan and Egypt to reach Israel or other Western countries, including the U.S. In most cases, the Eritrean migrants help those who are escaping from Eritrea with financial, informational, and moral support.

In the remainder of this chapter, historical and ethnographic contexts and analyses include the contributions made by Eritrean migrants to the U.S. in their own community’s transformation from “exiled” communities to transnational migrants.

**Eritrean Migrants to the United States: Four Phases**

The author of this dissertation argues that before the country’s independence in May 1993, Eritreans abroad were “exiled” communities, but as a result of complex historical processes in sending, transit, and receiving communities, Eritrean migrants have actively participated in the transformation process of their identities from “exiled” to transnational communities (Bernal 2004; Hepner 2009). Thus, the following, meant to show the migration experiences of Eritreans to the U.S., is organized into four phases.

**The First Phase, 1960s-1970s**

Migration of Eritreans to the U.S. started in the 1960s. Eritreans started departing to “exile” from their home communities because of their opposition to and different
political views on the future of Eritrea from the ones of the successive occupying regimes of Haile Sellassie (1962-1974), and Mengistu Haile Mariam (1974-1991), also known as Derg. Their migration to the U.S. gained momentum especially after the 1965 change in immigration law in the U.S. Because of such pro-immigration policy changes in the U.S., individuals of Eritrean origin, specifically those who became U.S. citizens and were over the age of 21, were able to petition for their family members, including their spouses, minor children, and parents, to come to the U.S.

The first phase of migrants was comprised of mainly young bachelors in their early 20s. They were educated and from an upper socio-economic status. Also, in the 1960s and 1970s, the Ethiopian powers started especially targeting young and adult Eritreans because they were the core of the human and intellectual capital of the two newly established Eritrean Liberation movements, the Eritrean Liberation Front (ELF), and the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF). Both the ELF and EPLF struggled for Eritrea’s independence from Ethiopia. As a result, many of the young educated Eritreans fled to Sudan on a large scale trying to avoid political persecution and in search of safety. Most of these young and educated Eritreans did not stay long in Sudan but migrated further into Western countries, including the U.S. They came to the U.S. looking for better life opportunities. They first lived dispersed throughout the U.S. They were relatively small in number compared to those who joined them after the 1980s. They were mostly sojourners who had no intention of having permanent residency and, as such, did not establish formal an Eritrean migrant community organizations in the U.S.
The Second Phase, Early 1980s

The second phase of Eritrean migrants came to the U.S. as early as the 1980s. They were mostly adult men. They were mostly refugees and asylum-seekers, escaping the Derg and the civil war in Eritrea between the EPLF and the ELF. Others were women, the elderly, and children escaping the general political instability and wars between Ethiopia and Eritrea (Hepner 2005; Kibreab 2000).

The U.S. Refugee Act of 1980 is also applicable to an asylum-seeker. However, while a refugee is located outside the U.S. at the time of application, an asylum-seeker is located in the U.S. or at port of entry. Since Eritrea was not an internationally recognized independent country in the 1980s, most of the Eritreans migrated to the U.S. as refugees from Ethiopia. The Eritrean migrants viewed themselves as communities in “exile” (Kibreab 2000). Consequently, the exact size of migrants of Eritrean and Ethiopian origins in the U.S. is unknown. There are some combined estimates for both migrants of Ethiopian and Eritrean origins in the U.S. For instance, after the enactment of the Refugee Act of 1980, the number of Eritrean and Ethiopian refugees combined, who resettled in the U.S. in the period of 1975-1984, reached a total of 33,195. Most of these migrants lived in the metropolitan D.C area (Woldemikael 1996:205).

The Third Phase, After 1986 and Early 1990s

The third phase (after 1986 and up to the early 1990s) of the Eritrean migrants to the U.S. comprised people from various demographic, socio-economic, and educational backgrounds. They included both men and women of various ages and income levels. Some were farmers, while others were highly educated urban migrants. They migrated as refugees and asylum seekers. After the 1986 Immigration Reform and Control Act (IRCA), many migrated through family reunification and sponsorship programs. It is
estimated that, between 1980 and 1999, 31,643 Ethiopians and Eritreans were granted
resettlement in the U.S, constituting one of the growing resettled groups from sub-

The Fourth Phase, After 1993 to Present

The fourth phase of Eritrean migrants to the U.S. came after May 24, 1993, when
Eritrea obtained international recognition as a politically independent nation-state. This
fourth group came to the U.S. in various ways, including as refugees or asylum-seekers,
as graduate students, through family reunification, and through the Immigration Act of
1990, or the diversity visa lottery program.

Although the U.S. had restricted acceptance of Eritrean refugees and asylum-
seekers between 1991 and 1997, as Eritrea became relatively stable, the acceptance
resumed in 1998, when Eritrea and Ethiopia opened another war over border issues
(1998-2000), resulting in further political instability, militarization, human rights
violations, and massive migration of Eritrean youth (Kibreab 2000; Hepner 2009). For
example, in 1999, Eritreans and Ethiopians represented the largest group of migrants
from sub-Saharan Africa to the U.S., accounting for 49 percent of the 79,833 new
African migrants in the U.S. (INS 2002). Most of these immigrants have mixed
backgrounds of rural and urban areas. This group also comprises college and former
university students who came to the U.S. to pursue their graduate level education and
later requested asylum status. Few pursued professional jobs or got married and settled
in the U.S. (Hepner 2009).

The 1990 Immigration Act or diversity visa program, also known as the "diversity
lottery," allowed for some to legally migrate to the U.S. For instance, data on the
diversity visa lottery of 2008 shows that, from over 6.4 million qualified applicants, 878
Eritreans were randomly selected as “lottery winners.” D.V. lottery winners are eligible to apply for a Green Card, which means permanent residency status for themselves, their spouses, and their children.

Some of the educated Eritrean migrants had professional expertise before their arrival in the U.S., but many had difficulty finding jobs that matched their educational and occupational experiences. This could be due to various reasons, such as lack of established professional network ties, limited English language skills, and lack of recognition of foreign credentials by employers.

The majority of the Eritrean migrants, especially the non-educated, who enter the U.S. economy work in the low-wage service sector, including working at 7-Eleven convenience stores, as cashiers, janitors, dishwashers, parking lot and gas station attendants, waitresses and waiters, in food preparation, as bus drivers, taxi drivers, night guards, hotel and hospital maintenance personnel, nursing home assistants, domestic servants, and providers of other related services (Levitt 2001).

These types of blue-collar jobs that most Eritrean migrants are concentrated in demand working long hours and double shifts. A few of these Eritrean migrants took initiatives to interdepend on themselves and their families to save enough capital to open their own businesses, including ethnic restaurants, where they sell injera (pancake-like traditional bread), cafés, grocery stores, liquor and convenience stores, gas stations, taxi cab services, parking lots, real estate agencies, and computer and printing services, among others. Eritrean migrants in the U.S. are concentrated in major metropolitan cities, following social and kinship ties and moving where better job opportunities are.
In short, the migration of Eritreans to the U.S., that started after the 1960s continued to grow in the past five decades in the form of political refugees, asylum seekers, family reunion immigrants, graduate students, and D.V. lottery winners. By 2004, there was an estimated 530,000 Eritreans abroad: in North America (80,000), Europe (90,000), the Middle East (70,000), Sudan (120,000), and the rest of the world (170,000) (Fessehazion 2005: 125). However, caution is required when using these numbers, because knowing the exact number of Eritrean migrants is difficult for various reasons: the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) did not break down the number of Africans by country of origin before the 1980s, and some Eritreans migrated before the country’s independence in 1991 as Ethiopians. Also, it is difficult to count the number of Eritrean undocumented migrants in the U.S. and elsewhere.

As long as the political instability and human rights violation in Eritrea continue, it will be difficult to stop future migration of Eritreans out of their home country. Thus, this dissertation addresses an important point with regard to the agency and roles of the four phases of Eritrean migrants and how they contributed in the process of their identity transformation from “exiled” and refugee communities to transnational migrants.

**Eritrean Migrant Agency in the U.S: From Refugees to Transnational Migrants**

This part of Chapter 3 interlinks the four phases of Eritrean migrants to the U.S. to make a point that the Eritrean migrants have themselves actively participated in the complex transformation process of their identity from “exiled” and refugee communities to transnational migrant communities. As discussed earlier, there were three pre-independence Eritrean migrant groups to the U.S.: (1) the first phase (1960s-1970s), (2) the second phase (early 1980s), and (3) the third phase (after 1986 to early 1990s). There is also one post-independence Eritrean migrant group (after 1993-present).
The first three phases of the Eritrean migration to the U.S. actively participated in the formation of the Eritrean nation-state itself, because Eritrea was not an internationally recognized country before 1993. These migrants participated in various ways, such as sending human and financial support to liberate Eritrea from Ethiopia (1970-1991), and voting for the independence of Eritrea from Ethiopia by participating in the 1993 referendum while abroad. Eritrean citizenship is derived from having at least one parent being an Eritrean citizen. Persons of Eritrean origin, with at least one parent being Eritrean, but born abroad, are also defined as Eritrean.

In addition, the Eritrean government requires the Eritrean diaspora to pay 2 percent of their income as tax (this is a 2 percent tax on the income generated in their host country), which is also commonly known as the “diaspora tax.” The migrants are required to show proof of payment before they ask for any official documentation from the Eritrean government, such as a national identity card, a passport, a birth certificate, a marriage certificate, a school diploma, an inheritance title, licenses for business and investment, a home ownership certificate, and so on.

The 2 percent income tax on foreign-earned income is one of the major hurdles that explain why so many Eritrean migrants who have money and expertise, and who would like to invest back in their home country, do not do so because they have differing views with the existing dictatorial ruling in Eritrea. Some are not willing to pay the “diaspora tax” because they argue that the same revenue is used by the ruling regime in Eritrea to remain undemocratic, authoritarian, defiant, and dictatorial. However, the Eritrean authorities claim that the 2 percent income tax, which is commonly collected through the Eritrean embassies and consular offices abroad, is “voluntary” and is used
for the rebuilding and rehabilitation of a country that is emerging out of a long war for independence.

After 1994 the Eritrean economy continues to be centralized and monopolized by the sole ruling party, the People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (PFDJ). There is minimum space for small-scale private businesses in the country. Eritrea has been in economic and political stagnation for more than a decade, particularly after the 1998 border war with Ethiopia. The use of the two seaports of Eritrea—Assab and Massawa—previously utilized by Ethiopia, have remained dormant in the last decade (Styan 2013). In such contexts, demands from the Eritrean migrants to remit money for the financial needs of their families and of their home country are heavy, as the revenue collected from the Eritrean transnational migrants generates hundreds of millions of dollars that are critical for the sustenance of the economy.

Eritrean migrants in the U.S. feel obliged to send remittance money to Eritrea to support their family members. Globally, it is estimated that one out of 10 persons on the planet either sends or receives remittances from abroad. According to the World Bank brief on global migration and remittances report, the flow of remittances sent by immigrants from developed to developing countries was over $400 billion in 2012. African migrants remitted about $51.8 billion in 2010 and, in the same year, the Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Africa was $43 billion. The same study shows that remittance money sent by sub-Saharan African immigrants themselves is becoming greater than the Official Development Assitances and more efficient in providing targeted family assistance than the flow of Western aid (World Bank 2012).
In the case of Eritrea, for the period 1990-2001, the country was the tenth top remittance-receiving country in sub-Saharan Africa (Sander and Maimbo 2003). In 2012 it ranked twelfth in sub-Saharan Africa for the amount of remittances received ($206 million). The motivations that explain why Eritrean migrants send remittance money include requirements by the Eritrean government, altruism, self-interest, and patriotism. For example, a “diaspora tax” was sent by some migrants to Eritrea every year, since 1997, reaching an average of $5.9 million a year. Also, when the border war with Ethiopia broke out in 1998, Eritrean migrants in the U.S. and other countries purchased bonds in Eritrea valued at $36.5 million, and provided outright contributions of $106.4 million, leading to a total of $142.9 million for national defense purposes during the border war period with Ethiopia (1998-2000). There were also additional contributions destined to combat the effects of drought and support war victims, thus increasing the foreign currency reserve of the country (Fessehatzion 2005).

In addition, remittance money sent by Eritrean immigrants in the U.S. is mostly delivered through unofficial channels and cannot be easily tracked, because the exchange rate is much higher in the unofficial channels than the official channels. For example, unofficially US$1 equals 4,500 to 5,000 Eritrean Nakfa in 2013, while the official exchange rate was US$1 was 1,500 Eritrean Nakfa. With the widespread use of the Internet, text messaging, and mobile phones, unofficial transfers of remittances from Eritreans abroad to their home communities are becoming faster, transnational, and not easily accountable.

Money sent by informal remittances to Eritrea is often used for supporting family members of migrants in Eritrea with their basic needs such as food, shelter, education,
and health care. A few Eritrean migrants in the U.S. who are on good terms with the only ruling regime in the country and who have obliged by paying the 2 percent “diaspora tax” to the Eritrean government since 1993 have used their remittances for building houses and small and medium businesses in Eritrea.

The negative side of remittances is that they increase the socio-economic inequalities among recipients and non-recipients in Eritrea. Families who receive remittances from abroad invariably improve their standard of living and their social status. This phenomenon of growth inequality between recipients and non-recipients of remittances in Eritrea encourages an imagined perception that migration to developed countries of the West could be a solution to local socio-economic and political challenges, and this also encourages further the migration cycle of Eritreans in search of opportunities in the West, including the U.S.

Another negative side of remittances is that they contribute to the formation of a dependency mentality. This means that many family members in Eritrea continuously expect remittances to be sent to them from their relatives abroad to solve their local economic problems. In the local market, remittances create a polarization of prices and create perceptions of conspicuous consumption by those Eritrean families who are supported by remittance money.

On the other side, the Eritrean migrants usually conceal information on the types of jobs they do, the hardships, and the racism they might have faced abroad, mostly due to fear that such information might damage their social reputation. Over all, their hard earned money plays a positive role in improving the quality of life, the health, and the economic, educational, and social capital of their relatives in Eritrea. At the
community level, remittances sent from Eritrean migrants abroad help maintain housing infrastructure and improve the local economy and the, access to education for children, even generating some local employment opportunities (Fessehatzion 2005; Temesgen 2007).

At the national level, in the past, the first three phases of the Eritrean migrants, for instance, had created associations and actively contributed by supporting the then rebel movements that were struggling for the independence of Eritrea from Ethiopia. This was mainly because, at that time, the Eritreans abroad had constructed their “exiled” or “diasporic” identities out of notions of an imagined national peoplehood (Koser 2003). Similarly, Hepner (2005) discussed the role of the then Eritrean migrants in the U.S. on the establishment of the Eritrean Liberation Front in North America (EFLNA), an association formed by former Eritrean university students and workers in the early 1970s to aid and support the Eritrean revolution, especially the Eritrean People’s Liberation Front (EPLF). They provided finance, information, and labor. Hepner’s (2005) work further shows that, although the EFLNA originally had a small number of active members at its inception, it evolved into the most powerful Eritrean nationalist organization outside of the EPLF and the ELF, which were both very active liberation movements inside Eritrea (Bernal 2004; Cliffe 1998; Mehari 2007; Woldemikael 1991). Al-Ali, Black, and Koser (2001) argued that transnational Eritrean identity and practices were imposed on the Eritrean migrants in the U.S. and elsewhere, from above, that is, by the EPLF headquarters, which was located in the Eritrean field. However, the willingness of the migrants to actively support the Eritrean cause for independence was because they also believed in the process.
The Eritrean migrants of the second and third phases also enhanced informal associations (*mahbers*) and formal associations (e.g. students, youth and women’s associations), and community centers (*mahber coms*) motivated by the desire to create a sense of community, compatriotism, and support for the Eritrean independence. Eritrean migrants in the U.S. also created some forms of traditional associations based on kinship, friendship, and linguistic, religious, and geographical origins (townships, villages or cities) to help the new migrants to adjust to their new environment.

Most of these informal associations by Eritrean migrants in the U.S. were originally created to provide mutual support among themselves through various means: by promoting social functions (members gathered to recreate and celebrate Eritrean holidays), by performing rituals (including during naming of children, marriages, and burials), and by providing safety nets and socioeconomic security (through rotating credit clubs, temporary lodging facilities for new arrivals and so on). These associations often acted as traditional associations or “*mahber.*” Through time, these informal associations were also shaped by the historical events that were happening in Eritrea, especially the struggle for national liberation. The Eritrean migrants sacrificed a great amount of their time, money, and resources for the liberation of their country. Many Eritrean migrants in the U.S. had little money left in their savings by the time the country achieved its independence in 1993.

Before the independence of their country, Eritrean migrants in the U.S. and elsewhere conducted annual public festivals, seminars, and Eritrean music shows as key mechanisms toward mass mobilization and fundraising for the liberation of Eritrea. Legendary singers—including Yemane Ghebremichael, Bereket Mengisteab, Osman
Abdrehim, Estaz Alamin Abdulatif, and others—produced several songs that related their life in “sedet,” a Tigrinya word for “exile,” including songs about Eritrean nationality and the struggle for independence. Songs were produced for all the nine ethno-linguistic groups of Eritrea (Afar, Bilen, Hedareb, Kunama, Nara, Rashaida, Saho, Tigre, and Tigrinya). These were songs about mass mobilization for the national struggle, hope for a better future of Eritrea, love for the country and its people, the negative effects of war on humans and animals, property destructions due to war in Eritrea, about migration, about family, and liberation.

After the country was liberated from the Ethiopian occupation by the EPLF in 1991, Eritrean migrants in the U.S. and elsewhere who were 18 years old or older were given Eritrean identification cards. Later they voted for Eritrean independence from Ethiopia. It is estimated that, around the world, over one million Eritreans in more than forty countries took part in the 1993 referendum on Eritrea that resulted in a 99.8 percent vote of “yes” in favor of Eritrean independence.

Following Eritrea’s political independence, officials of the newly formed Eritrean government came to the U.S. and continue to do so to provide seminars and workshops regarding political, developmental, and current issues in Eritrea, with particular emphasis on mobilizing the Eritrean transnationals to do their part in the process of nation-state building. Eritrean officials usually addressed the Eritrean migrants in the U.S. as “Ab America Zrekobu Eritrawian” in Tigrinya, meaning “Eritreans who are located in America.” In 2008, PFDJ officials formed the Young People’s Front for Democracy and Justice (YPFDJ), a nationalist Eritrean-migrant youth organization that targets the American-born youth of Eritrean descent. PFDJ officials continuously
advertise among the Eritrean migrants in the U.S. various investment opportunities in
Eritrea, including in housing construction, agriculture, mining, tourism, and the like.

On the other side, both in 2010 and 2013, thousands of Eritrean migrants in the
U.S. and elsewhere held a worldwide demonstration to voice their opposition or support
to the Resolution of the Security Council 1907 (2009) that stipulated an arms embargo,
travel restrictions, and asset freeezes of PFDJ political and military leaders in Eritrea

On February 8, 2013, hundreds of Eritreans who opposed the dictatorial regime in
Eritrea—who came to Washington, D.C., from several cities of the U.S.—held
demonstrations opposing the current single political party rule in Eritrea, and against the
human rights violations in Eritrea. They demanded the implementation of a Constitution
and the rule of law. They also opposed the lack of freedom of expression, and called for
respect for human rights by the Eritrean government back home. Thus, although the
Eritrean ruling regime through the state-controlled television, ER-TV, and the state-
controlled radio station, Dimsi-Hatash, attempts to depict a unified front, there is dissent
among Eritrean transnational migrants.

The political discourses among the Eritrean transnational migrants are diverse and
contested. The number of Eritrean migrants who are publicly and openly voicing their
opposition to the totalitarian and dictatorial government in Eritrea is increasing.
Especially, the newer migrants, who are mostly young men and women, use
advancements in telecommunications like the Internet, social-networking sites like
Facebook and Twitter, tools like Skype and Paltalk, chat rooms, video sites like
Youtube, and other websites to inform, mobilize, organize, and voice their concerns about the human rights violations in Eritrea.

In short, many Eritrean transnational migrants continue to maintain family, economic, political, social, and cultural networks by sending their children to visit Eritrea, usually during the summer. Some families and relatives of documented, well-established, and well-to-do transnational immigrants also come to the U.S. to visit their children and grandchildren using family visas or tourist visas. Important social and cultural events, such as weddings and child initiations, are shared either in person or using video and DVD cassettes, or over the Internet using Skype. Telephone calls are frequently made from the U.S. to Eritrea, occasionally vice-versa. Important social and cultural events, national holidays, and festivals conducted in the U.S. or Eritrea are also increasingly advertised online in various Eritrean migrant-owned websites such as awate.com, asmarino.com, assenna.com, dehai.org, and meskerem.net, among others.

A significant number of Eritrean transnationals from the U.S. visit Eritrea in the months of May to August, due to summer school breaks. Eritreans residing at home refer to this summer visitation, metaphorically, as “Mebsah Beles,” meaning “visitation of the prickly pear fruits.” The prickly pear fruit matures and is available in the Eritrean markets during the summer season, similar to the presence of transnationals. Some return to Eritrea to get married and return to the U.S. to continue their work and raise a family, and the majority has hopes of accumulating enough wealth through hard work in the U.S. to be able to retire in Eritrea and live a life of leisure in the future. In case of death, Eritrean Christians in particular prefer their remains to be buried in their home village in Eritrea. For Eritrean Muslims, a common practice is that the dead body is
buried in the same place where the death occurred. Other Eritrean migrants to the U.S. prefer to remain in the U.S. because they feel safe and at home in their new environment.

**Final Remarks**

Compared to other groups of migrants in the U.S., the Ethiopian and Eritrean transnational migrants are relatively “new” and are growing in number. The reasons that made them migrate to the U.S. vary, depending on what phase they have come to the U.S. The Ethiopian migrants of the first phase were mostly elites, single older men from the Amhara and Tigrinya ethnic backgrounds. They came for graduate studies in U.S. and some represented their government. First they had a sojourner mentality and planned to return to their home country but after the 1974 overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie by the military-led socialist revolution in Ethiopia (the *Derg*) most of them remained in the U.S.. The second phase came to the U.S. escaping from the *Derg*. Especially after the 1980s, the U.S. began to resettle Ethiopians to the U.S. as refugees and asylum seekers who were fleeing due to political persecution in their home country. This phase of migrants comprised both genders, as families or individuals. They were former intellectuals, government officials, students, and urban laborers in Ethiopia. They increased in numbers in the metropolitan D.C. area, because those already established were joined by rural farmers who were escaping civil wars, political instabilities, and famines in Ethiopia. By the early 1980s, they had founded various social, cultural, and non-profit organizations in the D.C. area. Most became legal residents and U.S. citizens and sponsored family members to join them. The third phase migrated in various ways, including through the Diversity lottery visa program, family reunion, graduate studies and the H-1B work visa.
Adjustment challenges for the community included language barriers, changing
gender roles and racial identity, the need of learning new skills and getting new jobs,
and downward social status, for some of them. Also, regional, ethnic, and political
tensions that happen in their home countries continued to affect them in the U.S. This is
specifically discussed in relation to the entrepreneurs and business cases studied in
relation to the entrepreneurs and business cases studied in subsequent chapters. To
overcome migration challenges, the migrants have established kinship ties, social ties,
and ethnic, religious, and civic associations. They have created informal credit
associations, organized soccer teams and summer tournaments, established
community development initiatives, and created self-help centers. They send remittance
money to their families and relatives in Ethiopia.

The second part of chapter 3 interlinked the four phases of Eritrean migration to
the U.S., since the 1960s to the present time. The author of this dissertation argues that
what is unique about the Eritrean transnational migrant experience to the U.S. is that
they themselves had actively participated in the process of their identity transformation
from an “exiled” and refugee community to a transnational migrant community. For thirty
years, the Eritrean migrants in the U.S. and elsewhere, as individuals, as families, and
as communities, have supported the Eritrean cause for national independence from
Ethiopia by raising awareness in the international community and by financially
supporting the movement for Eritrean liberation.

When the Eritrean referendum was conducted in 1993, the migrants massively
participated in it from abroad. They also participated in the drafting of the Constitution
that was ratified in 1997, but which has yet to be implemented. Since no independent
private media were allowed in the country after 2001, by using the Internet and its social media outlets, such as websites, Facebook, and Twitter, the migrants have attempted to get alternative news and organize themselves to discuss the developments in their homeland and to call for a democratization process in their home country.

The Eritrean economy after 1994 has continued to be centralized and monopolized by ruling party-owned businesses. The indefinite national service program, the no-war and no-peace situation, and the authoritarian and non-democratic rule in Eritrea continue to hampers potential economic investments by the Eritrean migrants at home.

The Ethiopian economic policy at the moment is following the “developmental state paradigm,” with a Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) that focuses on the eradication of poverty and on economic development. While the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of the country continues to be among the fastest growing in sub-Saharan Africa, the following continue to be major challenges in the country: infrastructural shortcomings, corruption, high population growth rate, high demand for electricity, lack of modernization of the agriculture sector, lack of expansion of the manufacturing industries with production of value-added products, low Human Development Index, and problems with improving the human rights situation internally. These challenges are also potential opportunities for future business investments at home, which are business opportunities that some Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant entrepreneurs are ready to tackle and handle, as they are able to invest both in their countries of origin and destination, if given chance to conduct their businesses.
Chapter 4 discusses the ethnographic fieldwork methods and techniques that the author of this dissertation employed in the study of the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant entrepreneurs and businesses in Washington, D.C. Primary data and supplementary secondary data were collected and analyzed over a 2-year period. Primary data collection was conducted, first, from September of 2009 to December of 2009 and from June of 2011 to August of 2011. This research drew from interdisciplinary methods of data collection and analysis from anthropology and entrepreneurship studies.

A sample that comprised cases of entrepreneurs and businesses from both the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants in D.C. was obtained using the snowball sampling technique. This is a method of sampling whereby initial contacts were made by the ethnographer in various businesses, including restaurants, cafes, grocery shops, 7-Eleven convenience stores, taxicabs, parking lot businesses, gas stations, migrant social-gathering centers, and so forth. Various entry points were used to increase the diversity of the sample studied by gender, nationality, and business type (including both traditional and non-traditional businesses).

Particularly, the author of this dissertation relied on passive snowball sampling, meaning that current informants provided information to other potential participants; the potential participants were then contacted after they confirmed their consent to participate in the study (Bernard and Ryan 2010; Black 2005; Creswell 1994). Taking into account that both the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants have passed through difficult periods of political insecurity in their home countries, in transit refugee sites, and in the
host country as new residents in the U.S, using a passive snowball sampling was found appropriate. It was also the most effective way to gain acceptance, obtain informed consent, and establish a trusting relationship with informants who are difficult to access (Bernard 2011; Bernard and Ryan 2010).

Primary data collection was mainly achieved through participant observation and semi-structured in-depth interviews with 20 “successful” Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant entrepreneurs who provided information to build the business cases (Meriam 1998; Miles and Huberman 1994; Patton 2002; Yin 2008). Data from “unsuccessful” business experiences was also collected, and the main reasons why these businesses have failed are also incorporated in this dissertation. However, the focus of this dissertation is on the “successful” entrepreneurs and businesses to be able to understand how they developed their businesses, and what made their business experiences successful. The length of the conversations during the interviews was flexible. The conversations lasted between 2 and 5 hours, depending on various factors such as the availability of the research participants. In all cases of interviews, I did multiple interview times in a given time context to obtain an increasingly better understanding emic (point of view of those being studied; peculiar to that society) culture. I have conducted participant observation with increased competence overtime. In addition, the linguistic competence and cultural background of the researcher in Ethiopian and Eritrea, as discussed below in detail, has enhanced the data collection process rather than take away from it.

The primary data and supplementary secondary data were analyzed to explore, describe, and compare the Ethiopian and Eritrean entrepreneurs’ efforts and their business experiences in the area. A thematic analysis was used to identify patterns and
peculiarities that unfolded from the systematically coded narrative research data on the entrepreneurs and their business case experiences (Bernard 2011; Bernard and Ryan 2010; Black 2005; Creswell 1994).

**Ethnographic Fieldwork Methodology**

The fieldwork sites that are at the center of this ethnographic research are the Adams Morgan neighborhood (positioned at the intersection of 18th Street and Columbia Road), and the U Street Corridor (located from 9th Street on the east to 18th Street and Florida Avenue to the west). Both areas are located in the Northwest sector of Washington, D.C. They are famous places for having many international ethnic businesses. Both sites also have a long history as residential places that attracted immigrant populations of culturally diverse backgrounds, including from Latin America, Asia, and Africa.

The U Street Corridor and Adams Morgan have a higher concentration of Ethiopian-owned and Eritrean-owned traditional businesses, including restaurants, cafes, grocery stores, cultural entertainment businesses, taxicab services, and parking lot businesses, to mention few, than any other place in the U.S. This means that both places were strategically selected for this site-focused ethnographic research to conduct participant observation over an extended period of time with entrepreneurs and their businesses, and with other migrant residents. This enabled the ethnographer to get rich contextual data (economic, social, cultural, political, and historical) on these migrants and these places of residence.

An extended fieldwork research process allowed the author to collect valuable lived-experience data based on informal conversations, field notes, and collecting insights through a combination of face-to-face, telephone, e-mail, and Skype-based
semi-structured in-depth interviews. The researcher was able to collect an extensive amount of qualitative field data in various social settings, including while having conversations in parking lots, while taking taxi rides, while meeting in traditional coffee places and Starbucks cafeterias, while dining at Ethiopian and Eritrean restaurants or cafes, and while observing the interactions in ethnic clubs.

The author of this study also conducted participant observation by visiting homes and apartments of migrants in the area. Besides, the researcher also participated in both ordinary days’ activities and special events like religious holidays, weddings, birthdays, and mourning ceremonies, among others. These allowed the author to understand the complexities of the migrants’ lives, their diverse experiences, and their contributions to the city. Both the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants add to the diversity of the city through their faces, work ethic, rich cuisine, coffee traditions, languages, clothing, culture, arts, and music.

Three languages were used for the data collection, namely Amharic (a dominant language spoken by Ethiopian migrants), Tigrinya (a dominant language spoken by the Eritrean migrants), and English (spoken by most Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants with various levels of communication competency). The researcher’s linguistic and cultural competency in all these languages helped in the process, and the language chosen for the data collection depended on the language the participants used to express themselves. The ethnographer let the participants take the lead in terms of the language chosen and followed during our conversations. Sometimes multiple languages were used, such as a mixture of Amharic, Tigrinya, and English.
During the fieldwork, the author found that the Ethiopian and Eritrean entrepreneurs were more comfortable interacting and providing information in conversational settings, using open-ended, informal, and semi-structured questions. As an ethnographer getting consistently engaged in informal conversations with the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant entrepreneurs, it was useful to seek an emic view and to uncover topics of interest from the research participants’ narratives on their business experiences. Emic is specific, even personal—contents and contexts that would relate to entrepreneurial—and not public culture, which is structural and often subsumes the personal. Probing and elicitation questions used during these conversations include questions about memories of childhood, family, friends, and school, as well as about their initial perceptions, ambitions, and dreams of coming to the U.S. Also included were questions about their lived experiences as migrants, and their experiences on owning business from start up to the present.

The author of this dissertation is a cultural anthropologist by academic training who grew up through the cultural and educational systems in both Eritrea and Ethiopia. I have had the opportunity to live in the U.S. as a graduate student for eight years. The relationship between my earlier exposure to a diverse cultural background in Eritrea and my fieldwork among the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant entrepreneurs in Washington, D.C., is unique in its own way, and it added valuable social and cultural capital for the data collection and data analysis.

Having the cultural and societal knowledge of the Ethiopian and Eritrean cultures in Africa as well as in the U.S. also helped to ask culturally appropriate questions. For example, I was able to collect extensive data by using culturally appropriate wording
and tones in the questions (depending on the age, gender, ethnicity, and so on, of the participant), and by using flexible and polite eliciting language.

I was not a complete stranger to either the life of a migrant in the U.S. or Ethiopian and Eritrean societies and cultures. Since part of my research was to understand and contextualize the lived experiences of the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant entrepreneurs in the area, I had to be constantly conscious of my own assumptions and biases in the data collection and analysis. Attention was also given to the emic views, by letting the participants provide information about their own migrant entrepreneurial qualities and business experiences. This also meant asking many basic questions.

All the businesses studied were in the formal sector at the time of data collection. They were owned either individually or by a family. This study covers traditional and non-traditional businesses owned by both men and women. The Ethiopian and Eritrean entrepreneurs who are organized in a large business association in Washington, D.C., are relatively few and were not accessible to me as an ethnographer, despite my attempts to include them in my study. Analyzing this elite business group could be an interesting topic for future research.

Whenever participant observation was not possible, I used the complete observer technique to gather data, especially when I was writing down what I was observing as field notes. This is also used to collect data on feelings and emotions, when people talk about some sensitive political, economic, social, or cultural issue, such as ethnicity, tribalism, regionalism, religion, political factions, and so forth. These are issues that strongly affect the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants in the U.S. in general, and in the local area as well.
Supplementary, secondary data collection was done from extensive sources on the Ethiopian and Eritrean transnational migrants in the U.S, including archival and historical research; Internet websites; television and radio programs; newspapers, journals, and magazines; documentaries; formal and informal speeches; and billboards of the Ethiopian and Eritrean immigrant-owned businesses in the fieldwork site.

The Washington, D.C. Metropolitan Area Research Settings

Washington, D.C., is a major national and international metropolitan area. During the last 200 years, it has developed into a center of global diplomacy and power of influence. The city is home to the U.S. Congress, the White House, and the U.S. President, as well as the U.S. Supreme Court and many government agencies. The city has numerous charming and refined historical monuments and federal government buildings, and the place is a magnet for millions of international and national visitors. It also is a source of jobs, and it provides diverse livelihoods for the residents of the city and beyond.

This city is one of the most vibrant ones in the entire U.S. Among the most notable cultural organizations in the area are the Smithsonian Institution and some of the most reputable museums and galleries in the country. It is estimated that, year round, more than 25 million tourists and conventioneers visit the monuments and memorials scattered throughout the metropolitan area (Livingston 2011).

The city covers 10 square miles and is divided into four quadrants, the center of which the Capitol and whose boundaries are North Capitol Street, East Capitol Street, South Capitol Street, and the Mall. In relation to the Capitol, the quadrants are known as Northwest, Northeast, Southeast, and Southwest. Every street name in the District includes a two-letter abbreviation indicating the quadrant. Downtown east-west streets
are named with letters of the alphabet, proceeding away from the capitol; numbered streets run north to south and count away from the Capitol. D.C. has a dynamic metropolitan area that includes the states of Maryland and Virginia.

According to the 2012 Census Bureau estimate, this is the seventh-largest metropolitan area in the U.S, with an estimated population of 5.7 million. The city itself has a population of about 632,300, the 25th most populous city in the U.S, and 13.3 percent of its population is foreign-born (Census Bureau 2012). Individuals and families come here from all over the world. The city, historically and currently, has a significant percentage of African Americans, about 50.7 percent of its population (McQuirter 2003).

In places such as the U Street Corridor, testimonials on the historical struggles of the African Americans during the Civil War (1861-1865) and Reconstruction (1865-1877) for racial equality, justice, employment, educational opportunities, social progress, cultural revival, and entrepreneurship in the U.S. are vivid throughout the streets, including at Howard University, founded in 1867, which continues to be a magnet for students and professors of African American heritage. The city is a center of cultural and intellectual capital for the African American community, in particular, and for the U.S. society, in general. It is home to the U Street/African American Civil War Memorial; to sounds of jazz, blues, hip-hop, and electronica; think tanks; recreational and artistic wall depictions of Duke Ellington and other greats; and to Ben’s Chili Bowl food, just to mention a few icons that continue to shape the identity of the city (McQuirter 2003).

During the 1920s and 1930s, the U Street Corridor was known as “Black Broadway” for its central role in the city’s African American entrepreneurial and vibrant
cultural life. Adams Morgan and the U Street Corridor are the centers and home to the largest urban African American community, one that expresses itself with effervescent cultural, musical, and theatrical activities, especially before the riots of the mid-1960s. Following the assassination of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr., on April 4, 1968, there were immediate and intense riots and reactions, including the burning and destruction of buildings and business centers throughout the neighborhoods of U Street and Adams Morgan, which resulted in the deterioration of these neighborhoods until their restoration in the mid-1980s.

Since the 1960s and through the 1990s, the size of the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant communities has continuously increased in the city and its metropolitan area. Since the 1970s there are some neighborhoods in the city that are inhabited by a growing number of African and Latino populations, with the majority coming from Ethiopia, Eritrea, El Salvador, Guatemala, and Mexico. There is a growing Ethiopian, Eritrean, and Latino population in neighborhoods like Adams Morgan, Mt. Pleasant, and Columbia Heights. The city has an official and small historic Chinatown that is located east of downtown, between H and I Streets, and 5th and 8th Streets NW. The Friendship Arch, a traditional Chinese gate situated at H and 7th Streets, is an easily identifiable symbolic marker of the Chinatown neighborhood. The Chinatown ethnic enclave has Chinese and Asian restaurants, Asian grocery stores, and other small businesses.

Washington, D.C., is an attractive place to live, especially for a younger generation of Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants who come from urban backgrounds and who are single or young couples. The younger residents are attracted by the vibrant economic
opportunities, and the quality of the social and cultural life that the site offers. The city’s tree-line avenues and the nineteenth- and twentieth-century Victorian architecture row houses embellish the city, as well as green areas, charming apartment buildings, offices, cafes, clubs, and neighborhoods. This urban, cosmopolitan life is attractive for many Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants in the area.

The city has a well-developed infrastructure that makes walking on foot easy along side of decades’ old restaurants and cafes, an enjoyable experience. Such practice presents opportunities to meet new people around the city and to socialize. Rock Creek Park, one of the largest urban parks in the world, is located there. It has many eye-catching trees and avenues, open spaces, and panoramic views. The culture of walking and socializing around Adams Morgan and the U Street Corridor while meeting and experiencing an encounter with familiar and new faces, languages, smells, cuisines, music, and artistic expressions is something that the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants find very special about Washington, and this reminds them very much of their home environment, which makes them feel that they are re-creating their community experience in the U.S.

Challenges to living in D.C. include the high cost of renting apartments and houses, the gentrification process, the traffic overcrowding, and the long commutes from home to work. Metrorail and bus systems provide alternative modes of transportation for the majority of the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants who live in the broader metropolitan area and who do not feel comfortable driving in the city. On working days, commuters from the surrounding Maryland and Virginia suburbs increase the number of individuals in D.C. to more than 1 million (Livingston 2011).
In 2011 the median household income for the city was $63,124, while the national median household income for the U.S. for the same year was $50,502 (United States Census Bureau 2011). Washington, D.C., households have a higher median income than the national median household income because there is a growing number of high paying professional and service jobs available. It is also inhabited by some of the most educated and affluent people in the U.S., who hold various well-paying governmental and non-governmental jobs in academic and research institutions, international and national for-profit and non-profit organizations, high-tech and biotech businesses, legal and consultancy services, and trade and transportation sectors, just to mention a few. All these employers provide additional growing job opportunities for supportive services (Livingston 2006).

The major sources of employment here include the private sector and federal government jobs; the later accounted for about 29 percent of the jobs in 2012 (District of Columbia Department of Employment Services 2012). The private-sector jobs are concentrated in the service industry, including financial, legal, health, and real estate services; as well as hundreds of jobs in hotels, movies, theaters, nightclubs, bookstores, and restaurants. There are also federal government-linked businesses, such as lobbying firms, mass media, public policy consultants, finance institutions, education and scientific research centers, trade associations, and other offices with their headquarters in the metropolitan area. In addition, the city hosts around 200 foreign embassies and major offices of powerful international organizations like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the Organization of African States, the Inter-American
Development Bank, and the Pan American Health Organization, which all provide job opportunities to tens of thousands of workers.

The District of Columbia does not generate much revenue by itself, because more than half of its area is owned by the federal government or by non-profit organizations, which do not pay taxes. And, because of that, the District of Columbia is constantly looking for revenue from private-sector jobs. For instance, Downtown Washington and its surrounding areas are increasingly becoming commercial and social centers of the city. The Washington Metro System (the “Metro”) opened in 1976 and revitalized the city. Together, the Metrorail and the Metro-bus systems carry more than 1.1 million riders a day (Livingston 2011).

The local resident population includes more than 100,000 students, who attend the city’s twenty universities and special schools. The seven major universities here are George Washington University, Georgetown University, American University, Catholic University of America, Howard University, the University of the District of Columbia, and Southeastern University.

Adams Morgan

Adams Morgan is a neighborhood in Washington, D.C., that draws its name from two elementary schools, the historically all-white John Quincy Adams Elementary School and the historically all-black Thomas P. Morgan Elementary School. Adams and Morgan were once racially segregated schools but later became united through the initiatives taken by their respective school principals. Shortly after the Supreme Court’s ruling on Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954, the Adams School, a white school, blended with the Morgan School, a black school, to create an environment that promotes and celebrates diversity. By doing that, they demonstrated that the newly
integrated Adams Morgan School and the residents in the neighborhood stood for biracial cooperation among white and black people (Kuan 2007).

Before it was named Adams Morgan, the area was named for the two streets whose intersection forms its center: 18th Street and Columbia Road. Both have a long history of commercial activities including ethnic restaurants, groceries, and electronic shopping centers, art galleries, furniture stores, and nightlife clubs.

At this moment, about six decades later, Adams Morgan is a neighborhood that takes pride in its openness to racial diversity. It is an environment that is inclusive for American communities of diverse ethnicities, all beliefs, genders, ages, and socio-economic status. It is a welcoming place for migrants from various parts of the world, including from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Asia, Latin America, and elsewhere. In this place migrants can survive and thrive economically, culturally, socially, and politically.

Highly visible icons in Adams Morgan include Madam’s Organ, a 13-foot, burlesque mascot on 18th Street NW, the oldest paintings by Chilean artists Carlos Salazar and Felipe Martinez on 18th Street and Columbia Road, billboards in Amharic and Tigrinya languages, pictures of Ethiopian and Eritrean artists, and posters of Ethiopian and Eritrean peoples, cultures and landscapes. They all add to the colorful and diverse streetscape.

Originally Adams Morgan was a homogenous, rich, and cookie-cutter suburb. Its composition changed as inhabitants became more diverse over the decades (Zapata and Gibson 2006). When Washington, D.C., was established, the mode of transportation in the city was primarily horse-drawn street cars and, thus, the first permanent white residents (including politicians, diplomats, business leaders, and so
on) who came to live in today’s Adams Morgan settled on a hill with cool breezes, an area that was organized in a more traditional, state-like fashion, in the northeast part of the town, which was a bit distant from downtown D.C.

Later, with the introduction of the automobiles, Adams Morgan became part of the city. Presently, it is part of both the city of Washington and the District of Columbia, as they share the same borders (Zapata and Gibson 2006). Particularly, in the 1960s and 1970s, there were several riots and protests in Adams Morgan and other parts of the U.S., mostly related to civil rights demands. And with the increased availability of cars in the United States after the 1950s, it became possible to live far from the work place, and thus many of its earlier affluent white residents moved from Adams Morgan to the suburbs and to other safer and more secure neighborhoods, away from the riots and the civil rights movements going on in places like Adams Morgan and the U Street Corridor. This resulted in a reduction of the population size and business activities around Adams Morgan and the U Street Corridor and, as a result, the rental prices in the area went down. Thus, in the 1960s and 1970s, poor people and non-profit and civil rights organizations, plus immigrants from various ethnic backgrounds were able to afford to live in the area. It became an affordable housing option for people of diverse racial, ethnic, and national backgrounds.

By the 1980s and 1990s, people of diverse ethnicities and racial groups resided here and became established by opening their own businesses in the commercial corridors of Eighteenth Street and Columbia Road. For instance, on 18th Street NW, a former Wash-n-Dry Laundromat was replaced with the Awash Ethiopian Restaurant. Awash is named after a river and national park in Ethiopia. On the same 18th Street, a
former U.S. Post Office was replaced by the *Meskerem* Ethiopian Restaurant, one of Adams Morgan’s best known, and one of the earliest Ethiopian restaurants in the area.

Washington continues to be inhabited by the highest number of Ethiopian immigrants in the U.S. (Getahun 2007). They have created the largest migrant community of Ethiopians outside of their homeland (Bigman 1995). In addition to absorbing selective elements in terms of integrating into the mainstream American culture, and as indicated previously in the Literature Review section of this dissertation, the Ethiopian transnational communities organize themselves in the U.S. through several ways: (1) kinship and family ties; (2) ethnic and regional organizations and associations; (3) religious institutions, such as churches and mosques (Christianity and Islam have a solid impact on the cultural and social fabrics of the Ethiopian society at home and abroad. Most Ethiopian migrants are Orthodox Christians, and relatively few are Ethiopian Muslims. For Ethiopian migrants who follow Christianity, going to Ethiopian churches on Sundays and for weddings, funerals, holidays, and other ceremonial occasions serves spiritual, cultural, and social functions. For Ethiopian migrants who follow Islam, going to Mosques during daily prayers, including Friday prayers, fasting during the month of Ramadan, and organizing public prayers and celebrations during *Eid* festivals gives them the opportunity to meet with other Muslims and reconstruct their sense of community in transnational settings); (4) informal social gatherings of friends in restaurants, cafes, and bars, which give Ethiopian migrants ways to gain current information of their homelands and of current events within the migrant community; (5) Ethiopian migrant community centers and associations that assist them with legal, educational, employment, and social service-related activities
targeted to newly arriving refugees and asylum seekers; and (6) the Ethiopian youth football federation, which creates positive, entertaining, and empowering activities to get together in various cities across the U.S. and soccer tournaments centered around recreational, social, educational, and fundraising activities to support their transnational and sending communities.

The U Street Corridor and Adams Morgan are home to the highest concentration of Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant-owned restaurants, cafes, and grocery stores in the United States. In the 1980s, they opened businesses in Adams Morgan and after the 1990s, added more businesses in the U Street area. The migrants decided to open their new businesses in the U Street Corridor, in places where real estate and rental prices were relatively cheaper (Zapata and Gibson: 2006).

In the Adams Morgan neighborhood it is common to see Ethiopian and Eritrean men and women walking in the streets, speaking in Amharic, Tigrinya, and Oromo, among other languages, hanging out and experiencing their home and community life. Mostly young adult men gather at tables inside bars, cafes, and hookah places and outside cafes like Starbucks and neighborhood bars, to discuss and debate current political, economic, and social affairs in Ethiopia, Eritrea, the U.S., and the rest of the world. A typical conversation starts with “Men Addis Neger Ale” in Amharic or “Entay Alo Haddish Neger” in Tigrinya, meaning “What’s new?” These are conversations about news events as they relate to what is going on in the U.S. and the migrant context, such as social affairs and ethnic politics. “Sira endet ale” in Amharic or “Sirah kemy alo” in Tigrinya is “How’s work?” “Betseb endet new” in Amharic and “Sidra kemy alewu” in Tigrinya inquires about family and relatives in the U.S. and in Africa. These are
conversations that go back and forth between the sending, transit, and destination contexts. Sometimes, migrant men like to talk about sports, especially global and national soccer tournaments. Many times conversations are themed on “Agerbet endet new” in Amharic or “Dehai Adi” in Tigrinya meaning “I’ve got news about the homeland.” These are about current and past political and economic developments in their homelands. The author of this dissertation remembers the latter topics as being heavily debated, sometimes for a few minutes, many times for several hours. Sitting together and debating about life for an extended period of time, just as they do in their home countries, is what happens when they meet, particularly after their working hours and during the weekends migrant-run Internet sites, radio and T.V. programs, and newspaper sources, local and international, like the Washington Post, CNN, the BBC, and others, provide them with context and inspirations for discussion. Conversations are often done in several languages.

**U Street**

This neighborhood, today called the Greater U Street Corridor and District, has a long history (Williams 2002). From the 1910s to the mid-1960s, African American businesses and entertainment centers continued to thrive in the area until the urban riots of 1968 following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., causing many of the residents to move to suburban neighborhoods (Williams 2002). By the mid-1970s and early 1980s, however, new businesses started to open again in the area. This helped to start a new transformation of the neighborhood toward becoming one of the most racially, ethnically, and nationally diverse areas in the country.

In the 1980s, the U Street/Cardozo Metro station was being constructed, and the Metro station opened in 1992, which resulted in an increased number of new residents
with new opportunities for doing business. In addition, in 1997, a National Park Service Memorial to the more than 200,000 black Civil War soldiers was erected at 10th and U Street, making it a place of historical and symbolic importance for the nation in general, and for the African American communities in particular. The area eventually became both a local and national district on the National Register of Historic Places in January of 1999 (Williams 2002).

As the crime rates decreased in the once unsafe and abandoned real estate properties and businesses around U Street, in the last twenty years many businesses started to open, property values increased, and the neighborhood became the center of a vibrant cultural mixture; a recognized place for having an international cuisine dining experience, and an area famous for its vibrant nightlife. For instance, about a dozen Ethiopian and Eritrean restaurants and stores opened in the area over the past two decades. They contributed to the aroma of strong coffee and spicy food in the street, as well as to the music, arts, and symbolic expressions of the neighborhood. Eritreans and Ethiopians consider that they have constructively contributed to transforming the neighborhood’s reputation from a neglected area to a center for economic and cultural progress. In fact, the U Street and 9th Street city block of Northwest D.C. houses more than two dozen Ethiopian- and Eritrean-owned restaurants and shops, highly concentrated in the same block and location, and as such this sector is informally known as “Little Ethiopia,” and its renaissance is attributed to the Ethiopian-American and Eritrean-American entrepreneurship efforts in the area. The Ethiopian entrepreneurs have access to their own advertisement directory that makes information about Ethiopian-American owned and Ethiopian-American related businesses available.
to the public, both in print and online. As a result, on a daily basis, it is common to find Ethiopian-Americans, tourists, and Washingtonians alike being attracted to the area.

**Virginia and Maryland**

Virginia and Maryland, the states abutting Washington, D.C., also have Eritrean-American and Ethiopian-American residents and businesses. The numbers of Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant-owned businesses in these places are smaller than in D.C. These migrants live in such Virginia cities as Alexandria, Arlington, and Lorton, and in some Maryland cities, such as Silver Spring and Baltimore. Some migrants moved outside of the D.C. area looking for more affordable houses and apartments, but they commute to D.C. by Metro and bus. Others have started businesses in those Virginia and Maryland cities, especially ethnic restaurants. In fact, although unofficial names, the “biggest Little Ethiopia” is located in U Street and the “smallest Little Ethiopia” is said to be located in Alexandria, Virginia (Chacko 2009).

This chapter discussed the research methods and the data collection process for this dissertation, and it described the contexts of the research sites. It explained that the research methodology used interdisciplinary anthropological and entrepreneurial data collection techniques. It indicated that the passive snowball sampling technique was effective in building trusting relationships with the participants. Amharic, Tigrinya, and English were used to collect necessary primary and supplementary secondary data. This research endeavor was primarily based on data collected using an extended ethnographic research method. Participant observation, semi-structured in-depth interviews, and informal conversations were used to collect relevant data from the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant entrepreneurs and businesses. The U Street Corridor and the Adams Morgan neighborhood were described as important fieldwork sites for
this dissertation, due to the high concentration of Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant businesses in those areas. Also, they are central sites for the creation of transnational social, cultural, and political discourses as they relate to the migrants’ sending and receiving countries.
Figure 4-1. Adams Morgan and U Street neighborhoods, Washington, D.C (Reprinted by Permission from DC GIS 2011).

Figure 4-2. Adams Morgan and U Street neighborhoods, Washington, D.C (Map data ©2013 Google, Sanborn).
Figure 4-3. Ethiopian and Eritrean Ethnic Entrepreneurship Niches in the U Street and Adams Morgan area, Washington, D.C (Map data ©2013 Google, Sanborn).
CHAPTER 5
ENTREPRENEUR AND BUSINESS CASE ANALYSIS

The unit of analysis for this dissertation is each Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant entrepreneur and his or her business case in metropolitan D.C (Allen 2009; Meriam 1998; Miles and Huberman 1994; Patton 2002; Yin 2008). A subset of qualitative methods case analysis is used to answer the research questions of this dissertation. An integrative entrepreneurial approach is used for the analyses of twenty “successful” Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant entrepreneurs and businesses in the area. It is an approach that combines the analysis of micro-level factors (of the entrepreneur, the migration experience, and the business development) and the analysis of macro-level (economic, political, cultural, and social) factors. This approach is also used to analyze the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) of the cases studied (Allen 2009; Yin 2008). These cases are systematically categorized into four groups: (A) restaurants and cafés; (B) grocery and convenience stores; (C) entertainment, advertisement, and clothing services; and (D) transportation services, gas stations, and real estate businesses. The cases grouped in categories A and B represent traditional types of businesses established by the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant groups in the Washington area. The cases grouped in C combine characteristics of both traditional and non-traditional types of entrepreneurship; while cases grouped in D are meant to explore types of non-traditional businesses owned by both the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants in the area.

It is important to point out here that there are other non-traditional businesses that were established and are owned by Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants, both men and women, which are not covered in this study, such as businesses in computer and
communication technologies, banking and insurance, air conditioning and heating, plumbing, legal advice, travel services, moving and shipping, health, employment placement, printing, and publishing, most of which are large-scale businesses.

Large-scale businesses were not included in this dissertation due to lack of information, and also because the methodology of this research focused on participant observation, to pay attention to the lived experiences of the entrepreneurs, and to understand how they conduct business with their customers on a daily basis. There is even an exceptionally successful case of an Ethiopian migrant who owns almost half of all gas stations in the District of Columbia, who was not accessible to the ethnographer. These types of large-scale businesses will make interesting cases to study in the future.

For the twenty small- and medium-scale business cases, thematic analyses were used to search for themes, patterns, peculiarities, and insights that unfolded from the research data on the entrepreneur and his or her business experiences among the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants. Representative quotations are included to capture the essence of their lived-experience narratives (Black 2005; Bernard and Ryan 2010; Creswell 1994; Geertz 1973).

The twenty individual SWOT analysis that were systematically categorized into four groups, A-D, are then put into a collective SWOT analysis of three major types of businesses established by the migrants in the Washington area: (1) traditional; (2) combinations of traditional and non-traditional; and (3) non-traditional. For comparative purposes, the SWOT analysis of each major type of businesses is provided in separate paragraphs. This collective SWOT analysis is meant to show what major shared themes
of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats emerged as they related to the experiences of the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant entrepreneurs in the area.

For confidentiality and anonymity purposes, “pseudo” names are used to replace the actual names of the entrepreneurs and of their businesses, except in one case in which permission was received to use real names.

(A) Restaurants and Café Businesses

Case 1: Taweke Ethiopian Restaurant

I had a vision that the U Street Corridor could be a profitable location for our business, and I took that risk, and it worked (Taweke, Washington, D.C., 2011).

Demography and Migration Experience of the Entrepreneur

Taweke is an Ethiopian-American migrant entrepreneur in his early 50s, and he has a strong entrepreneurial characteristic, being willing to take risks in business. He left Ethiopia, escaping from the Derg, in the mid-1980s during his teenage years, to come to America as an asylum seeker. He first worked as a cab driver for several years, mostly driving for long hours (more than 14 hours a day), and he was able to save enough money to open a business. While working as a cab driver, he got to know the migrant residents, entrepreneurs, and businesses in the city very well. He never expected to be a restaurant owner in the U.S., and he had no work experience in a kitchen. He went through an attitudinal change toward the kitchen work, and he made a business out of it.

He has the ability to constantly look for business opportunities in new locations. He is a visionary and is able to establish different businesses simultaneously, successfully establishing restaurants and grocery stores in different parts of the city. He has excellent communication and leadership skills. On several occasions, I heard him
delegate important business responsibilities to his family members and co-workers. He is a very determined and hard-working person. I observed him when he was multi-tasking in his job, including planning, managing, transporting, providing customer service, and acting as cashier. Especially, he enjoyed greeting his customers personally, as much as he could, by standing in front of the gate. As put by Taweke,

In our type of business, you have to be restless, looking for new opportunities and taking risks, quickly, when necessary. It is a very demanding and exhausting job. You need to know what your customers like and do not like. You sacrifice lots of your time away from your family and friends. That is why I helped my sister and two of my brothers to open their restaurant businesses around me. That way we could all support each other (Taweke, Washington, D.C., 2011).

Taweke has strong connections with his relatives in his homeland and sends remittance money to his elders. In return, he gets ingredients for his business and their blessings to make it well in the U.S. In fact, his restaurant in the U Street area is named after his hometown, which is a well-known tourist destination for its green geographic terrain and its archaeological heritages sites. One can see large posters of important sites of his hometown and its people on the wall of his businesses.

During my fieldwork, I noticed his adaptive abilities in using technology to promote his business. Unlike many small mom-and-pop Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant restaurants and cafes in the area, I found him to be able to extensively integrate technology into his business. He developed a website for the business and he uses the Internet (Facebook, You Tube, and Twitter) to constantly promote it and to innovatively communicate with his customers and, thus, he consistently reaches a much wider customer base. He makes sure that his business is heavily advertised in important newspapers in the city, including the Washington Post, and Ethiopian-American newspapers and businesses in the metropolitan area. Moreover, he encouraged his
family and friends to advertise their businesses on his website for a small fee. He was called a “solid entrepreneur anchor of the U Street renaissance” by a local survey group citing its superb Ethiopian food and entertainment services.

**Business Development**

Taweke is a pioneer and owner of one of the most famous Ethiopian restaurants in the U Street area. In 1997, Taweke first opened a grocery store retailing Ethiopian spices, using money he saved while driving a cab. The grocery store later developed into a sandwich take-out, and then to a small restaurant, to what is now one of the most popular restaurants in the area.

When he started to work in the grocery store and later take-out business, his primary clients were Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants, mostly single young and elder male cab drivers, given that the restaurant provided inexpensive food and served as an ideal place and space for meeting, making friends, and exchanging information. It is common to see Taweke himself chat and joke with his migrant customers.

Taweke also has a small carry-out shop connected to his Ethiopian restaurant that works from about 9 a.m. to midnight every day. Some of the items sold in the carry-out market include *Injera* (made from a tiny black, white, or brown grain called *teff* sold in various brands and colors), *Ambasha* (traditional *Habesha* bread), *Berbere* (hot pepper), *Shiro* (chickpeas), incense, soft drinks, Ethiopian music CDs, tapes, drama video CDs, international calling cards, and the like. Recently, Taweke expanded his business by opening a restaurant in a new location in the metropolitan area. In addition, Taweke helped his sister and two of his brothers open additional Ethiopian restaurants in the same area of the U Street corridor.
When passing through or after entering his restaurant one is greeted with a strong smell of incense mingled with the aroma of spicy stews. Also, during the weekends, live small-stage traditional Ethiopian song and dance performances (something that is not commonly offered by most Ethiopian and Eritrean restaurants) make his business unique and one of the best known in the area. On several occasions, migrants and tourist customers shared with me that they come there for the experience and to enjoy the traditional spicy food, the music, and the dance.

Since most of the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants in the U.S. are pretty much focused on their day-to-day busy working schedules, often times working in double-shift jobs, they treasure the few moments when they get the chance to visit Ethiopian and Eritrean restaurants and cafes to see their old friends and make new ones. An Ethiopian migrant customer, who was sharing a meal with other young male and female migrants who came to D.C. looking for job opportunities from other cities of the U.S., shared with me that:

The reason why I come to the U Street Corridor and the Adams Morgan area in the evening, and sometimes on weekends, is because it reminds me so much of my hometown. Here, I can meet many people from the homeland, I get to smell familiar food and roasted coffee. I can speak my mother tongue and dance to Ethiopian music. It is good for my body and soul. I have been away from my home country for many years. My friends are here looking for jobs (Ethiopian migrant customer, personal communication, 2011).

At the moment, Taweke’s business is able to attract primarily non-Ethiopian customers. Partly, this happens for three main reasons: (a) many of the young migrant male cab drivers have established their own families and are also coming to work with food that they have prepared at home to save money, especially more so due to the financial challenges in the U.S. after 2008. Not only has their income declined, but for
those who had earlier bought homes, mortgage payments are becoming a challenge; (b) some of the migrants, especially the younger generation, have developed the habit of enjoying more typical “American” cuisine items such as burgers and other fast food, pizza and other ethnic cuisines, like Mexican and the Asian; (c) Washingtonians and visitors are also increasingly getting accustomed to the tastes and experience of this new international cuisine. With relatively friendly prices, the Ethiopian and Eritrean cuisines and their unique spicy flavors make them very appealing to customers of diverse backgrounds. One can visibly observe such experiences on Taweke’s restaurant patio during the summer and fair weather days, (d) his restaurant strategically offers its customers free parking service in front and around the restaurant, and customers have the option of reserving a place in the restaurant online and can have the opportunity to read the menu and the food prices in advance.

One of Taweke’s brothers works as a manager of his restaurant on U Street, helping in the process of opening a second-floor dining room for private events and of applying for a 24-hour service license, offering a ‘round-the-clock breakfast menu that includes *kich*a (the Ethiopian and Eritrean counterpart to oatmeal); scrambled eggs with tomato and peppers; and shredded *injera* with stew and coffee. This idea of opening Taweke’s restaurant for a 24-hour breakfast service came as a result of recognizing a business market niche opportunity in that there is no 24-hour breakfast service in the area, and in recognizing that U Street is a busy commercial center, located a few blocks away from metro centers and bus service lines and, as such, is always full of potential customers for the business, literally 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
Taweke’s restaurant has been recognized locally and nationally as one of the best Ethiopian restaurants for the freshly prepared different brands of *injera* and its great variety of food (both vegetarian and non-vegetarian meals that are served for breakfast, lunch, and dinner). His restaurant has received several awards from well-recognized institutions, including the Washington City paper Readers’ Opinion Poll, which recently selected his business as the best African and Ethiopian restaurant in the area.

**SWOT Analysis**

**Table 5-1. SWOT analysis for Taweke’s Restaurant**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Weakness</th>
<th>Opportunity</th>
<th>Threat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Great at doing electronic-commerce and advertisement</td>
<td>Lack of focus in one location and one business type</td>
<td>Already has ventured into more business locations</td>
<td>More migrants are going into e-commerce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social capital, gets support from his family in the U.S. &amp; in Ethiopia</td>
<td>Delegates major business decisions to workers and family members</td>
<td>With his wide business network, it could expand into an import and export business</td>
<td>There is an increase in the number of similar businesses in the same area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invested in more than one business type and place</td>
<td>As his age advances, it may be difficult for him to keep up his working momentum</td>
<td>Could expand his take-out option, with delivery options, and could expand his sales volume</td>
<td>Entry to similar businesses is not difficult for others migrants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great customer service skills</td>
<td>He does not expect his children to work in the same line of business</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has many customers</td>
<td>Limited space for growth in each restaurant and store</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Case 2: Gojo Ethiopian Restaurant

I have passion for the promotion of my cultural heritage through our cuisine and my incredible drive for financial profit (Gojo, Washington, D.C, 2011).

Demography and Migration Experience of the Entrepreneur

Gojo, born in 1953 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, has pioneered in establishing a fine Ethiopian restaurant in the heart of Georgetown, juxtaposing Ethiopian cuisine with the finest cuisines of the world. Amalgamating her incredible drive for financial profit and her passion for promoting her cultural heritage primarily by serving delicious Ethiopian food and excellent Ethiopian hospitality to customers, she has managed to become one of the most successful foreign-born (in this case, of Ethiopian origin) women ethnic restaurateurs in the upper economic scale neighborhood of Georgetown. The author uses Gojo to denote both the woman and her restaurant.

In 1969, at the age of 16, Gojo migrated from Ethiopia to the U.S. to continue her education, which she did at least initially. She obtained several degrees and accomplished several professional endeavors in the U.S., including obtaining her high school diploma, and her undergraduate and graduate degrees, with a M.A degree in Education. Additionally, she attained several professional certificate accomplishments, including obtaining a Certificate in Internal Communication Skills, and a Certificate in Life Office Management. Over the years, Gojo became well integrated into the mainstream American educational and professional culture. She, certainly, has developed a sense of belonging in the U.S. mainstream culture, not just through the legal naturalization process, becoming a U.S. citizen, but also through her active participations in the U.S. mainstream culture. Gojo is an American citizen who values
gender equality, individual freedom, formal education opportunities available for men and women alike, the entrepreneurial spirit, and democratic values.

Gojo comes from a middleclass family of Amhara ethnic heritage (the political elite of the time). In, Gojo’s traditional Amhara culture, trade and business were among several socially stigmatized types of jobs. Although her father was a businessman himself (involved in a liquor store, and in cement-distribution shop businesses), his ambition for his daughter’s future was different. His dreams and aspirations for Gojo were that she would one day become a lawyer, a medical doctor or an educator. In other words, that she would have a job in a socially respected sector in Ethiopia. Thus, to fulfill their dreams for Gojo, her parents enrolled her first in the formal school system in Ethiopia and then sent her abroad to further her formal schooling in England. However, Gojo preferred life and school in the U.S. rather than in the U.K. and, to that effect, she continued her migration journey to the U.S. in 1969.

Five years after Gojo’s arrival in the U.S., in 1974, her home country, Ethiopia, was in political chaos, because Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown by the Derg, a Communist Junta. By then her father’s businesses, like other privately owned businesses in Ethiopia, were nationalized. Fearing for her security and hoping for her future growth, Gojo decided to stay in the U.S. As a result, for her, what was supposed to be a temporary educational stay in the U.S. became a permanent residential and “home” status. It actually took her several months to accept the fact that her dreams of returning to a stable Ethiopia had to be deferred for an uncertain period of time.

Consequently, immediately after her graduation with a B.A. degree, she shared her predicaments with the authorities of her school and was offered an opportunity to
work at her college as a research and teaching assistant. She worked there for three years (1974-1977). Driven by her ambition to earn more money, Gojo added another job with a private life insurance company and, meanwhile, she completed her Master’s Degree in Arts in 1977. While studying and living in the U.S. Gojo came to appreciate and embraced the values of individual liberty, respect for life, and the pursuit of happiness.

Gojo is a multi-tasker and operates in various capacities, playing roles as owner, manager, community outreach person, and marketing person for her business. Occasionally, Gojo receives a hand in her business from her husband and her two children, who are grown; however, Gojo is the only one in the family who works in the restaurant on a full-time basis. Her daughter, who is in her early 20s, has already published her own traditional Ethiopian cook, available for purchase at Gojo’s restaurant. Gojo hopes her daughter will take over the restaurant business at some point. Gojo recognizes the importance of networking, social capital, and business advocacy. To such effect, she is an actively engaged member of her community and her profession.

**Business Development**

Immediately after her school graduation in 1977, Gojo worked in various jobs, such as an assistant manager for an insurance company, for about a decade. While working for the insurance company, she opened a small traditional Ethiopian coffee shop business, by paying a rent of $250 a month, inside the office building of the company where she worked. Although she had limited observation, as a child, of how her father conducted his business in Ethiopia, this small coffee shop was her very first business investment experience in the U.S. While Gojo kept her job with the insurance
company, she hired a trustworthy Ethiopian migrant woman, who she had known over the years, to run her small coffee shop business. Immediately, she found out that the coffee shop was a very profitable business, and she opened additional coffee shops in other buildings of the same company.

In 1988, Gojo opened her first restaurant in Washington, using her personal savings, mostly accumulated from her job at the insurance company. She initially hired an Ethiopian immigrant woman, who she knew was a very skilled cook and was traditionally trained in preparing Ethiopian dishes. Gojo had met the cook she employed at her restaurant while she was in the small traditional Ethiopian coffee business and subsequently employed her to prepare Ethiopian food for her family at their home. At the same time, Gojo, continued working for the company.

One year later, in 1989, her cook decided to quit because she found the job to be too demanding. This unintended situation pushed Gojo to quit her formal job and started working in her restaurant full time. She multi-tasked-as the chief cook and manager of the restaurant.

Soon Gojo realized that running a restaurant business was far from an easy endeavor. It took her almost four years to get the restaurant business running well. Key legal hurdles she faced included obtaining a Food Inspection Certificate, from the Department of Health and a Food Protection Division and Public Health Food Establishment Restaurant Endorsement. She also needed to acquire an Alcoholic Beverage Regulation Administration license, and these legal processes took her months to accomplish, because she had no personal knowledge of the specific requirements she needed to fulfill. Rather, she had to pay legal advisors for their consultancy services
with the licensing process. Her husband, who had previously worked as a health inspector, also helped her with the rodent control inspection and food supervision.

When Gojo first opened the doors of her restaurant, it was mostly Ethiopian and Eritrean male migrants who were her reliable clients, especially the cab drivers in the area. Eventually, her restaurant grew to attract more customers among the mainstream Washingtonians and tourists, including key American political figures, actors, singers, professionals, and students.

The Gojo restaurant originally had another name, between 1988 and year 2000. Gojo is an Amharic and Tigrinya term that refers to a decoration that is put in a traditional or ceremonial shelter in Ethiopia and Eritrea. The characteristics and qualities of different Gojo decorative ornament types help to indicate the social status and social class of people who own a traditional or ceremonial shelter. Some types of Gojo decorative ornaments, through their symbolic and social meanings in the Ethiopian and Eritrean highlands’ traditional culture, are classified as representations of a higher, medium, or lower social status. The traditional Gojo ornaments in Ethiopia and Eritrea are commonly made from clay, wood, leather, or iron, often with artistic drawings of religious symbols and places, pictorial images of political figures, or paintings of traditional landscapes, homes, artifacts, traditional dresses, musical instruments, and so on. The higher the traditional income status or social class of the owner of a hut, the more complex and diverse the ornament types one would expect to find in that hut. Currently, Gojo is decorated with varied and complex ornaments to fit the tastes of both the majority upper-economic-class of both American and international tourists and the politically powerful class of Washington, D.C., who are regular customers of the
restaurant. Entering Gojo, the customers are welcomed in a friendly, quiet atmosphere, greeted with relaxed Ethiopian hospitality, while discovering the walls adorned with diverse Ethiopian traditional artworks, including traditional music instruments, depictions of Ethiopian people, houses, and communities, including well-framed pictures of Emperor Haile Selassie, among others. There is a huge, graceful display of Gojo’s pictures taken along with famous American top-level politicians and celebrities who have eaten there. Also, displayed are Gojo’s pictures with actors Chris Tucker and Clint Eastwood. Gojo’s pictures with professor Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and with heavyweight champion Mike Tyson are also displayed. These pictures are testaments that Gojo’s Ethiopian restaurant is a favorite for the political power players and global actors. It is also a very smart marketing strategy for Gojo to have the pictures of her taken alongside such high-profile global leaders, professionals, entertainers, and actors, all of them displayed in the walls of her restaurant and in her business website online.

Elegantly framed news articles about Gojo’s restaurant, including stories from The Washington Post, The Washington Times, The Washington Examiner, and The National Restaurant Association, are also displayed in the walls. For instance, Gojo’s restaurant has become a winner of testimonials from The Washingtonian as “one of Washington’s 100 Very Best Restaurants” several years running. Such recognitions were key milestones for her business to be recognized among the finest restaurants in Washington.

Most of the female wait staff in Gojo Ethiopian Cuisine are dressed in elegant, traditional, white hand-woven cotton fabric with decorative borders, and they occupy their busy days by serving a variety of vegetarian and non-vegetarian food options.
classified as appetizers, salads, sea food, poultry, beef, specialties, vegetarian dishes, and beverages. Wait staff members are knowledgeable and are eager to assist guests with explanations and suggestions on the varieties of Ethiopian cuisine. She hires both Ethiopians and non-Ethiopians to serve as waiters.

Alcoholic beverages are offered, including imported beers from Ethiopia such as Castel, Bati, and Meta, and non-alcoholic beverages are also served, including the famous Ethiopian coffee and tea. The flavors in the food are soothing, yet unique, provided largely by Berbere, a powder that combines chili pepper and other spices. Additional ingredients in a dish might include onions, tomatoes, and green pepper, depending on which combination best suits the dish, in main courses such as chicken stew with boiled egg (doro wat), lamb stew (yebeg wat), beef stew (siga wat), fish stew (Asa wat) or vegetables (lentil stews, stringbeans, and cabbage with potato). Among the most common and popular dishes are: the spicy Tibsi beef, chicken, and sea food dishes, and the outstanding vegetarian selections. Gojo cuisine is made to serve and please the demands of diverse palates. Most of the dishes are well-stewed and well-married flavors, with a pleasant texture. Spicing levels can range from subtle and mild to hot.

Gojo cuisine provides customers both with indoor and outdoor service options. In this cozy and casual neighborhood location, tables are set with beautiful utensils. Most customers prefer to eat in the traditional Ethiopian and Eritrean ways. The Ethiopian and Eritrean-style table manners have long been and still are a ritualized communal affair, symbolizing sharing and the bonds of friendship. Portions come meticulously arranged on a large round central tray lined with injera, the flat disk of spongy bread. In
the Ethiopian and Eritrean-style dining experience, *Injera* does not serve only as a bread and plate, but also as a spoon, as a knife, and as a fork. In other words, the *injera* is used to pinch up the food, and swiftness is necessary to maneuver food from the tray to the mouth. As a meal ends, the *injera* will have soaked up some of the stew juices, turning it into a rich and a delicious final portion. Conventional utensils are available on request, but that would ruin the Ethiopian and Eritrean-style dining experience. Eating with bare hands shows appreciation and respect for what has been served and, thus, clean hands are a necessary courtesy. Ethiopian and Eritrean restaurants are equipped with restrooms that supply soap and water.

Despite its relative high-end fare, Gojo’s traditional Ethiopian food was able to attract some elite Ethiopian and Eritrean customers and mainstream American customers. Compared to the cost of dining at Ethiopian and Eritrean restaurants in Adams Morgan or the U Street neighborhoods, Gojo Ethiopian cuisine is a bit expensive, but it is not out of range for this Georgetown upscale neighborhood, which makes its location match its pricey menu. Gojo is suitably located in a very busy tourism-magnet street, just across from famous hotels, and it is common to see patrons of the hotels and tourists dining at the restaurant. It is also a very close walking distance to major universities in the city and, as such, it is able to attract some of the student community, as well.

Gojo recognizes the importance of networking, social capital, and business advocacy. To such effect, as said before, she is an actively engaged member of her community and profession. Among other endeavors, she serves as a motivational speaker for high school students and fundraising initiatives. Also, she acts as a financial
consultant for small start-up restaurant businesses. In addition, she is involved in charitable causes through her restaurant and donations in the U.S. and in Ethiopia.

Gojo, as a very ambitious entrepreneur, planned to expand her business into her homeland by borrowing money from banks, but the high cost of accessing financing, the demand for a great deal of collateral to qualify for the loan, and the lack of sufficient knowledge on how to access other financial opportunities, has discouraged her from pursuing financing from the banks. After the 2008 financial crisis, getting loans from banks has become increasingly difficult for borrowers like Gojo who do not have much high-value collateral properties. In addition, the lack of an Ethiopian Restaurant Owners Association limits the effective advocacy, pricing, marketing, and food promotion capacities of the individual Ethiopian restaurant owners. Gojo emphasizes that an effective networking of Ethiopian restaurant owners could further enhance their strength and could give them an avenue for collective advocacy with regard to their business-related issues, including licensing, pricing, marketing, and regulation issues. Also, it would be beneficial for sharing experiences, skills, and increased promotion of Ethiopian cuisine and culture with the mainstream American societies. In the meantime, a few years ago, Gojo expanded her restaurant business, in collaboration with her brother, by opening a restaurant and a bar, in a different location of the Washington D.C. metropolitan area.
### SWOT Analysis

**Table 5-2. SWOT analysis for Gojo**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Weakness</th>
<th>Opportunity</th>
<th>Threat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unique location in an upscale location</td>
<td>Dining at Gojo is very expensive for most migrant customers</td>
<td>Opportunities for collaboration in creating a chain of Ethiopian restaurants in D.C. and other major cities of the U.S.</td>
<td>Entrepreneurs with more money and skills might open an authentic Ethiopian restaurant in Georgetown with lower prices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gojo attracts mainstream Washingtonians and tourists alike</td>
<td>The location of the restaurant is far from where most Ethiopians and Eritreans reside</td>
<td>Willingness to invest back in the home country and the host country</td>
<td>Several international restaurants compete for restaurant customers in the same area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a barrier to entry, because it is a very expensive neighborhood</td>
<td>Brick and mortar business, with a limited capacity for service provision</td>
<td>Economic policy in her home country is opening up for private investors willing to invest</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Established name as an authentic Ethiopian restaurant It expanded to an underserved market at an additional site</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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*149*
Case 3: Adi Eritrean Restaurant

I am in an Eritrean restaurant business because I needed to create job opportunity for myself, for my family, and for others in my community (Adi, Washington, D.C, 2011).

Demography and Migration Experience of the Entrepreneur

Adi is an Eritrean-American and the owner of the Eritrean Restaurant located in the U Street Corridor. Adi is originally from the southern part of Eritrea. He was 14 years old when he moved to Asmara, the capital city of Eritrea, and started working in a cafeteria as a waiter. He then moved to the port city of Massawa, located along the Red Sea coast. Several years later, in 1975, he left Massawa for Saudi Arabia, due to political instability in his home country. Adi states that:

Immediately after the annexation of Eritrea by Ethiopia in 1962, the situation in Eritrea became politically unstable and risky. During the same time, there was a better employment opportunity in the then-oil-rich countries of the Middle East, such as Saudi Arabia, and I decided to take a risk and migrate by boat from the coastal city of Massawa into Saudi Arabia in search of a job that would pay better (Adi, personal communication, 2011).

While in Saudi Arabia, then a middle-income country and one of the greatest labor importing countries in the Arab World, Adi started working in various service jobs, in construction, and in hotels. In particular, he remembers that while in Saudi Arabia, he used to eat at a small Eritrean immigrant-owned restaurant, but he was not satisfied with either the quality or the quantity of the food that he was being served. He also observed that many of his fellow customers, mostly men, in the restaurant, were not satisfied with the serving size, either. Such personal experience and observation made him recognize that there could be a market opportunity for him, if he could provide better quality Eritrean and Ethiopian dishes in Saudi Arabia. Soon he seized an opportunity, and quit his service job to start his own small Eritrean restaurant.
Business Development

In 1979 while in Saudi Arabia, Adi started selling Eritrean food to his former coworkers and did better than the other Eritrean restaurant. As a typical male from the highlands of Eritrea, Adi had no knowledge of the kitchen before he started his Eritrean restaurant business in Saudi Arabia. However, growing up as a child, he enjoyed watching his mother cook vegetarian meals, meat, and Shiro (chickpea) with berbere, and preparing Eritrean and Ethiopian spice blends with tomato, onions, garlic, butter, and salt. She made injera bread from teff, and she used firewood to cook the best meals in a pottery set, which he loved. For him it was not until he opened the Eritrean restaurant that he had to learn how to cook by trial and error, as well as by seeking some help from some experienced cooks among the Eritrean immigrant women.

The late 1970s and early 1980s were decades of economic boom in the Middle East, including Saudi Arabia, primarily due to oil revenue, which was doing very well in the global markets. As a result of the revenue from the oil industry, there were various job opportunities available for skilled and unskilled laborers alike in the construction and service sectors in the country. In those periods, thousands of Eritrean and Ethiopian men and women were migrating to the country in search of jobs.

For Adi, this phenomenon meant a great market for his small Eritrean restaurant. Soon after he opened his restaurant business, it had become so successful that he started hiring well-known cooks to work for him, and since he made sufficient profit, he was able to visit Italy for vacations in the mid1980s. Eritrea had been an Italian colony in the past, and visiting this country had always been in his dreams and imagination, to see with his own eyes and through his personal experience how modern day Italians lived their lives. Before Eritrea was liberated in 1991, Eritrean exile communities
overseas used to gather during the summer at the Bologna Festival to observe cultural and musical shows and to raise awareness and conduct fundraising activities for the Eritrean cause. Those factors motivated Adi to visit Italy as soon as he was able to save some money.

After his visit to Italy, Adi realized that he could even immigrate with his wife and two children to the U.S. Again he took the risk of closing his restaurant business in Saudi Arabia and moved to Italy with his family in 1988. After staying in Italy for six months, he and his family came to the U.S., three years before his home country got its independence from Ethiopia.

Two more children were born once his family arrived in the U.S. When Adi arrived in the U.S. he was over forty. He did not know any English. He had not had the opportunity to seek formal education while in Eritrea or Saudi Arabia. Upon arrival, he applied for various types of service jobs around the city, but all he got in response was that they would call him back if needed. He was an African immigrant in his mid-40s who could not read or write English.

Frustrated by several employment interview rejections, Adi went to a well-known Eritrean-American-owned café in the area. He started consulting with his fellow migrants, and he remembers that the majority of them advised him to establish his own business instead of searching for jobs in the service sector. Specifically, those Eritrean migrants who knew him when he was the owner of a restaurant in Saudi Arabia knew that he was an excellent cook and encouraged him to make a business opportunity out of his cooking skills.
Taking the encouragement seriously, and with confidence in his cooking and customer service skills, Adi started making sandwiches and Eritrean food items at home and informally selling them to Eritrean migrants who gathered to play in a soccer tournament in the area, mostly during the summer season.

In addition, the Eritrean-American migrants in the area had a community center, and Adi applied to compete for a bid to run a small café and kitchen in the center. Since the managers realized that he was an excellent cook and was coming in with a good bid, that he was diligent, and that he was sociable, they allowed him to rent the small café in the center for four consecutive years, then decided to give it to another bidder. While having a café at the center, during a period of time when the Eritrean and Ethiopian migrants in the U.S. had an overall great friendship, Adi was able to get to know the community very well and this process helped him establish meaningful relationships with many migrants from both communities. Compared to other Ethiopian and Eritrean entrepreneurs covered in this research who come with a high school or above level of formal education and good communication skills in the English language that they have learned in their home countries, Adi speaks very limited English, most of which he learned through conversations with customers.

When his contract with the community center terminated, he started searching for a place to rent and came across an ad for a place in the U. Street area. He immediately contacted the owner and was able to get a rental deal. In that small room, he started cooking and selling Eritrean dishes without a formal license. Soon, inspectors came, fined him some money, and requested him to get a proper license and clean his place, which he did. He then rented a second larger room and opened a restaurant with a bar,
and billboard table games, for the growing young Eritrean and Ethiopian migrant men who would like to dine, play, and hang around during their little free time in the evening and weekends.

In 1995 he opened a restaurant with a fellow Eritrean migrant as his partner, but later on there was some disagreement and they agreed to split. Adi bought the restaurant business. Now he independently owns and operates it with two of his children, both in their early twenties. His children help him as cashiers, cooks, bartenders, and DJs. His home is located in the same building. There are other residents who live in the same building and have made several noise complaints about his business. Most of his customers were migrants, but, with time, a few mainstream Americans and tourists have been patronizing his restaurant, mostly due to his menu, which is good and cheaper than other restaurants in the area.

**SWOT Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Weakness</th>
<th>Opportunity</th>
<th>Threat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cheaper price and good customer service skills</td>
<td>Has very limited English language skills</td>
<td>His children could help him reach a wider customer base</td>
<td>Barrier to entry is very low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Started in the informal sector and became formal sector</td>
<td>Has gotten several noise complaints from residents who live next to his business</td>
<td>He provides relatively cheaper-priced food and could attract more customers from the mainstream, including students</td>
<td>Mainly dependent on his cooking skills, and he is advancing in age</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knows the migrant community well</td>
<td>Business is mostly limited to the migrant communities</td>
<td></td>
<td>Migrants are highly politicized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has support from his children</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Case 4: Ful Eritrean Café

Our strategy is to remain small, modest, and serve an affordable Eritrean breakfast and entrée menu to our customers (Ful, Washington, D.C., 2009).

Demography and Migration Experience of the Entrepreneur

The owner of Ful Café is a very friendly Eritrean-American businessperson in his mid 60s, with great customer service skills. The waiters in his café include his teenage son, his wife, and a Mexican immigrant woman. Since she does not speak Tigrinya and limited English, she mostly works in the kitchen. Ful is a multitasker who gets involved in most aspects of his business, including working as a manager, cashier, waiter, cook, and accountant. Before coming to the U.S, Ful also worked in a café in Asmara, and he really enjoys talking to and really getting to know his customers. Using his earnings from the café, he was able to buy his own house in Washington, and he is able to remit support to his relatives in Eritrea.

The physical decor of his café is very modest, which gives it an authentic resemblance to typical cafés in various cities and towns of his homeland. The walls are adorned with various pictures, including a photo of ports, and old and new football teams from Eritrea. Live coverage of Eritrean TV news, which is broadcast in Tigrinya, Tigre, Arabic, and English, is shown there, and it makes it a convenient location for mostly young and elder men who might seek current news and information or conversation and company, while eating relatively cheap food, and drinking tea or coffee. Ful’s wife and son help him a great deal with various aspects of the running of the business.
**Business Development**

Ful’s Eritrean Coffee Shop is a small, popular Eritrean-American family-owned café that is strategically located in the Adams Morgan area. Since its establishment in 1987, this coffee shop is mostly known for its *Ful*, a spicy fava bean dish that is served mixed with red onions, tomatoes, diced jalapenos, and other spicy ingredients, optionally with or without scrambled eggs and sour cream. It is a menu item that is a popular dish for breakfast in East Africa mostly common in the lowlands of Eritrea and Sudan, which helps Ful’s Café attract customers from the Sudanese immigrant community as well.

It is also a café that is famous among cab drivers who have migrated from East Africa to the area. At his café it is very common to find single East African immigrant men who come there for their breakfast as early as 6 a.m., before they head for work, or during lunch, or just for drinking spiced hot tea and socializing with their friends in the evening. During the day and evening, older and retired Eritrean migrants also come to Ful’s Café to socialize, get news from on homeland, and have spiced tea.

Since most of the Ethiopian and Eritrean food items are pretty much similar, Ful’s Café attempts to pay attention to make sure that the Eritrean flavors in the dishes are included, like a pasta menu that includes such dishes as spaghetti and macaroni, since between 1889 and 1941, Eritrea was an Italian colony and Eritreans have adopted the legacy of the Italian cuisine, such as pasta and the use of lots of tomato sauce and olive oil in their dishes. For drinks, Eritreans enjoy mostly spicy tea and imported Asmara Beer and red and white wines. Due to the proximity of the Red Sea, for those who lived in the coastal area of the country, seafood is also a common dish they like to eat at
home and abroad. Ethiopian restaurants, on the other hand, pay attention to raw meat (Kitfo and Gored Gored), and the use of purified butter.

Ful claims that his ability to remain in business for the last 26 years without much change in the size of his business is due to his strategy of keeping his Eritrean Café specializing in Ful breakfast, of remaining small and customer-friendly in price, and his idea of serving coffee in an environment that reminds customers of the authenticity of a modest coffee shop in their home country.

**SWOT Analysis**

Table 5-4. SWOT analysis for Ful

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Weakness</th>
<th>Opportunity</th>
<th>Threat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focused on Ful, a breakfast dish</td>
<td>Not ambitious to grow</td>
<td>Can promote a carry-out menu option</td>
<td>Barrier to entry is no problem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broad customer base that includes migrants from several East African countries</td>
<td>Not willing to further elaborate menu options</td>
<td>His family can open another breakfast place in a new location, given that they have a built reputation already</td>
<td>Many Ethiopian and Eritrean cafes in the area have started to include Ful on their menus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingredients to make the Ful dish are easily available in mainstream U.S. stores</td>
<td>The café has a very small room</td>
<td>Allows customers to watch TV for long hours but has limited business space</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price and migrant-friendly environment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Case 5: Gobo Eritrean Café

We shine with the sun, and we make breakfast food with delight (Gobo, Virginia, 2011).

Demographic and Migration Experience of the Entrepreneur

Gobo Eritrean Café is owned and managed by the family of Gobo and her husband, who came to the U.S. from Eritrea. The authentic food they offer is prepared by Gobo’s mother (a grandmother), who speaks only Tigrinya and works in the kitchen. Gobo and her husband came to the U.S. in the early 1980s. He has worked as a technician, and she worked as an accountant in a bank. Both saved and pulled their resources together to lease the place and, after some time, they bought the property. They are very hardworking, motivated, professional, determined, and passionate. Also, they have great customer service skills. They work well as a team. They also support the Eritrean immigrant communities in their area by promoting artists and sales of artistic works via their websites, and they are also parents of three children and have their own homes in the U.S. and Eritrea. A few years ago both of them were able to visit their families in their homeland.

Business Development

Gobo is a café that was founded in Virginia in early 2000. It is mainly known for its home-style breakfast menu and its exceptional quality coffee. When Gobo and her husband opened the café in 2004, they imported most of the spices for their menu from Eritrea. After several years in business, they have managed to find a substitute, using domestic equivalent ingredients. The décor in their café highlights Eritrean heritage items, like photos, basketry, artistic paintings, pieces of traditional clothing, music, and the ER-TV live coverage starting early in the morning.
Their breakfast menu is known for sticking with the traditional Eritrean menu, with dishes like *Ga’at* (a spongy traditional porridge, with mixtures of *berbere*, which is a blend of chili peppers and herbals) mixed with yogurt and purified butter, and *Kitcha Fitfit* (traditional homemade flat bread). All these food items will make a person feel full for the most part of the day because they are food items that are full of carbohydrates that take a long time to digest.

Hot drinks in this shop include flax seed drink and tea (*Shai me’amer*). Early in the morning, Gobo’s Café is filled with Eritrean immigrant males who live around Virginia, and who come for a traditional Eritrean breakfast before they head for work. In addition to the Eritrean menu that reminds migrants of grandma’s cooking and the healthy organic drinks, the café also serves Italian pastries, along with macchiato, café latte, cappuccino, and regular coffee. It is a comfortable and homely place with access to complementary Wi-Fi Internet access for customers. It is a business that employs about eight people.

In 2010, Gobo’s Café was featured on a local TV program and was praised, along with nearly two other dozen favorite area restaurants, for its delicious breakfast in Washington. This spotlight gave Gobo Cafe recognition as one of the best choices for enjoying a traditional breakfast meal in the area. After a few months, the same documentary was translated into Tigrinya and broadcasted in Eritrea, via the ERI-TV.

Some of the challenges in their business include the limited space, seating only 50 individuals at a time. Finding parking is also very difficult for customers. Also, abiding by the rules, including following sanitation, taxation, and food and drinks licensing, is not a simple task.
SWOT Analysis

Table 5-5. SWOT analysis for Gobo

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Weakness</th>
<th>Opportunity</th>
<th>Threat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Authentic food with a grandmother cooking in the kitchen</td>
<td>Limited parking in the area</td>
<td>Can open in a new location with larger room and parking options</td>
<td>Barrier to entry is low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialized breakfast menu</td>
<td>The café is small</td>
<td>Potential to expand the music shop</td>
<td>The number of Eritrean and Ethiopian cafés in the area is growing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Excellent customer service skills</td>
<td>It is a bit far from the bus line</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transnational reputation and connections</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sale of music CDs on its website</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(B) Grocery and Convenience Store Businesses

Case 6: Ali Grocery Store

Everyone finds himself in the world where he belongs, and if one has the will, one does something to carry it out (Ali, Washington area, 2009).

Demography and Migration Experience of the Entrepreneur

Ali is originally from Asmara, Eritrea. He was born into a Muslim family, and his family did not own land to farm, but had a retail grocery shop in Asmara. As a young boy, he grew up going to his father’s retail grocery shop and helped out as the retail sales and marketing person. This helped him learn several trade skills, including how to conduct market research, negotiate, and buy merchandise like coffee, sugar, oil, soap, rice, pasta, powdered milk, and other food items, from wholesale import and export shops, and sell the same items retail to customers for profit. Early on he also realized that he had good marketing and sales skills, good customer service skills, and a
passion for doing business, but his family expected for him to go to formal education and get a professional job.

Therefore, he initially migrated from Eritrea to Saudi Arabia in the early 1970s, and then to the U.S., in search of formal educational opportunities. While in Saudi Arabia, he briefly worked in the business of exporting grocery items from Saudi Arabia to Eritrea. He is fluent in Arabic and Tigrinya. Some Eritreans who were involved in the import-export business were not able to speak Arabic very well, and the Saudi business people were not able to speak Tigrinya. Therefore, this was a great employment opportunity for Ali, who worked as a language translator, and also offered business consultancy services.

He arrived in the U.S. in the fall of 1977, and started his formal schooling in Colorado, planning to major in biology to fulfill the dreams that his parents had for him. However, he found life there to be lonely, and the weather was too cold for him. Thus, he decided to relocate to the East Coast of the U.S, to acquire a better social network and an improved quality of life. In the spring of 1980, Ali moved to the Washington, D.C., and started working for a company as a lab technician, and at the same time he pursued his formal schooling in microbiology. Since he had to cover his own living and school expenses, he was working during the day and studying at night. During this period, he remembers that many days there was no free hour for him to take rest or sleep. Commonly, he barely had a few hours to sleep and relax, yet he was determined and committed to achieve his educational goals. As a result, he was able to graduate in 1988 with a Bachelor of Science Degree in Microbiology.
Soon after his graduation, Ali travelled to Asmara, Eritrea, for a visit. Upon his return to the U.S., he faced a dilemma between opening his own grocery business and continuing to work as a full-time microbiology lab technician in a company. He made some economic calculations, including how much payment he was getting as a laboratory technician and he compared this amount to how much money he could potentially make if he established his own business. Based on such assumptions and calculations, he felt that, if successful, opening his own business would bring him higher financial rewards, independence, and job satisfaction. Thus, Ali, along with his wife, decided to take a calculated economic risk to open a small, traditional Eritrean and Ethiopian gift shop while he still kept working as a laboratory technician.

Ali and his wife are staunch believers in avoiding talking politics in the workplace, and he defends the idea of depending on his own capital and skills in starting, maintaining, and growing his family-run business. Ali is a multilingual person and has managed to develop and sustain very close and lasting relationships with his customers in the area. Ali sees himself as a successful man both in his entrepreneurial and family lives. He reiterates that, due to his involvement in business, not only he was able to support his family’s needs for shelter, food, education, health care, and other needs, but he was also able to help his extended family and relatives at home and abroad. He was able to buy a house for his family in Virginia without any loan from the bank or any sort of mortgage. His wife has a Certificate in Business Management. Both Ali and his wife, make sure that their children learn their culture and language at home. He says:

I am proud for my success as a businessman and also proud that my children are doing well in school and that they value the importance of education, so I hope that they will have a bright future in their professional jobs (Ali, personal communication, October 25, 2009).
The future aspiration of Ali for his children is that they will go to universities, will graduate, and will get a well-paying, and respectable jobs in professional sectors. This is a dream shared by the majority of East African entrepreneurs and communities in the Washington area.

**Business Development**

Ali started to test a business venture area in the U.S. by first opening a small traditional Eritrean and Ethiopian gift shop in the Columbus Height area in 1990. A year and a half later, he found out that his traditional Ethiopian and Eritrean shop business was doing fine at the start, but soon its business started to slow down because most of his clients were primarily Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants in Washington. Due to the limited number of customers, he was forced to close down his gift shop; otherwise, he was afraid that he would have lost more capital and time. As a result, Ali made the decision to open an East African grocery store in a new location, this time in Virginia.

In 1992, Ali started searching for a convenient location to open a grocery store in Virginia. He used his personal savings, collected while he was working as a lab technician and from the small profits he made from his previous small traditional gift shop. After looking in several areas of the Washington area, he found an ideal place with a “For Rent” sign in Virginia. He thought that this particular place would be a great location for two main reasons. First, there was a growing East African migrant community in northern Virginia and, second, there was no well-established traditional grocery store in the area. Thus, he thought he would be a pioneer in that area.

After contacting the owner of the store, he learned that somebody else already leased this place for a few years. However, Ali was informed that if he was willing to rent the place for a longer period, sort of agreement between the owner, the current
occupant, and him could be reached, which they eventually did after some rental
bargaining. The two others agreed that Ali could rent the place for $1,200, with a 10
percent yearly increment, which meant the rent would reach $3,720 in 2011.

For the first two months, Ali renovated the place and bought the necessary
equipment for the grocery store, including a refrigerator, a scale, a *Halal* (“permissible”) meat chopper, a meat binder, a cash register, flexible shelves, and other things necessary to start operating the store. However, he did not spend all his previously saved money just on establishing the necessary infrastructure, equipment, and merchandise. Rather, he kept some of his savings as a back-up, in case the initial plan of the grocery store did not go as smooth as expected.

Ali firmly believed that it was necessary for him to depend on his own resources rather than to use borrowed money to start his grocery business. He is a strong advocate for his type of business not to depend on borrowed money, either from a bank or other sources, partly due to the unreliable characteristics of the business. Ali knew that the U.S. Small Business Association (SBA) helped businesses by providing loans, loan guarantees, contracts, counseling sessions, and other forms of assistance to small businesses, yet he believed that it was not necessary for his business to rely on help from the SBA. Likewise, Ali did not see the necessity of borrowing money for his business from the East African migrant associations in the area. This was mainly because of his staunch belief on depending solely on his own financial resources during the launching and growing of his business. His stand on not seeking a loan from the formal banks appears to be shared by some other Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant entrepreneurs in the area. Partly, this can be explained because, in their culture,
borrowing and depending on somebody else’s money or otherwise has negative connotations.

Today he is the owner of a family-run retail grocery store employing up to 5 people, depending on the season and other circumstances. His store has more merchandise and competitive items than any other East African grocery store in the area. His items include spices, *injera*, coffee, tea, CDs, cassettes, DVDs, phone cards, and the like.

As a pioneer East African grocery store owner in Virginia, Ali had faced an unstable market and had had to advertise extensively throughout the East African migrant communities and during personal and social gatherings to help him kick-start his business. At the same time, he worked very hard to get to know his customers better and make available as much desirable merchandise as possible for his customers, so that their requests were met to their satisfaction.

What makes Ali’s grocery store unique and successful includes several points, but he emphasizes that it is primarily his ability to fulfill the needs of his customers. He said, “Everyone finds himself in the world where he belongs.” He assumed and found out that, as a traditional East African grocery business store, his core customers were Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants and other migrant communities from East Africa, including Somalis and Sudanese. He imported most of his merchandise from Ethiopia and Saudi Arabia. Some common items, such as sugar and milk, he bought them from wholesale distributors in the United States.

Although not formally educated in the field of business management, as a professional, Ali had developed acumen and insight into trading. Ali is a hard working
person, and he searches for the necessary items for his grocery store in many places to satisfy the demands of his customers. As a result, his grocery is full of hard to find goods merchandise in demand by his customers, a testament to his dedication and commitment. His trading knowledge and customer service skills enabled him to make sure that his customers would leave his shop with a satisfied need and a happy face. Ali emphasizes that although many people tried to invest in the traditional East African grocery store business, only very few succeeded in such an endeavor.

Ali believes that part of his success comes not only from his own exceptional and culturally appropriate customer service skills, hard work, dedication, and commitment to his business, but also from his wife’s support in all aspects of the business, from planning to purchasing to selling the merchandise. In addition to her full participation in the grocery store, his wife also takes care of their domestic affairs and of their children.

On a typical day Ali opens his business at about 9 a.m. If it is an Eritrean and Ethiopian holiday, however, his shop opens as early as 5 a.m. and stays open till about 10 p.m. At the same time, he has to keep the flow of merchandise without interruption. Sometimes customers may request something that is not available in the store. If possible, and depending on the anticipated demand for the item, he makes it available to them as soon as possible. The grocery store is a job that does not give him much rest or time to breath, but he says:

You have to keep going, and work harder all the time. I strongly believe that a person involved in business should try to stay away from the political developments of their sending countries. It is imperative for him and his family to stay away from talking about politics, while conducting business with their customers. That way the business is able to attract customers, irrespective of their political backgrounds and positions at home or abroad. I remember a Habesha business owner in Virginia who was forced to close his business, primarily because people would come to his store and talk
about the political developments of their home country, the whole day, and many customers did not like that, and they started avoiding going to the store, so that they would not be bothered about political issues. It is unnecessary to talk about politics while conducting business. If the business owner wants to make a political statement, he or she can make the point at political meetings, away from the business (Ali, personal communication, October 25, 2009).

Ali’s comments highlight the political sensitivity that is required to skillfully navigate the challenge of how to run and manage a successful business endeavor within the East African migrants in the area. Conflicting views among the East African migrant communities on various geopolitical issues (such as national, ethnic, regional, religious, and linguistic differences, among others) might arise among customers visiting an East African business such as a café, a club, a restaurant, a grocery store and so forth. Thus, it is imperative for Ali, as a businessperson, and his family to stay away from talking about politics, for instance, sensitive geopolitics between Ethiopian and Eritrea, while conducting business with their customers. As a result, his business is able to attract customers, irrespective of their political backgrounds and positions at home or abroad. Moreover, Ali says:

My passion, insight, and skills for trade enabled me to establish, maintain and grow my business and income. My wife and I try to separate politics from business and rather focus our energy on making sure that our clients get the merchandise they need in good quality, and we deliver those with an excellent customer service. These qualities, I think, enabled our business to stand above some of those East African entrepreneurs who tried and failed to start similar businesses in Virginia (Ali, personal communication, October 25, 2009).

Ali is determined to continue to run his grocery store as a family business. He believes that it is the best model for such type of store. Culturally, his customers are East African migrant communities who enjoy developing a very close acquaintance with
traditional storeowners, just the way the business relationship between a businessperson and customers is done in their home country.

For a similar reason, a family-run business helps him develop very close, personal, and lasting relationships with his customers. To that end, when customers come to his grocery store, Ali normally welcomes his customers using the language they primarily associate with, including English, Amharic, Tigrinya, or Arabic. Then, he inquires about their well-being and engages in a brief conversation with them on such topics as current family or social events in the community and the like, and then, at last, he starts conducting the business transaction. These types of conversations and interactions give him and his customers the chance to know each other better and develop a much closer relationship than just doing pure business, as is done in big grocery stores such as Walmart or Sam’s Club.
### SWOT Analysis

#### Table 5-6. SWOT analysis for Ali

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Weakness</th>
<th>Opportunity</th>
<th>Threat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>His is the very first East African grocery store in Virginia, it has excellent customer service, and he has the ability to consistently supply good quality and varied merchandise, which enables the store to attract many customers from East Africa as reliable clients.</td>
<td>Lack of interest in establishing extended business networks with bankers, investors, and venture capitalists. There is very limited potential for expansion, since it is primarily a family-run business. For instance, Ali does not have a plan for creating a chain of grocery stores in various cities of the U.S.</td>
<td>Potential ability to network and co-invest with people who are interested in similar types of business opportunities. Potential to invest back in his homeland. Can invest in an import-export business of East African grocery items.</td>
<td>Barrier to entry is relatively low in that any person with better investments and network connections in the U.S. and East Africa could easily replicate the same business type in a short period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>As a self-financed, family-run grocery store, it is a debt-free business.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential for investing and creating a chain of East African grocery stores in selected cities of the U.S., such as Seattle, Chicago, and Los Angeles.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Sustainability of the business is not secure yet, as the business interests and skills have not passed to their children so far.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### Case 7: Gebeya Ethiopian Grocery Store

My ethnic grocery store is located in a great location, in the neighborhoods of a growing Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant population in Virginia. Thus, so far, I have relatively less competition on my block (Gebeya, Virginia, 2011).

### Demography and Migration Experience of the Entrepreneur

Gebeya is an Ethiopian-American in his mid-50s. He owns a grocery store located close to Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants residential blocks in Virginia. He came to the U.S. to continue his higher studies in the field of Natural Sciences, specifically in Physics, in his early 30s, but later he shifted to the business sector because of the
opportunities he recognized in opening a small Ethiopian grocery store in Virginia. To be able to open his own grocery store, however, he decided that he first had to work in various service-providing jobs and later drive a cab in double shifts to be able to save enough money. He also worked in convenience stores to help him learn and develop skills and knowledge in the field of retail business. Thus, he worked in various service sector jobs, including in a gas station and a 7-Eleven convenience store and, while there, he was able to learn how customer service works and got some business training in retail sales and marketing that further sparked his interest and confidence to continue working in retail. Since he is a fluent speaker of such various languages as Amharic, Oromo, Tigrinya, and English, he is able to serve numerous customers, including those who do not speak English and those who are comfortable doing their shopping in their native languages.

**Business Development**

When Gebeya considered opening an Ethiopian grocery retail store in Virginia, he took the initiative and did some painstaking research on his own on various small-scale retail-business factors like the demographics of the area, including identifying the geographical location where the highest concentration of Ethiopians and Eritreans lived in Virginia; the market needs of the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants in the area; and the costs and mechanisms of bringing various products from Ethiopia to the U.S. Among other things, in his field research he found out that there were growing numbers of Ethiopian and Eritrean immigrant families and single men and women living in clusters due to the relatively cheaper rent and more affordable living expenses compared to the downtown Washington, D.C., area.
He assessed that there was a potentially unmet market for traditional Ethiopian grocery items and also found that he could consistently rely on Ethiopian Airlines and cargo delivery, a company that flies from Addis, in Ethiopia, to Washington, D.C., to be able to import the necessary ingredients and items for his supermarket, such as spices, butter, music videos, and CDs. He had two brothers and a sister who could help him with the purchase and delivery of the items from Ethiopia to the U.S. He also became confident that he could supplement his grocery store with organic products, such as organic injera and organic meat from local companies in the U.S. and provide it to his customers consistently, making a reliable profit while doing so.

Based on his thorough fieldwork research and his business environment assessment, he opened his business over a decade ago and is able to consistently provide his customers with various traditional spices and food products, particularly those he imports from Ethiopia. Because of his consistent ability to stock his grocery with authentic products, he was able to make his business a household name among the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant communities of his part of Virginia. From his business experience, he came to know that Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants are willing to pay a good amount of money for “nostalgic” items, provided that they get authentic products on a timely basis and with great customer service. He also came to realize that people frequent his grocery store to buy something that reminds them of “home,” buying authentic products that makes the migrants feel better, especially during the holidays.

Many people frequent his grocery shop to meet, greet, and chat, and many use it as an address reference point. Some come to the store to get newspapers, pamphlets, and journals published by the Ethiopian migrant communities in Washington. One of the
main challenges he faces in his business is to import authentic traditional products from Ethiopia consistently and sell them on time before they expire. Some products, such as butter, are sensitive to time and must be imported at the right time and in the right amount; otherwise, there could be either loss of profit or loss of customers. The relative advantages of his business are that it provides unique and authentic traditional Ethiopian products, is located in a prime geographic spot with low levels of competition, and has sensitive and respectful customer service.

These advantages are realized because, with the rise in real estate prices, the increase in rental prices and in the cost of living in D.C., many Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants whose incomes are derived mainly from low-paying jobs are increasingly moving out of D.C. and relocating to Virginia and Maryland. This is a great demographic improvement for Gebeya’s grocery store because many persons are relocating to areas that are walking distance from his grocery store, so customers can easily go ethnic grocery shopping, buying the merchandise on their way from work to home. If they were to decide to shop ethnically in the District of Columbia, it would require them to travel long distances by metro, bus, or car, which is costly due to added parking expenses in D.C. All these factors are making his customer base and business grow.
SWOT Analysis

Table 5-7. SWOT analysis for Gebeya

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Weakness</th>
<th>Opportunity</th>
<th>Threat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Did research and identified a prime location with low business competition</td>
<td>Some grocery items are time sensitive and need to be sold fast</td>
<td>Potential for investment in other blocks in the area</td>
<td>Barrier to entry is low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business is located in walking distance from residential apartments of East African migrants</td>
<td>It is a business run by a single individual and if he gets sick the business can close down</td>
<td>Can launch an import-export business</td>
<td>With more East African migrants coming to the area, other investors are targeting the area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multilingual, can communicate with customers in several Ethiopian and Eritrean languages</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has family ties in Ethiopia and can obtain grocery supplies fast</td>
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Case 8: Bahlu Market and Carry-Out Food Business

Our business style focuses mainly on the carry-out option (Bahlu, Washington, D.C., 2009).

Demography and Migration Experience of the Entrepreneur

Bahlu is an Ethiopian-American immigrant in his late 30s who since 2005 has co-owned and operated the Bahlu Market & Carry-Out, along with his uncle. His uncle is also the owner of one of the most popular Ethiopian restaurants in the area, located in the U Street Corridor, a few blocks away from Bahlu’s business.

Bahlu came to the U.S. in the 1990s to escape war and instability in Ethiopia. Before opening his market and carry-out business, he worked in several low-paying
service jobs, including as a parking valet and driving a cab. More importantly, in a restaurant owned by his uncle, he worked in various capacities, such as a waiter, cashier, and in charge of logistics, and in customer service. Working in the restaurant helped him to develop a good working relation with his uncle. He considers his uncle's restaurant as a model, first, it is where he got his training on how to run and maintain an Ethiopian restaurant; and second, it is one of the most successful and best-known Ethiopian restaurants in the area. His uncle’s restaurant is so successful that he along with his brother, another uncle, was able to expand his business by opening another restaurant in a new location of Washington. In addition, his uncle also helped his sister to open her own restaurant a few blocks away from his own business.

Bahlu Market & Carry-Out provides food service throughout the day, including breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Moreover, it is a market place that sells various East African products such as spices, injera, ambasha (traditional Ethiopian/ Eritrean cake), Ethiopian coffee, phone cards for making international calls to East Africa, CDs, DVDs, and cassettes produced by East African singers, among other items.

What makes the Bahlu’s Market and Carry-Out unique from the other Ethiopian and Eritrean-owned businesses in the area is that it is mainly a carry-out restaurant, while the other Ethiopian and Eritrean restaurants in the area focus on sit-down dining services. As a carry-out, his business is popular among the East African cab drivers. In addition, it provides party catering services, with East African foods and drinks for weddings, birthday and anniversary parties, or corporate events in the area.

At Bahlu’s Market & Carry-Out, the menu is inspired by his uncle’s restaurant, but the price is much lower. The reduction enabled him to attract more customers,
especially after the 2008 economic downturn, at a time when many of the cab drivers were suffering loss of income, because many of their customers started to take the metro or the bus instead of taxis to save money.

Three years after opening, he and his uncle were able to remodel the place to include more food items, a few dining tables, and more room for the kitchen. His business is also improving its customer service, by giving customers the attention they deserve with a welcoming environment and being known for providing authentic and high-quality foods and other products. Bahlu says that, more than anything else, the extended family ownership model of the business makes it stronger against various challenges and has allowed it to become successful. He reiterated that he and his uncle consistently support each other, including sharing experiences, financially and materially. He pointed out that such kind of kinship support could not be easily replaced by formal institutional support. He says that “family is family,” to emphasize the time-tasted endurance and sustainability of the relationship, which is not necessarily tied to business matters only. Family members feel obliged to support each other in all aspects of life, including within and outside the business, which he thinks is a relevant condition to his success.
SWOT Analysis

Table 5-8. SWOT analysis for Bahlul

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Weakness</th>
<th>Opportunity</th>
<th>Threat</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unique carry-out business model</td>
<td>Depends very much on his uncles support and investments</td>
<td>Could provide delivery options</td>
<td>Business model could be copied by others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has East African customers in the neighborhood</td>
<td>Business partnership could last as long as he is in good terms with his uncle</td>
<td>Could open new business in other locations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business partnership with his uncle, who is already a successful restaurant owner in the area</td>
<td>Need to diversify target customers</td>
<td></td>
<td>Most of the cab drivers are founding their own families, and this might mean fewer customers in the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Got practical experience on the job before launching his own business</td>
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(C) Entertainment, Advertising, and Clothing Businesses

Case 9: Haile Independent Film Maker

“Se wo were fi na wosankofa a yenkyi.” [“It is not wrong to go back for what you have forgotten.”] (Haile Gerima, Washington, D.C., 2009).

Demography and Migration Experience of the Entrepreneur

Haile is an independent Ethiopian-American entrepreneur, screenwriter, filmmaker, director, and intellectual who has lived in the U.S. in what he calls a “self-exile” since the 1970s. He was born in Gondor in 1946. Haile’s father was a prominent dramatist and playwright who travelled to various parts of Ethiopia to conduct shows, and Haile learned a lot from him as a young boy.
He is also a professor at a major U.S. university, where he has produced several films and has influenced many students. The core themes of his films include African Diasporas and African American experiences, Ethiopian folklore, Ethiopian history, Ethiopian traditions, and exiled Ethiopian intellectuals and their dislocations. He holds a Master of Arts in Film (1976), and he is a member of the Pan-African Federation of Filmmakers and the African Committee of Filmmakers. He is married and has several children. His wife, also a filmmaker and entrepreneur, is his business partner. Haile’s films are stories told from African, African American, and Third-World perspectives, and they present different views compared to the mainstream Hollywood perspective.

Haile migrated to the U.S. in 1967, at the age of 21, to study in Chicago. He received a scholarship through the collaboration of Peace Corps teachers in Ethiopia. Soon after his arrival in Chicago, Haile faced cultural shock due to the politics of race in America and as a result felt different from White Americans and African Americans alike. In his school, for instance, he was not satisfied by the type of acting roles he was assigned, just because he was of African origin and not because of his skills and talents. Frustrated by the racial discrimination, he relocated to Los Angeles, to study film. It was there that he swiftly developed his acting skills and established networks with various professionals. While there he was also convinced that making films about personal stories of his culture and tales of his people was as important as the stories told by Hollywood productions.

**Business Development**

Over the last four decades, Haile has been able to successfully make psychological, cultural, and economic adjustments to the U.S. He was also able to independently produce and distribute eleven films, some of which received national and
international acclaims. Haile is best known for his films *Sankofa* (1993) and *Teza* (2009). He is an entrepreneur and the owner of Sankofa (a video store, bookstore, and café) and *Negod-gwad and Mypeduh*, a film production company that is strategically located close to a historically black university.

Haile produces films from an African perspective that are historical, entertaining, and have social activist qualities. Various magazines described Haile as being one of independent cinema’s chief chroniclers of the African American and African Diasporas, and of the Ethiopian immigrant experiences. However, over the last four decades, as an Independent film producer and distributor, Haile has struggled to raise enough capital and find market outlets for his films and video productions.

Haile describes his films as “imperfect,” and points out the importance of learning as an ongoing life-long process. Since the 1980s, Haile has worked as a third-world independent filmmaker, and it is the same assertion the one that persists in his work, three decades later, of “a constant restless journey of struggle and complexity to have your story told as a valid story.”

His primary audiences include recent African migrants from Ethiopia, Eritrea, Ghana, Nigeria, South Sudan, Somalia, Sudan, and Egypt in the U.S, Canada, Europe, the Middle East, and elsewhere. Haile aims to get American and international audiences more interested in his independent films. He has used several media outlets at local, national, and international levels to advertise his films. His marketing strategies include spreading information about his products by appearing and giving talks in numerous local, national, and international television stations, radio stations, newspapers, magazines, conferences, and cinemas. To mention a few, Haile has done several
interviews with local radio programs and magazines owned by Ethiopian-Americans in Washington, D.C., such as Tadias, and well-known magazines owned by the mainstream American community, such as Variety. He has also done television interviews in international media outlets including BBC News and Aljazeera in English. Haile is also no stranger to giving interviews to nationally and internationally recognized U.S. magazines and newspapers, including The Washington Post, The Washington Times, The New York Times, CNN, and The Tribune News Services.

In the U.S., Haile distributes his films through his Sankofa store its e-commerce site. He also gets assistance from his wife, children, and co-workers. He constantly books theater venues across the U.S., Canada, Europe, and Africa to show his films. Haile’s films are mostly financed by himself and the Ethiopian-American and African American communities, or by independent film collaborators in Europe. He reiterates that getting funding from the mainstream Hollywood entertainment industry for independent filmmakers like him is not possible and that the stories told by independent filmmakers are not valued. Also, he mostly prefers to produce low-budget films to maintain his freedom and independence in his storytelling.

To give an example of his work, “Teza,” which means “Morning Dew” in his native Amharic, is his most recent and most autobiographical film so far. Teza is his eleventh and most critically acclaimed cinematic production. It took him fourteen years to find enough funding to produce the film through financial collaborations with Pandora Films (based in Germany) and with Ethiopian migrant intellectuals, who wanted the story of their generation to be told by an independent filmmaker like him.
With the displacements of Ethiopian intellectuals as its main concern, *Teza* has themes that relate to the director’s personal experiences and to the experiences of other East African migrants of his generation. These are themes such as displacement, dislocation, and the terrifying memories of his generation, mainly due to the brutal years of the *Derg* regime. For instance, the main character in *Teza* is Anberber, originally from a small village in Ethiopia, who is an idealistic young man and intellectual who comes to Germany to pursue medical studies. While in Germany, he faces racism, so returns to Ethiopia with the idea and hope of contributing to the transformation of his community in the practice of modern medicine. In this story, Anberber unfortunately ends up becoming a victim of the *Derg* regime. This is a story about how intellectuals from developing countries feel and express themselves as they experience frustrations that arise from their lack of ability to exercise their expertise and skills in non-democratic, militarized, and dictatorial regimes. In particular, it narrates the challenges and opportunities that young, naïve, and idealist individuals, trained in democratic Western institutions and who return to home countries (that have yet to build democratic institutions) face as they attempt to offer their small contribution in the process of transforming their societies. In the context of Ethiopian history, it narrates the complexities of life for exiled intellectuals in the context of the Cold War era. In short, it is a story of memories, remembrance, dislocation, social and political dynamics and tragedies, and hope.

*Teza* was shown for the first time in the U.S. in 2009. I was able to attend that opening, which took place at Washington’s historic Avalon Theater. I took this opportunity, as an ethnographer, to conduct participant observations on how Haile
communicates with his audience in person. Later I was also able to visit him and conduct extended conversations and semi-structured interviews at his business place and café. He multitasks as a scholar, storyteller, entrepreneur, producer, planner, filmmaker, human rights activist, fundraiser, and father. He markets his products from his venue, which he informally refers to as a “liberated zone” to highlight his vision of providing a space for people of all backgrounds to come and share stories.

*Teza* was produced in Amharic, German, and English. It was filmed in Germany and Ethiopia. In Germany, it was shot in actual places where Ethiopian students meet to discuss political and social issues related to their home country. It was also filmed in his home country to capture the voices and features of local people, places, homes, memories, and nostalgic sights and sounds of the childhood of his generation, like the *teza*, the morning dew in Amharic. *Teza* has won several recognitions and prizes in prestigious international film festivals. Haile’s decidedly innovative, critical, and disquieting films give him the opportunity to tell the stories of transnational migrants from East Africa because he feels that these are stories and voices that are ignored or distorted by mainstream media.

About his video store and bookstore, Haile explains that the word *Sankofa* is derived from Akan, an African language that is primarily spoken in Ghana, and it means:

We must go back and reclaim our past so we can move forward; so that we understand why and how we came to be who we are today (Haile, Washington D.C., 2009).

The *Sankofa* video store and bookstore is a brick-and-mortar retail shop and also serves as a place for cultural and intellectual self-expression, interaction, conversations, and discussions among members of the African Diasporas. It hosts several African film screenings, book signings, scholar forums, and artistic showcases. It is a space that
gives the young a starting point to network and exercise their talents in arts, music, dance, drawing, filmmaking, poetry, story-telling, activism, and so on. Haile is highly entrepreneurial and innovative in the way he distributes, promotes, and sells his products to his audiences. In doing so, he has managed to have an increasing number of followers in the U.S., Africa, Europe, the Middle East, and elsewhere.

**SWOT Analysis**

Table 5-9. SWOT analysis for Haile

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Weakness</th>
<th>Opportunity</th>
<th>Threat</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Independent film making</td>
<td>Limited funding for production and distribution of films</td>
<td>Ability to network with like-minded filmmakers and storytellers from all over the world</td>
<td>Fierce competition on from mainstream filmmaking–Holly-, Bolly- Nollywood, and the like, which have more capital for film production</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique story telling skills based on the lived experiences of people he understands well</td>
<td>Lack of extended business networks with investors and venture capitalists</td>
<td>Ability to make business partnerships with investors and venture capitalists who share similar visions with him</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market from audiences interested in African and African Diaspora stories and films</td>
<td>Lack of business network with the mainstream film production industry and media outlets</td>
<td>Capacity to expand to global markets, including inside and outside of Africa</td>
<td>Independent film productions have limited protection from bigger institutions and non-democratic governments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent marketing</td>
<td>Problem of succession because his business depends on his individual skills rather than on an institution</td>
<td>more films on recent diaspora engagements with African countries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limited distribution scope at the moment</td>
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</table>
Case 10: Balageru Advertisement Business

Blending good ideas with good marketing, and gaining family as well as community support, are keys to my success (Balageru, Washington, D.C., 2011).

Background and Characteristics of the Entrepreneur

Balageru has been the president and CEO of a major advertising business in Washington since 1993. When the first edition of her advertisement telephone directory of East African businesses in the area was launched that year, it contained 80 pages; approximately 1,000 copies were produced for circulation. By 2011, her ad pages had grown in size and distribution; the directory was comprised of over 900 pages and several thousand copies were produced for circulation. The printed version of her ad directory is estimated to cover approximately 80 percent of the Ethiopian-American businesses in Washington. She also advertises East African migrant businesses in the area through an online version of her directory. The online version provides her customers with Google Map links to the businesses.

Beside the ad business, her husband is also a famous Ethiopian singer. Together, they are the co-owners of a famous restaurant, situated downstairs in the same building as their ad business office. The core strategy of their restaurant business is to reconstruct traditional Ethiopian home feelings and to make Ethiopian music, dance, hospitality, history, and traditions a part of the dining experience. Balageru and her husband are also involved in the economic, social, and cultural developments of the Ethiopian-American transnational migrants in the U.S. and Ethiopia.

Balageru was born in 1962 into a royal Ethiopian family. She was not expected by her family or her community to be involved in business, because it was viewed as a job option for the lowest members of society, those who cannot own land for farming and
who cannot raise their own domestic animals. Also, girls in Ethiopia were socialized to be “good sisters” and “good mothers” rather than to be economically independent.

Although Balageru was born in Jijjiga town, near the Ogaden region, she grew up in the bustling commercial city of Dire-Dawa. Her entrepreneurial spirit surfaced early, however. As an adolescent, she defied traditional expectations by starting a very small business of her own from her home, originally concealing it even from her own family members. This was possible because she noticed a business opportunity to sell egg and vegetable sandwiches and fruit juices to the high number of people from the Afar nomadic communities who came to her neighborhood to visit their chief.

Balageru carefully observed that the Afar nomads were coming from various surrounding villages of Dire Dawa and were waiting days to get a chance to consult with their local chief, so Balageru started selling them sandwiches from her home. She even hired some neighborhood girls to help her make and sell the sandwiches. As her business started growing, her family was alarmed to realize that she was involved in trade. Despite her family’s several attempts to discourage her, she assured them that she would still excel in her school performance, and do business on the side, which proved to be the case. She demonstrated entrepreneurial qualities such as courage, passion, determination, risk taking, taking initiative, dedication, hard work, leadership, networking skills, and management skills that helped her become a successful person in her adult life, both as a migrant and as a pioneering entrepreneur in D.C.

After completing high school in 1979, Balageru was fortunate to be sponsored by a family member in the Houston to pursue pre-med studies. She joined her relatives then, after staying for six months, moved to Louisiana to study biology. A year later, however,
she learned that pursuing medical training in the U.S. would take too long and be too expensive, as she was then working in various low-paying jobs, such as babysitting, home cleaning, as a cashier, a saleswoman in beauty stores, and the like, to pay for her own school fees and living expenses. As a result, she changed her major to marketing.

**Business Development**

Balageru’s decisions to shift her career ambition from medicine to marketing and later to become an entrepreneur were decisive moves and proved successful for her. She graduated with a B.A. in Marketing in 1985. While in college, she participated in various business-related discussions, especially ones delivered by successful entrepreneurs who were invited to give seminars in her school. At the same time, she was also working as a salesperson in a cosmetic business.

After graduation, Balageru took a risk and established her own business. The combination of her academic preparation in marketing, along with her real-world business experience in sales with a cosmetics business and her teenage sandwich and fruit juice business in Ethiopia, gave her the initial confidence and inspiration. Specific critical skills she acquired in her latest marketing experiences were the ability to tolerate and accept rejection when it occurs; the ability to establish and maintain a positive attitude with customers; and the ability to take initiative in business, which she thought fit very well with her personality characteristics and qualities.

In 1989 Balageru moved to Washington, D.C. Shortly after her arrival in the city, she was able to recognize a business opportunity in a business sector that nobody else had undertaken before, advertising. After making fieldwork observations and talking to business people in the area, she realized that there were growing numbers of East African migrant-owned businesses in the area, but they had lacked organized and
systematic ways to communicate and share information with their customers. She observed that the East African migrant entrepreneurs in the U.S. were involved in diverse business sectors (accounting, automobile sales, beauty salons, education services, grocery stores, gift shops, health care institutions, insurance companies, attorney and law services, transportation, parking lots, music and entertainment stores, real estate and mortgage offices, money transfer services, restaurants, and hotels). Yet, there was no single advertising outlet for all these businesses in the city.

Most of these East African migrant-owned businesses advertised individually, distributing flyers at various East African migrant communities’ social events and also spreading information through word of mouth by family members, friends, and business clients helping through their respective business networks. However, such strategies had limitations due to their inability to reach wider pools of potential customers. She thought that investors would be interested in knowing what kinds of businesses and business opportunities were out there among the East African migrants. She rightly sensed that her directory would fill the information gap that existed among business owners, customers, and investors.

When she thought of starting a printed version of the advertisement pages in the early 1990s, she solicited East African business owners, asking if they would be willing to pay her 50 percent upfront so that they could advertise in the upcoming publication. She was inquiring if they would be willing to share the risk of the advertisement business endeavor with her. Although most were skeptical, some of them were willing to pay the 50 percent upfront, to roll the dice with their money on the line in support of their chance to advertise in her business pages. A few promised to pay more than 50 percent
of the advertisement cost, because they also realized the potential positive impact that the advertising could have on their business by attracting customers and investors.

The first edition of her directory was published in 1993, four years after the idea was conceived. The company was established with the aim of providing customers with the fastest and most accurate business information. Although the printed version primarily targeted customers in Washington, it was increasingly attracting users among the African migrant communities in other cities of the U.S. After 19 years in business, in 2012, the advertisement directory had grown in size and distribution: It then comprised over 700 pages and about 50,000 copies were distributed per year. The businesses that wanted to appear on the cover of the book pay triple the usual price and most of them pay upfront for the service.

When Balageru started publishing, she faced difficulties in getting enough start-up capital. However, she was able to get financial and indirect support from her family (primarily from her husband and her sisters and brothers), as well as her friends and networks among the East African migrant communities. Through her hard work, family and friendship networks, and support from the Ethiopian and Eritrean business community, her advertising company was able to kick-off publication, keep its initial customers, and also attract more customers through time. This was reflected in every subsequent edition, which covered approximately 80 percent of the Ethiopian-American owned businesses in the area by 2012. The company succeeded through its consistent improvement in quality and quantity and its increased distribution channels.

Her business has also recently attracted businesses owned by other African migrant entrepreneurs in the city. The online version might even have a higher potential
for expansion among non-migrant businesses in the area and beyond. The role of

Balageru’s husband was crucial in all the stages of her business. He helped her as a
designer, editor, and advertiser.

**SWOT Analysis**

**Table 5-10. SWOT analysis for Balageru**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Weakness</th>
<th>Opportunity</th>
<th>Threat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>It is the only print and online comprehensive advertising source that primarily focuses on the East African migrant entrepreneurs in the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. Strong network with East African migrants and business owners in the area.</td>
<td>The printed version is becoming costly Needs to hire more workers; at the time primarily depends on family members and a few workers Information in the printed version takes a year to get updated</td>
<td>The experience with the online and printed versions could be quickly expanded to other major cities in the U.S. and elsewhere, wherever there is a good sized community of African migrant entrepreneurs</td>
<td>With the increased spread of the Internet, many businesses have alternative ways of advertising, such as individual websites, Facebook, and Twitter, among other media outlets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Has an excellent reputation among business owners and customers in the city.</td>
<td>There is a limit on the potential for growth of their business model in D.C.</td>
<td>They could open transnational websites for African entrepreneurs and their customers. They could open a consultancy business and provide their service to others</td>
<td>Others could open and out-compete them</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|
Case 11: Desu Fesha and Hoita Club Business

Location, hard work, innovation, and constant adaptability to market needs are critical for success in our business (Desu, Washington, D.C., 2011).

Demography and Migration Experience of the Entrepreneur

Desu has been the sole proprietor and owner of Fesha and Hoita Club for the last thirty years. He is an Eritrean-American and his business establishment is located in the center of Adams Morgan. He comes from a family that was involved in a retail electronics and wood products business in Eritrea, since the mid-1900s. As a young boy, Desu used to observe and assist in his father’s shop, whenever it was not school time for him, especially during weekends, and he spent most of his summers in the family’s shop. Desu’s father learned a great deal about electronics and wood products from Italian entrepreneurs who had earlier established many businesses and workshops in Asmara and Massawa, Eritrea. Thus, as is customary in Eritrea, when one manages a family-owned business like Desu’s family’s business, all family members participate in the shop because they realize that if the business goes well, it means better stability and income for the whole family. At the same time, every family member can develop skills to support themselves and the future families they might create. With the active and responsible participation of all family members, Desu’s family’s shop was generating good profits and the family was able to afford a comfortable life in Asmara until the early 1970s.

Despite his stable and comfortable life in Eritrea, Desu became curious about migration and exploring life abroad because the increased political instability in Eritrea, especially during the last years of leadership of Emperor Haile Selassie in the early 1970s. Many young Eritreans, including childhood friends of Desu, were becoming
refugees and immigrants in various parts of the world, and some even used to send news and fascinating pictures from various parts of Europe, like Italy and England. Thus, Desu’s intense desire to leave Eritrea came because he wanted to experience the possibilities of living abroad, just like his friends of similar age were going through at that time.

In search of these imaginary fantastic places in Europe, he initially migrated to Israel in 1971, because he had relatives living there. For two years in Israel, he attended a Kibbutz and worked in several businesses, including in wood and iron manufacturing shops. However, his intention was to reach Europe. He found that the work experience he had while in Israel would prove to be very useful for his entrepreneurial endeavors in the later part of his life in Europe, and even more so in the U.S.

In 1973, Desu went to Germany as a tourist and stayed there. While in Germany, he worked in various low-paying jobs for about two additional years. This was challenging and full of life lessons for him. In 1975, he managed to sneak onto a ship that was leaving from Germany to the U.S. Upon arriving in the U.S., he contacted his relatives and friends who were living in Philadelphia. In Philadelphia, with the financial support of his family in Eritrea and relatives in the U.S., he was able to study engineering for two years and became a certified engineer and, as a result, got a formal job with a company as an electrician. For Desu, a single man at that time, this was a dream job that he enjoyed and that paid well for the first four years.

**Business Development**

In 1982, Desu’s life plans changed when he got married and he started to aim for a higher paying job and upper economic mobility through entrepreneurship in a
restaurant. To fulfill his dream of achieving higher income and economic mobility, he quit his job as an electrician in Philadelphia, entered into partnership with another Eritrean immigrant, and opened an Eritrean restaurant in Adams Morgan. His father, who came to attend his wedding, was a “little disappointed” and amazed to find out that his son worked in a restaurant and not as a doctor or a lawyer in America.

After working in the Eritrean restaurant for about a year, he and his partner decided to split by dissolving the partnership because of personal and business differences that emerged between the two owners, in that each partner felt that the other person was not equally committed to the business. They decided Desu’s share would be sold to his partner.

Immediately, in 1983, Desu rented a small bar for six months in the Adams Morgan area, then, decided he wanted to own the place. However, since he had limited savings, he had to borrow several thousands of dollars from his relatives, his father, and his friends to buy the bar, renovations, and stocking merchandise for it. Desu remembers, especially while renovating the place himself, it took him about six very tough, challenging, emotional, and demanding months to complete the task. However, he was able to overcome the various challenges he experienced during the renovation process using his learned personal knowledge, skills, meager resources, and tenacity, and he added the money he had borrowed to work. This was a “hellish” time for him. For instance, some of his friends and relatives advised him to stop risking his hard earned money and stop going in debt by launching a bar business that might or might not work at all for him. Rather, they advised him that it was more secure for him to seek formal employment as an electrician in a company. However, he was determined to
take the risk of making his vision of opening a bar and club and making it a hit, which he did, with hard work and passing difficult transitional periods.

Once he opened his bar at the end of 1983, he was approved to have his retailer’s class “CR” license for his bar and club, and his initial core customers were adult male Eritrean immigrants, who were mostly single. He worked during regular working days and more so on consecutive Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays putting in very long hours. He also worked hard to manage his money and customers carefully. For instance, he worked very hard to build his reputation popularity among the Eritrean immigrants by supporting the Eritrean cause for independence, morally and financially. And, since he was very careful with his money management, he was able to pay his debt back and by 1996 buy the second and third floors to expand his bar business to a three-story club. With the larger space, he was able to accommodate more customers, about 248 of them, and include a club on weekends, which became a hit.

By 2011, Desu’s club and bar was one of the largest and hottest spots in Adams Morgan, and it had (and has) two bars with separate entrances: Hoita, Purgatory, and Fesha. Hoita (downstairs) is an area in the basement that is dark, with dim lighting, no properly functioning air conditioner, a noisy environment, and a wall decorated with skeletons and demonic masks, but this area caters mostly to young professionals and college students who enjoy the DJ who constantly plays rap or punk music, a pool table, and a banner over the bar that says, “Welcome to Hoita-Have a hell of a good time.” Purgatory, (the second floor), although intentionally designed to be sparse, is there to send you to your next level of existence, and it is more of a lounge. Here, customers hear a mix of the Top 40 hit songs, Reggae, Reggaeton, Hip Hop, and whatever else
the crowd wants. This is also the primary spot for customers who wish to dine. Then, there is Fesha (the third floor), the centerpiece of the club. The largest dance floor in Adams Morgan, it will sweep customers away with Top 40 songs, Club, and Hip Hop music. All levels offer patrons an eclectic menu that is stacked with their favorite bar foods, as well as with great pasta and regional seafood dishes. Desu also offers an extensive wine and beverage menu and excellent drink deals. Bottle service comes with a choice of hors d'oeuvres and appetizers.

Fesha (the third floor) provides popular music and dance every night with flashing disco lights, a spacious wooden dance floor and with a wall adorned with paintings of angels and other art works. A resident DJ keeps the party going.

During the early stage of his bar business, Desu admired the support and encouragement that he received from the Eritrean immigrants. They admired his hard work and his struggle to succeed, and they supported him by spending some of their hard earned money, mostly after working odd jobs, in his bar, or simply by providing him with moral support or by passing good words about his business to others, which is what he really needed at that moment.

By the early 1990s, Eritrea got its independence, and the relationship between Ethiopian and Eritrean immigrants in D.C. started to get better. As such, his pool of core customers became a mix of Ethiopians and Eritreans. A few years later, mainstream Americans as well as tourists started to become core customers as well. As a result, by the year 2000 his bar and club became well known in Adams Morgan because Desu and his wife worked their business consistently, diligently, and were able to establish a great reputation with their core customers. Desu says that he managed to be honest...
with his customers; he did not overcharge, and he attempted to meet the demands of his customers as soon as he could.

After participating in the Eritrean referendum while in the U.S., and once Eritrea obtained recognition by the International community as an independent country in 1993, Desu went to Eritrea in 1994 for a visit and bought a house. Desu explains that his success depends on several factors, such as his willingness to work hard, his confidence in his vision, his ability to recognize business opportunities in a great location, and his ability to take risks, even if this included doubts and failures at times.

He also gives credit to his wife’s deep commitment for him to succeed in business and in life. She has been his constant supporter, including during the most difficult moments of his business career and family life. She managed to raise two children, a son and a daughter, and support him in his bar business. Her commitment to raising the children well was one of the most important things that he admires in their marriage. Since he was mostly tied to his business responsibilities, taking care of the children was left to his wife, a responsibility that she fulfilled without complaint. Their children are going to college now. This success, he says, is due to his wife’s ability to balance her responsibility at home while helping him in his business. After working in the bar and club for almost three decades in the U.S., Desu, now in his mid-60s, feels that he has already contributed to the U.S. economy though the taxes he pays and the employment opportunities he created for many immigrants and Americans alike. For instance, in 2011, he employed about 40 individuals in his business, mostly as part-time workers during the weekends. He made a remark that the money you make in the U.S. gets invested back in the U.S. in one form or another. He also said that he hopes to retire to
Eritrea and contribute to the economic development of the country by investing in various business endeavors in the future.

**SWOT Analysis**

Table 5-11. SWOT analysis for Desu

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Weakness</th>
<th>Opportunity</th>
<th>Threat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Great location</td>
<td>He is the only key person in the business</td>
<td>Can invest in his homeland</td>
<td>Tough competition in the area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>technical skills and knows market</td>
<td></td>
<td>Can expand to other locations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly traveled and great customer-relations skills</td>
<td>It would be difficult for his wife and children to take over his business</td>
<td>It is a hazardous job</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**Case 12: Fiori Flower and Wedding Décor**

I have a deep passion for flowers and wedding décor, and because of it I am happy to create a business doing such beautiful things (Fiori, Washington, D.C., 2009).

**Demography and Migration Experience of the Entrepreneur**

Fiori developed her passion for traditional and modern Ethiopian and Eritrean décor when she was a high school student in Asmara in the 1980s. Her appreciation and attraction to flower arrangements started during her childhood years. In the early 1990s, Fiori moved with her family from Asmara to Addis Ababa, and, while there, she was able to get some training as a florist and enjoyed the new flowers of Addis Ababa, in particular, and of various parts of Ethiopia, in general. When she got the opportunity to migrate to the U.S, through the Diversity-Lottery program, she started working in various service-providing jobs, including hotels and as a store cashier. Her entrepreneurial endeavor made her sell flowers by preparing them at her own home, and she started selling them to people who she would encounter at her regular job.
After a few years of frugality, she rented a very small grocery store near a university and started arranging and selling flowers, as well as traditional and modern Ethiopian and Eritrean wedding décor.

**Business Development**

Fiori Flower and Wedding Décor is a business that provides services to customers in Washington, D.C., Maryland, and Virginia. Her business is well known for providing affordable Ethiopian and Eritrean cultural wedding decorations. Her flower business also provides services to designers and offers luxurious decorations in both traditional and modern styles. Ethiopian and Eritrean clothing is unique in its use of cotton and its particular designs, and Fiori does a fabulous job in offering both traditional and modern clothing to her customers for weddings, birthdays, religious and seasonal holidays, and other relevant social events—including providing flower for anniversaries, Mother’s Day, and Valentine’s Day— for Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants in the area.

Fiori communicates with her customers in several ways, including through her business website, through Facebook for online shopping options, with advertisements in the Yellow Pages, in local newspapers, and spreading information about her products and services through word of mouth and the distribution of leaflets at social and community events. Although her customers are primarily Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants who live in the area, she has managed to increase her modern flower sales to mainstream American societies and business centers such as hotels, funeral homes, hospitals, and the like. In addition, Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants who reside in Europe and Canada at times order traditional and modern Ethiopian and Eritrean clothing from her.
Fiori is very innovative in providing décor and flower services that are thematic and colorful. Fiori also hires technical expertise to manage and expand her business online. This allows her to do more innovative designing in the flower business, as well as in the traditional and modern Ethiopian and Eritrean clothing venture. Fiori is an innovative, talented, artistic, hardworking female entrepreneur who is just in her mid-30s. She is married, and her husband helps in her business.

SWOT Analysis

Table 5-12. SWOT analysis for Fiori

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Weakness</th>
<th>Opportunity</th>
<th>Threat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Has passion and cultural knowledge</td>
<td>She has limited capital at the moment</td>
<td>Expansions into clothing and flower businesses through e-commerce</td>
<td>General economic decline of customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Specialized business type</td>
<td>Needs more room and equipment</td>
<td></td>
<td>Large number of flowers can get spoiled during storage or transportation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>She is innovative and creative in her style</td>
<td>All the flowers have to be sold quickly and have to be ready on time for pick up or delivery</td>
<td>Expand to more hotels and hospitals in the area</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Expand delivery mechanisms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Case 13: Gabi Clothing Business

Our aim in our clothing business is to design and sell T-shirts that help us and our customers connect to with who we are—Americans with African heritages. The concepts for our artistic T-shirt designs are primarily inspired by our childhood memories of African, Ethiopian, and Eritrean cultures and artistic expressions (Gabi, Washington D.C. 2011).

Demography and Migration Experience of the Entrepreneur

Gabi T-shirts is an entrepreneurial limited liability company (LLC) that was jointly started in early 2006 by one young Eritrean-American and three young Ethiopian-American entrepreneurs in Washington. At the moment, Gabi’s entrepreneurial team consists of two young men and two young women who are in their 20s and 30s and
have complementary T-shirt design and business skills. One has strengths in graphic design. One mostly takes care of the finances. One of the young women leads the marketing and sales section of their venture, while the other handles modeling and the photographic designs of the company. By 2013, Gabi T-shirts has become a popular fashion clothing line among the young African migrants in D.C.

**Business Development**

What is special about this company is the ability of its four young immigrant entrepreneurs to work together, transcending historical and contemporary political conflicts between their sending countries. Rather, they have joined hands and are able to design high-quality, stylish T-shirts in a venture that values and draws inspirations from their respective childhood memories, cultures, and traditions, and they connect their cultural backgrounds with their ability to design expressive and modern T-shirts that are appealing to their mostly young customers who live in various parts of the U.S., Canada, and Europe.

The co-founders of Gabi developed their initial T-shirt business ideas while working in various service and production jobs and meeting in coffee shops. For instance, one had a day job in designing. He felt that he lacked the opportunity to be creative at his day work, so decided to team up with other young Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants in Washington, D.C., who had similar interests in artistic design and innovation to launch Gabi’s. Their idea was to design T-shirts inspired by Ethiopian and Eritrean cultures that were also symbolically expressive, meaningful, stylish, with a cool appearance, something that would appeal to young Ethiopian-Americans, Eritrean-Americans, and the broader African diasporas and other customers alike, who enjoy wearing T-shirts that are inspired by such African-centered cultural themes as “Made in
Africa” and “D’Afrique,” which are popular among their customers. Other themes include the coffee ceremony. The T-shirts cost about $20 each.

As a team, they had the ability to envision and recognize the existence of a niche market and a business opportunity that would demand providing customers with products that are cultural, symbolic, meaningful, artistic, and creative and, at the same time, T-shirts that could be used during work and relaxation. They had not only the vision, but also the willingness to work very hard for several months, without salary, coming up with several possible design ideas, some that worked and many others that did not make it into final products. Still, they had the tenacity and a consistent push for making their vision of their artistic T-shirt design business happen. Gabi’s entrepreneurial team was able to survive and thrive despite having limited capital and business networks and just a small initial market.

At the moment, most of their sales happen online, via their website. They also have a small shop in Washington, D.C., where they sell T-shirts retail. Customers have the option of choosing from different T-shirt designs, sizes, and colors—for men, and women, and kids alike—from their business website. The delivery of purchased products is done through the U.S. Postal Service for domestic and international shipments with delivery cost and time varying from one country to the other. All customers, domestic, and international, are guaranteed by Gabi Company that if they are dissatisfied with their product for some reason, they can get replacement or refund, provided that they send their merchandise in its original condition.

Paying through the PayPal system, with an industrial-standard encryption protocol system known as Secure Socket Layer (SSL), is used to make sure that the privacy and
security of the information provided by their customers is guaranteed. Most of their customers are located on the East Coast of the U.S. and other major U.S. cities, such as Oakland, Seattle, and Chicago. About 70 percent of the sales happen within the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant community. T-shirt themes with pan-African topics like “Made in Africa,” “D’ Afrique,” and “Roots” attract much wider customers.

The T-shirts are conceptualized and designed at Gabi, but later they are printed by an American manufacturing company, a sweatshop-free environment situated on the West Coast. Gabi uses online social media sites such as blogs to encourage the customers to interact with them and let them write their opinions and views related to their products and various related topics. At the same time, the company started to sell its T-shirts in a few famous national clothing outlets in the Washington area.

Their plan in the future is to expand Gabi’s design and increase the number of T-shirt sales by continuing to make them available both online and in stores across various major U.S. cities. Their business plan was to start small and continue building on—one small step at a time—to make it bigger, more open, and more adaptable to technological and attitudinal changes in the business, and to make it more profitable. Gabi’s entrepreneurial team uses various local media outlets, including newspapers, television programs, and Internet communications to expand the business, within and beyond the Ethiopian-American and Eritrean-American immigrant communities. Recently, they promoted the T-shirts by hiring a famous African singer as spokesperson, and who has been featured at various local outlets and on the Internet wearing Gabi T-shirts.
SWOT Analysis

Table 5-13. SWOT analysis for Gabi

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Weakness</th>
<th>Opportunity</th>
<th>Threat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creative and skilled company</td>
<td>Limited capital</td>
<td>E-commerce expansion</td>
<td>Partner disagreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Table 5-13 Continued</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Committed and inspiring team</td>
<td>Limited storage capacity</td>
<td>Expand to more mainstream</td>
<td>Manufacturing cost could</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>stores</td>
<td>increase</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unique market and culturally</td>
<td>So far, they are able to</td>
<td>Partner with more experienced</td>
<td>Clothing could easily get</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>specific product</td>
<td>reach only a small market</td>
<td>investors</td>
<td>manufactured by others for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increased use of technology for</td>
<td>Few options of clothing,</td>
<td></td>
<td>cheaper price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>marketing</td>
<td>T-shirts designs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>T-shirt is good quality,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>but expensive</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(D) Transportation, Gas Station, and Real Estate Businesses

Case 14: Mengesha Taxicab Business

I am in the taxi business because it gives me independence and flexible working hours (Mengesha, Washington, D.C., 2011)

Demography and Migration Experience of the Entrepreneur

Mengesha is in his mid-40s and currently works as an independent cab owner, meaning that his taxicab is owned and operated by him independently, as a sole proprietor, in the Washington area. His mother is Ethiopian, and his father is Eritrean. While in Ethiopia, he was majoring in biology and worked as a teacher. He got the D.V. lottery and came to the U.S. in 2004.

When he first arrived in the U.S., he rented a house with several other male Ethiopian migrants in Washington, D.C., and began working in various service-providing jobs, including in gas stations and a 7-Eleven convenience store as a cashier, and in a hotel as a receptionist, mostly working double shifts to be able to save enough money to
pay his living expenses. In the meantime, he started taking classes at a community college. After completing a three-year community-college degree, he transferred to a university and pursued his studies in the field of Health Sciences, specializing in Cardiovascular Science. While he was a student, he applied for a taxicab license to help him cover his living and educational expenses. In the meantime, he had to take student loans to finance his studies.

**Business Development**

He chose an independent taxicab owner operator license particularly because it would give him the freedom to manage his own schedule. He also thinks that renting a cab from a fleet owner is expensive, about $600 per week. He did the necessary paperwork, took the driving exams, bought a new car, and became a qualified taxicab driver in D.C. His insurance for his taxicab business costs about $35 per day. Currently, on average, he makes about $32,000 per year. He is concerned that his independent taxicab ownership in the District of Columbia might become a thing of the past soon.

Washington, D.C., is an exceptional U.S. city in that it does not operate under the medallion system, yet. According to the D.C. Taxicab Commission, D.C. had 10,672 licensed taxicab drivers, and 116 licensed companies in 2010. The ratio of taxicab per resident in the District of Columbia is disproportionately high in that it is estimated to be one cab for every 93 residents. In New York it is one taxicab for every 625 residents. He is worried because the proponents of a new medallion system in the City Council want to restructure D.C.'s taxicab industry from an open-to-all and independent taxicab driver industry into a medallion system. For instance, such change could make the standard of vehicles and drivers better, by bringing in newer cars and more trained service, but it would also limit the number of taxis in the district by ending the free-for-all system that is
operating now. And the Medallion system is expensive. For instance, in New York City, the cost of medallions in 2011 ranged between $200,000 and $700,000.

However, Mengesha is deeply concerned about his personal safety because of criminals, and about a recently proposed bill, the “Professional Taxicab Standards and Medallion Establishment Act of 2011,” that suggests the individual ownership of taxicab businesses in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area to be replaced by a medallion system, as has happened in other cities in the U.S. beginning in the 1930s. The proposed medallion legislation defines a medallion as “a metal plate issued to a vehicle authorizing it to be operated as a taxi.” It suggests limiting the number of taxicabs, and it provides equity to taxicab owners.

Mengesha thinks that the medallion system would have disastrous consequences for individual taxicab owners like him, because the market could be totally dominated by the very few larger corporations that could invest more than a half million U.S. dollars to get the medallion license, and then they might put their profit above anything else, including the taxicab driver, who would be working long and risky hours under the rules and regulations of the medallion company but, at the end of the day, the hard-earned profit would go to the coffers of the owner of the taxicab’s medallion.

In addition, all individual ownership of taxicab businesses would be swallowed by the few large corporations that could later consolidate and possibly monopolize the market, reducing the number of taxicabs serving residents and visitors of the metropolitan area alike, especially in the low-income neighborhoods of the Southeast and the Northeast, and focusing on neighborhoods that generate high margins of profit, such as at the airports, downtown, and the K-street area. This could produce an
increase in taxicab costs quickly due to the limited competition, after they drive out of business the many independent taxicab owners who currently help to provide lower prices and great coverage in the D.C. metropolitan area. This could mean placing the small, individually owned taxicab businesses, including the majority of Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant taxi independent drivers, in a place of vulnerability, far from moving up into the middle class. This would mean that taxicab drivers would be like modern-day sharecroppers.

The newly proposed Medallion system suggests that a company that operated in the District of Columbia for at least 30 years will be charged, at the beginning, $500 for having authorization of unrestricted medallion. However, the price jumps to $5,000 for a taxi company that has been operating in the District for less than 20 years. Once the medallions are in place, prices would shoot up, leading to a significant rise in fares and making it financially prohibitive for aspiring independent drivers to enter the industry. Thus, the independent, individual taxicab owners are concerned that they might be wiped out by the medallion system.

Drivers like Mengesha own only one taxi, commonly get their customers from the streets, and accept cash only from their customers, they have to compete in the market against bigger taxi companies that operates with more than 650 taxicabs, with a computerized dispatch system that allows its customers to pay with all major credit cards, if they choose to do so, and also operates in the entire Metro area.

Like most independent taxicab owners, Mengesha resides outside the District of Columbia because rent and living expenses are much more affordable in Maryland and Virginia. He and thousands of other independent taxicab drivers risk their lives daily in
the streets to make ends meet. Mengesha personally knows many take taxicab drivers who were injured in an accident, robbed, and even killed. Driving a taxi is a rough job in the U.S., yet many Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant cab drivers in the District see it as a source of good income, if they are willing to work very hard for very long hours. It is also a way of having an independent job. Most Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants are not comfortable working for bosses. If possible, they prefer to have their own jobs, and owning taxicabs gives them that opportunity and to be able to take pride in their work.

Opponents of the medallion system, including Mengesha, argue that it would leave thousands of taxicab drivers jobless or forced to work for large companies that might not have the interest of the taxicab drivers as their primary motive. The value of the medallion ownership would increase over time and, due to the reduction in the number of vehicles, fare prices could be hiked-up unnecessarily, and could be open to corruption, and gentrify the taxicab service areas.

**SWOT Analysis**

Table 5-14. SWOT analysis for Mengesha

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Weakness</th>
<th>Opportunity</th>
<th>Threat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Job independence</td>
<td>He is not in the business full time</td>
<td>Can buy more taxicabs and rent them</td>
<td>Medallion system could drive him out of business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can work as much as he can, including long hours and weekends</td>
<td>Owns one taxi only</td>
<td>Can save money and invest in another type of businesses</td>
<td>Personal safety is at risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can be profitable</td>
<td>Insurance costs</td>
<td>Can join an association of taxicab drivers</td>
<td>His health is at risk</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cannot compete with larger taxicab companies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Case 15: Yemane Parking and Car Sale Businesses

I had a relentless dream of a day that I would have my own business. If I can work for someone else, there is no reason why I cannot establish, maintain, and grow my own business (Yemane, Washington, D.C., 2009).

Demography and Migration Experience of the Entrepreneur

Yemane, 40 years old, migrated to the U.S. at the age of 17. He grew up in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, and he came from a middle-income family. After high school, he graduated in Computer Sciences but soon decided to get involved in business. Yemane migrated to the U.S. at a young age and started working from scratch in the parking lot business and learned how to create a parking lot business from his limited personal work experience. However, he leaped from parking valet to cashier, to parking manager, to used-car dealer, and to a well-known parking lot business owner in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area. In particular, since the mid-1990s he is best known around in the city for his parking company. Yemane is the founder and the president of his company, which was incorporated in 1998.

Yemane first arrived in the U.S. in 1990 and started taking college level business courses while working as a parking valet in downtown D.C., because, as he says,

I had a restless and bigger dream of establishing my own business one day. I not only came to the U.S. at a young age, at 17 years old, but also with no money except $50 in my pocket. However, I succeeded in opening my own parking lot and used-car dealership businesses. I was working hard, disciplined, committed, saving a lot, taking calculated risks, and I was able to build business networks. I thought that if I can work for somebody else, there is no reason why I cannot establish, maintain, and grow my business (Yemane, personal communication, August 2011).

Business Development

Yemane began working as a parking valet, and he was making a few hundred dollars a month. From the meager income that he was making, he was frugal enough to
save a few hundred dollars on a regular basis so that he was able to take some business courses and later start his own parking lot company. His drive to work hard and save was made possible because he had a relentless dream and vision of the day that he would have his own company.

Using his savings from his work as a valet parking attendant, he was able to open, first, a very small 22-car-capacity parking business in Washington, D.C. Also, a few years later, he managed to get a $35,000 microloan from the Ethiopian Community Development Council Enterprise Development Group microfinance program to expand his parking lot business and to start a used-car dealership business.

Yemane faced challenges from the day he opened his parking business because, at that time, the neighborhood was perceived by Washingtonians as “unsafe for parking” due to fear of crime, prostitution, and drug sales in the area. As a result of such negative perceptions of the U Street neighborhood in the 1990s, he had very few customers willing to park their vehicles in his lot. Thus, to be able to pay his business rent and survive as a company, he had to be innovative and try more endeavors to generate more income. As a result, he came up with the idea of turning half the parking space into an area for purchasing and selling used vehicles. Also, he started providing valet services, as a part-time job, for restaurants, bars, and clubs in his neighborhood.

Thus, using the supplementary income he got from the valet service, and from buying used cars from auto auctions and retailing them for a small profit at his parking lot site, he was able to just make enough money to keep his living expenses covered and his parking lot expenses paid. This experience, however, made him learn some of
the necessary foundational ingredients, techniques, and skills for making and sustaining a successful parking lot business.

The ECDC helped him with a loan just at a time when he needed assistance the most. To secure the loan, he showed collateral that comprised the few used vehicles he had. This loan also enabled him to open an additional small dealership business in Washington, D.C., and to buy more used vehicles in the price range of $3,000 to $4,000, such as Hondas, Toyotas, Fords, and the like. Also, as the U Street neighborhood continued to revitalize, more and more Ethiopian restaurants and bars opened, and his company started providing valet services to a few restaurants and bars. These small-business initiatives were so successful that he was able to pay the loan back in a very short period and started making more money and accumulating savings.

Yemane helped three of his brothers to migrate to the U.S., and one of his brothers joined him in his business. By 2005, in his early 30s, he was spending most of his time managing his parking lots and his used-car dealership. Soon enough, Yemane’s parking company expanded to various places, eventually employing more than 400 people, mainly his fellow Ethiopian migrants and migrants from elsewhere, including Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

By 2003, Yemane and his brother had made enough money to surprise their mother by opening an Ethiopian restaurant business for her. They did that because they knew that she had the passion, the knowledge, and the skills for running a business based on traditional Ethiopian cuisine and for feeding people. A few years later, they opened a beauty salon for their sister, just next door to their mother’s restaurant business.
In December of 2009, Yemane won a very rewarding business contract, to oversee 37,000 public parking spaces in Washington, D.C., in which he partnered with a U.S.-based and well-experienced parking company. The contract deal they won comprised four garages, three surface lots, and a valet service, and the deal was possible because of several reasons, including Yemane`s successful parking-lot entrepreneurial history. Yemane is expected to make millions over the next five years.

**SWOT Analysis**

**Table 5-15. SWOT analysis for Yemane**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Weakness</th>
<th>Opportunity</th>
<th>Threat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Provides a reliable and less pricey parking lot service</td>
<td>Had limited financial capacity, and thus could not possibly compete for larger parking lot bids alone until 2009</td>
<td>Opportunities for expanding into various parking lot spaces around the city</td>
<td>Parking lot is a very competitive business in the city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bottom-up and diversified parking lot business skills of the management team</td>
<td>The top management positions primarily rely on family members</td>
<td>Possibilities of expanding the parking lot business to other cities and places of the U.S. through partnerships as well as through team investments</td>
<td>A corporate model of parking-lot businesses could be a stronger competitor against a family-owned parking lot business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>His parking lot company has a fine reputation and has expanded to several locations in D.C.</td>
<td>The used-car dealership is just a side business that he has not capitalized on yet</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a barrier to entry, because it has become a very expensive neighborhood</td>
<td>His customer service skills could use an upgrade</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Case 16: Temelso: Gas Station, Real Estate, and Home Rental Businesses

I like the idea of sole proprietorship because of the advantages it has for independent ownership and the management of a business (Temelso, Washington, D.C., 2011).

Demography and Migration Experience of the Entrepreneur

Temelso, who is in his late 50s, has been involved in three types of entrepreneurial endeavors: a real estate brokerage; a gas station franchise with Exxon, and a home rental business that operates in Washington, D.C. Although Temelso’s family is originally from Eritrea, he grew up in Ethiopia because his father had a small grocery business there. At the age of 17, he left Ethiopia for Europe, because of the Red Terror campaign by the Derg. While in Ethiopia, he had some ideas of conducting retail business but not much knowledge about how to operate a business because his father took care of their shop, and he had to go to school.

When he left Ethiopia, he had completed his high-school education and had a great dream and hope that he would get a better education and later a professional job that would guarantee him a secure future in Europe. Since he had lived in Italy and France for some years, he now speaks Italian and French. In addition, he also speaks Amharic, Tigrinya, and Arabic. However, after having lived in Europe for some years as an illegal immigrant, he realized that he could not realize those dreams had he stayed there, so he further decided to migrate to the U.S. in the early 1980s to fulfill his dreams.

Once in the U.S., he thought of pursuing his education in medicine but later, when he calculated that he could not handle the educational expenses in the field, he shifted his plan toward a two-year business diploma program, with focus on Finance and Hotel Management. Upon completing his diploma, he got employment in a hotel, as a manager for 14 years. Through his business and customer service experiences and
skills, he progressed in the hotel industry. Temelso felt that it was time for him to move into having his own business. In addition, by then, he was married with two children. As a result, his commitment to his family and his expenses were getting higher, and he could no longer make ends meet with his regular salary at the hotel. Also, he was getting bored with the routine work schedule of 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

**Business Development**

Thus, Temelso quit his job in the hotel and started a consulting firm as a real estate broker for Beltway Nationwide Insurance Company, and he was providing his various management-skills and financial-forecasting services. He was also serving as a personal financial advisor to a Middle Eastern gas station owner in Washington, D.C. The gas station owner was having some health problems and had to have surgery. Temelso also knew that the Middle Eastern entrepreneur had been suffering, for a long time now, from fear of racial and religious discrimination in the place where his business was located. In addition, the owner was not systematic enough in his retailing and customer service skills, and he was not investing in community development efforts, so he decided to sell his gas station before he defaulted and before his franchise license was reclaimed by Exxon.

Over the years, the Middle Eastern gas station owner and Temelso had become good friends and had developed trust in each other. The man requested Temelso, as a broker, to help him sell his gas station. Initially, the owner attempted to sell it to another Middle Eastern businessman, but it did not work as planned because the buyer was taking too much time, and the owner needed to sell it quickly, before his health deteriorated or the business went bankrupt. Realizing that it would not work with the first
buyer, the owner later approached Temelso and asked him if he could buy his business, which he did after some negotiations and after getting a better price for the gas station.

Since Temelso had enough time to observe the business weaknesses of the Middle Eastern owner. Immediately after he bought the gas station in 1996, he fixed the problems and turned them to his advantage. For instance, he improved customer service and was not afraid to take the risk of adding a retail grocery along with providing gas. He also started contributing toward community development efforts by providing scholarship opportunities for high-performing school children. He also went to Exxon Corporation training school by paying $15,000 for three weeks, and he improved his knowledge about Exxon Mobil company rules and regulations, learning about franchise business management skills and the like.

Combining his accumulated business skills and expertise, the proper application of the management training he got with Exxon, and the changes he made in the gas station business, after just three years in business, Temelso was recognized as the best performing gas station franchise and he was called by the company to offer him recognition. He recalls that he was named a “Baby Tiger” by Exxon, recognizing that he was following the rules and regulations of the company very well, particularly the guidelines for commitment to excellence, customer service, marketing skills, and positive contribution to community development efforts.

Temelso believes that entrepreneurial work in the U.S. provides unlimited opportunities for upper income mobility but, at the same time, the lifestyle and expenses of a person also change as the income level increases. For instance, as Temelso’s income increased, he moved from a low-income neighborhood to an upper-income
neighborhood, with better schools for his children and improved safety for his family. He also wanted to drive a much more expensive car, and he purchased stylish furniture for his new home. At the same time, he came to learn that, in 1999, Exxon and Mobile, both multinational oil and gas companies, were merging to create ExxonMobile. After that, they did not renew his franchise license, and, for that reason, he started to get involved in his own home rental business in the Washington area.

Temelso has many of the characteristics of the successful entrepreneur: He takes risks, is flexible, and is adaptable in his business decisions. He is highly skilled and educated. He is trained, highly traveled, has networking skills, possesses street smarts, and is able to work in various endeavors, smoothly shifting from one to the next.

**SWOT Analysis**

Table 5-16. SWOT analysis for Temelso

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Weakness</th>
<th>Opportunity</th>
<th>Threat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Great customer service skills</td>
<td>He fell into the gas station business by accident</td>
<td>Could invest in gas station again in another location</td>
<td>Franchise license was not renewed due to merger</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly traveled, multilingual, and street smart</td>
<td>He is the only key figure in his business model</td>
<td>He could invest in real estate in his home country</td>
<td>Real estate and home rentals were affected by the overall economic situations of customers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Involved in three different types of businesses</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly adaptable and a risk taker</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Got training when offered</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Case 17: Shemsu Gas Station Business

It is about trying, working very hard with determination, and taking the risk at the right time. Business is business: It comes first (Shemsu, Washington, D.C., 2009).

Demography and Migration Experience of the Entrepreneur

Shemsu migrated to the U.S. from Ethiopia in 1998 because he got a D.V. lottery. Given that he had no family connections, realistically thinking, he was not sure if his dream of coming to the U.S. would materialize one day. Fortunately, when the D.V. lottery opportunity came, he was happy to take it.

Shemsu’s academic background is in irrigation engineering: he was in a second-year advanced diploma program when he left school in Ethiopia. Shemsu is of Gurage origin, people who are known to be among the highly entrepreneurial and business-minded people in Ethiopia, and he is married to an Eritrean Jeberti woman, who comes from a group of people who are also known as highly entrepreneurial. As children, both Shemsu and his wife came from families who were involved in retail grocery stores. As such, they had gotten some idea and practice on how to conduct retail business from helping their families. Currently, Shemsu, his wife, and their children, who were born in the U.S, all live together in the Washington area.

Business Development

Initially, for two years, Shemsu worked for a convenience store and gas station for $7.15 cents per hour, and later he shifted to start working as a dishwasher in a restaurant for $8 per hour. He also worked as a pizza-deliveryman for $4.25 per hour, but he was making good tips of about $60 to $70 per day, although he was working in tough weather, during odd night hours, and in crime-ridden and risky neighborhoods. In 2000, Shemsu, started working in an Exxon gas station for more than 120 hours a
week, with very minimum hours to sleep and rest. One midnight, Shemsu remembers, he was robbed and his car was stolen from a parking lot and was never found. Even with setbacks, this was an important job for him to be able to make a living and save as much money as possible. And, since Shemsu was very hard working, an excellent saver, dedicated, persistent, and had good customer service skills, he was promoted to trainer in 2003 and, later on, to a manager position for a single gas station in 2004.

As a manager, his salary increased to $43,300 a year, with a 401K plan, sick leave, health insurance, vacation, and other benefits. From 2007 to 2009, Shemsu was promoted to work as a business manager for three gas stations located in various areas of the city. He demonstrated his talent, skills, work ethics, and efficient management style. He was also able to make friends and was able to conduct more business and network with very successful gas station entrepreneurs in the area.

By the end of 2009, Shemsu made the acquaintance of Joe, of Capitol Petroleum Group and DAG Petroleum Suppliers (“DAG”) that owned, operated, or supplied over 200 retail sites in the area (Joe controlled nearly half of all gas stations in the District of Columbia) and some more in New York, and he owned about 60 percent of the stock of the company, making him the major shareholder of the company. At that time, ExxonMobile was moving from retail to the “refinery” side of the business. Taking advantage of this situation, Joe aggressively bought more than 200 former ExxonMobile gas stations around the area. Once he bought the retail gas stations, Joe started to move away from retail distribution and being a “dealer,” into becoming a “branded wholesaler,” a business that gets the fuel from the “refinery” and sells it to the “dealers.” Thus, Joe’s company was subcontracting gas stations around Washington, D.C., and
Shemsu was one of the lucky ones to get that opportunity through business networking, his previous proven job experience, and some capital.

Thus, as soon as Shemsu was approached to see if he was interested in becoming an agent, a sub-contractor for one gas station owned by Joe’s company, he gladly agreed and established a Limited Liability Company. For Shemsu, this was a once-in-a-life-time opportunity just at the right time. In addition, he was able to get some professional advice on the topic of benefit and cost analysis before he became the sub-contractor, and some of the benefits of this experience included increased self-esteem, sustainability, and job security. Currently, he is the manager with nine full-time employees. In just the first three months, Shemsu broke even. He is, nonetheless, still aware of the hidden costs and the tax expenses that a business like his involves.

In the future, Shemsu plans to go into importing Ethiopian coffee, but most of his business consultants are located in Singapore, and he is working on that. Meanwhile, he has a taxicab business as a part-time job, during nights, weekends, and whenever he gets the time. Thus, his success includes great sacrifice of family time, as he does not get to spend much time with his wife and children, does not get much rest, and has overcome some dangerous circumstances, including robbery, car theft, and exhaustion, but he has remained hardworking, frugal with his time and money, lucky, great at networking, open-minded, energetic, always unafraid to take risks and venture into new business fields. For him, he says, business is business, and it comes first.
SWOT Analysis

Table 5-17. SWOT analysis for Shemsu

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Weakness</th>
<th>Opportunity</th>
<th>Threat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Risk-taking</td>
<td>He does not involve</td>
<td>Could invest in more gas stations</td>
<td>Gas station is a sub-contract and, thus,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great saving skills</td>
<td>his family in his business affairs</td>
<td></td>
<td>the contractor has to do well all the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>He and his wife</td>
<td>Not focused on one type of business</td>
<td>Can go into import-export business</td>
<td>Personal security is at risk in this type of business</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>come from families</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>that have business</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>experience</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Case 18: Meda Holiday Inn Hotel and Parking Lot Businesses

You have to be street smart, be great at communication with customers, always seek information, be quick to act when opportunity comes, and be ready to take risks to succeed in the hotel and restaurant business (Meda, 2009, Washington, D.C.).

Demography and Migration Experience of the Entrepreneur

Meda migrated from Eritrea to Italy in 1975. He came to the U.S. from Italy in 1979 for a summer vacation and to visit his U.S. relatives. The same relatives convinced him to stay in the U.S. and advised him that he could either go to school or look for a job. Meda was persuaded by their arguments and felt that he could get better educational and economic opportunities in the U.S. than in Italy.

While in Italy, he was a second-year electrical engineering student, through a scholarship opportunity he received during the time of Haile Selassie. As soon as he came to the U.S., he depended on his relatives for shelter, food, and information. Meda recalls some of his very early days in the U.S, when he and his friends went to a restaurant in Georgetown where a waiter was not happy to get their food order because of their dark skin color. This experience made an impression on him and showed him
that even though the Civil Rights Movement in the U.S. had achieved equal rights for all citizens, irrespective of their race, some individuals in the U.S. still had prejudice and discriminatory attitudes toward people with dark skin.

**Business Development**

For a few months, the first jobs he got were work in various service jobs in hotels and convenience stores. He also worked as a cab driver for about six months. After that, three Eritrean friends asked him to join them in a restaurant business, which he agreed to do. Each of them contributed $5,000 for a total of $20,000, and they bought a small restaurant business from an Eritrean immigrant lady in Washington and started selling food mostly to their single male migrant compatriots who were living in crowded shared rooms and with no convenient kitchen facilities to cook, so they had to eat outside. Meda and his three other business partners thought this would be a great market opportunity for them. However, this business partnership did not work because they had leadership competition problems among them. They could not agree on how to run the daily operations of the business, and all the members were not equally committed. The restaurant business partnership lasted for about a year. However, this partnership endeavor gave Meda the opportunity to be part of the creation of something from scratch and also showed his sense of adventure into a new field, even without having the necessary know-how.

After the restaurant partnership failure, Meda was unemployed for some months, and lost thousands of dollars. While seeking for information from his friends and relatives about new business investment opportunities, he found out about a Holiday Inn Hotel franchise holder who had some financial problems with the Internal Revenue Services and the city, and who was planning to sell his franchise. As soon as he heard
this news at the end of 1982, Meda managed to make a deal with the franchise holder and Meda agreed to buy the Holiday Inn Hotel franchise business, which included a restaurant, for a total of $150,000, an amount that Meda agreed to pay completely in four months but he was not able to comply with that timeframe. Initially, though, he paid a down payment of about $60,000, and the franchise holder agreed and transferred the lease of the Holiday Inn franchise to Meda.

Meda sees himself as an active "hustler" or “street smart person,” a slang phrase he used to articulate that he also used smart methods to obtain information or deals from people. He emphasized that, in business, everything is about information and getting it at the right time, and communication helps one achieve that effectively. In the Holiday Inn deal, Meda took the risk of telling the earlier franchisee that he had some money that he was expecting to get from his home country to pay the remaining $90,000, which he never did; but he needed some time to make the money and pay him back completely over time.

Persuaded by Meda’s reassuring statements but swindling approach, the franchisee agreed to complete the transfer of the franchise to Meda. Unexpectedly, as soon as the ownership deal was complete, the owner decided to vanish, and never returned, to this day, because he was afraid about the amount of debt he had with the Internal Revenue Service from another Holiday Inn that he had, and he realized that he could not pay the IRS back completely. Meda says that this was like a “lottery” opportunity for him, because there was nobody to claim the remaining $90,000, at least for some time, until he was able to make enough money to pay back in case the person who made the deal with him showed up, which he never did to this day.
Meda used the money he generated from the Holiday Inn hotel and restaurant business to invest back by introducing new items on the food menu, Ethiopian and Eritrean dishes, as well as beverages. He was providing breakfast, lunch, and dinner. During breakfast time, his place became a hit among migrants. During lunch and dinner times, he introduced room service. Besides, he frequently hired musicians to come and play in his restaurant during the evening.

In 1986, Meda was approached by the Holiday Inn corporation to see if he was willing to sell his hotel and restaurant franchise back to the company, and since at the same time he was getting complaints from customers that the chairs and carpet in the restaurant were worn out, and that the glass was stained because of the indoor smoking, he decided to sell the franchise back to the company for $300,000, and by then he had already made a great deal of profit over the past four years, on top of the hotel sale money.

Meda reiterates that his success in the Holiday Inn hotel and restaurant business was made possible by of his ability to communicate with people in general and with his customers in particular. His communication skills helped him because he had customers of various backgrounds and professions. Again, he used his “hustler” methods aggressively to work on his accounting, worked long hours every day to make sure that his inventory was complete, and invited and paid well known musicians, DJ’s, and bartenders to entertain in the hotel, which attracted customers to his business. More importantly, he says, he enjoyed this hotel and restaurant business to the fullest.

Starting in 1987, he went into the parking lot business. He won two parking lot bids, with space for 2,000 cars in the Washington area. He got this opportunity because of his
outgoing personality and excellent communication and networking skills. Although he faced various challenges while he tried various business ventures, he learned to widen his horizon and he improved his ability to think logically. He always went into business with his full heart and mind, and with an “I’ve got to make it happen” attitude. These characteristics, combined with the knowledge and skills he developed along the way, helped him to succeed in his business endeavors.

**SWOT Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Weakness</th>
<th>Opportunity</th>
<th>Threat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Risk taking</td>
<td>Does not always follow rules and regulations while conducting business</td>
<td>Could invest in hotel business, given that he has experience in this sector</td>
<td>Business competition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Street smart</td>
<td>Great customer service skills</td>
<td></td>
<td>Legal costs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Always open to new business opportunities</td>
<td>Lacks paying more attention to his specific business</td>
<td>Parking business gave him more income for future investments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Case 19: Bedri 7-Eleven Franchise Business**

Motivation, luck, adaptability, innovation, networking, and family are important in our business. You have to make the best out of small opening opportunities. They might lead to something bigger (Bedri, Washington, D. C., 2011).

**Demography and Migration Experience of the Entrepreneur**

Bedri came to the U.S. in 2000, after winning the Diversity Lottery. As a first-generation immigrant, he had to learn to adapt to a new environment, the cold of D.C. during the winter season, a different culture, a new way of communication and English language pronunciation, and a different outlook on race relations in the work environment in the U.S., among other things. All these initial encounters and work
experiences, if anything else, made him patient and work very hard in double shifts, seven days a week, learning as much as possible from his initial mistakes and performing better in the future endeavors at his work and in family matters alike.

Once he arrived in the U.S., Bedri had the dream to continue his education and to become a Certified Public Accountant (CPA). Although Bedri had a College Diploma in Accounting from Ethiopia, in order to qualify for a formal accountant job in the U.S., he had to do more training and pass a uniform CPA examination that is meant to protect the public interest by making sure only qualified accountants become licensed. In the meantime, he started working in various low-paying jobs and started saving money as much as possible. A year after his arrival in the U.S., his wife, who was living in Germany at the time of his arrival, came to join him in the U.S. A few months later, his wife got pregnant, and with the need for health insurance for his wife and the expectation of a baby, he realized that their financial demands would increase soon.

Bedri comes from the Oromo ethnic group in the Southern part of Ethiopia, numerically the major ethnicity but a political minority in Ethiopia, with no business background in his family, who are farmers. He comes from a Muslim family, and his father is in a polygamous marriage and has three wives and more than a dozen children. This made him work extra hard to help support his father to raise his brothers and sisters, by sending remittance money to Ethiopia every month, consistently. Bedri feels obliged to support his family in Ethiopia as much as they need to survive and send the children to school. He is also the breadwinner for his family in the U.S. He attributes his ability to accomplish both successfully to his communication skills with his customers, his hard work, and being lucky in his business.
Business Development

To meet the immediate financial pressures of his family, such as paying for his pregnant wife’s prenatal and delivery expenses and the like, he decided to quit pursuing his dream of becoming a CPA, and started working double shifts in 7-Eleven convenience stores. Because of his seriousness at work, his consistency, his hard work, and the sales results he shown, after about a year of service he was promoted to the position of trainer in a 7-Eleven store. His initial success came as he successfully overcoming his culture shock. After working as a trainer for an additional year and a half, and after proving that he could help increase sales, he was further promoted in 2003 to manager of a 7-Eleven. As a manager he was able to increase sales and improve the bottom line for the company. He did that by working very hard with no summer vacations for years. The company rewarded him in by providing him not only with a salary increase but also yearly and monthly bonuses.

These promotions, as a trainer and later as a manager, helped him build his confidence, and he started thinking seriously about owning his own business. When opportunity came, because 7-Eleven was going to give franchise opportunities to seasoned managers of the company in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area, Bedri jumped at the opportunity, although he did not have enough financial savings or collateral to do it by himself. Instead, he depended on his extended family to support him. He said he did not depend on a formal bank because he did not have enough credit history to get a loan, and he also said that he preferred to depend on relatives, because he assumed that his relatives would not ask him for interest, or ask him to prove that he was going to pay them back. Rather, they would pool resources primarily based on trust and with a sense of mutual support among family members.
Bedri, on the other hand, had fulfilled the requirements to qualify for a franchise, such as having legal permanent residency, and excellent records of retail, managerial, and customer service experiences with the company. Through his work experience with 7-Eleven in various capacities, he had a proven record of his ability to manage multiple tasks successfully; manage and participate in the day-to-day operation of the store with dedication; hire, train, and supervise employees; implement company programs and strategies to increase sales; manage food services and retail, with excellent customer-service skills, and connect with the local community, among others.

At the moment, Bedri owns a 7-Eleven convenience store and employs about 10 of his fellow Ethiopian immigrant men and women. By hiring more workers, he is now able to share some time with his children in the afternoon, but he finds the summer months to be a difficult time for him to have extra time with his children because, even though they are out of school, he has to work in the store for longer hours because the summer time is when his 7-Eleven sales volume pick up the most. Additional challenges in his business include that the 7-Eleven company has the tradition of introducing new items all the time, and his store has to keep up with the company standards at all times, which means upgrading things such as menu items, equipment, infrastructure, and technology. It is a constantly challenging and demanding but rewarding job, he says. Bedri also attributes his success to his wife, who understands and supports his endeavors consistently. For instance, she does not complain about his long working hours, and they share the things happening in his business on a timely basis.
SWOT Analysis

Table 5-19. SWOT analysis for Bedri

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Weakness</th>
<th>Opportunity</th>
<th>Threat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity recognition</td>
<td>Limited time to spend with family</td>
<td>Could invest in more 7-eleven franchises</td>
<td>High demand for financial support from family members in the U.S. and Ethiopia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial support from family members</td>
<td>Limited initial capital and limited training</td>
<td>Could invest in partnership with his family in Ethiopia</td>
<td>It is a franchise, so it has to do well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly motivated</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Case 20: Tesfom Real Estate and Gas Station Businesses

You have to take risks, keep looking for new business opportunities, work very hard, be able to reduce prices to attract more customers, and be willing to venture out into new business areas constantly (Tesfom, 2009, Washington, D.C).

Demography & Migration Experience of the Entrepreneur

Tesfom is originally from the highlands of Eritrea and, escaping the Derg, came to the U.S. as a refugee in 1977. He began working in various service jobs like a dishwasher in a restaurant and a cashier in a convenience store. To cut down on expenses, he shared a room with other male immigrants. He had to work 7 days a week and 14 to 18 hours a day.

Psychologically, this was a social mobility downturn for him because he had previously worked for as a bank manager in his home country. A few years later, however, because he had an educational background in the banking sector, he was able to find a better job based on his real-world work experience. All his previous academic preparation and work experience helped him get an entry level accounting job at a bank in New York. In 1982, he got married and had his first child three years later,
and as a result of increased family responsibilities, increased living expenses, and pressure for more income, the amount of money he was making as an entry level employee in a bank in New York was not enough to support his and his family needs. Also, he felt that could not see his economic status changing for the better in the near future, either, if he decided to stay in the same job.

**Business Development**

Thus, Tesfom took the risk of quitting his job and took a leap of faith by deciding to relocate to the Washington, D.C., area, where there were bigger Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant communities. Along with his wife, they opened a small grocery store. Since he was working 7 days a week and 16 to 18 hours a day, he could not spend any time with his wife and now two children, to the extent that they had to visit him in his grocery store on Sunday to be able to see him. He went home when they were asleep late at night, and returned early in the morning before they woke up. He was in a retail business and getting up early to open his shop was necessary for the success of his business. After two and half years of business in the grocery store, he realized that, although he was able to save some money, the grocery store was demanding and costing too much, because he was spending less time with his family and was creating tensions with his wife and children. Also, there was the threat of robbery in the area.

Thus, he took a risk again and bought five apartments that were located next to his business and started renting the rooms. Since he was located in a low-income neighborhood, most people were not prompt in paying their rent, but he could not evict them before providing them with a 6-month notice, according to D.C. law. Because of those problems and the risk for his safety, he decided to sell and try another type of business in a different location, where he could make good money.
This time Tesfom acquired a gas station and found it to be a better and safer job. He bought his place from another Ethiopian who had gone bankrupt because this other person had too many loans and some family crises. Next to the gas station, he bought a mechanic repair shop that he made work by hiring an individual who had excellent mechanical skills and good customer service skills. Tesfom decided to treat the mechanics who were working for him very well so that they could feel as if they were the owners of the mechanic workshop. Unfortunately, several years later the mechanic decided to establish his own business and all the customers went with him. The gas station business also started to slow down. Thus, once again, he was forced to change his business to a different location and had to establish new customers.

A few years later, Tesfom heard of another place that an Eritrean migrant owned, a gas station that was going bankrupt and was about to be taken over by the ExxonMobile company, so he bought it from him. This was easier for him because he had the dealership license, had worked for several companies, and had work experience and knowledge about how to run a business.

In this last business, Tesfom started to make more money, and his success this time came from his ability to provide a relatively lower price and focus on achieving higher sales. He is an extremely flexible entrepreneur, consistent and very serious in his work. He comes every day and surveys his neighborhood, making sure that he puts his price at least 20 cents lower than the market price. He started selling 80,000 gallons a month, and now he sells 200,000 gallons per month. He has increased his volume of sales consistently, and this gave him the credibility he needed in his company. On top of that, he had participated in various seminars and conventions, and does follow up with
the company. He gets constant supervision and communication with his company. Their support system and help desk is always open for him in case there is a need to service a pump and to check the safety of the business.

Tesfom makes sure that he provides his workers with enough guidance and a list of assignments and responsibilities, and he follows with the rules and regulations, such as environmental compliance. Tesfom recalls that most things were done manually when he started in the gas station business in the early 1990s. There was very little work done automatically back then, but competition was very high and needed the owner to do constant follow-ups, promotions, sending letter of thanks, reminders to customers, and the like. He thinks knowledge and common sense are very important for having success in a business, as well as excellent customer service.

Moreover, in partnership with his sister-in-law, who is a housing developer and resides in Eritrea, they were able to build about 33 houses in Eritrea and sold most of those houses for a profit to Eritrean-Americans. He also owns a couple more houses of his own in Eritrea, to be used as vacation homes. He has a very secure financial stand with his own houses in the U.S. and in Eritrea. His children are going to U.S. colleges, and he bought them their own houses, also in the Washington area, so he thinks that he is a very successful entrepreneur and successful in his family life. He plans to own more gas stations, at least 2 or more in the Washington area, and he plans to retire in Eritrea in the future.
**SWOT Analysis**

Table 5-20. SWOT analysis for Tesfom

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strength</th>
<th>Weakness</th>
<th>Opportunity</th>
<th>Threat</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opportunity recognition and risk taking</td>
<td>Jumps to business opportunities without detailed studies</td>
<td>Opportunities to invest in real estate both in the U.S. and in Eritrea</td>
<td>Gas station is a sub-contract and, thus, the contractor has to do well all the time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Willing to try different businesses</td>
<td>He does not involve his family in his business</td>
<td>Could expand the gas station business in the U.S.</td>
<td>Transnational investment depends on current macro-policy views towards business investors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business investments in the U.S. and in Eritrea</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highly networked</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Collective SWOT Analyses**

In this collective SWOT analysis, attention has been given toward identifying and comparing the SWOT factors that are shared by the major types of businesses (traditional, combinations of traditional and non-traditional, and non-traditional) established by the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant entrepreneurs in the area. Findings and meanings of the combinations of individual, group, and collective SWOT analyses, as they relate to the literature on entrepreneurship and transnational migration, are articulated in the Findings and Analysis section in Chapter 6. An analysis of the meaning of findings to the research questions is presented in the conclusions of this dissertation, in Chapter 7.

**Traditional Types of Businesses**

The strengths of the traditional types of businesses include that they are businesses that are established based on the migrants’ ethnic identities, providing ethnic injera food, traditional coffee ceremonies and ceremonial goods, ethnic grocery
items, and entertainment activities. All these types of businesses appeal to migrants because they are meaningful to their ethnic identities and remind them of their home countries. The entrepreneurs worked hard, saved money, and used social networking to establish and run their businesses. They made attitudinal changes toward doing business, provided relatively affordable menus, and gave their customers an authentic Ethiopian and Eritrean food experience. They are also located in high concentration in specific geographical locations of Washington, D.C., in particular, in the U Street Corridor, Adams Morgan, and in northern Virginia. For instance, case 1 describes the profitability of the U Street Corridor for ethnic restaurants, cafés, and grocery shops. For non-Ethiopian and non-Eritrean entrepreneurs, going into traditional business is difficult, due to cultural and social barriers to entry, unless the person has the necessary cultural knowledge and the transnational social networking capacity in Ethiopia, Eritrea, and the U.S.

On the weaknesses side, it can be stated that a high concentration of restaurants, cafés, and grocery shops in a few blocks of the city makes their businesses highly competitive, especially when trying to attract customers from within their migrant communities. This is because, overall, the Ethiopian and Eritrean food and grocery businesses serve similar menus and offer similar items. In addition, they are mostly brick-and-mortar businesses, family or individually owned, with limited capital and limited capacity for growth at the moment (e.g., cases 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7).

On the opportunities side, there is the potential to expand to new business sites in the metropolitan area, and to other cities in the U.S, and for some migrants to invest back in their homelands. For instance, some of them potentially could get involved in
the import-and-export business of grocery items (e.g., cases 1, 2, 6, and 7); there is the potential to invest in similar businesses in their home countries (e.g., cases 2, 5, 6, and 7); there is an opportunity to expand the carry-out and delivery services of food items (e.g., cases 1 and 8); and there are possibilities to expand into e-commerce (e.g., cases 1, 2, 5, 6, 7, and 8).

The most common threat that all the traditional businesses face is the low barrier to entry into similar businesses by their fellow migrants. With more and similar ethnic businesses opening in an area, it could potentially become more competitive for customers in the near future. Even for those who have specialized in specific menus (e.g., cases 4, 5, 6, and 7), or who chose specific locations (e.g., cases 1, 2, 3, and 7), or particular carry-out services (e.g., case 8), their business model could easily be replicated by other migrant entrepreneurs in the future. Similarity of menu might end-up damaging them.

Combination of Traditional and Non-traditional Types of Businesses

With regard to the strengths of the entrepreneurs who have created a combination of traditional and non-traditional businesses, one is that each of them has uniquely and creatively combined their traditional knowledge, as well as the intellectual resources and the opportunities they have received in the U.S., to establish, maintain, and grow their businesses. As a result, each of them has a specialized market and a unique knowledge-based business. Most of them have attracted non-migrant customers. Most of them are educated and passionate about their businesses. They combine younger (e.g., cases 1, 2, and 3) and older generations of entrepreneurs (e.g., cases 9, 10, and 11). Their businesses are appealing to both the first generation of migrants (e.g., cases 9 and 10), and the second generation of migrants in their communities (e.g., cases 11,
12, and 13). Their products and services are also available online (e.g., cases 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13).

On the weakness side, one is that they are all business types that are dependent on the unique knowledge-based skills of the individual entrepreneur (e.g., cases 9, 10, and 13). The family members help, but the “success” of these business models depends on the expertise and the relentless passion of the entrepreneurs. Therefore, sustainability is a concern in such kinds of business models (e.g., cases 9, 11, and 12). Compared to similar types of businesses, they have limited capital of their own and limited access to external capital investors for growth at the moment (e.g., cases 9, 12, and 13).

With regard to the opportunities for growth of their businesses, one common trend is that they need to attract co-investors and business partners who share a similar vision for their business (e.g., cases 9, 10, 11, and 13). They have the potential and the needed knowledge to expand their businesses into their sending countries, into other locations within their host countries, and beyond (e.g., cases 9, 10, and 12). They could expand their businesses, especially through e-commerce, by hiring and training more skilled workers, and by expanding their business networks (e.g., cases 10, 11, 12, and 13).

On the threat side, at the time, one problem for the growth of these businesses is their inability to get loans from banks, due to limited collateral and limited credit histories (e.g., cases 12 and 13). Also, these migrants could face tough competition from other well-established businesses, which could provide their customers with a comparable but less expensive product or service, and with a wider variety of product and service
choices (e.g., cases 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13). As technology changes quickly, these businesses would need to quickly react by getting more training and by investing more resources in technology to make their respective businesses efficient and competitive in the market (e.g., cases 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13).

**Non-Traditional Types of Businesses**

On the strength side, the entrepreneurs who are involved in non-traditional businesses have a shared capacity to recognize business opportunities (e.g., cases 16, 19, and 20), in risk taking (e.g., cases 16, 17, and 18), in business adaptability and good customer service (e.g., cases 14, 15, 16, and 20). Most of them have either built their businesses from the bottom up over time (e.g., cases 14, 15, and 20), or had some sort of support (financial and informal business training, etc.) from their social and business networks (e.g., cases 16, 17, 18, and 19). If successful, their businesses are highly profitable, with ample room for potential growth in the future.

On the weakness side, non-traditional businesses start with limited capital and limited business experience. These limitations affect their ability to grow faster in their respective areas (e.g., cases 14, 15, and 19). Pressures to generate more revenue for future business growth push some of these entrepreneurs to seek additional investment opportunities. Such process puts them in a vulnerable situation regarding their personal safety, because they often invest in neighborhoods that have high crime rates, and it often leaves them with little time for their family and other social life (e.g., cases 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20). Also, their limited capital puts them in a vulnerable situation as they compete for markets and bid against larger companies.

With regard to opportunities, these businesses share the potential for a high level of growth of their investments in various cities in the U.S. and in their home countries.
(e.g., cases 14, 16, 17, 18, 19, and 20). They have the potential to create business associations and business partnerships among themselves, and with other capital investors (e.g., cases 14, 15, 18, 19, and 20). When such businesses do well, they can gain high levels of revenue and can generate networking opportunities to create business with larger companies.

With regard to threats, these non-traditional businesses are affected by the competition from larger corporations. Their franchises, sub-contract licenses, and business well-being are affected by how well they are doing with the larger corporations they partner with. They also are affected by how well the larger corporations that they are joined to are doing in the local, national, and global markets (e.g., cases 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, and 20). Their ability to invest in transnational businesses that include business creation in their host and home countries depends on how well the macro-economic policies, infrastructure, and business environment are conducive to business creation and growth.

**Final Remarks**

The demographic, migration-experience, and business-development contexts of each entrepreneur were examined in the twenty cases presented above. Collective SWOT analyses of the major types of businesses established by the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants in the area were also included to show what the businesses’ strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats mean to their collective experiences.

The main findings of this study show that there are various types of businesses (traditional, combination of traditional and non-traditional, and non-traditional businesses) that are undertaken by the Ethiopian-American and Eritrean-American entrepreneurs, men and women, in the Washington, D.C., area. The businesses studied
in this research are in the formal sector. The entrepreneurs who lead these businesses have learned to value doing business as a culturally legitimate way of employment creation and social mobility in the U.S.

The businesses included in this study are small-scale and medium-scale. They are mostly owned by individuals or families. The traditional ones are businesses primarily based on social and cultural capital. Even though initially most of these migrants came to the U.S. for reasons other than for conducting business, given the favorable business opportunities they found in their host country, a few of these migrants who were entrepreneurial, industrious, and able to save money created businesses that were inspired by their cultural knowledge. In the process, they collectively managed to create what the author defines as "ethnic entrepreneurship niches."

The disproportionately high number of Ethiopian-American and Eritrean-American entrepreneurs with restaurants and shops along the U Street Corridor, Adams Morgan, and northern Virginia has resulted in these areas receiving the unofficial designation of "Little Ethiopias." Nonetheless, these areas are not ethnic enclaves per se, but ethnic entrepreneurship niches, because not all the businesses are congregated in the same neighborhoods, not all the migrants live in those neighborhoods (in fact, many tend to live farther away, in areas where the rent is cheaper), and not all the customers are migrants, and the businesses also cater to Washingtonians and tourists alike. What is true is that it is very common to find Ethiopian and Eritrean restaurants and grocery stores located in close proximity to each other in these areas. Also, since the Ethiopian-American and the Eritrean-American migrants in the metropolitan area are the largest in the U.S., their entrepreneurial presence is also bigger there than in any other city in the
U.S. Newcomers from Ethiopia and Eritrea to the U.S. often find support from their relatives, friends, and compatriots and many men, for instance, start out working in the service sector, or as cab drivers, and adjust to Washington, D.C., culture with some ending up opening their own businesses. In the process, they contribute to the transformation of these neighborhoods into prosperous business centers.

Currently, the U Street Corridor is as a very vibrant ethnic entrepreneurial niche, and it is visited all day long by Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants who come from all walks of life. For tourists, these ethnic restaurants and cafés provide an international dining experience, or as some would call it, the “exotic feeling” of eating with your hands, without knives and forks. For the migrants, these restaurants and coffee shops constitute familiar places that feel like “home.” And in this process of re-creation of ethnic foods and identities, the Ethiopian and Eritrean transnational entrepreneurs have been pioneers with their business endeavors in neighborhoods like Adams Morgan, the U Street Corridor, 9th Street, and 18th Street.

Both the Adams Morgan and the U Street Corridor neighborhoods were well known to be dilapidated areas. Starting in the late 1970s and more so in the early 1980s, Ethiopian and Eritrean transnational entrepreneurs started opening businesses, first in Adams Morgan and then later (when property value and rent increased in the Adams Morgan area) in the early 1990s, in the U Street Corridor, which had relatively lower property values at the time. Ethiopian and Eritrean entrepreneurs began to buy property cheaply starting in the early 1990s, around U Street and 9th Street. The Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants in the area created a cluster of businesses offering authentic and cheap food, grocery stores with otherwise hard to find ingredients, and
nostalgic cultural experiences. The result is a mixture of a “home” and ethnic environment for the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants, and an opportunity for international food and culture experiences for Washingtonians and tourists alike. And, for the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant entrepreneurs, it means having creating an ethnic entrepreneurial niche. In the process, the migrant entrepreneurs feel that they have played an important role in transforming the image of Adams Morgan and of U Street from neighborhoods in disrepair to thriving business areas.

There are also a few unique combinations of traditional and non-traditional businesses among the ones led by Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants. They have creatively established businesses that are both traditional and modern, or knowledge based. These types of businesses have a wider base of customers, including first and second-generation migrants, intellectuals, and business establishments. These types of businesses are highly dependent on the passion, creativity, and unique skills of the entrepreneurs. They take a longer time to establish due to their limited financial capital, but they use technological advancements and potentially can attract many more customers.

The non-traditional types of businesses that are run by the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants are mostly in transportation services, gas stations, 7-Eleven convenience stores, and real estate businesses. However, the diversity and scope of their businesses is wide. Regarding the non-traditional cases that are included in this research, it is relevant to point out that these non-traditional types of businesses do not fit into either the “ethnic enclave” or the “ethnic entrepreneurial niche” model. They are
businesses scattered in various locations in Washington, D.C., without the geographic concentration of the traditional businesses mentioned above.
CHAPTER 6
FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

The data collected from twenty entrepreneurs and business cases, described and analyzed previously in Chapter 5, were used to develop the following core thematic findings and analyses. They are organized thematically. The focus for this chapter is what the findings of this research mean as they relate to the literature on ethnic entrepreneurship and transnational migration.

For comparative purposes, it is important to know how the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants who have settled in the metropolitan D.C. area since the 1970s kept home connections, and how the entrepreneurial ones among the migrants were able to establish, maintain, and grow their own businesses in the area. These are particularly interesting cases because these migrants come from predominantly subsistence farming and pastoral societies that stigmatized the business sector or neged. For instance, as a contrast, West African transnational migrants from Niger and Senegal see trade as a socially recognized sector, and this is even supported through various networks, including religious, ethnic, and social capital ones (Babou 2002; Diouf 2000; Stoller 2002). This is not the case for Ethiopians and Eritreans, as will be described later on in this chapter. Thus, to study the experiences of migrant entrepreneurs and their businesses, this dissertation indicates that an integrative theoretical framework is relevant for advancing a comprehensive understanding of the complexities of the migrant entrepreneurs and their businesses.

This study shows the importance of a theoretical approach that helps capture the combined supply-side views or micro-level factors (entrepreneur migration experiences, business development), and the demand-side views or macro-level factors (economic,
social, cultural, and political) to have a comprehensive understanding of the study of the transnational migrant entrepreneurs (Allen 2009; Baber 1987; Bird 1989; Granovetter 2005; Harvey 2005; Jones 2010; Light and Gold 2000; McClelland 1961; Meriam 1998; Miles and Huberman 1994; Patton 2002; Polanyi 1944; Sassen 1998; Schumpeter 1934; Spring and McDade 1998; Thornton 1999; Yin 2008).

Thematic Findings and Analysis

Relevance of Integrative Theory to the Study of Transnational Migrant Entrepreneurs

There is growing research that focuses on the relevance of articulating the complexities of transnational migration flows through the use of comprehensive and multidimensional research topics that cut across the economic, social, cultural, political, and historical dimensions of migration (Appadurai 1996; Basch et al. 1994; Foner 1999; Hannerz 1996; Holtzman 2008; Levitt 2001; Kane and Leedy 2013). Currently there is also a rich literature on the experiences of transnational migrants and entrepreneurs from Italy, China, India, Korea, and Latin Americans in the U.S. who have established neighborhoods, considered “ethnic enclaves,” in various metropolitan areas of the U.S. (Light and Gold 2000; Portes 1998; Portes and Kenneth 1980). However, there is limited research on the particular experiences of the new transnational entrepreneurs from sub-Saharan African to the U.S. (Arthur 2000; Anne 2005; Apraku 1991; Copeland-Carson 2004). There is even less ethnographic research on the entrepreneurial experiences of transnational migrants from Africa to the U.S. (Babou 2002; Bagchi 2001; Diouf 2000; Stoller 2012). This study offers an alternative approach to remedy such gaps by providing a relevant and systematic integrative theoretical framework that could be useful for interdisciplinary studies.
This dissertation shows the application of this theoretical framework to twenty cases. Through individual, group, and collective strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat (SWOT) analyses, it shows in detail the complexities of the lived experiences of several transnational migrants from Ethiopia and Eritrea (Allen 2009; Meriam 1998; Miles and Huberman 1994; Patton 2002; Yin 2008). It does so because it is an interdisciplinary approach that draws from anthropological and entrepreneurship views that could capture both micro- and macro-level experiences (Black 2005; Bernard and Ryan 2010; Creswell 1994; Geertz 1973). This study has also offered a comparison of the characteristics of Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant entrepreneurs and businesses in the D.C. area and the characteristics of other migrant entrepreneurs in the U.S. (Aldrich and Waldinger 1990; Allen 2009; Diouf 2000; Farraro 2002; Halter 2000; Light and Gold 2000; Portes and Kenneth 1980; Portes and Manning 1986).

**Effects of Micro-and Macro-level Factors on Transnational Businesses**

Individual characteristics of the entrepreneur, such as the ability to recognize a business opportunity, take risks, innovate, create value, be dynamic, do things differently, and so on, are relevant for success in entrepreneurship, as conceptualized and explained in entrepreneurial theories of micro-level analysis (Bird 1989; Evans 1942; McClelland 1961). Nevertheless, this research shows that the relevance of macro-level structures and institutions that value entrepreneurs and businesses are also critical (e.g., adequate market structures, economic policies that create favorable environments for doing business, and positive social, cultural, and political views toward the creation and promotion of a business culture). This research shows that Ethiopian and Eritrean entrepreneurs have been inspired, been supported, and have benefited from the pro-business and trade-friendly environment of the U.S.
Entrepreneurs and businesses owned by Ethiopians and Eritreans in the area are continuously affected by the political, economic, social, and cultural contexts of both their home and receiving countries. For instance, the Ethiopian and Eritrean restaurants, grocery stores, taxi businesses, lawyers, translation services, gas stations, bars, clubs, and the like, are challenged by customers (who talk about sensitive ethnic and national politics) from their communities who tend to mix political, ethnic, and regional issues with business. The successful entrepreneurs know how to maneuver through these situations without upsetting their business customers. Also, transnational Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant entrepreneurs are likely to increase in number and type, as far as the macro-structural factors and environments in their sending, transit, and receiving countries and communities provide them with the necessary conditions to establish, maintain, and grow their businesses.

**Change of Attitude toward Doing Transnational Business**

The Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants in the D.C. area have learned that doing formal business is an acceptable way of creating employment, wealth, and social mobility in the U.S. They come from predominantly subsistence or pastoral-based cultures and economies, where the business sector was considered socially stigmatized. During feudal times in Ethiopia and Eritrea, it was only the landless families who pursued trade (*neged*) for a living. Landowners would aspire either to work on the farm or in some public or government office. After the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie by the *Derg* socialist regime in Ethiopia, the country followed a centralized and nationalized macro-economic policy. Private businesses and capital ownership were activities viewed as exploitative. When Ethiopians and Eritreans migrated to a capitalist-led economy such as in the U.S., they had a change of attitude toward business, trade,
and entrepreneurship. They began to accept business as a socially accepted economic activity, and they also viewed it as a mechanism for achieving economic success and social mobility. This change of attitude also happened because they learned that in U.S. culture conducting business and being an entrepreneur are highly valued activities.

This shows the importance of supportive macro-level factors (economic, cultural, societal, and political conditions) for conducting business in the U.S., and of determinant micro-level factors to do so (willingness of a few migrant entrepreneurs to make an attitudinal change, recognition of a business opportunity, and acting on the business opportunities they found in the U.S.). Hence, some of these migrants established businesses even though they faced discouragement from their family members and compatriots. During my research, I encountered several migrant business owners from both communities who had not been successful in the 1980s and the 1990s in their business endeavors due to social and cultural discouragement, including from their family and friends. However, in the 2000s and the 2010s, the majority of these migrants valued entrepreneurship and businesses as prestigious and beneficial. They saw entrepreneurship as a mechanism for economic and social mobility in the U.S. and in their sending countries. Some valued business ownership because it gave them flexibility to manage both business and family affairs. For instance, taxicab businesses allow their owners the flexibility of working on their own schedules at their own pace. Some of the taxi owners and drivers have attended graduate school or have additional part-time jobs.

**Men and Women Migrant Entrepreneurs Succeed**

Men and women entrepreneurs from the Ethiopian and the Eritrean migrant communities are succeeding in establishing traditional and non-traditional types of
businesses in D.C. because a window of opportunity for economic growth and entrepreneurship is open for both in the U.S. Traditionally, in the majority of the patrilineal societies and cultures of Ethiopia and Eritrea, women are primarily socialized to be good sisters and good wives. Many family members traditionally resisted the idea of allowing women to do business independently. With increased gender awareness and improved human-development levels in the U.S., an increasing number of Ethiopian and Eritrean women are trusting their own initiatives and demonstrating their full capacity to create their own independent businesses or to create them in collaboration with men from their family and from other groups. Similarly, stereotypical assumptions against girls and women are slowly changing toward more equal participation of both genders in both domestic and public affairs. As a result, more Ethiopian and Eritrean girls and young women are going to secondary school, college, university, and establishing businesses. Some migrant women based their businesses on traditional knowledge (e.g., cooking, breading hair, making traditional clothing, weaving baskets, providing labor services, and so on). Others have ventured into unique and non-traditional businesses, including advertising, managing parking lots and gas stations, and providing legal and medical consultancy services.

There are also disproportionately more successful Ethiopian and Eritrean restaurants in the area that are owned by women than by men. This may be happening because, traditionally, men are not socialized to cook. Thus women have much more in-depth knowledge of the cuisine and its proper management. Their husbands are often involved helping with the management and customer service sides of the business.
Again, this explains the reasons why many Eritrean and Ethiopian women were able to overcome structural, social, and cultural barriers in the U.S. However, not all migrant women took the initiative to break such barriers and decide to go into establishing their own business. What sets the successful female entrepreneurs apart is their ability to use their cultural knowledge and make a business out of it, their ability to make a change of attitude, their determination, their ability to take risk, their leadership, and their customer service skills.

**Small-scale and Medium-scale Formal Businesses Are the Norm**

Some of the Ethiopian and Eritrean entrepreneurs conduct transnational business that spans their receiving and home countries, but the majority of them have created small- and medium-scale formal businesses. The most common is the “mom-and-pop” store type of traditional business. The main reasons why many of the migrants are not investing in businesses in their sending countries include the perception of insecurity in Ethiopia and Eritrea, perceptions of lack of transparency and lack of efficiency in terms of getting licenses and operating businesses, and lack of capital and business networks. For instance, the majority of the Ethiopian and Eritrean entrepreneurs do not have a corporate business structure and network. Rather, they are family- and kin-based businesses, and these entrepreneurs do not have access to large bank loans or developmental expertise. Recently, there have been economic policy improvements taking place in Ethiopia, and some of the Ethiopian transnational entrepreneurs seem to feel some confidence in the country, and so they are starting to open small import-export businesses in their country of origin. Eritrea has yet to open the country to a more sustainable, pro-market environment.
In addition, obtaining a business license for Eritrean migrants is primarily contingent upon the migrants paying the 2 percent income tax, or “diaspora tax,” to the Eritrean government, and demonstrating loyalty to the ruling party. The diaspora tax is usually collected by the Eritrean embassies and by local community centers overseas, and is estimated to account for a significant amount of Eritrea’s Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Proof of payment of the diaspora tax is required to establish and maintain property and to conduct business in Eritrea. Also, the Eritrean diaspora members are not tolerated in Eritrea if they happen to have political differences with the ruling PFDJ party. Since there are some Eritrean migrant business owners who do not support the ruling party, because they view the ruling system in Eritrea as being non-democratic and having an anti-business policy, they refuse to pay. In return, it is impossible for them to get the necessary paperwork to start or operate a business in Eritrea. Ethiopian migrants are not required to pay an income tax, which makes their experience different. However, it is equally important for them to be on good political terms with the ruling party to do business properly.

**Traditional and Non-traditional Businesses Have Different SWOT Characteristics**

The strengths of traditional businesses include that they are businesses that are established based on the migrants’ ethnic food and coffee preferences; identities, goods, and groceries and staples. There is a barrier to entry for similar businesses for non-migrants. However, the barrier to entry for other migrants is not difficult to overcome. These types of businesses have limited capital and limited potential for growth. The businesses that can be considered combinations of traditional and non-traditional are creative and unique knowledge-based businesses. They are not easy to replicate and have their own niche market. However, their sustainability is vulnerable
because they depend on the unique quality of the entrepreneur. Their growth is often constrained due to financial and business network limitations. The non-traditional types of businesses involve relatively higher risks and high competition from larger entities, but can be highly profitable when they work well, with bigger room for potential growth in both the host and the sending countries. The most common non-traditional businesses covered in this study are in transportation, parking lots, gas stations, and real estate offices.

The Ethiopian and Eritrean Traditional Migrant Entrepreneurs Have Their Own Unique Characteristics

There are dozens of Ethiopian and Eritrean restaurants, cafes, clothing stores, music shops, and entertainment centers clustered in the U Street Corridor, the Adams Morgan area, and Virginia. The strategic business model, “ethnic entrepreneurial niches,” is used by the entrepreneurs in the area to conduct business with a focus on the re-creation of ethnic identities in specific geographical locations. In these areas customers can get “injera” food, the aroma of roasted African coffee, familiar languages, and entertainment that reminds people of their home culture. The migrant entrepreneur’s intention, nonetheless, is to conduct business across the board: their migrant community, the host society (Washingtonians), and tourists alike.

In this regard, this business model is different than other “ethnic enclave” populations in the U.S., ones with well-established neighborhoods of businesses and co-ethnic migrant residents. For instance, the Ethiopian and Eritrean ethnic entrepreneurial niches are different from the experiences of the ethnic enclaves of Little Italy in New York, or Little Havana in Miami, where they have high concentrations of diverse co-ethnic businesses in specific neighborhoods, and high concentrations of co-
ethnic migrant residents in these neighborhoods. These ethnic enclaves provide their co-ethnics with alternative options for employment, capacity to build on social capital for faster business establishment, and socio-economic mobility (Abrahamson 1996; Aldrich and Waldinger 1990; Babou 2002; Light and Gold 2000; Portes and Kenneth 1990).

It is true that the Eritrean and Ethiopian businesses show a geographic concentration in some areas of Washington, D.C., but they do not reach the level of the ethnic neighborhoods found in such enclaves as Little Italy or Little Havana. Besides, the residents of these geographic areas in D.C. are diverse, not only Ethiopians and Eritreans. In fact, Ethiopians and Eritreans tend to live in other areas of the city or even in other states where the rent is cheaper. For these reasons, I consider the research sites of this study as ethnic entrepreneurship niches, but not yet as ethnic enclaves.

Also, unlike ethnic cuisines, such as Italian, Mexican, Asian, or Middle Eastern, that have become part of the typical “American” food choices, Ethiopian and Eritrean cuisines are not yet well known or very popular and their ingredients cannot be found in typical American stores. Still, in their own ways, Ethiopian and Eritrean restaurants are slowly becoming part of the American cuisine experience in the Washington area.

In non-traditional businesses, on the other hand, both men and women are invested in transportation services, gas stations, 7-Eleven convenience stores, and real estate businesses.

**Final Remarks**

This chapter described the findings of this study and showed that an integrative theoretical framework is relevant for advancing a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of migrant entrepreneurs and their businesses. Drawing from anthropological and entrepreneurship literature, it shows the importance of an
integrative theoretical approach that helps capture the combined supply-side views or micro-level factors (individual entrepreneur skills, migration experience, and business development) and the demand-side views or macro-level ones (economic, social, cultural, political, and historical conditions) to have a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of the transnational migrant entrepreneurs. This framework was applied in the thematic articulation of the main findings of this study about the experiences of the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant entrepreneurs and businesses in Washington, D.C.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSIONS

This dissertation examined the entrepreneurial and business experiences of the Ethiopian and Eritrean transnational migrants in the Washington, D.C., area. It examined the reasons why Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants establish their own businesses and how they recognize an opportunity and take risks to establish, maintain, and grow businesses in the area, without having all the necessary resources in advance (e.g., with limited financial capital, without business training, coming from subsistence agricultural economic systems, and with no culture of trade in their homelands). It explored what is different about their entrepreneurial experience compared to true ethnic enclaves. It identified which key micro-level factors (entrepreneurial characteristics, migration experience, and business development) and macro-level factors (economic, social, cultural, political, and historical) affect the success or failure of a business. It discussed what we can learn from successful and unsuccessful Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant business experiences and behaviors.

Primary and secondary data were collected and analyzed over a two year period. The dissertation drew from interdisciplinary methods of data collection and analysis from anthropology and entrepreneurship studies. One of the ways in which this research contributes to the literature is by articulating the relevance of an integrative theoretical framework and approach toward building a comprehensive understanding of transnational migration businesses and entrepreneurs.

Reasons Why Some Migrants Establish Their Own Businesses

With regard to the first research question of this dissertation, Why do some Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants in the Washington, D.C., area establish their own
businesses?, it can be concluded that the entrepreneurial mindsets and behaviors among the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant entrepreneurs in D.C. were inspired and made possible because they found themselves in the right environment and in a culture that values business creation and expansion, as the U.S. is one of the leading countries in innovation and entrepreneurship in the world. Most of these entrepreneurs had no intention of going into business when they first arrived in the U.S., most after the 1970s and 1980s. They initially came to the U.S. for other reasons, including as political refugees, asylum seekers, to pursue higher studies, due to family reunification, due to diversity lottery opportunities, and for better life opportunities. Upon arriving in the U.S., however, they started applying for bureaucratic jobs, and all they could get into was jobs in the service sector. Some have very little choice except to take very low-end jobs, nonetheless saving money, and then starting out with businesses that cater to people with needs similar to their own. Thus, they had to change their attitude about business, from viewing it as a stigmatized sector of employment toward viewing it as a sector for economic and social upward mobility in their host and sending countries.

**How Do the Migrants Establish, Maintain, and Grow Their Businesses?**

With regard to the second research question, How do these Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants establish, maintain, and grow their businesses in Washington, D.C.?, this study concludes that the creation of entrepreneurship among these Ethiopian-American and Eritrean-American communities in the area are primarily based on kin networks and close family relations. Their interdependence can be observed when the migrants seek financial support, resources, or labor, or when they obtain necessary information on management and maintenance of businesses. Thus, within the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant-owned, family-based, and kin-based clusters of businesses, where extended
families tend to locate their businesses next to each other, those businesses can be identified. In addition, it is common for the Ethiopian and Eritrean entrepreneurs to hire people who are of the same kin group. This is similar to the experiences of other immigrant entrepreneurs, such as Chinese-American, Italian-American, Indian-American mom-and-pop stores (Aldrich and Waldinger 1990, Flap 2000; Lessinger 1995; Light 1972; Portes and Rumbaut 1996).

Traditionally, Ethiopian and Eritrean society has a culture of interdependence among family, kin, ethnic groups, and friends in supporting each other in various daily activities, including farming crops, tending livestock, caring for and socializing children, and house construction. These types of support systems and networks are also useful among the successful migrant entrepreneurs. Most importantly, these support systems and network mechanisms have several key characteristics that help to create and maintain businesses. The interdependence among persons, informality of the structure, reliability of the members of the network, and sustainability of the support system are some advantages.

The types of interdependence that Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant entrepreneurs and businesses in the D.C. area provide to each other as family and kin members are not only economically sound, but also have additional multidimensional social, psychological, and cultural advantages. In contrast, the dependence on formal organizations for creating and expanding their businesses, such as banks, attorneys, and business consultancy firms, would mean that the businesses would need to show that they have a good credit history or would need to demonstrate that they have collateral (such as valuable property or holdings), which is difficult to achieve, as they
establish their business. Sometimes lack of knowledge or lack of experience on how formal institutions such as banks, trade licensing offices, and regulating institutions work severely limit these entrepreneurs, especially the smaller ones. Hence, they rely on what they know best: the support of social capital, mainly family-based, in establishing, maintaining, and growing their businesses.

**What Is Different about Their Experience Compared to What Has Been Called “Ethnic Enclaves”?**

The third research question asked What is different about the entrepreneurial experiences of the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant entrepreneurs and businesses compared to the “ethnic enclaves” in other areas of the country, such as Little Italy in New York or Little Havana, in Miami? It also asked whether the Ethiopian and Eritrean businesses are ethnic enclaves, ones that primarily target their own Diasporas, or whether they are “ethnic entrepreneurship niches,” where-by transnational migrant entrepreneurs concentrate in a particular geographic location and disproportionately focus on some particular types of businesses, such as food services, to recreate ethnic identities, and to target both their own immigrant communities and beyond.

This research concludes that the Eritrean and Ethiopian businesses in the Washington, D.C., area are different from ethnic enclaves. It concludes that the Eritrean and Ethiopian traditional types of businesses are ethnic entrepreneurial niches. The Eritrean and Ethiopian types of businesses that have the combined characteristics of traditional and non-traditional ventures, as well as the Eritrean and Ethiopian non-traditional types of businesses, which are located scattered throughout the D.C. area, are not ethnic enclaves, either. They are just family or individually based businesses.
These last two types of businesses do not fall into the category of ethnic enclave or in the ethnic entrepreneurial niche category.

The traditional businesses are based on providing goods and services related to food, coffee, traditional clothing, cultural grocery items, music, and arts. These businesses are used in the creation of what I define as ethnic entrepreneurship niches, whereby migrant entrepreneurs and businesses concentrate in a particular geographic location and focus on particular occupational areas to trade both within their immigrant communities and with their host societies (with Washington customers and tourists alike). In particular, in the geographical space between U Street, east of 16th, and in the 1900 block of 9th street, there are a dozen Ethiopian and Eritrean restaurants, cafes, and grocery shops and a half dozen Ethiopian and Eritrean traditional businesses in the Adams Morgan area. There is a similar trend of creating niches of traditional businesses owned by the migrants in Virginia, which is also part of the metropolitan D.C. area. This research concludes that this is a strategic business model of ethnic entrepreneurial niches that focuses on the re-creation of ethnic identities in a specific geographic location, where one can get “injera” food, the aroma of roasted coffee, familiar faces and languages, and entertainment that reminds people of their home culture. The migrants informally call these places “Little Ethiopias.” This gives the entrepreneurs the strategic advantage of getting visibility and recognition for their ethnic entrepreneurial niches as they do business with other migrants, with Washingtonians, and with tourists and visitors to the city. These types of businesses also allow them to build a business based on their cultural and social capital, which establishes entry barriers for non-Ethiopian and non-Eritrean investors. Only a few cases, like Case 2 (Gojo), are
established in different upscale socioeconomic locations. Gojo, for example, decided to start and was able to grow a profitable business in the heart of Georgetown by promoting her cultural heritage, which includes offering the traditional coffee ceremony, Ethiopian food, and the culture of hospitality from her homeland to upper socioeconomic Washingtonians and tourists alike. The other traditional businesses located in the ethnic entrepreneurial niches specialize in specific menus and services, such as food delivery, as in Case 4 (Ful), offering a popular, spicy fava bean dish. Case 5 (Gobo) is known for its authentic Ga’at menu cooked by a grandmother; Case 6 (Ali) focused on expanding his merchandise to include East African items in a different location; and Case 8 (Bahlu) included a carry-out option.

These types of concentrations of ethnic businesses in a specific geographic area could be a move toward the ethnic enclave model, but the ethnic enclave model would require a higher number of ethnic entrepreneurs and businesses, as well as more co-ethnic, business-supportive institutions in the area, which is lacking in the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant business experience. Ethnic enclaves would also require a wider variety of business activities, and they would also require well established, ethnically identified neighborhoods with a residential concentration of immigrant groups from Ethiopia and Eritrea around the businesses, in the U Street and Adams Morgan neighborhoods, such as it happens with Little Italy and Little Senegal in New York and Little Cuba in Miami; among others (Light 1994; Portes and Manning 1986; Waldinger 1994).

The business types that combine characteristics of both the traditional and non-traditional types of entrepreneurship covered in this research were in entertainment,
advertising, and clothing services. The non-traditional types of businesses studied in this dissertation were in transportation services, gas stations, and real estate offices. Again, it can be concluded that these two types (the combined and the non-traditional) are either family- or single-owned businesses that were established, scattered in different locations of the D.C. area. They are not part of an ethnic enclave or of an ethnic entrepreneurial niche.

Unlike migrant businesses in ethnic enclaves with well-established institutions such as banks and associations that support businesses, the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant entrepreneurs’ experiences are different in that they have yet to establish such larger business associations and institutions. It can be concluded that having a business association among the Ethiopian-American and Eritrean-American transnational migrants in the area and in the U.S. would help bring together entrepreneurs from different parts of the metropolitan area and from different parts of the country to become organized and to have better access to information that can support them with their businesses. In addition, such associations could help them create opportunities to network and share their experiences, facilitate collaboration, and promote innovation among the entrepreneurs themselves and with entrepreneurs of other national origins who are located in various cities of the U.S. and beyond. Ethnic, tribal, and national wars between Ethiopia and Eritrea, and regional, political, and tribal divisions among the citizens of these two countries are part of the roadblocks that explain why an Ethiopian-American and Eritrean-American business association has not yet been created in the metropolitan D.C. area.
Effects of Micro- and Macro-level Factors in the Migrant Businesses

With regard to the fourth research question of this dissertation, What key micro-level factors (entrepreneur characteristics, migration experience, and business development) and macro-level factors (economic, social, cultural, and political) affect the success or failure of a business?, this research concludes that the majority of the Ethiopian-American and Eritrean-American migrant entrepreneurs established their businesses because of the supportive environment and the pro-business economic policies in the U.S. Thus, to fulfill their dreams and aspirations of achieving financial success and a secure future, some took the risk of abandoning low-paying jobs and, in a few cases, their formal jobs, to establish their own businesses. Most gained financial success, created employment opportunities for others, and got recognition as a result. This shows the importance of both individual (micro-) and larger (macro-) level factors for migrant entrepreneurship to succeed. For instance, not all migrants were able to establish businesses. Those who were successful business owners shared some similar characteristics and behaviors, such as ability to recognize a business opportunity, take risks, create value, work hard, save and invest, determination, good customer service, flexibility, strong work ethic, ability to network, and ability to multi-task, among others.

This research also concludes that macro-level structures and institutions that value entrepreneurs and businesses are also critical (e.g., adequate market structures, economic policies that create favorable environments for doing business, and positive social, cultural, and political views toward the creation and promotion of a business culture). For instance, the migrant entrepreneurs and the businesses owned and run by the Ethiopians and Eritreans in the area are continuously affected by the political,
economic, social, cultural, and historical contexts of their home societies. Successful entrepreneurs were able to maneuver through such challenges without upsetting their business customers.

**Differences between “Successful” and “Unsuccessful” Entrepreneurial Experiences**

With regard to the fifth research question, What can we learn from these “successful” and “unsuccessful” Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant business experiences and behaviors in Washington?, there are several points to be made. This question is related to a fundamental debate in the study of entrepreneurship between those who believe that entrepreneurship cannot be taught but rather individuals either do or do not have “natural” entrepreneurial individual spirit and behavior (Bird 1989; Evans 1942; McClelland 1961; Schumpeter 1934). Contrary to that argument, there are those who argue that entrepreneurship can be “learned” by individuals, just like any other field of specialization or career (Morrison 1998; Piore 1977; Polanyi 1944).

This study concludes that a combination of both perspectives is applicable to the experiences of the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant entrepreneurs. For instance, not all Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants in the D.C. area were interested in business growing up or even as adults. Some “learned” to become entrepreneurial: for instance, they had to make attitudinal and behavioral changes to see business as a socially prestigious occupation, not a socially stigmatized job, and to start taking risks to venture into establishing a business even when they did not have all the resources, like capital and information, in advance. They started formal businesses by following business rules and regulations carefully. All the successful entrepreneurs had to overcome various challenges related to being a migrant, like language barriers and cultural differences,
but they worked hard for long hours, taking double shifts (14-15 hours a day), saved as much money as they could, and pooled resources, information, and finances among family members to establish their businesses.

The successful migrant entrepreneurs have characteristics that include the ability to recognize business opportunities, the vision to add value to their services and products, the “eye” to choose great business locations, the wisdom to separate business from politics, and such attributes as willingness to work hard, determination, courage, risk-taking, flexibility, and optimism amidst challenging circumstances. They were also able to overcome the devastating effects of war with unexpected resilience in circumstances that for so many of their compatriots had a destructive effect. And, of course, good timing and family and kinship support also played roles in their success. Their personal matters, family issues, and businesses initiatives were highly affected by the dynamics of the political and economic developments of their sending and receiving countries. The entrepreneurial behaviors they have demonstrated could be a source of inspiration and a lesson for the new generation of entrepreneurs.

**Implications for Future Research**

This research has implications for both basic and applied research in the future with regard to the importance of using an integrative approach to understand and analyze the role of migrant entrepreneurs and businesses in the U.S. and the potential of their entrepreneurial skills to advance their host and home countries. The lived experiences of migrant entrepreneurs studied in this research could serve as a basis for conducting more research on this topic and for studying in more detail the potential impact of specific policy applications and recommendations, such as the creation of business associations and business skill development training to transform the various
ventures from small- and medium- to larger-scale firms, to organize and inspire the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants to play an active role in building the economic ties between their host and sending countries, and to enhance the quality and quantity of the businesses of the Ethiopian-American and Eritrean-American communities in the metropolitan D.C. area and beyond.

This research is the beginning of a larger anthropological research endeavor in which I will attempt to situate the Ethiopian-American and Eritrean-American migrant entrepreneurs and businesses in Washington in a much broader context and through comparative studies. For instance with Somalis (Hashim 1997; Kusow 2006), and Sudanese (Abusharaf 2002; Carbett 2001; Holtzman 2008).

First, I would like to study the Ethiopian-American and Eritrean-American entrepreneurs and their businesses in such other U.S. cities as Los Angeles, Chicago, Seattle, Dallas, and Atlanta. I am particularly interested in increasing the number of ethnographic research cases collected. Second, for comparative purposes, I am interested in the study of transnational entrepreneurship experiences among Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants in Canada, Europe, the Middle East, Asia and Africa. This could lead to writing a more thorough ethnography and generate comparative studies of Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant entrepreneurial experiences globalized era. For instance, some migrant entrepreneurs might have lived and experienced multiple sites.

Many individuals from the Ethiopian and Eritrean migrant communities have come to the U.S. without having all the initial necessary resources to start their own businesses, but somehow some of them, innovatively, taking risks, making sacrifices, and through hard work, managed to not only establish their own business in the U.S.,
but were also able to expand their businesses transnationally with successful results. Therefore, this dissertation adds to the literature of international migration and entrepreneurship by showcasing and analyzing the experiences of different ethnographic cases of Ethiopian-American and Eritrean-American migrants in the Metropolitan D.C. area.

Migration and entrepreneurship are two trending phenomena that continue to play a crucial role in the globalized economic system. Currently, on a global scale, there is a systemic connectedness, with an increased speed, scale, and volume of global interactions. There is also a fast-growing discontent with economic and social inequalities between and within nations and states, with the global financial crisis, uneven population growth, poverty and food insecurity, environmental challenges such as global warming and increased desertification, and various global, regional, national, and local movements with demands for better economic, political, social, and cultural opportunities and representations. This interconnected global environment will result in the movement of millions of people from one part of the world to another in search of stability and better opportunities for themselves, their families, their communities, and their next generation.

Entrepreneurs and their entrepreneurial environments, with their unique characteristics such as risk taking, creativity, innovation, dynamism, ability to network and to work in teams, have been and will be at the forefront of solving global crises. Various areas of complex challenges during the twenty-first century in such areas as the economy, education, health, food security, environmental protection, and climate change, among others will require various areas of alternative solutions, as there will be
no one-size-fits-all formula for addressing those complex problems. Contemporary anthropological research could help promote effective intercultural communication and international businesses and commerce initiatives through face-to-face interactions or through the media, Internet, smart phones, and other high-tech information technologies and flows. This could be done conceptualizing and investigating research questions in a local field site, but also studying global fields, and the relations between sites and the dynamics that impact one’s field work.

This research shows that Ethiopian and Eritrean migrants in the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area are living increasingly complex lives, maintaining social, financial, cultural, and political connections in the host environment and transnationally with either the home country or with multiple countries. The successful entrepreneurs among them are able to survive and also to thrive in this globally interconnected world. Entrepreneurs and businesses strive to find opportunity amidst crisis and, in the process, they end up creating jobs and alternative, sustainable local and global solutions.
APPENDIX

DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS

Table A-1. Demographic Characteristics of the Entrepreneurs

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<th>Variable</th>
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<td></td>
<td>2 F</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Group (2F &amp; 2M)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 (20-30s)</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 (40s)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 (50s)</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 (60s)</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Elementary</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 High School</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>10 College Diploma</td>
<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 Undergraduate (B.A.)</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Graduate (M.A.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ownership</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11 Family</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8 Individual</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Group</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Country</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9 Ethiopia</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9 Eritrea</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 ( Mixed Family Ethiopian/Eritrean)</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Group</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8 Tigrinya</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 Amhara</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Mixed (Amhara/Tigrinya)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2 Oromo</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Gurage</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Bilen</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Group (3Amhara and 1 Tigrinya)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Time od migration to the U.S.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7 before 1980</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 1981-1990</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8 after 1991</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Number out of 20</td>
<td>Percentage (%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
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<td>Reason for Migration to U.S.</td>
<td>6 Higher studies</td>
<td>30</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 D. V.</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 Asylum seekers</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Refugee</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Tourist visa</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Undocumented</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 family reunion</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family Background in Business</td>
<td>6 Yes</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>14 No, developed by experience</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 U Street Corridor</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3 Adams Morgan</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 D.C</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 Virginia</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 Maryland</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business scale</td>
<td>12 Small</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7 Medium</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1 Large</td>
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<tr>
<td>Main Customers</td>
<td>3 Migrants</td>
<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8 Mainstream</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9 Both</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sources of Capital</td>
<td>16 saving and social capital</td>
<td>80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 saving and loan</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 saving and partnership</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Types of Businesses</td>
<td>8 traditional (3 restaurant, 2 breakfast, 2 grocery, 1 take-out)</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5 Combination (1 film, 1 advertisement, 2 entertainment, 1 clothing)</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7 Non-traditional (1 taxicab, 2 parking, 3 gas station, 1 hotel, 1 7-Eleven, 1 real estate)</td>
<td>35</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

In 2012-2013, Mussa Sultan Idris worked at Elon University, in North Carolina, as a pre-doctoral fellow and as an instructor of Anthropology. From 2003 to 2005, he was Chair and instructor in the Department of Sociology and Social Work at the University of Asmara, in Eritrea. Between 2000 and 2002, Mr. Idris completed his Master of Arts in Anthropology at the University of Florida, through a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) scholarship fund.

Mr. Idris speaks Amharic, Tigrinya, and English. He has also worked as a consultant for various NGOs in Eritrea on such topics as social entrepreneurship, health, and education. In 1994-1999, Mr. Idris earned his blended Bachelor of Arts in Sociology and Anthropology, from the University of Asmara, Eritrea.

Regarding his teaching experience, for more than ten years Mr. Idris has taught undergraduate classes in Anthropology, Sociology, and African Studies, both at the University of Florida (Gainesville, in the Department of Anthropology and at the Center for African Studies) and at Elon University in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology), and at the University of Asmara in the Department of Sociology and Social Work).

Idris received his Ph.D. from the University of Florida in the fall of 2013.