



THE AFRICAN DIASPORA IN CANADA: NEGOTIATING IDENTITY & BELONGING

Edited by Wisdom J. Tetey & Korbla P. Pupilampu

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BETWEEN HOME & EXILE: Dynamics of Negotiating Be-Longing among Young Oromos Living in Toronto

Martha K. Kumsa

INTRODUCTION

THIS CHAPTER PRESENTS an empirical study examining the experiences of negotiating be-longing among young Oromo refugees living in Toronto.¹ I use hyphenated be-longing to unfreeze the fixity in conventional notions of predetermined belonging and to emphasize the often-observed movement and fluidity inherent in the longing in belonging (Ilcan 2002; Philip 1992; Probyn 1996). The study is part of a larger work in which I explore the experiences of navigating the shifting territories of identity and cohesion.² I selected a small, community-based sample of eighteen self-identified, young Oromos of varying age, class, gender, religion, region of birth, level of education, routes to Canada, immigration status, and proficiency in *Afaan Oromo*³ and English. Rich qualitative data were generated through story telling, evocative exercises, one-to-one and small group conversations, individual and group reflections, activity participation (participant observation), and a focus group debate. Narrative

activities and exercises were structured around the Lifeline Exercise (Nadeau 1996) divided into weekly themes including childhood memories, experiences of flight/dislocation, life in Canada, dreams and nightmares, and hopes for the future. We met every week in three small groups and in four one-to-one sessions for an average of seven weeks in two rounds. This process built up to a larger focus group debate at the end of the second round of weekly sessions.

Data were generated from February to May 2001, and all sessions were both audio- and video-taped. Six events of ethnographic activity participation were completed intermittently. Throughout those weeks, participants shared sacred stories and precious objects, they sang songs and chanted poems. They cried and laughed as they made sense of their narratives, disputed meanings, and reflected on and co-theorized their personal and collective experiences. For the most part, negotiating meanings and reconstructing narratives happened throughout the multiple sessions of the prolonged engagement as part of my broader strategies of minimizing the effects of power between the researcher and participants (Lather 1991; Smith 1999). But I continued to negotiate my interpretations with participants to enhance trustworthiness as I further analyzed the data. For analysis, I used critically interpretive and reflexive strategies of hermeneutics (Avelsson and Sköldbberg 2001; Denzin 2001; Geertz 1973; Mason 1996; Myerhoff and Ruby 1982). To enrich my interpretive repertoire, I used multiple models of narrative analysis from across disciplinary boundaries, including literature, anthropology, psychoanalysis, psychology, and sociology (Cortazzi 1993).

My analysis evidenced that narratives are context-sensitive, collaboratively constructed, edited, and reconstructed stories (Chambon 1995; Chanfrault-Duchet 1991; Gubrium and Holstein 1998; Linde 1993). It showed that stories and narratives constitute the strings by which participants construct a sense of self at the same time as they weave themselves into the fabric of the wider society. Indeed, an overarching finding of the study indicated that the intricate processes of negotiating multiple layers of identity and cohesion are also processes of constructing multiple layers of be-longing simultaneously. For the scope of this chapter, I focus on be-longing and present an analysis of three themes that emerged from the data. I explore competing theoretical perspectives throughout the analysis. But first, background regarding the *glocalizing* processes that brought the young Oromo refugees to Canada is provided.

OROMO GLOBALIZATION

The globalization of Oromo refugees is a unique facet of wider African globalization. By African globalization, I mean the movement of African bodies through global spaces. In this depiction, African globalization is an ancient phenomenon. Some works claim the presence of Africans in Ireland and Britain long before Indo-Europeans arrived in the area (Ali and Ali 1994)

and of African travelers in ancient Greece (Miles 1989). But Africans were also forcefully removed from their homelands and brought into the New World during the Atlantic Slave Trade (Rodney 1972). Although Africans are no strangers to forceful mass displacements, I see a dramatic difference between the slave and refugee facets of African movement to the West. In the sixteenth century, Africans were dragged out of their homeland, tied, bound, and brought to the West under torturous duress. Today, coercion has changed in form, content, and direction, thus policing the boundaries and preventing Africans from coming to the West (Chimni 1998; Richmond 1994). While African slaves desperately refused to come then, now many Africans desperately seek to come to the West. They line up at the gates of immigration offices and consulates to acquire immigrant and visitor visas. News headlines seethe with hundreds sinking and perishing in overloaded boats heading for Europe. Many African refugees wait in refugee camps for years and go through the ordeal of humiliating interviews to get resettled in the West.

Historicizing this incredible reversal is crucial for understanding the current realities of the young Oromo refugees in this study. As theorists, such as Fanon (1963) and Foucault (1979), would argue, in the period between the slave and refugee facets of African globalization, the application of disciplinary coercion has moved from the physical body to the soul. This transformation in the technologies of coercion coincides with the emergence, consolidation, and globalization of modernity, with its liberal principles, just as colonialism and imperialism account for the emergence of the nation-state. Just as the nation-state sits at the heart of modernity, the production of refugees sits at the heart of the nation-state. Processes that create and gel together the nation-state also exclude and expel deviants as refugees at one and the same time (Adleman 1999; Keeley 1996). Yet the production and expulsion of refugees is never an isolated internal and local process. It results from the interplay of powerful local and global forces engaged in the project of creating and maintaining nation-states through inclusion and exclusion (Chimni 1998; Ilcan 2002; Moussa 1993). More often than not, regimes that produce refugees are regimes that are put in place by outside forces to serve the interests of external powers (Abdi 1987; Woodward 1987; Zolberg, Shurke, and Aguayo 1989).

African representation in Western imagination has been shifting in congruence with the changes and continuities of the processes by which African bodies move through global spaces. Thus, ancient Greeks and Romans depicted Africans as physically different human beings and as the imagined *Other* – the barbarian beyond the borders – just as they depicted all those who were different from them. Christianity imagined the African as the evil *Other*, the devil, Satan (Miles 1989). At the dawn of modernity, Western imagination represented the African as the tormented brute savage (Hobbes) and the noble savage (Rousseau), but savage nonetheless (Mama 1995). As skin colour gained *scientific rationality* at the height of modernity and scientific discovery,

the inferiority and non-human status of the African became *objective truth*. These representations served to create conditions for, and justify the brutalities of, slavery, colonialism, imperialism, and the *White Man's Burden* of the civilizing mission. Indeed, forces that moved the bodies of African slaves to the West and those that currently move the bodies of African refugees across multiple national boundaries are the same forces using shifting representations and serving different phases of capitalism (Miles 1989; Wallerstein 1997).

The movement of Oromo refugees in the global space is part and parcel of this larger process. Oromos are among the ancient indigenous peoples of the Horn of Africa region, mostly inhabiting present-day Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia. Long before Oromo refugee bodies were globalized, ideas about Oromos had migrated to the West mainly through the activities of Western explorers, slave traders, travelers, missionaries, military personnel, anthropologists, and historians. Until recently, extant literature referred to Oromos as Galla, although the people refer to themselves as Oromo (Hassen 1990; Hultin 1996; Jalata 1993; Lata 1998; Melba 1988). Most ethnographic accounts depict the Oromo egalitarian socio-political system of *gadaa* as a powerful instrument of Oromo collective self-identification (Blackhurst 1978; Baxter 1978; Hultin 1996; Kassam 1987; Kassam and Megerssa 1996; Knutsson 1967; Legesse 2000; Van de Loo 1991). While ethnographic works are subtly political, the more overtly political works come from Ethiopianist historiography that constructs Oromos as Gallas and as Others of both ancient and *modern* Ethiopia (Bahrey 1954; Clapham 1990; Haberland 1963; Levine 1974; Ullendorff 1960).

Beyond the racialized imagining of the African Other, then, Oromos stir Western imagination in yet another layer through unique images of Ethiopia. Sorenson (1992) identifies two more othering discourses: anti-communism and Christian mythology. While anti-communist discourses project the image of communist Ethiopia as war-ravaged and a famine-stricken land of poverty and starving children, they have also provided sanctuary for Oromo refugees fleeing from the horrors of communist Ethiopia. In Christian mythology, ancient Ethiopia is constructed as the land of Prester John, the legendary Christian king who triumphed over Islam and whom Europeans sought to locate somewhere in Abyssinia. As the Other of ancient Ethiopia, then, Galla evokes the image of an invading horde of heathens threatening to engulf this Christian island of Abyssinia. As the Other of modern Greater Ethiopia, Galla evokes the image of the uncivilized savage and the inherently *inferior* invading horde bent on destroying modernity and civilization (Hultin 1996; Lata 1998; Melba 1988; Triulzi 1994; Zitelmann 1996). In both cases, the images evoke Western collective unconscious as strong Western identification with, and desire for, Ethiopia, and strong disidentification with, and aversion for, its Oromo Other.

This unfavourable location of Oromos in Western imagination has serious implications for young Oromo refugees, and indeed, for Oromo self-identification in the contemporary glocalizing world dominated by the West and by Western

institutional structures. Hence, Melba (1988, 3) laments that Oromo history “is a work [historians] have unjustly treated or unjustifiably ignored in the past,” and Lata (1998) warns that Oromos may have cast off the Galla label, but the negative images it evokes persist in the present politicized workings of Western institutions. Legesse (2000) reveals a racialized layer of Western selective identification and disidentification. He glorifies the Oromo *gadaa* as a uniquely African, democratic political system and calls to question Western silence on *gadaa*. Charging the West and Western anthropologists categorically, he specifically takes Fortes and Evans-Pritchard (1940) to task for leaving *gadaa* out of their typology of African political institutions. Asking why (and answering his own question), Legesse writes:

Was it really because they could find no evidence of democratic institutions in Africa? Did they consider these institutions to be so different from their Western counterparts that they could not possibly be examined under the same intellectual rubric? Was it any more justifiable to compare African and European monarchies, than it was to compare African and European democracies?

I suggest that both types of institutions were equally divergent from, or comparable to, the European prototypes. However, since monarchy was in decline in most of Europe, and the transition to democracy became the epitome of Europe’s highest political aspirations, admitting that some varieties of democracy were firmly planted in Africa in the sixteenth century when in fact they were not fully established in Britain, the United States and France until the seventeenth or eighteenth centuries and in some parts of Europe as late as the middle of the twentieth century would have made the ideological premise of the *civilizing mission* somewhat implausible. The idea, further, that African democracies may have some constitutional features that are more advanced than their European counterparts was and still is considered quite heretical. (2000, 29–30)

Such Western identification with Abyssinia and aversion for its Oromo Others sits at the heart of the historical processes that constructed imperial Ethiopia as a modern nation-state and continued to perpetuate the repression of Oromos through years of colonial domination. The massive exodus of refugees is a simultaneous product of the construction of Ethiopia (Holt 1970; Marcus 1975) and the continued maintenance of its hegemony (Abdi 1987; Bulcha 1988, 2002; Clay and Holcomb 1986). An invention of powerful global and local players, Ethiopia was created as a territorial political entity through a unique extension of the infamous western-colonial “Scramble for Africa” (Holcomb and Ibssa 1990). Oromo resistance that later developed into an Oromo national liberation struggle (Hassen 1990; Jalata 1993) was a localizing response to these globalizing processes of colonial expansion. Although they constitute

more than half of the Ethiopian population numerically, Oromos were reduced to a politically-dominated, economically-exploited, and culturally-degraded minority. As Western powers continued to consolidate Ethiopian hegemony, their aversion for Oromos crystallized in their violent repression and repeated brutal bombings of Oromo peasants when they rose up against the tyranny of Abyssinian⁴ colonialism (Jalata 1993; Melba 1988).

The discursive construction and consolidation of Ethiopia as a hegemony of the Amhara minority ethnic group automatically excluded the Oromo majority, thus forming the crucible in which Oromo national identity was constructed as a counter-hegemonic, discursive practice (Hultin 1996; Megerssa 1996; Lewis 1996; Triulzi 1994). When centuries of oppression exploded into a revolution in 1974 and the pet regime of the West came tumbling down, Western powers lost Ethiopia to the Eastern side of the Cold War divide. This time, even the Oromo national liberation struggle gained some support from the American-led Western nations in fighting against the communist regime. This time the West promised to facilitate the building of true democracy in Ethiopia (Lata 1999). After the 1991 overthrow of the regime, however, they reneged on their promises and instated another Abyssinian minority ethnic domination – this time the Tigre. Thus, as these mutually exclusive, antagonistic identities competed, many Oromos, including the parent(s) of the young Oromos in this study, were jailed, disappeared, executed, exiled, or joined the armed resistance.

Most Western nations continued to actively support the Tigrayan minority group even as they blatantly derailed the fledgling democracy. When the conflict intensified, the West dealt Oromos a bittersweet deal by denying them the necessary support for democratic participation in the affairs of the country but facilitating the *safe departure* of Oromo leaders out of the country into exile (Lata 1998, 1999). When this led to a massive exodus of Oromo refugees, Western NGOs led by the United States made a concerted effort to prioritize the resettlement of Oromo refugees in the West. While it seems humanitarian on the surface, this subtle process resulted in removing the *Oromo roadblock* and facilitating the Tigrayan move to establish a single-ethnic, single-party, minority dictatorship in Ethiopia. The young Oromos in this study came to Canada as part of these complex processes within the nation-state. Some came as children with refugee adults, others as minors reuniting with their refugee parent(s) or as refugees in their own right. And these processes have a deep impact on them, not only because their very dispersal from the homeland is predicated on Western disidentification, but also because this disidentification continues to shape the texture of their mundane, everyday living and sense of be-longing.

UNCERTAIN SPACES OF BE-LONGING

In this section, I theoretically position this paper among the voices in the literature and move on to critically analyze how the different perspectives play -

out in the empirical data. By analyzing three layers of be-longing: belonging to Canada, be-longing with Blacks, and be-longing with Oromos, I attempt to make visible the need for an alternative framework.

Voices in the Literature

The depiction of be-longing is a hotly disputed territory where two principal, polarized perspectives compete. In nativist discourses, every person belongs to a natural and authentic ethnic or national group rooted in a natural habitat; a homeland. The national substance, the essence that makes one a member of the nation, is transmitted from generation to generation via genealogical continuity (Armstrong 1982; Conner 1994; Van den Berghe 1992). In this sense, “full belonging, the warm sensation that people understand not merely what you say, but what you mean, can only come when you are among your own people in your native land” (Ignatieff 1993, 7). Constructionist discourses dispute this essentialist fixity and argue that be-longing to any categorical identity is created within social relations and through multiple forms of othering and exclusion (Ilcan 2002; Probyn 1996). In nativist discourses, be-longing is given, final, and binding. In constructionist views, it is a constant movement through social distance, neither final nor binding. But how do refugees negotiate these disputed territories of be-longing? And how do these polarized notions of be-longing empirically play out in the experiences of refugees?

Empirical studies of the experiences of refugees abound. Extant literature is steeped with them. Bosnian refugees in Australia (Colic-Peisker and Walker 2003) and the United States (Keyes 2000), Somali refugees in the United Kingdom (Griffiths 1997), Burmese (Hyndman and Walton-Roberts 2000), Ghanaian (Manuh 1998; Opoku-Dapaah 1992), Salvadoran (Jacob 1994; Young 2001), Southeast Asian (Phillion 2001; Beiser 1999), Central American (Hrycak 2001), and Eritrean and Ethiopian women (Moussa 1993) refugees in Canada are only a few examples. Some works localize the problem of settlement and focus on issues of mental health, loss, and victimization (e.g., Beiser 1999; Kamaldeep 2002; Kohli and Mather 2003; Young 2001). Others externalize the focus towards global, structural barriers (Alastair 2003; Leddy 1997; Opoku-Dapaah 1992). While most of these studies do not directly examine identity or be-longing, the issues they do examine sit at the core of identity and be-longing, albeit implicitly. Many studies do examine identity as their core issue (see Camino and Krulfeld 1994; Fantino and Colak 2001; Griffiths 1997; Manuh 1998; Okeke-Ihejirika 2003; Phillion 2001; Saucier et al. 2002). However, they fall short of making the theoretical link between identity and be-longing. Indeed, there are studies that do explore refugee be-longing (see Jodeyr 2003 and Kohn 2002), but they too fall short of making visible the intimate link with identity and cohesion. This intimate link remains invisible even in works that critically interrogate borders and develop transnational

frameworks for research (Hyndman and Walton-Roberts 2000) and argue for postnational practice (Alastair 2003).

Zooming in on the experiences of Oromo refugees, studies range from those examining political factors in Oromo refugeeization (Abdi 1987; Bulcha 1988, 2002; Clay and Holcomb 1986) to those exploring issues of identity in Oromo refugees (Gow 2001, 2002; Sorenson 1996). Other works whose main focus is on other groups also discuss experiences of Oromo refugees as asides (Matsuoka and Sorenson 2001; Sorenson 1992, 1993). Reflecting the wider polarization, however, this body of literature is also permeated with a dichotomous depiction of Oromo identity. While some present a strong nativist depiction (Bulcha 1988, 2002), others hotly dispute this and paint a strong constructionist picture instead (Sorenson 1992, 1996). Furthermore, like their cohorts in the wider discourse, these works fail to explore the intimate interwovenness of identity, cohesion, and be-longing. I argue, therefore, that without this crucial link, studies with refugees and other diasporic communities cannot overcome the constraining blindfolds of these dichotomized perspectives.

Coming to Canada as an Oromo refugee myself and subjecting my three teenage children to the refugee life, I find these mutually exclusive binaries severely constraining. They fail to capture the complexities of our experience as we attempt to make sense of our new realities and relate to each other in a new way in a new land. They fail to capture the lived, mundane realities of many Oromo refugees, young and old alike. They foreclose the creative possibilities of the in-between spaces of marginality in which refugee lives are embodied and embedded. Some works do capture these spaces of hybridity by making visible both the shifts and the fixities in the construction of identity among Oromo refugees (Gow 2001, 2002). Beyond overcoming the great nativist-constructionist divide, however, these works hardly make the crucial link between identity and be-longing. It was in an attempt to make sense of our reality and bridge this yawning gap in the production of knowledge that I embarked on the study of identity and cohesion. In this journey, I have discovered the intimate link to be-longing and developed what I call dispersal-affinity as an alternative conceptual framework for both analysis and practice. To elicit and stress the need for dispersal-affinity, therefore, I critically engage competing perspectives in the literature as I construct my analysis of the empirical material in the following subsections.

Be-longing to Canada

For young Oromo refugees, escaping the horrors of Ethiopia and landing in Canada does not automatically mean they be-long to Canada. Canadian be-longing is a contested territory they have to negotiate artfully in ways unique to them. As well, Ethiopia is not something they leave behind or escape

(Matsuoka and Sorenson 2001). They continue to wrestle with temporally and spatially dislocated Ethiopia. Encounters with Abyssinians in Toronto mean renegotiating old power relationships in their new home, where old hostilities continue in new ways. The stereotypical question, Where are you from? draws war-ravaged Ethiopia right into the heart of their interaction with Canadians. Television images of starving Ethiopians peer at them through Canadian eyes. Racializing discourses congealing Canada as a White nation greet them the instant they arrive, and they have to make sense of what it means to be Black in Canada. They experience these as exclusionary boundaries of be-longing that they have to negotiate. The discourse of Canadian peacekeeping is constructed against the touchstone of warring Others, thus congealing Canada as a peaceful nation and sending the message: If you are from warring Others, you don't belong with us. Television images of famine and poverty are constructed against Canadian plenty and wealth, erecting more boundaries of othering and not be-longing. Below are some narrative clips from primary school encounters of those who came to Canada as children.⁵

EDO: It's little kids stuff ... [They say] "I see you guys on TV," blah blah blah and joke around ... You know, the poor people thing ... malnourished kids come on TV. So they go, "You guys are poor" and stuff like that. And I go, like, "Well, I'm not Ethiopian!" They go, like, "What are you?" I'm, like, "Oh, shut up," or something, you know? ... [They say] "You're Ethiopian! You look Ethiopian!" ... I go, "That's a different part of that country, I'm not from that part that you see on TV!" ... I don't wanna be known as Ethiopian, but I have to say Ethiopian because nobody knows our problem ...

WARTU: Yeah! Is it true that in Ethiopia you drink dirty water? I'm, like, "No! Like, what part of Ethiopia? Like, I've never even seen that part! I never seen dirty water back home!"

IBSITU: And it makes you, like, it makes you feel, like, bad inside, like, you know, did I really come from there? But I get mad, and I get really defensive.

Yet Ethiopia is shrouded in ambiguity, and sometimes identifying Oromo kids as Ethiopians is not to exclude, but to include them as those different from the different Other – to distinguish them from *bad* Blacks and Africans. Here, Western identification with Ethiopia is at work:

IBSITU: And sometimes they think it is a complement, too. They go, "No, you're not African, you look different, you're not Black."

WARTU: You don't look African ...

KUWEE: You're Brown, not Black?

IBSITU: Yeah, my friend's, like, she hates Africans, OK? She goes, "I think African girls are so rude." I'm, like, "Excuse me! I'm African!" She goes, "No, you're not. You're not African, you're like, you know, you're, you're ..."
"I'm African!" (people laugh) She goes, "You're not!" I go, "I'm Black!" And "You know, Ethiopians are so different!" I go, "But we're African, though."
She goes, "You are?" I'm just, so stupid!

Thus, even after the rupture with Ethiopia and escape to Canada, Ethiopia maintains its symbolic grip through its discursive continuity in Canadian imagination. Be-longing to Canada requires negotiating these formidable boundaries of exclusion and becoming Canadians. Throughout the sessions, including the larger focus group, participants shared experiences and discussed various layers of becoming Canadians and be-longing to Canada. Below are some excerpts.

WALANA GROUP

WARTU: Those kind of things make you feel, like, "You know what? I don't belong here!" Even if you're a citizen, you know you don't belong there ... It doesn't make any difference if you are a citizen. It doesn't change you to say, "You know what, I'm Canadian because I'm a citizen."

ADDOOYYEE GROUP

JALANE: Do you consider yourself, ... like, do you feel like a Canadian citizen?

DINSIRI: There is always the back home for me. So I don't feel Canada is, like, you know, my country. But at the same time, I feel that I am, I pay my taxes; I do any other thing other Canadians do. So I'm as much a Canadian as they are ...

JALANE: But is that sort of a *head* knowledge ... or do you really, really feel that? Like, do you really feel you're a Canadian? (people laugh)

AYANE: I mean, how do you feel like a Canadian? ... I do feel like a Canadian, I feel like an Oromo and a Canadian ... Whether I like it or not, I have a lot of Canada in my life ... a lot of Canadian culture ... a lot of Canadian things are a part of who I am ...

JALANE: What does it mean to be Canadian?

AYANE: You can be a Canadian and, for example, if your family was Chinese, and you were born here, you can be a Canadian. But you will still have something else, but as long as you don't have that other level, like, your identity and culture, you don't have anything else. That's a Canadian!

KUWEE: So who is a Canadian?

AYANE: You have to have European ancestry [if] you're a Canadian ... a very volatile definition, but still, if you are European, you're Canadian.

JALANE: If you are European, you're Canadian?

AYANE: That's the same for me ... you have to be White to be Canadian.

JALANE: How can you feel Canadian, then, if you're not White?

FOCUS GROUP

F: But there's a difference! ... I am an Oromo by identity and a Canadian by citizenship. But, like, I'm not, like, Canadian by identity and culture and ...

M: Hold on! Hold on! Hold on!

F: No! There's a difference! No! No! No! Citizenship and identity are different!

M: Whose culture are you living in?! (laughs)

M: Sure, everybody can be Canadian! But say if I become a Canadian, and let's say I rob a bank, then I'm no more a Canadian. Everybody is gonna say, he's an immigrant from Ethiopia, or something. (people laugh)

F: That's true! You're not Canadian.

M: That's right!

M: But if you do, like, if I play football or basketball good, then they're gonna say I'm Canadian. (people laugh)

GAMMEE GROUP

EDO: I don't wanna forget my background and say I'm Canadian. I do wanna be called Oromo-Canadian, because I do live here and ... because I did grow up here, too, so ... I don't wanna just exclude Canada ...

Y. B.: Canada is not like Africa to me. I like it still ... No, I don't feel like I belong, but I still feel home, if I go for a different place to move, whatever, I still miss Canada ... I still feel home. That's the only town I like. I stayed here longer ...

YOM: I feel like I'm an Oromo. I don't feel like I'm a Canadian at all! I wish I could ...

LATIFA: I'm a Canadian citizen ... but I don't know; I don't consider myself to be Canadian. Like, I consider myself Oromo-Canadian, I don't know ... OK. Like, when I went to Australia, I felt homesick ... and I wanted to come back to Canada. Yeah. Even when I went to the States, I couldn't wait to come back to Canada, to Toronto ... This is where I always come back.

GEE: Me, I just got my citizen! (people laugh) ... Proud? ... No. I feel that little bit happy because I can leave and come back. Even if I could go home, back home, and come back anytime I want. They can't say no to me, you know. I am Canadian! ... I think, me, I'm Oromo, period! ... people in this country could call me Canadian-Oromo. If they prefer, they could call me Oromo. I don't care!

What comes out loud and clear from these narratives is the tension between citizenship and nationality (dubbed identity) – citizenship associated with contingency, and nationality with essence. Nationality is tangled up with a deeper sense of home, ancestry, and origin (Armstrong 1982; Conner 1994; Geertz 1973; Van den Berghe 1992). The thicker the blood and the farther back it goes into genealogy and history, the deeper the sense of be-longing it evokes. Participants experience this end as a site of exclusion with no space to become Canadians and be-long to Canada. Oromos are and will always be Oromos, and Canadians always Canadians. At the other end of the tension, however, most participants experience citizenship as a site of inclusion, as something malleable and instrumental, something they can weave into their Oromo souls, become Canadians, and be-long to Canada. Yet they know that Oromos cannot *really, really feel* Canadian and be-long to Canada, as they find be-longing to be layered. They can attain some dimensions of it, but true Canadianness is something unreachable, something that remains beyond acquiring culture, paying taxes, and gaining citizenship. Navigating this tension between the exclusion and inclusion of essence and contingency, participants seek solace in the hybridity of becoming Oromo-Canadian and flutter between Oromoness and Canadianness. This fluttering varies from participant to participant and, for a participant, from moment to moment.

This tension also makes visible another tension between the routes (mobility) of exile and the roots (anchorage) of home in the discourses of globalization

and diasporization (Clifford 1997; Ilcan 2002; Malkki 1997). Participants experience home and be-longing as both fixed and mobile, depending on which discourses they slip in and out of. In the nativist discourses, home is fixed and tangled up with homeland, as Wartu laments, “those kind of things makes you feel like, ‘You know what? I don’t belong here!’” with or without Canadian citizenship. She can only be-long to one, and only one, authentic nation rooted in its true homeland, and that is where she is born. Constructionist discourses challenge such deep territoriality of the nation and one-to-one correspondence between peoples and places (Gupta and Ferguson 2001; Malkki 1997). Speaking from within these discourses, Y. B. and Latifa long for Toronto when they long for home, and a male focus group participant defines his Canadian be-longing situationally, depending on whether he robs a bank or plays basketball “well.” Thus, beyond the instrumentality of Canadian citizenship and the exclusivity of its nationality, participants challenge the notions of both fixity and eternal mobility. They create a fluid space between home and exile where they perform their unique sense of home and be-longing (Bhabha 1994; Gow 2002; Ilcan 2002; Probyn 1996). In this space, be-longing is experienced and performed as layered and multifaceted.

Be-longing with Blacks

Just because racializing discourses that congeal Canada as a White nation mark them as Blacks and leave them out, it does not mean that Blackness is up for grabs for young Oromos. As a form of categorical identity, Blackness has to be negotiated and earned. Participants encounter immense conflicts, both within their families and in the communities among their Black peers. On the one hand, Oromo families and community elders cope with the colour-coded exclusion by splitting Blackness into good and bad, thus triangulating the Black/White, bad/good dichotomies in order to be different from the different (Cole, 2003). They attempt to control and *save* their children from dressing like, talking like, and walking like, *bad* Blacks. They strive to save them from Jamaicans who they assume epitomize bad Blackness. On the other hand, some of their Black peers challenge young Oromos for not being Black enough and for being nerdish and acting White (Dei et al. 1997). It is in the context of these forces tearing them apart that young Oromos negotiate the hotly contested territories of Blackness – away from the White world, yet so deeply immersed and soaked in it.

Y. B.: Once you’re Black, you’re Black! ... They treat you the same.

GEE: They don’t care if you are African.

LATIFA: You know what? That Jamaican thing, I think that’s in the African culture.

Y. B. That's within Africans. Basically, to White people, Black is Black. There's no such thing as Jamaican to them. Just, once you're Black, you're Black ...

LATIFA: No! It's just, like, to the Ethiopians, like, Jamaicans are the bad guys, and then, to the other White culture, it's just Black in general ... Like the Oromo and Ethiopian culture, they use Jamaican as a negative.

To White people, "Once you're Black, you're Black," says Y. B., speaking from homogenizing discourses of racialization. It is only Oromos and other Africans that label Jamaicans as bad Blacks. And group members agree on this. Thus, as the young Oromos hold adults responsible for badmouthing and portraying Jamaicans in a negative light, divisive schemes of racialization and their project of lateralizing conflict slip by unnoticed. Despite discourses of homogeneity, however, Blackness proves to be a deeply contested territory where boundaries are moved and re-moved, displaced and re-placed. This discursive multiplicity and fluidity affirms the claim that Blackness is a historical category rather than a skin colour (Hall 1996). It is a space of multilocality where young Oromos have to bend, transform, and relocalize it into their unique singularities. As an uneven site of difference and struggle, Blackness has to be negotiated and earned. Who is Black and who is not is disputed and constantly contested. Fully embracing and longing to be-long in Blackness is not good enough to be accepted into the space of those who identify as Black. This is evidenced in the clip below:

GEE: He just say, "Fake nigger!" (people laugh) ... Some Jamaican guy, he's just saying that because ... "Fake nigger, fake nigger!" I looked at him. I'm sending message, he just don't. I looked at him, I shook my head and turned around, and he's still talking. I meant it, if he understanding me, I mean, like, you're nigger, too! What the hell, you're cursing yourself, too! And I'm talking.

KUWEE: Maybe he meant, fake means, like, you're not a real nigger, he is the real nigger?

GEE: No! Not even just that. It's just that, I don't know. Some niggers just don't have a line to talk to girls.

LATIFA: No, fake nigger, there is no definition behind it. Not just ...

EDO: May be, like, it means, like ... What he said is, like, I'm a nigger, you know, it shows how, like, I don't know, man! (people talk)

GEE: You weak, you not, you can't stand out for yourself ...

LATIFA: Weak, like a wannabe.

GEE: Weak, like you wanna be Black.

Y. B.: Yeah, fake, weak.

Latifa says, "Fake nigger, there's no definition behind it," but Gee interprets it as, "You weak," and "You can't stand out for yourself," and "You wanna be Black." To me, this suggests that Gee's Blackness is not real enough for his Jamaican friend. At best, it is an aspiration, and Gee is a *wannabe Black*. At worst, it is bogus Blackness, and Gee is a *fake nigger* who does not deserve the appellation. This puts Gee in an ambiguous position in the eyes of his friend. He is Black, just like himself. Yet he is not Black, in that his Blackness does not quite contrast with the White Other. Here, neither Blackness nor Whiteness signifies a skin colour. If the fake Blackness in the above clip is shrouded in vague terms, below it is crystallized in the name of Ethiopia:

KUWEE: So [your White friends] recognize you as different from other Blacks. And how about other Blacks?

EDO: Yeah. They kind of segregate you, too. Not if you, like, it depends how you act with them ...

YOM: Yeah. I know, like, when I first came, I used to have this Jamaican friend. He thinks, like, we Ethiopians, we don't act like we're Black. So he told me that he doesn't like Ethiopian people ... Yeah, like, he told me they act like Whites. He thinks, like, we say we're White, and we're not Black and stuff.

KUWEE: And we kind of look down on them, on other Black people, right?

YOM: Yeah, that's why they don't like us.

EDO: But we mix! I mean, my school is, like, Black. They are usually, like, Jamaicans. Like, I don't hang around with them, but we say, like, always, hi, whatever. So.

KUWEE: But you don't get really closer and become friends?

EDO: Because of my mom, you know. (giggles) She's, like, making me hate them ... I don't know. It's the way they [Oromo parents] talk about them. It's the way they hate and, I don't know. They hate everybody, man! (laughs)

They don't like Jamaicans, or ... They don't like the way they dress, you know. So as soon as you do something, they think you are a part of that, you know. That's not true. But it does put something on you, like ...

Here, the hating of Ethiopians is ironic, in that Ethiopia constituted the very symbol of Blackness. The love of Ethiopia was first crystallized into the movement of "Ethiopianism" in Jamaica (Cohen 1997). But some Jamaicans don't like Ethiopians and, by extension, Oromos. And the sentiment of hostility is constructed as mutual, thus, yet again, obscuring the racializing processes that pit them against each other in the first place. Thus, to some Jamaicans, Oromos evoke the African, and Africa spells multiple ghostly returns of the repressed from the collective unconscious of enslaved Africans. As Cohen argues, "To many, *Africa* signified enslavement, poverty, denigration, exploitation, White superiority, the loss of language, and the loss of self-respect" (1997, 40). Africans from the continent also signify Africans that collaborated with White slave raiders and sold their ancestors into slavery. Seen in this light, some Jamaicans experience this as a deep-seated aversion in their encounters with Ethiopians and Africans.

Sometimes these hostilities erupt into confrontations, even for Gee, who believes he belongs with Jamaicans fully. Sometimes Oromoness and Blackness are mutually exclusive, and Gee faces a deadly situation where he has to choose between his Oromo and Jamaican belonging:

He's, like, half Oromo, and he used to go to my school ... I saw him getting beat up by Jamaican people. Like, ten people and him alone, like, beating him up ... These guys are my friends, and the guy, I know him too. I just don't know him too well, but I know him as Oromo, period. But I know the Jamaican people more. I chill with them ... Cool friend with me, you know. Sometimes we hang around. But this guy, Oromo guy, we don't talk a lot. I just know him. So I went in and stop, "Yo, leave him, leave him, leave him!" There is this other guy, the same Jamaican people, don't like me, you know, we don't get along. He's kind of, like ... "So, Yo, what? You got any problem? Yo, what up, what up, are you gonna help us or what?!" And I told them, "Leave the kid alone, he just wanna get out of here, you can't even fight one on one? Just leave him alone, I know the kid, leave him alone!" So this guy say, "You wanna stick up with that nigger now? What up? What up?" He start pushing me. I say, "Yo, cool yourself down, man, you know me, cool yourself down!"

And he went around, and after two day, three day, he came in the wash-room. I was in the washroom. He came behind me, and he said, "What up, man?" I look back and I say, "What up, what's goin' on?" I swear to God, he put a gun on my head! He told me, "Yo, I will shoot you down and leave here. And don't you ever, ever step to me!" ... And he's shaking, too, the

same time. I knew he's scared. But it's just that, you know, he's trying to be, you know, powerful. And he's pulling that gun. I swear to God, this kid scare me! I was scared, I be honest ... "Yo!" I said, "Nigger! Stop poking me up!" I say, "Yo! Get out of my face!" And the kid's, like, "You wanna deal one deal?" And I tell him, "Yo, I have nothing to do with you, you now. I didn't even say nothing to you. What you put a gun on me for?" And the kid say, "You shut up!" You know how kids get powerful, you know? You know how it is when you carry a weapon behind ... I cut that kid up, and I went to the other niggers we chilling with, and I say, "Yo, what's wrong with this guy? You know, he's acting stupid ... the young thug, you know, the young blood ..." And after, the same kid came up to me and say, "Sorry, you know; I'm your friend."

Gee's simultaneous be-longing in Oromoness and Blackness came to loggerheads dangerously and physically. He be-likes with both warring identities, but the in-between space could not contain him safely. His deadliest confrontation was when Black gangs attacked him and knocked out his four upper front teeth. At other times, Gee navigates comfortably in his be-longing with both Blacks and Oromos. Though perhaps not as deadly as Gee's experience, other participants also experience Blackness as an uneven terrain of multiple definitions they have to tread, sometimes in harmony and solidarity and other times in discord and conflict. They find that *their* Blackness wears other shades of yet other colours when reflected back from the eyes of their Black peers who define Blackness in their own unique ways. For some participants, their Blackness gets reflected back tainted with colours of backward, uncivilized Africans. For others, it is smeared with *Fresh off the Boat* (FOB). "They don't like us; to them we are FOB refugees," laments Qoricha about her Black peers. "Even the streets have the toughest rules and skills; I was so green I couldn't fit in," moans Jaba, longing to be-long with his Black peers who define Blackness differently and defend its boundaries with passion.

Other times, the young Oromos find other Black peers with whom they redefine their unique Blackness in ways that make be-longing comfortable. For example, finding that being a serious student is stigmatized as *acting White* and being a *nerd* (Dei et al. 1997), Edo, Jaba, and Yom befriend other Blacks who rename excelling in education as *acting Black*, and they embrace it like other Blacks before them (Willie 2003). Thus, young Oromos continue to bend and localize the boundaries around Blackness to fit their realities and their deepest needs of be-longing. They continue to further contest and dispute the territory of Blackness. And they find that they cannot fully and wholly be-long with Blacks despite their deepest yearnings. Even Gee, who gains a sort of be-longing by doing *nigger talk* and *nigger walk* and by being *bad* and being *cool*, learns the hard way that be-longing is neither final nor complete (Ilcan 2002). And when the Blackness of their peers could not wholly contain *their* Oromo

Blackness, participants long back to wholly be-long with their Oromo peers. Would their Oromo be-longing be final and binding?

Be-longing with Oromos

Away from colour-coded be-longing, even the most taken-for-granted turf of Oromoness, where the young Oromos automatically and naturally long to be-long, presents a hotly disputed terrain. Who is authentic Oromo and who is not is fiercely contested, and participants are torn apart by yet other forces shaping their be-longing. On the one hand, young Oromos embrace Oromoness and passionately defend its boundaries against encroaching Others. Now there is no boundary among them and they be-long with each other. On the other hand, the moment the external boundary dissolves and the young Oromos face each other, old internal boundaries reincarnate and new ones emerge. And now participants define and redefine the boundaries of their unique Oromoness and defend them against their own Oromo peers.

Thus, in the context of negotiating Canadianness where Canada threatens to swallow their Oromoness, participants hold on to Oromoness and adopt the Oromo-Canadian hyphenation. They actively background the Canadian end and foreground the Oromo. In their encounters with threatening Oromos from the United States, however, they reverse this dynamic in an interesting twist. In this movement, Canada surges into the foreground as Oromo recedes. They embrace the Canadian end of the hyphen closely and defend it against Oromo-Americans, thus endearing Canada, be-longing to it, and reversing the hyphenation as Canadian-Oromos. Usually, even the hyphenation is discarded, and they refer to themselves as Canadians. Thus Oromos seek each other out at the same time as they shy away from each other into their Canadian and American be-longing. This finding makes visible the ways in which young Oromos weave together the same strands of geographically designated identification differently to construct different longings of be-longing in different contexts (Ilcan 2002). This is evidenced in the clip below:

TICK: They [American Oromos] actually do treat us different way when we went for our tournaments there. You Canadians, eh? ... We went there, and then, you know how the White Canadians, when they go to the U.S., they use that word, Eh? Eh? Eh? (people laugh). They're like, you Canadians, eh, like, you know. And then, how is it up there? You guys play hockey, too, you guys do that? How is it freezing, na na na? And go back to your ice! When they come here, we kind of feel different about them, too, like they're gangsters! ... When we ... Odaa and Oromia [Toronto Oromo soccer teams] go to the U.S., we cheer for each other, and the Americans cheer for their own. Beat those Canadians, la, la, la ...

JABA: Oromo in Canada, the poor guys, the one's taking the welfare, right? And who will live in Metro housing and the Oromo in America who work in gas stations ... When the Atlanta people came and played against Toronto, they were saying, "*Deemnee dhukkee irraa kaafna!* [Let's go beat the shit out of] those people on welfare!"

IBSITU: You know those Atlanta guys, they're crazy, OK? ... they party a lot, whatever, eh? So, I guess they were asking us, let's go home ... We go, "No!" You know, you don't get that much excited, right? Then they go, "What's wrong with you? See American girls back home."

WARTU: Back home in America! (people laugh)

IBSITU: Yeah! "See, they're chill, they're chill ... Like, you guys, you're so stush!"

WARTU: They have this mentality, like ... Canadian girls are, like, more cheap; they love Americans. They think that we love them, they think we love Americans!

All of these non-hyphenated references to Americans and Canadians are all references to young Oromos in the United States and in Canada, respectively. The boundaries within Oromoness are constructed and consolidated just when the boundaries around it are dissolved. The territoriality of Oromoness and its attendant be-longing is localized and firmly re-inscribed in geography just at the point where Oromoness itself is actively deterritorialized and globalized (Clifford 1997; Gupta and Ferguson 2001; Malkki 1997). While the soccer tournaments bond young Oromos together, their local geographical identities interrupt this bonding and fragment Oromoness. This further demonstrates that be-longing can never be final or complete (Ilcan 2002). *Us* and *them* are reterritorialized, and who longs to be-long where is geographically determined, thus simultaneously and paradoxically freezing and unfreezing Oromoness.

As Wartu and Ibsitu's narratives in the above clip suggest, young Oromos also seek each other out for intimacy. They long to be-long together intimately. Indeed, Ayane's narrative affirms this. Yearning for intimacy, young Oromos have actively created and maintained Oromo youth spaces on the Internet. By so doing, they further de-territorialize and create digital Oromoness in the virtual space. As an active participant in this process, Ayane says,

That was after Atlanta soccer tournament ... so we came back, and it was all sorts of different connections ... People came from everywhere from the U.S. and then us from Canada. And it's people we knew from back

home, you know ... but you met new people, too, so after that, we tried to keep everybody together. But it was really such a nice thing to be among Oromo young people. It was such a positive experience, and we wanted it to continue, so that's how the virtual community was started ... for a lot of people, this was a way to meet others, not only friends, but also meet potential mates, partners, boyfriends, girlfriends, whatever.

Scattered all over the globe, young Oromos seek each other out as they long to be-long with each other. Like other dispersed peoples in the lands of others (Bhabha 1994), the young Oromos find themselves alienated from the familiar and desperately seek solace in cyberspace (Herbst 2001). They use the Oromo *gadaa* as a symbolic anchor (Gupta and Ferguson 2001) of community and belonging. Herbst names this anchor *GadaaNet* to signify this seeking of solace in the ideal of the ancient Oromo *gadaa*. Speaking out of such deep longing to be-long, Ayane says, "It was really such a nice thing to be among Oromo young people." Yet there was no shortage of young Oromos in Toronto. But these were Oromos either from a different region of Oromia or they are from a different religion, and Ayane felt left out. Ayane's longing for digital Oromia comes from this place of Oromo exclusion. In an ironic reversal, however, she looks back on this space of be-longing and detests the very Internet youth group she helped create:

Those Americans are weird. I ended up hating that group ... They think they have reached *there*, you know! They show off, like, This is us! This is the life! We are living it! They're *there*, you know, no more growth. No, no, no! Excuse me! I call this rotting! ... They say they love intelligent, hard working, independent Oromo girls. But they lie! They're liars, honestly! ... That's a very closed group! When it comes to the real stuff, they choose ornamental girls, decorative girls, you know.

Ayane's narrative indicates the gelling together of an exclusive young Oromo elite group in digital Oromia, and how the face-to-face spaces of inequity extend into the virtual space. In the first place, those who go online are those who have the physical, instrumental, and technical access to the Internet. Far beyond the digital divide, class, gender, language, region, and religion interplay in the inclusion/exclusion of constructing longing and be-longing in digital Oromia. The fierce exchanges in chat rooms reveal that be-longing is not only deterritorialized but also stratified within digital Oromia. Indeed, side by side with its provision of solace, *GadaaNet* (Herbst 2001) also creates hotly contested spaces of longing to be-long.

Globalized Oromoness is further fragmented and relocalized in many more ways. When the boundary between Canadian and American Oromos dissolves, others are raised among Canadian Oromos. And they split Oromos into *olders*

and *young bloods*, embracing the young, othering the old. When the boundary of age dissolves and the young bloods face each other, they split into FOB (freshies) or old timers, from this or that religion, and from this or that Ethiopian province. Boundaries are moved and re-moved, vanish and reemerge, creating new longings to be-long. Oromoness gets so illusive that young Oromos start asking who, then, is an Oromo? Now the boundaries move elsewhere to separate those who are pure and those who are mixed, those who speak *Afaan Oromo* and those who do not. Oromoness is localized again by ancestry and by language. But those who come from mixed ancestry and those who do not speak a word of *Afaan Oromo* fiercely claim Oromoness. Disrupting yet another undisputed territory of racialized Oromoness, they discover blond, blue-eyed, White Oromos. Constantly moving between settlement and unsettlement (Ilcan 2002), they unsettle even their most settled beliefs in the purity of genealogical be-longing and ideas of blood and ancestry. Be-longing to Oromoness proves as deeply contested as other identities; it cannot be taken for granted.

TOWARDS AN ALTERNATIVE FRAMEWORK

The findings from the above analysis both validate and unsettle extant notions of be-longing. The essentialist view constructing authentic be-longing as a warm sensation that comes from being among one's own people who understand, not what one says, but what one means is untenable. Findings do validate this position, in that the young persons feel intense affinity for Oromos back home and that they essentialize their own be-longing. But this does not mean that this intense longing to be-long is inherent. Nor does it mean that warm understanding comes only from other Oromos. Participants have enjoyed warm understanding in their interaction with others and bitter misunderstanding in their interaction with Oromos. In its emphasis on continuity, however, the essentialist view overlooks the discontinuities of meaning and understanding. Its fixity forecloses the fertile possibility of young Oromos be-longing in the here and now of life in Canada. In this, the findings validate the constructionist notion of constantly negotiated and fluid be-longing. They validate the constant longing in be-longing and the constant desire and yearning for the Other. In its emphasis on movement, however, this position overlooks the continuities and fixities also inherent in the longing in be-longing. Moreover, emphasizing desire and longing to be-long, this position overlooks the aversion, the longing not to be-long. Yet the findings strongly indicate both desire and aversion in be-longing, thus affirming the flight and search in dispersal-affinity.

The findings emerging from the analysis also indicate that dispersal-affinity is layered. Taking into account both movements and fixities, dispersal-affinity responds to the simultaneous flight and search in the young Oromos' simultaneous seeking and shying away. In congruence with these realities, dispersal-affinity interweaves four paradoxical spaces into a meaningful whole.

First, the temporal space signifies the paradox of continuities/discontinuities. Here the past is deeply ingrained in the rolling present and anticipated future. Not only the discontinuities of the refugee facet, but also the continuities of the slave facet of African globalization, shape their negotiation of be-longing. Secondly, the glocal space signifies the paradox of global/local. Here, intertwined processes of global homogenization and local fragmentation shape their deepest sense of be-longing as they negotiate be-longing in the interface of diasporization and globalization, territorialization and deterritorialization, placement and displacement. Thirdly, the reflexive space signifies the paradox of conscious/unconscious. Here, be-longing is negotiated in the conscious-unconscious blur of both the individual and the collective. This accounts for the ghostly return of the slave in the everyday racialization of their be-longing. Fourthly, the relational space signifies the paradox of singularities/multiplicities. In this space, be-longing is negotiated in the dialogue between the unique singularities of individual participants and the ordinary multiplicities of the social. Here, be-longing is a relational process of Self and Other, signifying myriad creative possibilities of dispersal/affinity.

CONCLUSION

In summary, then, for young Oromos, the notion of be-longing is tangled up with ever-increasing uncertainty. Fully be-longing to Ethiopia is impossible, because it leaves out their Oromoness. Landing in Canada does not mean they automatically be-long to Canada. Despite homogenizing discourses of racialization, fully be-longing with Blacks is not possible either. Nor is fully be-longing with Oromos possible, despite their intense affinities. Every turf of be-longing has to be contested and its boundaries negotiated, as nobody can be “simultaneously in all, or wholly in any” categorical identity (Haraway 1991, 193). In this sense, I view be-longing as a living space of poetics, thus affirming the notion of movements in and through social relations in the longing in be-longing (Ilcan 2002; Probyn 1996). However, these are not just movements of Self towards Other. These are fiercely directional movements in that the young Oromos long away from spaces of perceived exclusion and oppression towards spaces of perceived inclusion and freedom. This has important implications for social justice. If justice is defined as freedom from oppression (Young 1990), I see the longing in be-longing as a longing for justice. If be-longing is a Self/Other relational process and thus requires demarcation of boundaries to make sense of the world, then the question, for me, has little to do with erasing boundaries. As the findings indicate, boundaries seem to be a fact of life. It seems impossible to think of a world without boundaries (Lamont and Molnar 2002). Nor is this necessarily desirable in my view. For me, the question is how can we make the crossing of these boundaries easy and equitable? How can we make multiple layers and forms of be-longing readily available? How can

young Oromos be-long with Oromos, with Blacks, with Whites, and with other groups in Canada, elsewhere in the world, and back home in Africa?

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NOTES

- 1 An early draft of this paper was presented at the 46th annual meeting of the African Studies Association, 30 October to 4 November, 2003, Boston, Massachusetts.
- 2 This larger work is my interdisciplinary doctoral dissertation entitled: Sieves and Reeds: Identity, Cohesion, and Be-longing in a Glocalizing Space. Young Oromos in Toronto, Faculty of Social Work, University of Toronto, 2004.
- 3 *Afaan Oromo* means the Oromo language. Literally, it translates as the Oromo mouth.
- 4 Many works use Ethiopia and Abyssinia interchangeably, while some make a distinction. I follow the later in depicting Abyssinia as the land of Abyssinians and Ethiopia as the geopolitical entity created by the interplay of powerful global forces at the time of the European colonization of Africa. While Abyssinians evolved into two distinct ethnic groups (Amhara and Tigre), there is no ethnic group called Ethiopian. The name *Ethiopia* came from ancient Greeks who referred to all Black Africa as Ethiopia, and by Ethiopia, they meant burnt-faced people (Melba 1988).
- 5 Here some notes on notation and quotation are in order. The quotes in this paper are all excerpted from the transcripts of one-to-one and small group conversation as well as the larger focus group debate. To protect the anonymity of participants, I have used the

research names they coined for themselves in the conversations. For quotations from the larger focus group, there is only the *M* (male) and *F* (female) distinction between voices, as we withheld both real names and the research names of participants, again to protect anonymity. My name remains Kuwee throughout the conversations and is indicated by a *K* in the focus group debate. Quotations that appear in one segment are from the same small group or one-to-one session. There were three small groups in the study: the *Addooyyee*, the *Gammee*, and the *Walana*. At the orientation sessions, participants self-selected and formed their own small groups. Those who were not comfortable sharing in groups chose one-to-one sessions. There are some demographic differences among the groups. One female and four males constitute the *Gammee*s, the youngest group (three 17s, one 19, one 21). At the time of the conversations, they were all in high school, except for one in college. Two females and three males constitute the *Walana*s (two 17s, one 19, one 24), of which three were in high school, one in college, and one in university. The *Addooyyees* are the most homogeneous group in that they were all female and all were in graduate school, except for one in university. They were also the oldest as a group (21, 23, 25, 28). The focus group is a larger debate where willing participants from all the small groups and one-to-one sessions participated.

