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Yimer, Amel Belay

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The Ethiopian Clubs:

The Development of Social Institutions and Identities amongst Ethiopians in Johannesburg.

Amel Belay Yimer.

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Contents

1. INTRODUCTION 3

DEFINING AND UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS 14
LEAVING HOME AND INSTITUTIONS BEHIND 16
FINDING THE 'OLD' IN THE 'NEW' 19

2. SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS 22

THE HISTORY OF SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS IN ETHIOPIA 25
THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS IN ETHIOPIA. 27
THE DEVELOPMENTAL NATURE WITHIN THE SOCIAL 28
SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS, IDENTITY AND THEIR PERIPHERIES 31
UNDERSTANDING IDENTITY 31
I) SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS BECOMING COMMUNITIES 32

3. THE CURRENT SOCIAL CONTEXT 36

ETHIOPIANS IN SOUTH AFRICA 36
I) ETHIOPIANS AS BUSINESS OWNERS 37
II) ETHIOPIANS AS FOREIGNERS 39
THE STATUS OF ETHIOPIANS IN JOHANNESBURG 39

4. FINDINGS 43

PROFILES OF FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION PARTICIPANTS 43
SOUTH AFRICA AS A DESTINATION 45
MEMBERSHIP OF ETHIOPIAN INSTITUTIONS IN SOUTH AFRICA 46
***THE COFFEE DRINKERS* AS PART OF THE RESEARCH 49**

5. CONCLUSION 55

THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION ON ETHIOPIAN SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS 58
THE IMPACT OF MIGRATION ON ETHIOPIAN IDENTITIES 60

6. BIBLIOGRAPHY 63

7. FILMOGRAPHY 67

1. Introduction

Ethiopia's tumultuous political and economic history has led to the continuous expulsion of her citizens in the hopes of establishing a better life for themselves elsewhere and for the remainder of their families back home. According to a study by Matsuoka and Sorenson, Ethiopians form one of the largest migrant[1] populations in the world (2001:13). In today's world, migration has become an all too familiar and painful reality, for Ethiopians and for countless other nationalities that lack the fulfilment of their needs in their own country. This research selects migration as one of the phenomena that characterise the 21st century and form its landscape alongside notable technological, economic and social advancements that have allowed the creation of a global market, travelling, sharing cultures and fostering tolerance among different groups. It is these very same advancements that make it possible for migrants to leave their countries, find entry into new countries and etch out a new existence for themselves amongst new people who practice a different set of culture.

This research discusses how, as the benefits of bridging economies, politics and cultures become more and more evident and 'intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole' (Robertson, 1992: 8) continues to grow, the world of migrants and their own culture is impacted. Specifically, the survival of migrants' traditions, the way in which they are integrated into the dominant mores of the country they live in and the overall impact these changes have on their perceived identities. What happens to clusters in the face of the masses? What becomes of local customs and values in the wake of

[1] The different distinctions that are connoted by terms such as immigrant, refugee, expatriate, will not be observed in this research. The word migrant will be used instead to denote any and all of them as a person living away from their country of birth or origin.

globalization? Does acceleration towards the promotion of inter-social development merely leave intra-social progress on the periphery or does it forcefully push it back to the recesses of mind? How is identity reconfigured to fit into a new mould? The technological, economical and social developments of today have created many new dimensions and the survival of migrants' imported cultures and identity is one with many of its own subtexts that needs to be explored.

Over time, migration has opened doors to the growth of concepts such as 'multi-ethnic', 'mixed race', and 'inter faith' which dilute crude distinctions of 'us' versus 'them' that would otherwise exist in a mono-social setting. Yet before the once-clear boundaries that defined identities become even more blurred and indiscernible, there is the need to trace and understand a migrant's social heritage in its purest form in order to understand how much of it has been transformed, accommodated and allowed to thrive in a new context. This would allow insight into the altered or new identity that forms and the factors that allowed or hindered this development. Preliminary investigations that aim to create such an understanding must also assess the environment and its permeability to migrant cultures based on its present dynamics at play which will impact the import of cultures as well as their practice and survival. That is why this research will include the import of social institutions in addition to their practice.

Social institutions are the vehicles in which traditions, customs and values are transported from one's native country to one's current country of residence. They are the means

through which customs penetrate into foreign settings and continue to survive[2]. This research will therefore analyse this component of migration in terms of select Ethiopian social institutions, the strength and depth of their influence in everyday life and the practices they entail. This will allow an understanding of how and why (or why not) social institutions can be entry points for traditions and related identities that are crossing over from one country to another.

In *Marxism and Literature* (1977), Raymond Williams wrote extensively about the interplay between hierarchical classes and the ultimate outcome of one dominating: with the other becoming subordinate. His notion of 'interplay' is featured not as the simple confrontations of new and unequal elements that share a common space, but rather one of an active process called hegemony where 'disparate meanings, values and practices [become incorporated] into a significant culture and an effective social order (1977: 115). Hegemony is the reconstruction of 'meanings, values and practices' which is what institutions essentially offer within a cultural framework. While the notion of culture can also differ in meaning, denotation and value, Williams considers 'culture' for its functional value and equates it with the Marxist notion of 'ideology' and the associated dynamics of 'ruling' that the rhetoric preaches will inevitable take place among classes that stand on unequal grounds. The interplay between the ideologies and the hegemony they result in leads to the formation of 'residual', 'emergent' and 'dominant' cultures. A residual culture is one effectively formed in the past and still active in the present but incorporated into the dominant culture (through dilution, projection…) to credit its

[2] Focusing on social institutions which are vehicles of social customs, as opposed to focusing on social customs alone allows insight on the human relationships that are created by and surround these customs. Isolating social customs would take the focus of the research away from their practitioners, the connections customs allow them to maintain with one another and the values sustained thorough them.

prevailing applicability (1977:122-3). Its incorporation into a dominant culture does not guarantee a balanced representation between the two. It rather signifies a silent, dormant or vague presence of the residues of a culture embedded in the foundations of what now make up the dominant one. An emergent culture on the other hand, although on the other end of the spectrum being discussed, is again defined in the context of the dominant as having emerged from it to create new meanings, values, practices and relationships (ibid). An emergent culture is another expression of the confluence that hegemony brings when different variables are mixed. As much as the concept of 'emerging' signifies novelty and development, so does it refer back to a basis from which it still borrows and must credit its beginnings to.

The relations that these concept bear to one another are not only important to define them, as Williams observes, but also to understand the realm in which they place the practitioners of these cultures and the development of the institutions that encompass the meanings, values and practices within these cultures. Similar questions of possibility, applicability and development are raised when considering the hegemony that can result in when Ethiopian institutions are imported into South African. Ethiopian social institutions evolved out of a confluence of the country's history, culture and societal needs and an environment where all these elements find each other and form a particular landscape. Their existence is therefore not only based on members having been initially socialised into them or merely bearing an emotional attachment to them. While an environment that continues to sustain the psycho-social and emotional forces which define social institutions is essential for the successful import of social institutions, so is one that validates their existence on a practical level. This research

asks what type of environment South Africa offers to Ethiopian migrants and their institutions and investigates the type of hegemony that takes place.

Although Williams' writings on the dynamics of culture and ideology are rooted in the context of political and economical institutions, he presents class and hierarchy as the governing elements of institutional dynamics which lead to one presiding over the other. When migrants enter a foreign country, their lack of political and economical backing places them in the country's lower stratum. In the case of migrants from the same country, they are left with social institutions that are juxtaposed with an already existing framework that contains its own culture. Being brought into 'unequal grounds', as Williams states is the trigger, the same elements found in the political and economical institutions that he describes shift and become represented within social institutions as well. Therefore, new entrant migrants become subordinated to the prevailing and (therefore) dominant cultures of the host country. The question of their subordination, however, is not an overnight or outright one that follows a particular ethos. Instead, it is a lengthy and complex process where migrants either maintain or abandon the applicability of their own social institutions and give way to the creation of either residual or emergent ones. This in turn would lead to various degrees of alteration in their identity or an altogether renewed commitment to maintain it. The relationship between identity and cultural environment is therefore a facet that needs examination.

Identity is the sum of culture, history, experiences and codes that are shared with people of the same origin (Hall, 2000: 21-24). Identity is dependent on factors that are deeply pitted in their particular environment, notwithstanding the economic and political

realities that shape them. Due to these factors that make up its sum, it is not a static entity. Instead it is one that undergoes continuous transformation based on the environment it is placed in and the existing processes that allow its sharing. While it is necessary to study the external factors that constantly affect and alter the status of one's identity (particularly in the context of migrants who experience both geographical and psycho-social changes) it is equally important to understand and identify a constant core that can always be found underneath all these changes. Hall's breakdown of 'identity' requires an unvarying point of reference which can always serve to unite groupings and act as their common ground if his definition of identity is to remain true in the face of varying circumstances such as migration. This steady point of reference comes in the form of what Sturken simply terms as 'memory'. It acts as the very core of identity where the past, present and the experiences within are validated (Sturken, 1997: 1-9). Given that it is the premise of this research that cultural institutions exist to allow practices that pertain to value systems, the role of memory as described by Sturken is also pivotal to fuelling their continued existence. This would be especially true during migration where there are apparent changes in external factors such as geography, the platforms they offer are dismantled and internal factors such as memory are left as clasps for those in need of reconnecting with their culture and its offerings. Memory is crucial to the understanding of a culture…because it indicates collective desires, needs and self definitions (ibid). Sturken continues to explain that like identity, even memory (and the cultures contained therein) is also vulnerable to altering with its environment (ibid) but these changes take place only after a complex and lengthy process where the stories that make up memory and the modes in these stories are represented are

subjected to numerous historical, political and even emotional filters (ibid). The elements of identity and memory are intertwined and are both critical factors in the anatomy of social institutions (as discussed in the next section) and will be examined in the context of Ethiopian social institutions and the alterations they undergo in the environment Johannesburg offers. Understanding the components of their culture which make up their 'memory' will help unveil a more revealing layer to them as migrants and understand the relations they maintain with their social institutions, both before and after South Africa became their place of residence.

In order to understand any changes that take place in the culture and identity of a migrant community such as the Ethiopian one in South Africa, it is important to first establish their true essence and the primary environment they came to exist in. Determining these components will allow insight into the corresponding values and traditions that have been internalised in people before they became migrants as well as the niche that is created when they leave their country. A close study of the social institutions migrant communities ascribe to and the structures found within these institutions is one way to outline the practices involved in shaping their lives and their corresponding value system. There are many universal categories that value systems are based on throughout different cultures. Members of a family within a community may be automatically recognised as wise, breadwinner or caretaker categories based on age, status within a family, gender or a combination of them all. A closer look into the traditionally ascribed roles of men and women are particularly indicative of the community structure they belong to, any hierarchical patterns that exist within and corresponding practices. This in turn will shed light on the essential characteristics that

make up the culture and identity of members of communities who later on become migrants.

Age old notions that men are the decision makers of the household and the breadwinners of the family are present in Ethiopia as strongly as any country with defined patriarchal influences. These notions are also reinforced by elements such as rites of passages which emphasise notions of manhood and male pride. Examples of such practices include practices by the Algonquin Indian Tribe of Quebec where boys are brought to a secluded area, often caged, and then given an intoxicating medicine known as *wysoccan* to force any memories of being a child out of the boy's mind (*Listverse*, 2009). Another example from the south of Ethiopia is practiced by the Hamer tribe where before being permitted to marry, youth must jump over cattle four times while naked. This being a symbol of the childhood one is about to leave behind him (ibid). When contrasting these fuelled senses of manhood with the disempowered categories they are placed in as migrants, the differences in the sense of self worth and strength of identity they display become very telling of the new communities they are in and the gaps they experience. Such was the case in Japan where migrants from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Iran felt like their personal characteristics and personal histories were continuously under threat (Orford, 2008: 216).

On the other hand, there are viewpoints which claim that in the world of migration, a woman's experiences are at the heart of the dynamics of culture, environment and processes that link the two (Baber & Allen, 1992). This is primarily due to the universal notion that women are the caregivers of any family unit, which endows them with the

unique ability to influence and shape the cultural outlook of their families. Second, due to the vulnerabilities their gender exposes them to, women are the most open to experiencing any existing pressures in their environment. Therefore, their combined experiences of being culture bearers and vulnerable migrants make their perspective indicative of changes that take place.

These ascribed roles of men and women place them in different hierarchical positions even before the migration. While the manifestation of men's roles is described as one that projects pride and power, women's positions are seen as weak and very open to influence. Yet both are still interdependent to help one another fulfil the needs that their family units require. In order to understand the influences present in Ethiopian families and communities in Johannesburg, this research will investigate the roles Ethiopian men and women play in their new environment and assess whether these roles have any bearing on the practice of their existing social institutions. These roles will set the context in which the film *The Coffee Drinkers* will discuss the implications such changes have on the nature of Ethiopian social institutions in Johannesburg, the type of migrant community they serve, and the identities contained in these communities. The relationship between identities and institutions is one that reflects a change in their environment and Johannesburg is a city with its own distinctive culture which would have its own impact on Ethiopian migrants and their own culture.

There are several scenarios where social elements such as institutions alter not only because of a change in environment but also because of evolving times and demands. Examples of this include the transformation of the institution of marriage in some

countries to allow homosexual couples to marry, the right to vote being extended to women or affirmative action to ensure minorities of a country certain rights. Through the film *The Coffee Drinkers*, this research examines what type of transformations the nature of Ethiopian social institutions undergoes when brought into South Africa and what these transformations are suggestive of in their identities and memories.

The film, produced in tandem with this research, will also explore these transformations by showcasing the physical environment in which the vast majority of Ethiopian migrants in Johannesburg spend a significant amount of time and the stories that unfold in that environment. Through the combined narrative paradigm of the filmmaker and a fictionalised character (whose voice will be informed by the findings of this research and expressed through letters written to her sister in Ethiopia) the emotional component that accompanies changes in their culture will also be told. The film will juxtapose the narrations of this character with other elements central to the social institutions in question, i.e. group gatherings and coffee drinking, and discussions, to allow insight into the expectations Ethiopian migrants have at the onset of migration, the realities reflected in their current environment and the overall changes Ethiopians feel they have undergone since their arrival in Johannesburg.

Two institutions that emanate from Ethiopian culture and are practiced by Ethiopians will be investigated; funeral groups and social associations. The pertinence of this research

lies in focusing on a prominent migrant group[3] in South Africa and by posing the following questions;

- What factors affect the existence of these social institutions in a foreign setting?
- What types of influences and changes are they subjected to?
- What are the effects of these alterations and subordination on the identities of Ethiopians in Johannesburg?

The fact that Ethiopian social institutions in Johannesburg are neither entirely observable entities nor open to inspection and enquiry the best mode of representation to employ in the film is a self reflexive one that can allow the telling of a story while also letting viewers understand the circumstances that surround that story. This will also allow the identity of subjects who might be vulnerable to be protected. By employing both a fictional and real first person narrative within the documentary genre, the film will allow progression between depicting a physical environment (along with all its connotations) and the changes this environment creates in Ethiopian migrants. Many women approached for interviews have refused to speak on camera for several reasons including desire to preserve anonymity and fear of legal repercussions. The use of a fictional

[3] In addition to being one of the biggest migrant groups in South Africa, Ethiopians are also one of the most prominent by virtue of their physical settlement. Much like migrant Chinese migrant Chinese who establish 'China Towns' or Italians who settle in 'Little Italy's, Ethiopians are known to re-establish their communities in large clusters. In Washington D.C for example 18th Street is known as' Little Ethiopia'. In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, a section of the town Jeddah known as Kerentina is also synonymously referred to as Tigray Street, named after the northern region of Ethiopia where most of the residents and business owners come from. Similarly, in the Central Business District of Johannesburg, Ethiopian businesses have over taken Jeppe Street, Bree Street and connecting streets leading for that area to be informally known as 'Ethiopia Town'. Ethiopians exhibit a strong physical presence and own what George A. Lipsky describes as 'a strong sense of tradition… unlike other African[s] with their imprint of colonial experience [and] … tradition [with] dominant cultures and governing institutions that go back many centuries (1962:5). Their number and devotion make them a significant populace in terms of motivation to 're'-create their institutions and the permeability of their environment to these institutions.

character was therefore necessary to ensure the inclusion of their perspectives and experiences without visually overemphasising the issue of anonymity (if, for example, only their backs or silhouettes were to be shown during interviews). The profile of the fictional character and her narrations will be representational of the different women that will have been interviewed for this research while the men have agreed to directly represent themselves. *The Coffee Drinkers* will therefore factually and interpretively explore present elements in the lives of Ethiopian migrants and help to answer the aforementioned questions.

Defining and Understanding Social Institutions

Culture has many informal institutions that aid members of a society to perform or adhere to the traditions, rituals and practices found therein. It is through these institutions that members essentially interact with one another and reinforce their belonging to that society. In a Westernised context, examples of such institutions range from neighbourhood watches to car pools and political rally organizers. In the Ethiopian context, funeral groups and social associations fall under this category.

Unlike, formal institutions which reflect official rigid hierarchy, authority and structured repercussions or punishments if not respected, (e.g. a country's constitution and its stated power structure and laws or even a body corporate of a residential area and its by-laws), social institutions are more fluid and resonate on a personal sense of responsibility rather than an official or legal one. Their initiation or reinforcement is not subject to any legal authority. Their influence spans over smaller communities as units that make up a whole society instead of one big country where everyone falls under the same label of 'citizen'. Their existence (or development with time) takes place communally to cater to a vacuum

that needs filling and to accommodate the needs of their community members as opposed to a legislative process that involves modifying structured tenets (i.e. parliamentary bills or votes.)

Social institutions are made up of and function by embracing individuals who assume certain responsibilities and have the *desire* to fulfil them out of love, respect and loyalty for those who share their culture and community. Individuals who function as such within social institutions are aware (and made aware by others) of their particular standing in their community. They understand that their contribution reflects the standing of their families as well as themselves. Those who volunteer for neighbourhood watches, car pools or organizing political rallies do so voluntarily and with that in mind unlike a citizen or a tenant who is forced to comply with the expectations set for them legally or contractually.

Therefore, social institutions exist so that they help members of a community fulfil their *social* obligations and holistically contribute to its wellness. This in turn reinforces their identity as members of that community. This research asks what happens when Ethiopians migrate to the West, or in the case of this research, a country structured according to a Westernized way of life such as South Africa. What are the factors that determine whether or not Ethiopian migrants continue to subscribe to their own institutions?

The film will capture discussions about elements at the root of social institutions and the factors that either inhibit or enhance their existence for Ethiopians in Johannesburg. Through the film, the audience will be able to both understand the independent factors being discussed and the *perceptions* they create within the continuum of a migrant's story. The contrast between the discussion and the story will in turn allow an understanding of the prospects that mark Ethiopian lives, their value system and the actualities that tie the two together.

Leaving Home and Institutions behind

When an Ethiopian migrant family leaves their community, they leave behind a network of social institutions which fulfil their social obligations and needs. They also leave with a niche for the corresponding values that these institutions offer, for example, 'a neighbour is family'. This niche remains (and indeed can even grow) as migrants struggle to understand and establish their status in their new environments and their standing amongst a different culture who do not necessarily share the same values. This is especially true for women who would otherwise rely heavily on social institutions to support them when they find themselves living isolated lives in a new country and substituting their old lifestyle with the pressing need to go out and go out to work in order to survive. Social institutions at home would have allowed them to forge relations that can help fulfil both everyday functionalities (such as the extended family structure to help look after children, cook meals and perform other household chores) and other value based needs (such as a women's group to celebrate a patron saint, attend funerals with, cook together with for community events and other social obligations).

Ethiopia also has several distinct social institutions that are based on age, religion, ethnicity and gender. For both men and women, all institutions revolve around their different duties such as being mothers, caretakers, church goers and neighbours. Part of their roles in familial and social settings is fulfilled through membership of these institutions. As these social institutions help reinforce and celebrate the exclusivity of their traditional roles which form the core of an elaborate cultural structure, the study of these institutions will allow insight into the identity that emanate from this culture and how all three elements of social institutions, identity and culture are affected in the face of migration.

The two chosen groups whose importance and significance in the lives of Ethiopians are funeral groups or *Idirs* and social groups or *Mahbers.* These groups embody the values that form part of daily life for Ethiopians, a channel through which relationships amongst one another is built and a means of expressing one's existence as part of a community. Departing from Ethiopia includes departure from these groups, the social environment which sustains and validates them as well as the network of people in those groups who share other relations such as friend, neighbour, co-worker or church member. This research also aims to establish on film how such groups and their membership are either replicated or abandoned when one migrates. A new environment would either encourage or inhibit their replication. Attaining knowledge of how these groups take root or fail to do so will also allow parallel insight into the extended impact of migration with reference to the elements of a migrant's identity that continue to exist.

Idir is a funeral group established on the basis of either kinship or neighbourhood but they also come together in times of weddings or other feasts in order to share the associated burdens that fall on a family. In the event of a death, *Idir* members play a supportive role to the grieving family by assisting with arrangements and consoling them through regular visits.

Mahber (which literally translates to association) is a social group of people who take turns to host each other monthly (Constantinos, 13: 1997). A *Mahber* has its origins in the monthly celebrations of particular patron saints but today has extended to any 'territorial bonds' (Levine, 1966: 279) or any group of people that decide to meet. *Mahbers* organized for recreational purposes are held monthly at members' residences on a rotational basis. Eating, drinking and socializing form the basis of this type of group although they also offer a support structure in times of crisis as well as celebrations. Membership can be organized on the basis of gender, individuals or couples.

While the functions of these social institutions vary, they share a similarity in their objective to strive and collectively help its members within a community as well as strengthen bonds between them. This is done through a series of actions which include meeting regularly, living up to roles and responsibilities prescribed by the community and creating a space where members can communicate and share their experiences. The above mentioned groups are chosen as examples of such functions and to investigate if and how these groups are sustained in a foreign context such as South Africa.

In the context of migration, one's environment and its demands are altered. Consequently, the formation and functionality of these groups are also subject to alterations based on the new circumstances migrants find themselves in. This can range anywhere from their discontinued existence, to developing new conventions that govern them and the relations between members. The developments speak to Williams' notion of residual cultures where the remnants of 'old' culture can be seen but after being engulfed in new values that belong to the dominant host country or of emergent cultures where additional elements that reflect the new environment come to existence.

Finding the 'Old' in the 'New'

Traditions and values emanate from within a physical and social context. People tend to lose this context in the face of migration and being distanced away from the environment that perpetuate these traditions and values. There is also a discontinuation of psychological and emotional support that follows in such a context. In the absence of a familiar cultural environment and corresponding values that provide guidance in psychological, social and spiritual spheres, what follows then is migrant's attempt to re-establish their lives and find some semblance of their old identity in their new one. Despite the fact that *Idirs* and *Mahbers* are specific to Ethiopia, the values they promote (friendship, mutual aid, caring for one another) are not unique to any one country. Therefore changes in culture from one country to the next make it clear that while they do have ties to geographical locations, the practice of their values will still exist in many or all of them.

In theory, the transference of these elements within one's culture should have been made easy with globalization just as it allows economies, technologies and ideas to circulate the world easily today. The growth of Diaspora communities[4] in this time of globalization should also facilitate the transference and practice of their culture because of the increase in number of people who share these cultures and can participate in 're'-creating their institutions.

These institutions also act as support networks for Ethiopian women and having been both providers and recipients of benefits of these institutions at one point, a gap begins to exist after they migrate. Establishing residence in a country that does not share the same social background (made up of language, religion, and other unique cultural practices) prevents them from rebuilding their support networks in the form of the aforementioned groups even if the values they seek exist in the country. The social dominance of the surrounding majority looms over the new entrant minority and migrants find themselves at junctures where they either retreat to preserve their culture despite the pressures of the majority or allow it to be laced with new elements they are introduced to. How does South Africa's current context (which has a history of apartheid, and more recently, xenophobic tendencies towards migrants) mould the lives of these migrants? Does it motivate or allow them to connect or disconnect from their culture? How does it affect their identities and that of their families? It is important to delve into these questions and allows insight on the processes of 'migrants…

[4] 'Diaspora' being communities across international boundaries that share a similar understanding of their identity, culture and history of their home country.

continuously renegotiat[ing] their identities in relation to both their lost homeland and their new countries of residence' (Matsuoka & Sorenson, 2001: 77).

The research will first establish the specific social significance that the selected institutions claim in the lives of Ethiopians, especially the revealing lives of women, before their migration by presenting their historical development and the realm of their lives which they cater to. It will then explore the connections between membership of such institutions its effects on identities by examining previously established theoretical connections that exist in the fields of gender, the nature of communities and cultural memory. The transference of all this will then be analysed in terms of the current social context that Johannesburg provides Ethiopian migrants with as well as any motivations that might exist for importing their social institutions and continuing their practice. This would also include new elements found in South Africa and the 'revision' of migrant culture that follows. Finally, it will capture group discussions with Ethiopians from which an analysis will lead to insight and conclusion on the question of the role of social institutions amongst the identity of Ethiopians in Johannesburg. The fictional narrative in the film *The Coffee Drinkers* will be based on important factors identified in the research in relation to practicing social institution. It will also establish the connection between social institutions as practiced in Johannesburg and the emotional developments that take place during the reconstructing migrant identity.

2. Social Institutions

For an individual to engage in a particular society or community one has to live according to its traditions and adhere to rituals and practices that define its realm of 'culture'. In order to understand the social institutions that help members achieve this, it is important to scrutinize the nature of these institutions, the roles played by their members and the environments which both institutions and members are being transferred from and to.

The culmination and exhibition of all these aspects comes together in what Marita Sturken simply terms as 'memory' but elaborates as the fabric of human life, affecting everything [including] the recognition of self (1997: 1). Sturken explains that memory is an integral ingredient in establishing identity, recognizing history and experiencing culture (ibid). It begins with it being prone to continuous production and reproduction by both individuals and communities and resulting in fluidity and continuous change, along with the affirmations, reinforcements or denials it brings about (ibid). This includes the initial experiencing of events, to the processing of their implications based on one's social, political and psychological mindset, to the impact this processing has on one memory. The totality of one's memory is therefore manifested in one's identity. Memory is an important component to consider for a migrant community that is always experiencing transitions and the effects these transitions bear on their understanding of their identity.

Amidst the traumas and developments which families that migrate experience, the overall phenomenon can be described as experiencing an 'identity vacuum'. This is explained by

Orford as a feeling of having lost everything that previously represented and anchored their social identities (2008: 213). Identity is also a fluid concept that is not an established entity but an ever changing understanding of oneself based on rearing, experiences and memories. In his essay "Cultural Identity and Diaspora", Stuart Hall writes that one should think of it as a production which is never complete [and] always in process...(2000: 21-24). Therefore, even when one is still in his or her homeland, his or her identity is always in the process of being shaped. For example, in Argentina, Gordon cites an example of how killings by the government controlled the imagination, controlled the meaning of death and created new identities that haunted the population into submission to their will (1997: 127). The dynamic nature of identity makes it susceptible towards changes in any circumstance. These can range from simple alterations in individual mannerisms to changes in community entrenched values. The shift that occurs in an individual's and a community's collective identity, however, following a change in physical location and cultural context is an even more complex one that this research will examine.

In the context of the migrants, domination and subordination of cultures continue to make an impact on migrants as they establish a new life. It is such a process of renegotiation that Hall says allows two different ways of thinking of identity (or 'cultural identity' as he terms it) to emerge. One way is thinking of it in terms of culture, history, experiences and codes that are shared with people of the same origin while the other is in terms of differences that occur in the ruptures and discontinuities in these very same things which constitute [each person's] uniqueness (ibid).

The relationship between migrant community, their culture and identity is defined by the experiences they share and the memories created. This would include leaving home, arriving in a new country, re-starting their lives in it and personally re-adjusting to their new environment. It is these common experiences or cultures that this research wishes to examine in the realm of social institutions for migrants so as to understand the resulting memory and the multiple common layers it adds to migrant identity.

Sturken also speaks about 'technologies of memory' such as objects, images and representations are important components in the creation (or even destruction) of memory (1997: 9). While the historical and emotional experiences fuel culture, its resulting memory and contribution to identity, their representation through 'technologies' such as photographs and film contribute to its preservation by creating a platform for contact between memory and bearer to take place. For example, a person who recollects a childhood companion will have his memory reinforced by pictures, home videos or personal belongings of this companion. The particularities of these technologies, (for example a facial expression or the quality of the image or object also work to alter and reinforce layers to the relationship by preserving select aspects and leaving out others. Therefore, the embodiment and experiencing of memories is based on the culture that arises out of interacting with artefacts or technologies. The production of *The Coffee Drinkers,* therefore, not only serves to understand the memory of Ethiopian social institutions as practiced by migrants in Johannesburg, but it also contributes to the creation and preservation of the migrant communities' cultural memory.

The History of Social Institutions in Ethiopia

The starting point of the institutions in question, especially funeral groups or *Idirs*, are in constant debate amongst scholars[5] who attempt to connect their establishment with different times and the emerging needs of those times. Different researchers and their thoughts on the origins of the *Idir*, range from the 19th century (Aredo as cited by De Weerdt, 2007: 21), to the early 20th century (Pankhurst, 2003: 2-41) and middle of the 20th century (De Weerdt, 2007: 22). The necessity of identifying the times during which these institutions emerged is not only important for historical accuracy but is also key to understanding their significance and relevance to a society at a particular stage in time. Social institutions such as *Idirs* (funeral groups) and *Mahber*s (social groups) could either be simple time honoured traditions or practical means of achieving a need that is shared by a community or both. Their significance and relevance is directly related to how much (or not) they are rooted in communities and the identities of the practicing members. Identifying the social context in which they came into existence also allows inference regarding the institutions' patterns of existence and development in different times and contexts. They also attest to the space they claim in the memories of Ethiopians and the scope that exists for the transformation of these memories during migration.

Ethiopia's progression between the late 19th and early to mid 20th century is characterised by internal migration and urbanization[6]. Until the 19th century Ethiopia was a fractured kingdom where each region had its own king and life was contained within the borders of these regions. With the ascension of King Menelik in 1868, however, Ethiopia became

[5] See Aredo (1993), De Weerdt (2007) and Pankhurst (2003)
[6] See Pankhurst (2003), Aredo (1993), De Weerdt (2007) and Comhaire (1966)

more unified as a country under one king and in 1886 Addis Ababa was established as the capital city. With the king's quest for urbanization, migration to the city became a trend that followed. The order of life now spilled beyond the borders of these once self contained regions and with migration came the redefinition of community, belongingness and responsibilities. The placement that institutions have in the memories of Ethiopians is one that has been deeply entrenched with time and history.

According to a report by the Aga Khan Development Network (2007) such a context provides a strong prerogative for people to come together and seek quick, practical and sustainable means of solving their problems. Their findings showed that the roots of *Idirs* or funeral groups lie in [imported] traditions of rural self-help which migrants [to the city] adapted to the requirements of urbanization. De Weerdt reiterates this concept writing that the *Idir* seemed to have emerged in the context of monetisation and literacy, and probably linked to urbanization…and the need to have clearer community links and obligations (2007: 22). This implies that in a situation where Ethiopians migrate to a new country, there is a strong possibility that *Idirs,* or indeed any other self help groups such as social groups (*Mahber*), will be brought along by migrants as an indigenous practice. Given the fact that these groups *evolved out of a need,* there is also the implication that once imported by migrants, these groups can once again evolve to accommodate their new needs.

The history of these institutions is telling of how deeply entrenched they are in Ethiopian culture and it is on this premise that the voices in the film *The Coffee Drinkers* will be

built. They will reflect the relevance of social institutions in the life of migrants while gauging any differences that may have developed. Although each institution represents unison for fulfilling a particular function, the narrative of the story will explore the spirit that drives these groups in Ethiopia and the significance of changes experienced in South Africa. The perspective of women is critical for this representation because of the specialised and quintessential roles they play within these institutions.

The Social Significance of Social Institutions in Ethiopia.

Although the social institutions in question have varied functionalities, there are several similarities they share, beginning with the frequency in which they are practiced among communities throughout the country and the importance they claim in those spaces. There is also a degree of inter-changeability between the functions the groups because of the intent that underlies their existence.

For example, while the main function of *Idirs* is to provide families within the community with all the support they require at the death of a member, the same can be done by members of a *Mahber*. The responsibilities taken on by members reflect a personal commitment to serving community members in the best way they know how and forms part of their shared identity. Women in particular ascertain their contribution by cooking and serving during funerals or weddings (Constantinos, 13: 1997) or during *Mahbe*r gatherings.

Associations, or *Mahbers,* are historically rooted in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church where patron saints are celebrated once a month. Members of a *Mahber* meet at each

other's places, feast and socialize. *Mahbers* also help each other during serious problems such as crop failure… [or] accidents such as…burning houses (Constantinos, 1997: 13). In urban settings *Mahbers* can now be mixed and tailored to the member's needs, for example, high school graduates of the same class, couples in the neighbourhood or women from the same workplace. Again, the variance between meetings for religious purposes, emergencies and general socialization signify the all-rounded purposes that *Mahbers*, and indeed other social institutions, can accomplish.

Both institutions have a lot in common with regards to their informal structure and goal orientation. The depth of their relevance in communities and the practicality and effectiveness in people's financial and social realms renders them one of the few pragmatic systems that exist for many people equally. The question remains if this is still true in the face of migration to South Africa, and if so then to what degree.

By explaining these aspects that exist for the average Ethiopian migrant, *The Coffee Drinkers* will refer to the applicability of these institutions in the context of homeland and discuss their development in that of migration, the reasons behind their existence or disappearance, and the new identities they give way to, factors otherwise unseen to those outside of the community.

The Developmental Nature within the Social

The importance (and efficiency) of *Idirs* and *Mahbers* in social life has therefore made them likely candidates for carrying out actual developmental work. The Ethiopian government has always faced numerous problems such as unemployment, poor service

provision and an exploding urban population following rural-urban migration to escape these very same problems. Successive governments, particularly the Derg[7], advocated and promoted these institutions as 'self-help' civil society actors to ease their burden of service provision. In recent years the current government has attempted to work with *Idirs* as local partners to create awareness about HIV and spreading new agrisocial activities. (De Weerdt, 2007) In fact, several of the studies cited in this section refer to *Idirs* and *Mahbers* as 'welfare institutions' (Levine, 1965), Indigenous Insurance Associations (De Weerdt, 2007) and informal and semi-formal financial sectors (Aredo, 1993). These names indicate the functionality of these groups in terms of providing financial and social security. By 2007, there were over 4,000 registered *Idirs* in Addis Ababa alone (ibid).

Despite the specific scope of work that these groups are established for (whether it is to help bury the deceased or simply help them to meet in an embracing and socially fulfilling manner) throughout the years of political and economic changes, they have adopted a multi-dimensional purpose that exceeds the sphere of community based sociability and finances. Based on the current situation in Ethiopia, they are best understood as 'organizational structures developed in interaction with the general socio-economic and political context, and that they evolve...in response to changes in the environment (De Weerdt, 2007). Primarily as groups that either bury, finance or socialize, but also as groups that have the influence and capacity to take on the larger reflections of their original intents (i.e. social policy, politics and economics). The fact

[7] The Derg regime came into power after executing the King during a coup in 1974. Since then, they ruled the country with a Socialist rhetoric inherited from Lenin and Stalin, part of which preached masses were to be empowered by being arranged into self-help groups.

that they have developed from one to the other also implies their developmental nature to ‘evolve’ and serve its members as well as the environment they live in. These are the type of institutions in Ethiopia that make up a landscape which does not include official status or law and yet function as effectively to the wellness of the country, if not more.

The migration of Ethiopians not only implies the removal of the physical and social setting of these institutions and the services the institutions offer, but the need for them to evolve in accord with the new environment. This evolution might be so extreme or stagnant. Therefore, this research asks how intact are social institutions when they are imported and what quality of relationships do they represent once imported? What else does the practice of Ethiopian social institutions in Johannesburg reflect about men, women and their traditionally ascribed roles? These are all questions necessary in understanding the overall effects that migration has on Ethiopians and their value system compared to the ones expressed through social institutions in Ethiopia. The answers to these questions determine the type and quality of relationships migrants build in the community while grappling with the changes these relationships bring about on their identity.

Through questions posed in the film, this study aims to investigate what different circumstances in new host environments contribute to the reconstruction of the ‘identity vacuum’ which Hall writes about and the relationship between of these reconstructions and the practice of imported social institutions.

Social Institutions, Identity and their Peripheries

Migration dictates that people change the way they live after being uprooted and losing their political, economic and social status. This is usually due to the existence and development of factors that surround and continue to help define those lives. The effect has been a constant and cyclic evolution between social institutions, identities and the lives that emanate from them, creating a retrospective urge to trace the roots of these modern-day complexities. For this reason, two factors, gender and the nature of community, lie on the peripheries of social institutions and identity and need to be addressed. These factors have important bearings on the way people's lives are defined and what this research is attempting to isolate and gain a deep understanding of. The development of identity in the context of migration creates a particularly unique scenario where their importance cannot be overlooked but are usually misunderstood or undermined.

Understanding Identity

In his book *Community* Gerard Delanty writes that in today's era of post-modernity and search for understanding of the 'self', identity has become an issue because the reference points for the self have become unstuck (2004:135). International interactions which include migration have melted the 'rigid structures of class, gender, nation ethnicity…[allowing] 'the self [to] be invented in many ways' (ibid). His research also takes the interchange of community to be the factors that have allowed sociologists and anthropologists to deconstruct and re-define the nature of society, its inhabitants and the notions of identity that result from their developments.

Ethiopian migrants come into South Africa with culturally pre-defined identities which include roles based on membership of a community. It is important to determine in what ways are these identities are challenged when placed in a context that these particular elements of identity no longer apply in.

i) Social Institutions becoming Communities

With the development of society and the changes that take place within its different components, concepts found therein such as 'community' also develop to embrace new meanings. In effect, community was seen as pertaining to relatively small groups …based on mutual interdependence and common forms of life [and was] held to be the foundation for a sense of belonging based on shared experiences, a common language, kinship ties and above all, of inhabiting a common spatial life-world (Delanty, 2003: 55). Historically speaking, locality and geographical area have also been important and perhaps central components of the idea of community (Plant, 38: 1974). With the spread of migration however, while many forms of community are being fragmented, there has been the reinvention of others (Delanty, 2003: 149). This is because locality has ceased to be the sole criterion and, as changes to lifestyle and the cultures that surround become inevitable, community has developed along the lines of contemporary living. While the word community used to refer to the attributes traditionally attached to it such as locality or shared ethnicity, its current definition presents another (although not mutually exclusive) sense of the word. Today's community can equally refer to geographical vicinity or simply a mix of either people from various backgrounds, origins, experiences, that may not necessarily share the same geographic vicinity but just similar ideas.

In addition to the existential aspects of community, there is an implicated functionality in that it satisfies the need of people, whether it is to reinforce a feeling (security, belongingness, rootedness) or a service, for example community schools or community health projects. Calhoun writes that traditional communities provide important shared structures for shared interests and a capacity for collective action to develop (1982, 1983). Ethiopian social institutions are the very embodiment of shared interests and collective action but their being brought into a country with different cultural settings may gradually alter them from being ineffective to altogether non-existent. This would result in a wide gap for migrants.

The memories that migrants carry with them also become endangered when they lack the corresponding physical or psychological embodiments of culture. These may range from a number of things that enable remembering, for example looking at pictures, being involved in certain acts, or watching others being involved in those acts. During this lack of contact, the fluidity of memory is activated and they begin to take shape around the present elements instead of the lacking ones. This is why Sturken speaks about the process of forgetting being an equally important one in the process of building memory as the process of remembering is (1997: 7-8). While remembering everything would amount to being overwhelmed (ibid), 'alteration' or 'omissions' in memory lead to the creation of new ones. Alterations or omissions could either be due to deliberate attempts, such as the need to block out traumatising memories, or due to the lack of connection maintained with their sources, which in this case can be social institutions as well as the practices, values and identities they represent.

Another challenge to communities in modern times is that, unlike the spirit of fraternity, cooperation and social solidarity that these terms are traditionally known to be based on, they are instead placed in the context of industrial capitalism. In the case of Ethiopian migrants who come to South Africa seeking better financial opportunities, their communal virtues are replaced by competition, cash, and conflict. As citizens with social values turn into mere specialized role players in the industrial context, this leads to the ultimate fragmentation of society (Rousseau, 1964, Plant, 1974, Delanty, 2003). *The Coffee Drinkers* will show viewers how this fragmentation translates in the Ethiopian community and what this also means on an individual level through discussions and the narrative voices that speak about the personal changes they have experienced as a result of these changes.

The flexibility in defining the word community now allows us to classify social institutions such as the Ethiopian funeral and social groups as a type of community, especially when they are established far away from home ground and possibly mixed with social elements of the host country. Despite the assertions of Rousseau, Delanty and Plant, these institutions in Ethiopia have resisted the 'damaging' effects of modernity and continue to serve the interests of their members based on communal and religious virtues. There are key factors still at play in Ethiopia which have allowed the sustenance of these institutions, despite the bourgeois culture that is also budding there[8] but missing in the life of migrants elsewhere. This is mainly because of the closeness that communities afford their inhabitants in both the geographical and social sense of the word. This allows

[8] The development of a bourgeois culture has been in place in Ethiopia since the overthrowing of the socialist Derg regime on 1990 and the adoption of a free market policy by the EPRDF (the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front), the country's current ruling party.

members of social institutions to continue investing in and developing the relationships within those environments. In the context of migrant life, however, these institutions can become subject to industrialization and class interests. This research investigates the applicability and depth of different factors such geography, the incompatibility of social values, the subjugation of migrant's cultures and other factors that surface during interviews with subjects. The analysis of these factors will then allow inference to the developing notion of identity and the connection the two entities maintain.

3. The Current Social Context

South Africa's current geopolitical and economic status makes it a popular destination for migrants both from the Southern African Development Community and beyond (Landau, 2005). Due to the continuous flow of undocumented immigrants into the country and the lack of a reliable methodology to verify the numbers (McDonald *et al*., 1999), there is no data indicating the exact number of immigrants residing in South Africa (Crush and Williams, 2005). There are however different studies from different times by the Human Science Research Council (HSRC) and Statistics South Africa which have claimed the existence of 500,000 to 1 million migrants[9]. Lack of further research makes it difficult to estimate Ethiopia's share of migrants in these figures. The information contained in this section regarding their livelihood and related matters is also based on informal discussions[10] held with various Ethiopians in Johannesburg rather than any literature.

These discussions are used to inform the fictional narrative which drives the film *The Coffee Drinkers,* marking the most likely beginning of life for an Ethiopian migrant woman in Johannesburg and the various circumstances it leads to later on. This also allows the narrative, *albeit* fictional, to be constructed on elements displayed by Ethiopians in Johannesburg and to therefore accurately mirror their way of life.

Ethiopians in South Africa

South Africa is a country that has its own unique and turbulent historical, social and political framework. Migrants enter this framework seeking the otherwise advantageous

[9] There are several more researches conducted earlier by the HSRC which claimed much higher numbers but disputes in methodology have rendered the findings erroneous.
[10] The interviews conducted have been referenced in the bibliography but under a pseudonym to protect the identity of the interviewees as stated in the ethical clearance.

economic arena the country offers. The effects of migration in the South African context differ for every migrant and the social heritage they bring with them. This section looks at the status of Ethiopians in Johannesburg and the environment they find themselves in. This will pave the way for understanding the factors at play (or against) importing and practicing their social institutions while earning a living. Discussion held with Ethiopian men and women in Johannesburg reveal that while many of them left Ethiopia mostly for economic reasons and few for political reasons, their sentiments about their current status in South Africa revolve around two main themes; being a business owner and being a foreigner.

i) Ethiopians as Business Owners

Throughout this research, it was continuously remarked by members of the community and those outside of it, that Ethiopians, particularly in Johannesburg, are responsible for a huge portion of the informal business sector. There is no concrete method of confirming or denying this statement. However, their claimed prominence in the country's economy is evident when one witnesses the number of Ethiopian business owners on Jeppe Street, Bree Street and other connected streets located in the Central Business District. These streets are informally also referred to as 'Little Ethiopia' or "Ethiopia Town'. Their businesses range from small scale sales of various items to the importing of merchandise from China and its redistribution in bulk amongst other Ethiopian vendors.

This particular business sector and the geographical area it is located in is under constant scrutiny and criticism by the South African government due to the fact that much of the merchandise imported from China are imitation brands, which negatively affect the

market for branded products. However, despite the clear legal breaches of this sector, it continues to thrive with only occasional raids conducted by the South African government[11]. Additional facts, such as many of the business operators or employees being either undocumented or awaiting documentation and claims of corruption amongst the South African Home Affairs department in granting these documentations only adds to the instability of the sector. Recently this instability culminated into a brutal raid by the joint forces of the Metro Police, the South African National Defence Force and the Tactical Response Team where armed men took over Jeppe Street, pepper sprayed several people and confiscated merchandise worth hundreds of thousands of Rands from Ethiopian merchants (*The Star*, Jan 11 2012 & Jan 12 2012). The fact that volatility of legal status is common to most Ethiopian migrant has given way to a culture of suspicion, mistrust and fear. This is also reflected in the film *The Coffee Drinkers.*

The physical set up of their business environment where they spend the bigger portion of their days, still allows Ethiopians physical closeness and constant interaction with one another. Aside from the comfort of dealing with people who share similar economical and cultural background, the relationships formed in this community do not extend to more than knowledge of one another's' basic background information such as city of origin, religion or marital status. They are also usually more business based than social ones. The close knit and seemingly impermeable structure of this business-minded

[11] Many Ethiopian merchants also believe that there is an agreement in place between the governments of China and South Africa which allows Ethiopians to import goods from China, even though the goods are illicitly branded and may later on be confiscated by the Johannesburg Metro Police. The main objective of the agreement, Ethiopians believe, is to allow the Chinese market to flourish at the expense of the Ethiopian merchants' loss. Regardless of whether this belief is true or not, it is very indicative of the continuously suspicious approach Ethiopians in the CBD carry with them and the mistrust they feel for even the authority figures of their new habitat.

community however sparks many different and negative sentiments amongst locals, not the least of which result in xenophobia.

ii) Ethiopians as Foreigners

Xenophobia is one aspect of the country's environment which all migrants bear the brunt of. Xenophobia is an attitude and prejudice developed by the host community that often results in the 'newcomers' being rejected and excluded from the rest of the community (International Organization for Migration, International Labour Organization, Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2001). In South Africa, this has translated into a series of violent attacks on migrants, culminating into a brutal rampage in May 2008 where 62 people were killed, 670 injured and 30,000 displaced (*Mail & Guardian Online*, 2008). The attacks were initiated by sentiments that foreigners stole jobs from locals, thereby exacerbating unemployment and crime. For Ethiopians, the rampage of 2008 and the events that preceded it had its own significance in terms of lack of security and continued uneasiness over their future in South Africa. Many across the country including Cape Town and Johannesburg suffered injuries or fatal attacks. The tight knit community became more impermeable as the threat they perceived outside of it grew. This is the environment into which the majority of Ethiopian migrants, including women, are brought into to establish a new life.

<u>The Status of Ethiopians in Johannesburg</u>

Many of the Ethiopian migrants in South Africa experience problems with documentation. In a study conducted by Liqu Gebre about the experiences of Ethiopian

migrants in Durban, many respondents reported that they entered South Africa illegally and attempt to obtain legal status after they came into the country through brokers who bribe officials at Home Affairs (Gebre, 2007: 35). The overall risks they face in undertaking illegal cross border journeys[12] is of such a great magnitude that it becomes the preset for all the relationships and activities they participate in once they arrive and begin interacting with other people. This is especially true for the women who feel vulnerable to crimes such as theft and rape. The fictional voice in *The Coffee Drinkers* is important to capture this aspect of women's experiences which in reality is found at the core of many of migrant families, family-owned businesses and social institutions.

Despite all these points of insecurity, many Ethiopian business owners are successful and make profits. However they feel that their success cannot be trusted by anyone but family, especially when it comes to looking after their shops and handling the cash flow. This mistrust has now extended to non-related Ethiopians as well as other foreign nationals on account of several instances where there have been reports of Ethiopians collaborating with other nationalities to commit crimes against them. Therefore, Ethiopian women usually find themselves being asked to migrate to South Africa to help look after a family business. Many of them are promised education in return and an improvement in the quality of their lives. Eventually, the strains of running a brimming business result in these promises never being fulfilled and the women becoming irreplaceable cogs in the wheels of the businesses. Other women who migrate on their

[12] Despite the attractive economic prospects, Ethiopians also struggle with their decision to migrate to South Africa based on the stories of crime and violence which are reported in the media and are retold by family members and friends who live in South Africa. Therefore the very onset of their journey is filled with trepidation and mistrust.

own initiative do so with the intention of being employed by Ethiopians or starting up their own businesses with the help of Ethiopians they know there. Here begin observable changes in traditionally ascribed roles between men and women.

The fact that Ethiopians are involved in a highly lucrative yet informal sector of the economy, in addition to the dubious legality of their status in South Africa only adds to the tension and instability they experience. For example, another research being conducted by the University of Witwatersrand on the growth of Jeppe Street and connected streets as models of 'modern cities' instigated many fears and rumours about hidden intentions of the research to displace Ethiopians and their businesses. For these reasons, while many were hesitant to be interviewed on camera, the women in particular refused, exhibiting the vulnerability they face in particular. Their refusal to be interviewed on camera and consequent physical absence in the film motivates the filmmaker to try and understand the barriers they face which lead to a string of actions ranging from social immobility to fear of self-expression. This gave rise to the fictional female voice that serves to incorporate several of their voices and presents other aspects uncovered in this research. It firstly allows an honest portrayal of the changes and emotions experienced within the constant fearful state they are in. Through intimate letters that this new migrant sends to her sister in Ethiopia telling her about all the differences she sees in Johannesburg, viewers are invited to understand the changes and emotions that arise out of different aspects of a migrant's life (i.e. arrival, starting work, integration with other migrants, experiences within social institutions). Secondly, it provides a setting for any residual or emergent culture that exists within their community

and the factors behind these changes. Lastly, it allows a conscious expression of the cultural memory that develops in their lives as a result of all these changes and the environment they take place in. The stream of consciousness found in the letters gives way to a story usually hidden behind statistics and reports.

4. Findings

The effects the institutions in question have on identity and any transformation that takes place cannot be measured as such. Therefore, focus group discussions with migrants were used to generate general information about Ethiopians in Johannesburg. The discussions with them were also analysed qualitatively to allow a greater understanding into their perceived identity, any changes they believe they have experienced, and what relations any changes may bear to the practice of social institutions. The information contained in this section is therefore based on the information these informants have provided the researcher with.

Profiles of Focus Group Discussion Participants

The discussions with Ethiopian migrants took place with 10 women and 7 men on various occasions. While 17 respondents is not a statistically sufficient number, it is sufficient to determine the common facets Ethiopians share, and observable trends that exist for men and women and any changes that take place when compared with traditionally ascribed roles. The information gathered from other Wits researchers that were simultaneously working in the area is also utilised in this study. This has allowed the development of qualitative analysis within the research which has helped create a fictional character with a realistic voice for the film.

While many of the interviewed women cited various day jobs that ranged being hired for sales clerks to managing family-owned clothes shops or restaurants, all the interviewed men claimed they were either business owners or business men involved in brokering deals or importing merchandise. All the interviewees spend their working hours on Jeppe

Street and its surrounding area but their residences much further away in various areas across Johannesburg. The positions held by women indicate that they claim responsibility for the day to day operations of businesses and that they are the ones trusted with the financial aspects. This translates into long working hours and limited free time to spend on anything outside of work as shops are open from Monday to Saturday. The men on the other hand spend most of their times in venues where businesses are discussed and conducted such as restaurants, cafes or other barbershops. The nature of the roles they play in Johannesburg as entrepreneurs allows them to meet and socialise amongst one another. The film reflects the different restraints and freedom exercised by these men and women. There were no women willing to be interview on camera in the interest of maintaining their anonymity[13]. More men on the other hand (although not all interviewed for the research) were comparatively willing and comfortable to be interviewed on film. While the men's interview reflects their opinions on the present day social conditions of Ethiopian migrants in Johannesburg, the women's absence is accounted for through the fictional voice of a newly arrived migrant. She marvels at the differences in the intimacy and mannerisms of Ethiopian women between those still in Ethiopia and those in Johannesburg. The unattached and distant mannerism she observes in the women are reflected in the film through their absence and unwillingness to be filmed. This point is also reiterated through the narrative of the filmmaker.

[13] The legality of their status in South Africa has also not been included in this research in accordance with the ethical requirements of this research to protect their anonymity, although the fact that the researcher has informally ascertained that many Ethiopians in Johannesburg are either undocumented or awaiting documentation does play a part in the analysis of this data in the final section.

South Africa as a Destination

All of the participants stated that they came to join at least one family member and to assist with running their business. Before South Africa was suggested to them as a destination, many of them were either still students in Ethiopia or unemployed and awaiting an opportunity to continue their education or search for a means of income.

A number of respondents also said that they expected to be able to move to other countries such as the USA or Australia and that their stay in South Africa would be temporary. They only considered South Africa as a crossing bridge to a country that they felt offered better economic prospects and security. Many of them were based on their current legal status in South Africa discouraged them and they finally accepted that South Africa is now their home.

Many of them explained that they are not happy with staying in Johannesburg because they perceive it as an unsafe and violent city that has limited their ability to socialise. They also feel unwanted by both locals who they feel are hostile to them and by official authorities who do not respect their rights and constantly harass them. These feelings culminate in the film through archival footage showing the Johannesburg Military Police and the Tactical Response Team storm into their businesses, confiscating their merchandise and physically assaulting bystanders. All these events results in a mindset where women feel that their lives are in suspension, solely focused on working, avoiding attacks and prevented from creating social ties that they otherwise would have if they had

either remained in Ethiopia or moved on to another country. This mindset is also reflected when examining their membership of social institutions found in Johannesburg.

Membership of Ethiopian Institutions in South Africa

Only 4 of the interviewed respondents are members of a funeral group or *Idir* and only one of them is a member of a social group or *Mahbers*. Their stated reasons for not being members of an *Idir* or *Mahber* centred on the fact that they did not know they existed and even if they did, either did not have time or know enough people in the groups to become members. Of the 4 that are members of an *Idir*, 3 of them are men. The one respondent who is a member of a *Mahber* is also a man.

There is a duality in the development of Ethiopian social institutions in Johannesburg, one that reflects the emergence of certain aspects while other remain residual in the sense that Williams speaks of and all in relation to the dominant one. In the face of the dominant culture in South Africa, there is a very large migrant community made up from different countries, all vying to gain space in the capital's highly competitive economy. For Ethiopian migrants, earning an excessive income to support large families both in the country and back in Ethiopia takes precedence. Meanwhile, the basic functions of Idirs and Mahbers are retained as residual, partly because certain aspects of migrants' lives such as marriage or death remain constant. Another reason is because the learned processes of socialising amongst and supporting one another, and the platforms or institutions they are encased in, remain deeply ingrained and therefore unaffected by other processes which exist in the South African context.

The emergent culture, however, is the changed membership of these institutions. While traditionally ascribed roles were still used by migrants as a referent in their interviews, it becomes clear that women, because of their assumed responsibilities as shop keepers, money managers or trusted overseers of business become submerged in day-to-day functionalities and have little time to socialize with other Ethiopians. Instead, the men have been left to socialize and to take advantage of utilising the social processes once primarily benefitted women. The result of this role reversal and emergent culture is arrested development in relationships amongst Ethiopian women in South Africa, which is also depicted in the film *The Coffee Drinkers*. The men on the other hand, because of the nature of work they have undertaken as deal makers or business representatives, take advantage of various social platforms and social interactions (*albeit* on a reduced scale such as meetings at restaurants or barbershops) to fulfil their roles which form a picture of Ethiopian migrant men in Johannesburg. These aspects seep into the practice of social institutions which, although visibly transported to South Africa, have their functionality also reduced to the bare minimum.

Williams writes that although both residual and emergent cultures do exist in the framework provided by a dominant one, the residual is always easier to trace since they relate to earlier social formations ….in which certain real meanings and values were created (1977: 23-24). In certain niches experienced (which although he does not specify to the context of migrants but they can still pertain to) he explains there is a 'reaching back' to the past which contains these meanings and values because 'they represent human experience, aspiration and achievement which the dominant culture neglects,

undervalues, opposes, represses or cannot even recognize' (ibid). These elements are the building blocks of one's socialisation which is encompassed in the memory (as Sturken elaborates and states to be the essence of what she sees to be the identity that results from it). While it is obvious that Ethiopian migrants in Johannesburg do still act in accordance with the basic foundations of their memory by importing the semblances their social institutions, despite the little encouragement they gain from the dominant culture that surrounds them, the changes seen therein are vast and noticeable.

On the surface of these institutions as practiced in Johannesburg, the value of personal commitment is exhibited through monetary contributions or representational visits by the males of the family. However, the personal touch that families and neighbours in a community provide, as well as the emotional and psychological backing social institutions represent in Ethiopia, have been lost in the framework of living and surviving in Johannesburg as migrants. In *Idirs,* the various roles that members play in their capacity as men and women have been reduced (because of lack of membership and commitment) to simply contributing a fixed amount of money in the event of a death amongst migrants, while *Mahbers* have shed their facets of fostering or maintaining ties and have 'devolved' to their original function which is that of celebrating patron saints. Meetings no longer take place in members' homes and instead take place in one of the two Ethiopian Orthodox churches found in Johannesburg. This is also illustrative of the distance migrants place between social institutions and the personal spaces of their homes, another reversal of practices that change the nature of imported social institutions and the changes they bring to Ethiopian identity.

The Coffee Drinkers as part of the Research

The Coffee Drinkers is a self reflexive documentary that combines a personal and factual journey with an imaginative depiction of what an Ethiopian migrant woman's life is like in Johannesburg. The film starts in Ethiopia indicating that a migrant's experiences are always connected to and measured against his or her homeland. From there, the film travels to South Africa with Aster, a fictional Ethiopian woman whose story is born in the subconscious of the filmmaker when she experiences resistance from Ethiopian women to document their lives and experiences. Aster's story reflects a combination of the little the filmmaker discovers about Ethiopian women in Johannesburg and magnitude of what the absence of women is telling of.

Aster writes regularly to another sister back in Addis Ababa and informs her of the changes she is experiencing and witnessing other Ethiopian women go through. Her letters are the only mediums that afford a sense of real communication amidst a community that is fragmented and unsettled. As the film progresses her tone shifts from uncertainty to despair, realising that she will not be living the life she had imagined anytime soon and that there is no one to share this sentiment with.

At the beginning of the film, the repeated imagery of a clay coffee pot and coffee being consumed shows the solidarity amongst Ethiopian women which inspired this film. The coffee pot is also presented as an inanimate character which is also representational of the ties coffee making bears with women and their practices within social institutions.

The imagery for this story is told by weaving random archival shots, photographs of Jeppe Street, and newspaper articles which when put together tell a story of how the community lives on a day to day basis (ranging from an exotic culture to an illegally operating business community) and the place they hold in the continuously reforming structure that is Johannesburg. In one scene a photograph showing the regular activities of the day is juxtaposed with a photograph taken from a newspaper clipping which shows the police brutality and violence experienced in the same place. This juxtaposition shows the different elements that govern the community's existence and continuously active in the building of their memory and identity.

While affording viewers of this film factual and interpretive insight about the lives of Ethiopian men (and through the letters, the lives of Ethiopian women) in Johannesburg and the transformations that take place in their identity, another story runs parallel to the narrative; that of the filmmaker herself. The filmmaker talks about her childhood memories in relation to social institutions and the sense of community she grew up with. She asks what happens to these communities and ties to them, when women, who are the most active members in Ethiopia, travel to a country like South Africa. The importance of the filmmaker's own perspective is made apparent from the very first scene where in addition to her voice, her reflection can be seen next to an old woman roasting coffee. The questions she asks community members in the local language throughout the film are slightly inaudible[14] which shows the subtle yet essential presence she chose to be represented in the film, a reinforcement of the role she plays as emotionally engaged researcher, narrator and 'objective spectator'.

[14] Her voice would have still required subtitling even if it were in English because of its inaudibility.

Additional interviews in the film show the important places the representation of these characters hold in the community, namely that of Ethiopian men in general and researchers from Wits university who started frequenting the area around the same time the filmmaker did. Although also new to the community the Wits researcher is included to support and help complete the perceptions of the filmmaker by explaining her own observations during her time there. The researcher is representational of the little room the community has for outsiders and the limited means they have of interacting with them on equal footing. Although the researcher's experiences are based on staunch resistance to converse and reveal anything, this strong will is actually reflective of the weaknesses that the community believes lies within them and could be used against them. Again the lack of sense of unity and wellness that social institutions usually afford communities is visibly missing and replaced with a heightened sense of migrant identity.

The interviews with men show how they have come to the foreground of social activities; they serve to explain the role reversals between men and women in the community and how as a result the social processes that once validated the traditional roles of women in Ethiopia have been altered by life in South Africa. The clarity of this sentiment is expressed when one of the barbers jokes that i-phones now replace social institutions amongst Ethiopians in Johannesburg. The very fact that they are the only ones present to speak in a space claimed for men only and on behalf of women shows the men as practitioners of social processes and, by inference, the space women occupy as the ones hard at work (instead of the men) and far removed from other roles.

The narrative paradigm employed to tell Aster's story and the filmmaker's journey to self reflection has all the customary techniques such as point of view, character development, climax, and denouement (Uko, 2007). While point of view is utilized to impart the personal emotions Aster and the filmmaker harbour throughout the film, and the changes they both experience while witnessing the life Ethiopians lead, climax is used to position the violence experienced on Jeppe Street during police raids and the denouement sees the realisation of the effects this results in for all involved. Aster's story, and consequently the representation of Ethiopian migrants, is told through her confusion of how things can be so different despite the familiarity the environment around her projects. The mistrust, secrecy, constant anxiety, danger and unhappiness she perceives is also key to the relationships she witnesses in the community, an indirect reflection on the way the community interacts and social institutions are manifested. At the end of the film it becomes apparent that the lifestyle she is witnessing and is so critical of is none other than her own fate.

The combination of imagery, interviews and fictional narrative portrays the filmmaker's attempt to document the lives of Ethiopian migrants as a self reflexive one. The film utilizes the reflexive mode of representation, making the convention of representation (such as microphone boom poles or subtle reflections of the filmmaker) apparent and using self reflexivity as a premise for both two stories. The first premise is that all the filming in the setting of this research, Ethiopia Town, had to be done in secret, much like the surreptitious nature of all the relationships and transactions amongst Ethiopians that is described in it. This includes the images taken during the violent scene on Jeppe Streets

which is shaky and illustrative of the instability sensed and danger posed. Second, self reflexivity allowed the filmmaker to address issues that arose before the film and to incorporate them into the film. As the community members questioned the intention of the filmmaker, and women in particular refuse to be interviewed on film, the filmmaker uses these suspicions to further understand the elements present in Ethiopian migrants' lives and its manifestations on the practice of social institutions. By addressing all of the roles that the researcher played during the study and the making of the film, as researcher, Ethiopian and unwanted guest within the community, *The Coffee Drinkers* draws on the similarities between the sentiments of the filmmaker and those that Aster harbours about her new community, fuelling her narrative and projecting the troubled spirit of the Ethiopian community in Johannesburg. Aster's story however could not encompass all of the issues present because of the sometimes indirect and far ranging connections between the two. Another evidence of the film's self reflexivity is the way different interviews are framed to the screen and the relations these framings bear to the comparative strength of presence the filmmaker sensed in the community. For example, the interviews with the Ethiopian men in the barbershop take over the whole screen to show their level of comfort in being interviewed and the representation their gender offers within the community. The interview with the researcher is framed slightly smaller based on the distance she claims was always maintained from her in the community. Aster's letters on the other hand are framed to only take up a certain portion of the centre of the screen to show the space her representation and the representation of other women takes in the community. These framings are also reflective of the memories created during migration

by allowing interpretative visualisation of the amount of space used to represent them on the screen.

The narrative of the filmmaker and Aster serve the recurrent argument of whether or not even reflexive documentaries are clouded by the ideology of the filmmaker[15]. While certain things about the imagery for Aster's story has been manipulated, for example the consumption of coffee being depicted as an important platform in an Ethiopian's life, the imagery for the parallel story of the film making process shows the limited options regarding how, when and where to shoot, proving that there was little scope for selectivity and thus achieving some objectivity.

The Coffee Drinkers uses the same technique found in the documentary film *Okay Bye-Bye* by Rebecca Baron where the viewer is placed in the position of reading letters addressed to someone else (Baron, 2011: 336). In both films, the letters allow issues raised in the parallel story line to be addressed and they allow them to capitalize on the sincerity of the emotions and thoughts being relayed as opposed to embellished dialogue designed for aesthetics or entertainment. The resulting similarity of intention between both *Okay Bye-Bye* and *The Coffee Drinkers* is also apparent when Jaimie Baron, who analysed Baron's film, writes that her film not only enacts the desire to turn archival footage into a narrative but also suggests that certain fragments can never be contained by the story (ibid).

[15] See Carroll (1996: 224), Nichols (1991: 33-57), Bruzzi (2000: 4).

5. Conclusion

Ethiopia's history of political and economical instability accounts for the existence of one of the largest migrant populations in the world. Although there are no concrete statistics, various evidence show that South Africa hosts a significant number of these migrants.

The world of migrants is one riddled with complications that follow from being physically and emotionally distanced from one's home country. The deficit of legal, economical and psychological frameworks that are otherwise meant to provide support lead to migrants experiencing a niche which can affect anything from their day-to-day lives to deep entrenched values associated with practicing their culture and embracing their identity. Equally vulnerable to being affected are social institutions that help reflect, celebrate and preserve these values. Social institutions are 'tools' found within a community that allow community members to fulfil their traditions, live up to responsibilities towards one another and contribute to their growing sense of identity.

Ethiopia has several social institutions that help attain these benefits; two of which were chosen to gauge the sense of community and traditional roles brought along with migrants. These groups are funeral groups or *Idirs* and social groups or *Mahbers*. While both function to assist community members with different aspects of their lives (i.e. burials and social meetings) they share the common trait of being community based and reflective of the roles all members are expected to play towards one another based on ingrained values and prescribed traditional roles amongst the different age groups, sexes and statuses in the community. This research examined if and how social institutions are

reformed in the context of migration and what changes this reformation leads to in the reconstruction of Ethiopian migrant identity.

When looking specifically at how Ethiopian social institutions are based on gender to help members fulfil their traditionally ascribed roles, this translates to women cooking for funerals and carrying out celebration for the patron saints of the month while men handle finances and represent the family during gatherings, even in their absence. Therefore studying the different impacts that imported or reformed social institutions have on both its members allows an understanding of the factors at play in a new environment and the broader changes they will lead to in communities.

The research showed that what appeared to be changes on the surface in the routine and life style of migrants were also telling of the transformation that takes place in the culture beneath. By living in South Africa, Ethiopians have subconsciously been forced to prioritize other aspects of their lives over elements of the social processes that once governed them in Ethiopia, not necessarily because of any new learned values but based on the practicalities of their current environment. This is a reflection of Williams' analysis of how cultures become subjected to change when brought into a new environment. The presence of an already existing culture, which in this case is the South African one, means that it is the dominant one while elements of Ethiopian culture, namely the social institutions, diminish in importance and retreat to being residual. An ensuing clash between the pragmatics of life in Johannesburg and conformity to their own

culture has taken place as *Idirs* and Mahbers still form part of their value system[16] but their lives in the Johannesburg leave them no time for. The result of this clash has been the emergence of a new culture where Ethiopian men have taken over social processes, while the women have taken on the male roles of 'worker' and business manager. This role reversal is depicted in the film *The Coffee Drinkers* through the story of Aster, a new migrant who tries to reconciliate the values she lived by in Ethiopia and her new life in South Africa. The film also comments on the emotional value these changes lead to through the voice of the filmmaker who is dismayed by the absence of women in her film but uses it to understand the new roles men have taken in their place.

Through the interviews conducted with community members and those who come in close contact with the community, the most common sentiment expressed is the instability of their lives and the lack of meaningful interactions they lead to. The constant fear that Ethiopian migrants experience due to their legal status, the legality of their businesses and the hatred they sense from locals casts a shadow over their sense of belonging, safety and lack of community. The fear and anxiety caused by these circumstances solidifies their statuses as 'outsiders' or 'new-comers' no matter how long they have been in the country. Consequently, their understanding of South African culture and languages becomes very limited and remains an incomprehensible phenomenon. The result is an environment where migrants do not mix with locals, gain

[16] None of the respondents were members of any of these social institutions in question before they migrated to South Africa. This could however be attributed to the fact that they were young and still living in their parents' homes. They also stated that their mothers or female guardians who were the caregivers of their homes in Ethiopia were members of at least 2 out of 3 of these institutions, a testament to the values these institutions promoted and the social environment into which these women were brought up in.

little to no understanding of their culture and remain enclosed in their own community which has the psychological and somewhat physical demarcation of Jeppe Street, Bree Street and closely connected streets, collectively known as 'Ethiopia Town' in the CBD. The new lifestyle they adopt however, even though they remain in their own community has a significant impact on the existence of Ethiopian social institutions in South Africa.

The Impact of Migration on Ethiopian Social Institutions

The close day-to-day proximity that Ethiopians find themselves in predetermines that they utilize social institutions familiar to them to maintain and govern interactions amongst themselves. The collective memory that they share is also a core reference for the manner in which these interactions should take place. However, the transitory mindset they enter the country with and the anxiety they feel from their experiences in the new country extends to the quality of relationships established therein. The change in the environment pre-empts a certain level of 'evolution' on behalf of the institutions so as to maintain their applicability. This research has found that the chain of circumstances that surround migrant's lives here have led to alterations in the practice of their institutions which lead to a reduced quality of social ties they maintain with other Ethiopians. While the relationships they maintain with one another are still under the guise of the institutions, they are actually ruled by practical needs instead of ingrained values. This includes assistance required in the event of a death as opposed to consolation, or assistance required to organise church festivities in the place of families meeting to celebrate together. Priorities to earn money and provide for their families in Johannesburg and Ethiopia have led to the deterioration of other spheres in their lives. This explains the

drastic transformation of social institutions from being a platform that caters to people's economical, psychological and spiritual needs to one centred only on pragmatics.

Due to the fact that Ethiopians maintain a strenuous work routine and do not live in the same residential areas, both institutions have evolved to run differently in South Africa. Firstly, locality or social ties no longer forms the basis of membership as it does in Ethiopia. They are instead represented in a physical business environment that has little space for the active practices of value found in Ethiopia. Therefore migrants can be members of the same *Idir* or *Mahber* based on the mere fact that they are Ethiopians and regardless of where they live. The combination of their work routine, lack of pre-established social ties and dispersal of residences has led to substituting meeting in member's homes with meeting in a communal venue. Socialising, consoling and celebrating a patron saint all take place in either a rented hall or in one of the two Ethiopian Orthodox Churches found in Johannesburg. The social memories that form out of these acts are limited to revolving around the basic civilities that join them in Johannesburg rather than deep rooted values they shared in Ethiopia.

The second significant difference that these semblances of social institutions display is that they have superseded the notion of community, from being structures found within to replacing them altogether. The Ethiopian migrant community does not meet or socialize except on occasions afforded by these institutions such as weddings, funeral and religious celebrations. There has been a literal deconstruction of the notion of community as the day-to-day interactions amongst them have been reduced to a business oriented nature.

The third and final difference noted is that these reformed social institutions no longer call for the specialised contribution of women which would allow them to socialise on their own. Instead their membership is usually merged with that of either their spouse or the male head of the family. The fact that migrant life has changed the role of women from caregivers to business managers has also led to their dispossession of the social processes that used to reinforce their primary identity. As a result, Ethiopian men now claim the foreground in the sphere of social institutions by virtue of their free time (as compared to the women) and the fact that, as men, they experience fewer restrictions than women. Therefore, importing Ethiopian social institutions into Johannesburg has led to the aspects that are based on rituals and values to be a residual form of culture and one that is defined against the dominant culture of a fast paced economy and society with too many cultural barriers to cross. The aspects based on traditionally ascribed gender roles have, on the other hand, become an emergent culture, characterised by gender role reversal in both the day-to-day setting and the setting of a social institution.

The Impact of Migration on Ethiopian Identities

The Ethiopian community members' interdependence on one another creates a repressive effect where they hardly ever leave their community and find themselves able to interact only with other Ethiopians. However, the busy and stressful new lifestyle that they adopt also prevents them from fully and freely engaging with other Ethiopians. The very nature of the work they undertake in the informal (and quite illegal) business sector and life style Ethiopians adopt in South Africa makes them feel unsafe, unwanted and believe in its temporariness. Bulcha found similar effects amongst Ethiopian migrants in Sudan where he explains all of these difficulties as a disruption of life, the loss of a sense of belonging

to a community, and the postponement of education [and] careers. (1988). This research has established that in Johannesburg, the fast-paced unstable and untrustworthy environment forces them to limit their relationships outside of their families and invert to the immediate members of their family present.

Social platforms, which would have otherwise facilitated mutual understanding and support for one another, cease to exist. As a result, age old social groups such as *Idirs* and *Mahbers* which are based on trust and a mutual sense of values exist outside of their authentic structures. The newly moulded versions of these structures equally leave only a hint of the cultures they were taught to embrace. They nonetheless exist as they are they are part of the fabric that make up the memory of the average Ethiopian who was in all likelihood raised with at least one (if not both) of these social institutions forming a part of his or her life . Memory, as Marita Sturken explains, is the spine that holds up one's understanding of whom one is. Within it are many elements that are the building blocks of one's identity. The change of context and social dynamics means that identity begins to be remoulded to suit this new context, a process Stuart Hall explains to be natural since 'identity' is not a static entity but one that is always in the process of being reformed.

The erosion of the lifestyle and associated values Ethiopians practiced prior to migration coupled with the strenuous routine the community adopts on arrival in South Africa[17] has curbed their need to socialise amongst one another, their ability to trust one another, and therefore, the practicality of the social groups or institutions in question as they are

[17] The findings in Gebre's research (2007) also indicate similar findings in Durban which allows some generalization about Ethiopians in South Africa.

practiced in Ethiopia. The repression of their identities is in turn reflected in their attitudes when the respondents of this research spoke disparagingly about other Ethiopians in Johannesburg and the futility of relationships with one another outside the membership of these altered social institutions and their future in South Africa. The response of one respondent encapsulates this attitude,

> If I get the chance to get married and have a child, I would pick a husband from back home, and I would teach my child nothing but English. All my cousins married here and where are they now? All my family members and I here speak Amharic and what good has it served us? I wouldn't want my husband or child to be a part of this world. (Birukti)

Interviewees in the film also speak about how the fact that people come to South Africa to strictly earn money and support families robs them of sentiments and values that once governed their acts in Ethiopia. Repeated statements such as "there is no love in this country' and 'everyone here is just searching for an opportunity' shows how far removed Ethiopians consider themselves to be from the identities that their collective culture once provided them with. This is once again made observable though the drastic changes that exist in social institutions. The memories that play an important role in creating their sense of identity become replaced with new ones made in Johannesburg. These new memories carry the sense of old values being challenged every day, new ones being represented and a reversal in the roles of men and women who once contribute to the maintenance of these values in their own special ways. The result is either a fragmented memory of the past or its complete replacement with the new, but a change in Ethiopian migrant identity either way.

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7. Filmography

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