Deterritorialized People in Hyperspace: Creating and Debating Harari Identity over the Internet

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Abstract: Where Glick-Schiller and others have preferred to use the terms transmigrant or transnational (1992; 1995) rather than immigrant, in order to suggest that identities are multiply constituted and lived across borders, these identities may, in fact, be further complicated by the creation of an additional dimension which others have not considered—a virtual reality within which aspects of community and culture are simultaneously being defined. In the deterritorialized space of hyperspace, where time and space are compressed (cf. Harvey, 1989), and constructions are detached from any local reference (Kearney, 1995: 553), members of a small Ethiopian population, known as the Harari, are invoking a new language of nationhood in order to give shape to a now dispersed community. This is an example of how new media can provide a forum for the creation of national identity outside national borders, and how those with access to this technology are the ones most active in that discussion. This exploration of the use of new media offers insight into the ways in which transnational, and more broadly, transtemporal and transspatial processes are involved in redefining community relations and identities amongst dispersed peoples in a postmodern world.

Résumé: Glick-Schiller et d'autres ont préféré parler d'identités transmigrantes ou transnationales (1992, 1995) pour évoquer la condition immigrante dans le but d'indiquer que ces identités sont constituées de divers apports et se vivent à travers les frontières. Ces identité peuvent en fait être compliquées davantage par l'addition d'une dimension qui a été négligée – une réalité virtuelle à l'intérieur de laquelle certains aspects de la communauté et de la culture sont définis simultanément. Dans l'espace déterritorialisé de l'hyperespace, où le temps et l'espace sont comprimés (Harvey, 1989), et où les constructions sont détachées de toute référence locale (Kearney, 1995: 553), des membres d'une petite population éthiopienne, connus sous le nom de Harari, font appel à un nouveau langage de nationalité pour donner une forme à une communauté maintenant dispersée. C'est un exemple de la façon dont les nouveaux média peuvent offrir un forum pour la création d'une identité nationale hors-frontières et du fait que ceux qui ont accès à cette technologie sont ceux qui participent le plus à cette discussion. Cette exploration de l'utilisation des nouveaux média permet de voir comment les processus transnationaux, et plus généralement les processus qui transcendent l'espace et le temps, sont impliqués dans la redéfinition des relations communautaires et des identités parmi les groupes dispersés dans le monde postmoderne.

Introduction

In 1991, Ethiopians abroad celebrated as revolutionary forces toppled the socialist dictatorship that had ruled their country of origin for nearly two decades. This regime, known as the Dergue,[1] will be remembered by many Ethiopians and foreign observers as a reign of terror during which the government committed gross systematic and wide-scale human rights abuses. Not only did the atrocities committed by the Dergue throughout the 1970s and 80s[2] create massive internal displacement, but hundreds of thousands of Ethiopians scattered worldwide in search of refuge. In a matter of less than two decades, a global diaspora of people from a country that had no previous history of immigration was created.

Diaspora, the idea of people who imagine themselves as a nation outside of a homeland (Kearney, 1995: 553), is a phenomenon implying movement—not only dispersal, but often that of an idealized return (cf. Safran 1991: 83-84).[3] Until recently, Ethiopians living outside the country were considered to be living in exile (Catholic, 1998: 1)—an undesirable and involuntary state of homelessness that could only be rectified by return. In the Ethiopian case, the possibility of return became an option in 1991. The majority of those living in exile, however, did not seize upon that opportunity. This has forced the creation of an identity which acknowledges the permanence of the diaspora, and demands the establishment of borders which define a community in global terms.

In this paper I explore aspects of this negotiation amongst members of one Ethiopian community. The Harari—a community of Muslim Ethiopians originally from the city of Harar—are a dispersed community, with one third of their population now scattered across the globe. With the creation of a Harari e-mail discussion forum and several web sites devoted to history, language and culture, Hararis are using the Internet as a space within which the widest number of people from the community living abroad can engage in the debate and cre-

ation of a new global identity. This is ironically, however, a conversation that excludes both Hararis in Ethiopia, who lack access to this technology, and most elders living abroad because they are not conversant in English, and/or the technological language required to participate. Elders are well aware of what is communicated though, as e-mails are regularly shared, translated and debated within families and community associations in different cities.

In the deterritorialized space of hyperspace, where time and space are compressed (cf. Harvey, 1989), and constructions are detached from any local reference (Kearney, 1995: 553), a limited number of Hararis are invoking a new language of nationhood in order to give shape to a now dispersed community. This is an example of how new media can provide a forum for the creation of national identity outside national borders, and how those with access to this technology are the ones most active in that discussion. This exploration of the use of new media offers insight into the ways in which transnational, and more broadly, transtemporal and transspatial processes are involved in redefining community relations and identities amongst dispersed peoples in a postmodern world.

Where Glick-Schiller and others have preferred to call such identities transmigrant or transnational (1992; 1995) rather than immigrant, in order to suggest that identities are multiply constituted and lived across borders, these identities may, in fact, be further complicated by the creation of an additional dimension which others have not considered—a virtual reality within which aspects of community and culture are simultaneously being defined.

The Myth of Return

In many diasporic cases, the idea of repatriation to the homeland is phrased as conditional; dependent upon a change in the circumstances which led to dispersal, and often attached, in the collective imagination, to a political or spiritual event such as the establishment of a separate state (as in the case of Israel), the overthrow of a dictatorship, the secession of war, or, for the more eschatologically oriented, the day of resurrection, or the afterlife. Since most Ethiopians who fled their country did so as a result of direct or indirect persecution by the *Dergue*, the fall of this regime and the installation of democratic government between 1991 and 1995[4] marked the realization of the condition upon which the idea of return had been premised.

Few Ethiopians have actually returned home though, since the combined forces of the Ethiopian People's Revo-

lutionary Democratic Front (the EPRDF) seized power in 1991. The worldwide dispersal of Ethiopians has to be recognized as having a permanence now that repatriation is (for many) possible. The idea of return is often revealed as shared myth when the circumstances which created a diaspora have been ameliorated and repatriation is realistically considered and more often rejected than attempted. The sentiment "when there is democracy in Ethiopia" is now being rearticulated as a question of whether or not lasting peace and democracy is ever possible in Ethiopia.

The thought of having to give up material gains acquired abroad undoubtedly informs much of this new questioning. Generational differences in attitudes toward repatriation also assert a critical influence here. Ethiopian youth in the diaspora—the first generation of Ethiopians to grow up outside Ethiopia—tend to identify more with the North American contexts in which the majority of them have been raised than the distant homeland most left as young children. Where repatriation is discussed among them, it is a consideration framed more by their experiences in and perceptions of their North American environment than by the commitment to, memory or imagination of the homeland which members of their parents' generation are more likely to possess.

For people whose diasporic identities have to some extent been defined in terms of the notion of eventual return to the homeland from which they are exiled, rejecting the possibility of return once return is made possible, inevitably results in a reconsideration of one's place, and one's people in the world. But as Clifford states, "Peoples whose sense of identity is centrally defined by collective histories of displacement and violent loss cannot be 'cured' by merging into a new national community," (1994: 307). When return home is not possible, resisting merger may be easier; at a distance, home can be idealized and exile considered temporary. With the reopening of space and the creation of the option of return, the language of exile necessarily transforms into the new language of diaspora and identities are redefined in light of this.

Ethnographic Contact and Harari Dispersal

The Harari homeland is the small walled city of Harar in the eastern highlands of Ethiopia. The city is legendary among Ethiopians and adventurous European travellers.[5] Hararis governed what was an independent Muslim city state and a centre of commerce and Islamic scholarship for several centuries. As a population, they stood in a privileged position vis-à-vis neighbouring populations of Oromo, Somali, Argobba and Afar. Hararis owned the fer-

tile farmlands around the city, monopolized trade in the marketplace and converted neighbouring populations to Islam. While they were able to fend off successive attempts at invasion by warring factions of Oromo over the centuries, in 1887, the Harari army (which included both Hararis and enculturated Oromo) was ultimately defeated by the Amharas. The army of these Abyssinian Christian highlanders annexed Harar in their campaign of territorial expansion, incorporating it into the country we know as Ethiopia today. [6]

The first extensive ethnographic work on the Hararis was undertaken in the early 1970s, before the *Dergue* began to deny foreign researchers access to most parts of the country. Then, the community was described as a "one city culture" (Waldron, 1974: 6)—with the vast majority of the population living within the city walls and sharing something they describe as a moral commitment to remaining there, and, in particular, to defending the city from outside forces. Over the last two decades, approximately two thirds of the community has left the city, one-third taking up residence in larger Ethiopian cities, and the other third compromised of those who fled abroad and the relatives they subsequently sponsored. The largest concentration of Hararis outside Ethiopia is found in Toronto, where nearly 10% of the population has come to reside over the last 15 years.

The research upon which this paper is based is the first multisited ethnographic work (cf. Marcus, 1995) with a specific Ethiopian population and draws comparatively on three years of field research in Harar and Toronto. My field research in Toronto has drawn upon complementary sets of relations: participant observation with both individual families and the Harari community association, and, simultaneously, involvement in discussions taking place on H-Net an e-mail-based discussion forum for Hararis. Membership on the list requires nomination by one or more Harari "brothers" or "sisters," which means that to some extent, this virtual community is founded on real-world connections. The majority of subscribers are young men who live in North America. I was allowed access to this closed and moderated list otherwise exclusively subscribed to by Hararis. Some of the methodological concerns which might be legitimately raised relating to the anonymity of this kind of exchange are mediated by the fact that I, as well as most of the subscribers, know many of the other members in person. As such, people frequently elaborate on discussions raised on H-Net when they meet.

While Hararis are now dispersed around the globe, they call themselves the *Ge usu'*, literally, "the people of the city of Harar." This highly emotive and place-referen-

tial language is used to refer to many aspects of their culture, and to distinguish the Harari from Oromo, Amhara, Somali, Gurage and Argobba neighbours in Harar.[7] Just as Harari culture is known, for instance, as *Ge 'ada*, "culture of the city," houses as *Ge garach*, or "houses of the city," Hararis refer to themselves as *Ge waldach* and *Ge kahatach*, "sons" and "daughters of the city."

Since the ethnographic observations made in the late 1960s and early 1970s, Ethiopia has undergone nearly two decades of a socialist dictatorship which has had dramatic socio-economic and demographic repercussions. For the Harari, as a wealthy landed class, this included the total undermining of the basis of their position of relative economic prestige over neighbouring populations with the abolition of private ownership. With consequent movement in search of other economic opportunities, the execution of significant numbers of their population who were involved in resistance movements, and the flight of more than a third of their population abroad, only one third of the total population of Hararis remains in the original city today and Oromo, Somali and Amhara have moved in to occupy those places formerly occupied by Harari.

From the mid-1970s onwards, Hararis sought political asylum in the neighbouring countries of Djibouti, Sudan, Somalia, and Saudi Arabia. From here, most eventually left for Europe—primarily Italy and Germany. After an average of one to seven years of temporary residence in Europe, most Hararis left for the U.S., Canada and Australia—countries where many have found eventual citizenship. As was the case with members of other Ethiopian ethnic groups, the first Hararis to arrive in North America were young single men. In some cases they fled taking younger siblings with them, and in a limited number of cases entire families escaped together. These initial exiles subsequently sponsored friends and family members to join them.

While those who fled during the Mengistu era did so primarily as political asylum seekers, the establishment of communities abroad appealed to many who were less directly threatened by the *Dergue*, and presents an option to those who live in the post-*Dergue* era and wish to migrate to better their educational and/or economic prospects and/or be reunited with family. Where the notion of exile is associated with the temporary foreign residence of individuals, community building is a diasporic process. Migration is now considered a viable and desirable option for the younger generation of a population who historically did not generally consider such a possibility beyond the seasonal migration to Saudi Arabia during the month of the *Haj*, and for elderly parents whose children now all reside abroad.

Hararis are now concentrated in the major urban centres of Toronto, Washington, Dallas, Houston, Atlanta, Los Angeles and Sydney and struggling to maintain connections to each other and the homeland. As much as they are sons and daughters of the city, they are sons and daughters of transnational passage and a global diaspora. In the diaspora, they refer to themselves by the less place-specific term Harari, or Hararian, and in describing their current dispersal, they see themselves as *butugne usu'* (dispersed or scattered people) or *baqannga* (refugees—from the verb for flight, escape or evacuation during war time). In calling themselves Harari they implicitly acknowledge a global identity—the word Harari, the English word for inhabitants of Harar has been appropriated by the *Ge usu'* of the English-speaking world. What are the processes involved and repercussions of this semantic shift, though? What happens when *Ge usu'* become Hararis? What transformations of identity occur when people of the city leave the city? If *Ge usu'* identity refers to a specific place how is identity recreated in multiple sites and in whose terms and what language? How is this place embodied, abstracted or widened to encompass a global arena?

Where most work on diasporic communities emphasizes the sense of collectivity which dispersed peoples work to achieve, studying such a newly formed diaspora as this serves to illustrate the often exaggerated generational differences between members and the consequent tensions which occur as a community resettles in multiple sites.[8] "The empowering paradox of diaspora," states Clifford, "is that dwelling *here* assumes a solidarity and connection *there*," (1994: 322). In fact, where Clifford is rightly critiquing the assumption that there is a common *there*, or "axis of origin and return," equally as problematic is the implicit assumption of a solidarity and connection *here*. The diasporic and Western-world orientation of a significant percentage of Harari youth threatens to sever cultural continuity and contact with the city of origin that is their homeland. Where a long established diaspora might share some common orientation to a homeland most have never known, the differences between those who flee a homeland as refugees, and their children who either have no memory of the homeland or were born outside it create very different orientations. Events at "home" necessarily impact upon diasporic identities, though do so differently for first generation immigrants and their children. In the early stages of diaspora formation then, it might be the case that generational and gendered differences create tensions that determine what will be shared among subsequent diasporic generations.[9]

The Specifics of Homeland

The Harari homeland is not the country of Ethiopia, but the city of Harar, particularly its walled interior known as *Djugel*. The city was founded by their ancestors as early as the 9th century,[10] and the wall, built in the 16th century as a defensive measure to keep out warring factions of Oromo. As Hararis consider their city and its inhabitants to have been occupied and annexed by force by colonizing Amharas, they have long maintained that their identity is distinct. The last hundred years of their history have taken place under two successive Amhara dictatorships—an Imperial state established by King Menelik and latterly headed by Africa's longest reigning leader, Haile Selassie, and the socialist dictatorship known as the *Dergue* which emerged from the bloody revolution which overthrew the Imperial regime in 1974.

In the attempt to unify and bring under central control the disparate peoples of the Ethiopian region at the end of the last century, Amharic, the language of the Amhara, was adopted as the national language and Ethiopian Orthodox Christianity, as the religion of the Imperial state. Christian nationalists dominated Ethiopian politics throughout the Imperial rule of the Amharas and the Amhara-based socialist dictatorship, which succeeded it, despite the fact that somewhere in the order of 60% of the country is now acknowledged to be Muslim.[11] "Ethiopianness," as expressed in Menelik's campaign, was based on the idea of the acceptance of Christianity (Kinfe, 1994: 157). Under Haile Selassie's rule (1930-74), government propaganda asserted Ethiopia was a Christian island in a Muslim sea and was used to elicit support from the United States against the "Muslim threat" (ibid., 155).

For non-Amhara, Amharic was held up as the prestige language of education and political power and many assimilated into this largely class-determined category because of the privileges associated with membership and allegiance. While Christianity and Amharic were promoted as the religion and language of the Imperial state, the military dictatorship which seized power from Emperor Haile Selassie in 1974 intensified this to demand and enforce linguistic, religious and cultural conversion, exercising brutal and oppressive measures designed to suppress the expression of ethnic difference.[12] The *Dergue*'s socialism demanded conformity in ethnocultural terms; the reality of Amhara dominance over other ethnic groups[13] in the country was masked by nationalist rhetoric, and opposition was undermined through various economic and political strategies.

Since the overthrow of the *Dergue*, Ethiopia has adopted a democratic constitution, which guarantees basic

human rights including the right to freedom of expression in ethnocultural and religious terms.[14] The new government elected in 1995 proposed to restructure the country along ethnic lines, dividing the country into nine ethnic regions,[15] which were granted the right to self-determination, up to and including the right to secession. It was on this basis that Eritrea gained independence from Ethiopia in 1993, after 30 years of protracted struggle, though disputes over borders between Eritrea and the northern province of Tigray continue to this day.

Harar is the smallest of these newly defined autonomous regions. In this new era, after more than a century of foreign rule, Hararis have been granted the right to govern their city and its environs again. While the Harari have seen dramatic changes over recent decades, they remain an affluent and exclusive community, and now have administrative control over a region where they are far outnumbered by resident Oromo and Amhara populations. This suggests something more complicated than that implied by the macro-political perspective on Ethiopian history discussed above. It is not possible to divide the country neatly into the oppressors and the oppressed. While national rule was Amhara, in local sites, hierarchies of power were complexly stratified and often reflected long-standing historical patterns.

Hararis were situated at the apex of what Waldron described as "pyramid of ethnic stratification" in Harar (1974: 6), from where they dominated both agriculture and trade for several centuries. When the French railway linking the capital city to the coast through nearby Dire Dawa was built in the early 20th century, Harar declined in importance as a primary trading centre. Virtually all Hararis who still farmed at this time moved into commerce in order to capitalize on the cheap influx of new foreign goods, which came by way of Dire Dawa. Their land was rented out to and worked by Oromo tenants in a system of virtual feudalism where Hararis constituted a wealthy landed class.

Although private property was abolished under the *Dergue* and farmland was collectivized, Hararis managed, in many cases, to retain control over their land through creative arrangements with their Oromo tenants, and through subdividing their land within families into the 10 hectare plots which individuals were permitted to own. Hararis have long been skilled traders, and continue to dominate the markets of Harar. With their relative affluence a larger percentage of Hararis were able to secure passage abroad than was the case for members of many other populations. Those abroad have sent back substantial remittances to support their families, which works to support the historical pattern of marked differences in wealth between Hararis and their neighbours.

As a wealthy, highly literate and exclusively urban community, Hararis have come to be better represented proportionately in the new central government than any other ethnic group. The right to rule their city was won through vocal assertions of their previous autonomy. With popular party slogans like "The history of Harar is not the history of Ethiopia," their representative party, the Harari National League, has been able to demand recognition of the former autonomy of the city state.

Connections with the Homeland

Where some middle-aged men have been asked to return to Harar from exile to take up positions of leadership in the new administration, rates of repatriation have been particularly low among Hararis. Members of other populations who remained in exile in neighbouring countries are more likely candidates for repatriation. Because of their affluence and the community's small size, Hararis were better able to ensure that their members found quick passage from the refugee camps and temporary shelters in Sudan and Somalia to Western countries.

Connections with the homeland today largely take the form of correspondence and remittances. Arranged marriages between Harari girls in Harar and young men in the diaspora are also not uncommon and are seen as one way of perpetuating Harari language and culture in the diaspora (see Gibb, 2001). Arranged marriages were particularly important during the early years of community formation in the diaspora when the gender ratio was highly imbalanced. As an endogamous community, Hararis maintain a strict preference for marriage within the group. There remains a preference for marriage to girls from the city as they are seen to embody the homeland in many ways.[16] Marriages are also arranged between Hararis in the diaspora. By patrolling its borders in this way (cf. Tölölyan, 1996: 14), the community seeks to ensure its survival.

Since 1991, a number of Hararis have made frequent visits home for investment purposes. While I was in Harar, for instance, I met a Harari Canadian businessman there to identify investment opportunities for a consortium of 50 Harari businessmen in North America. At the time, they were considering purchasing a gravel quarry. In 1998 though, they began construction of a modern shopping complex just outside the city wall, where imported goods such as televisions and computers, goods previously not available in the area, are now being sold.

Contact within the diaspora takes place through various networks including those based on kinship, and

those created by inter-city soccer competitions, cultural festivals and communication over the Internet. The fastest and easiest mode of communication has proven to be H-Net, the Harari e-mail discussion list established in 1996. H-Net brings together Hararis who might otherwise never have the opportunity to interact, transcending traditional associations, which are primarily based on kinship and physical proximity. Over the Internet, spatial and temporal distances are compressed, transforming and reconfiguring identity (Harvey, 1989: 239; Kearney, 1995: 554) and redefining community relations. Communication via H-Net is dominated by Harari teenagers and young adults. Many of the participants grew up outside Ethiopia, often in Somalia, Saudi Arabia and Italy before coming to North America. Some of them were born in the first country of their parents' exile and arrived in North America speaking Arabic or Italian. Their treks have, in many cases, taken them through several countries and the way in which this impacts upon how they are identified, and how they identify, is reflected differently given their particular experiences.

For many teenagers then, Harar represents something of a mythological homeland, which they do not remember or have never even visited. Return to this place is thus rarely interpreted literally among members of this generation. As Tölölyan notes, "it makes more sense to think of diasporan or diasporic existence as not necessarily involving a physical return but rather a re-turn, a repeated turning to the concept and/or the reality of the homeland," an orientation which may manifest in symbolic, ritual or religious rather than physical terms (1996: 14-15). While this might be true in the case of Jews of the Western diaspora to which Tölölyan refers, the parents of this generation of Hararis generally still speak of return in literal terms. Their children too, as I discuss here, may invoke return as a literal, physical notion at certain times when they feel insecure about their future in North America. Return is thus informed not only by changes at "home" which are needed to make this option possible, but also by political events that effect popular American perceptions of Muslims and make the idea of returning "home" to a more sympathetic climate, an appealing option to Hararis in both the U.S. and Canada.

With the change of government in Ethiopia in 1991, the possibility of voluntary flow between Hararis in the homeland and abroad has increased. Access to the technology which allows Hararis to construct, circulate and consume images of the homeland and the diaspora over the Internet, is limited, however, to those in the diaspora, reflecting a global hegemonic hierarchy of technological control and access. Appadurai states that "the

homeland is partly invented, existing only in the imagination of the deterritorialized groups" (1991: 193). The Internet is one place where that imagination can speak in visual, literate and interactive terms and provides an environment in which the young, literate, and technologically savvy become in some senses those responsible for the communication and creation of culture. The loosening of ties between people and place, has, as Appadurai suggests, fundamentally altered the basis of cultural reproduction in this case (1995). Elders in the community, who have hitherto been responsible for transmitting knowledge of Harari history, religion and culture are largely excluded from this form of diasporic communication, although many are often informed about the discussion which takes place here by their children. Young Hararis who have had limited direct contact with the actual city of Harar are engaged in redefining community and identity in the global and largely impersonal arena of cyberspace, a space which largely excludes both elders in the diaspora and Hararis in the homeland.

Precisely what this global identity of Harariness is though, particularly for the youth of a scattered people whose contact with the homeland has been limited, and whose experiences between there and here have been so varied, is unclear. What has been most consistent perhaps, is the sustained, or even increased commitment to Islam in the North American context. For many Hararis, religious identity, rather than national or ethnic identity has become the most salient point of reference in the diaspora. Many Hararis have found in Islam an ideological framework through which to cope with the upheaval of recent decades, and establish new relations in the non-Muslim countries in which they have resettled (see Gibb, 1999a).

Through upheaval and resettlement however, what it is to be Muslim has been reoriented from a culturally specific understanding revolving around highly localized practices to a more homogenized, globalized tradition of standardized practices reinforced by other Muslims. In Toronto for instance, many Hararis, particularly men in their late 20s and 30s active in the Harari Community Organization, have told me that they have become "more Muslim" since being in Canada. This process has resulted in Hararis having much more in common with other Muslims in Canada than members of many other Ethiopian groups (ibid.). As part of a larger Muslim community, or *umma*, Hararis are situated in a wider ideological framework and social network from which they derive support.

As Hararis tend to identify first and foremost as Muslims in this context, specific historical knowledge

about the city becomes less relevant than the history of Islam with which most Harari children are taught to be familiar. If Hararis are simply Muslims, the relevance and meaning of the term Harari appears to be unclear to some younger members of the community. Earlier this year, a young man posted the following message on H-Net entitled: WHO AM I? "I've just got one brief question," he wrote. "What makes a Harari ... Harari??? Signed WAFA GADID age 18 (DALLAS, TX.)."

The discussion this question provoked proved that there was no immediate, obvious or unanimous answer. Up until this point, discussion on the net had assumed a shared identity. Wafa Gadid was, in all innocence, asking precisely what was shared. Given the focus of many discussions on the net, it might appear that what was most common was the experience of living as Muslims in North America. "You have to be, believe, feel and understand what it is to be Harari to be Harari," was someone's circular reply. "I subscribe to H-Net because I am a Harari," was someone else's equally as tautological reply. "If I were simply a Muslim, I would only subscribe to Islam-Net, if I identified as an Arab it would be Arab-Net, or as an African, African-Net. As it is, I subscribe to Harari-Net."

Farhan, a regular contributor and vehement Harari nationalist posed a similar question in response to Wafa. "Harar is just the capital city of the Emirate of Harar. You can chose to live anywhere you like," he wrote. "The question is, are you Harari or will you change your ethnicity when you move?" This assumes that there is something constant about identity over time and space. Remaining Harari is in some senses a commitment to the embodiment of place. While the debates which ensued on H-Net played with various criteria, primarily linguistic and cultural, and acknowledged both blood lines and assimilation as means of connection to the community, what appears to be central is the notion of allegiance, which one subscriber defined as "a strong—not superficial—belief that you belong to the Harari Nation." Critical to the Harari understanding of nationhood is kinship—as a nation they are *ahli*, family, and all Hararis are related to each other as many Harari proverbs state.

"If we organize ourselves we will be winners—we will attain our goal—we will be one of the recognized nations which has historical background, which has identity, which has its own religion, culture and tradition in the universe," wrote Ahmed, implying that though nationhood, identity can be made recognizable and permanent. Others agreed that Harar is a nation, appealing to a glorious and exalted past in which the city stood at the centre of an autonomous Muslim state governed by a Harari elite, and a democratic present in which the Hararis have been granted the right to self-govern over the region they historically dominated. Like other cases where eventually, as Tölölyan has stated "the concept of homeland is overlaid by the national idea," Hararis have "come to view themselves as members of one nation that is spread across different states" (1996: 14).

While the concept of nationhood is largely troubled in a world where populations are not bounded by national borders, it is the condition of dispersal that has provoked this particular discussion of Harari nationalism. Where Hararis in Harar refer to themselves as a community, a people, or a tribe, young Hararis in the diaspora have begun asserting Harariness as nationality. In order to do so though, they must make constant reference to the motherland and discuss what their obligations to it should be. The form of this allegiance, the issue of repatriation, and the experience of Hararis as Muslim Africans in North America are complexly intertwined as the discussion on H-Net suggests.

While very few Hararis have moved back home, for those who have grown up in North America and describe themselves as "bicultural" or, in many senses more American or Canadian than Ethiopian or Harari, return is still a refrain or motif, but one more often motivated by perceived or anticipated changes in popular North American attitudes toward Muslims than by changes in Ethiopia. These youth have less, or rather, differently romantic ideals than their parents about the homeland they were forced to flee as young children, and have generally not embraced the imperative to return in literal terms.

Among the first questions many youth ask me, as a researcher who spent a year in Harar, is how I could withstand the desperately unhygienic conditions, the lack of adequate water, the flies, cockroaches, rats and hyenas, and the lack of modern conveniences which they associate with a city they see as dirty, crowded and "third world." Although many of them might condemn it as third world, they do not perceive it as a hostile, racist world—terms often levelled by Hararis in North America against the government and citizens of the United States. Voiced in the language of racism, and raised on a media which has demonized Muslims from the Iran-Contra affair, to the Lockerbie bombing, the P.L.O., the fatwa issued against Salman Rushdie, Saddam Hussein's "mother of all battles," the war in Somalia, and most recently, the bombing of the World Trade Centre, Harari youth in the United States are aware that as Muslims they are popularly associated with America's post-Cold War enemy #1.

Where members of their parents generation see return to Harar as a moral imperative, the discussion of repatriation among youth on H-Net is voiced primarily as a response to the perceived fears of increased racism and anti-Muslim sentiment in the United States, and by extension and association, Canada. These concerns played themselves out most dramatically through an ongoing discussion about Y2K. Throughout their discussions in 1999, there was considerable anxiety concerning the impending millennial computer compliance crisis. A couple of members, prophesizing total pandemonium in the year 2000, began in 1998 to urgently encourage Hararis to return home. One member, Mohammed, wrote:

> Our chance of survival is greater there. Ethiopia will not be as affected as the U.S. Of course the impact will be there. Shortage of gasoline and consumer goods will (happen) everywhere ... Harar is less dependent on electricity, and there is no water and wastewater treatment plants and no chemical plants to worry about. If you acquire land, you could start farming, raising cattle and chickens. All we need to survive is food, water, shelter, and clothing. The rest is luxury and materialism.

The new romance of the homeland suggests a return to a simple agricultural existence—ignoring the fact that Hararis, although historically farmers and traders, stopped working the land over a century ago. It idealizes an environment which many young Hararis otherwise imagine as an undesirable place to live. Other members suggest additional advantages to living in Harar, including "a sewer system which won't fail (because there isn't one)," and "Y2K compliant cooking equipment" (a fireplace, in other words).

Members also appealed to the sentiment that if Y2K was going to impoverish everyone in North America, then it was better to be poor among your own people. What was at issue was not only the fear of the breakdown of infrastructure and the supply of essential resources, but social breakdown as well. Mohammed wrote:

> I would not recommend that you stay in this country. The U.S. is a place that is highly charged with racial tension. With the economic disparities that already exist, when further exacerbated by Y2K induced poverty the whole place could erupt into Balkan style warfare ... There is talk of National Guards being deployed in some states due to Y2K. What is the consequence of that to you? I would only remind you of what the Canadian special forces did to Somalis in Somalia.

Another member added:

> I was watching C-PAN last night. The State Department at the CIA were giving a briefing to the Senate subcommittee on Y2K. The issue raised was the possibility of terrorism in the U.S. during the Y2K crisis. And of course I hope we all know who is meant by these terrorists. Whenever there is a problem in the West they always look for a scapegoat. I happened to watch the 700 Club one night. It is a Christian ministry station. They were also discussing Y2K and terrorism. However, unlike the CIA they named who they thought were the potential terrorists, and lo and behold it was us ("the Muslims").

Related to this is the common Muslim response that millennial anxiety is a Christian superstition—the Muslim calendar, after all, begins 622 years after the Christian calendar with the *Hijra*, the flight of the Prophet Mohammed and his followers from Mecca to Medina. But while Hararis use the Hijri calendar for the purposes of fasting and commemorating other Islamic events, this is false comfort for those who live in the West and those who rely on Western technology. Using Islam as a counter-argument, several members responded with appeals to religious faith, (or fatalism depending on your perspective), with sentiments like "Nothing will happen to us that Allah has not willed," or likening this to the punishment God inflicted during Noah's lifetime upon those who disobeyed him. Being Muslim might be a problem in a racist America, but Islam is still salvation.

The Imperative of Return

Mohammed ended one of his frequent postings on this subject with the following postscript: "In my humble view I believe this is the time ... *Gey waldow gey giba', tey saribey waraba yagba'ba.*" This line is from the chorus of an old Harari wedding song and translates as: "Child of Harar, return to Harar/Let the hyena live in the black mountain." The lines are understood to be a call for Hararis to return to where they belong, to their rightful place in the city of Harar. The city is juxtaposed with the black mountain, the hyena with the child of the city. The black mountain is not a specific place, but a metaphor for all the distant and alien places beyond the city. "In our case," stated one man, "North America/Australia or anywhere that is not Harar is considered 'Tey Sari.' The soul of the meaning is a place not fit for Hararis to inhabit." Adding, "I just happen to believe this thing to be true now more than ever."

There is an imperative for Hararis to reside in Harar. The obligation to honour this call is regarded as

the "last will of the ancestors." Where there is impossible, as it was for those forced to flee as refugees, the obligation is, in the words of one young Harari man, "to contribute everything we can afford to strengthen and enhance the interests of our people in Harar." One of these obligations is to protect and defend the city—to wage *jihad*, holy war, and be willing to die in defense of Islam. "If necessary we should go back to defend our motherland against any potential enemies," wrote Farhan. In the wake of a Y2K crisis, "I think (Harar) will need all the men it can get for defensive measures ... " wrote Mohammed. "It is potentially possible that any kind of warmongers could invade Harar and destroy it. Protecting Harar could be one incentive to make you think of going back."

Historically, where Hararis engaged in ongoing struggles with warring factions of Oromo and Amhara and dominated inter-ethnic trade in Harar, they were forced to manage foreign influences in various ways. Defining what is foreign, and maintaining boundaries around the group in such a way as to prevent foreign infiltration, are issues with which Hararis have long had to contend. As an exclusively urban population, the place of the Hararis is in the city. The mountains beyond are the untamed wilderness—the world outside the city wall is inhabited by creatures that threaten—hyenas and outsiders. Relations with these outsiders are carefully negotiated through political, economic and ceremonial means.

Vital to this is the possibility of enculturation. Despite a strict pretence to endogamy and ethnic exclusivity, members of other populations, notably Oromo and Somali can and sometimes do "become" Harari through a recognized process known as *Ge limaad*—"learning the way of the city," or rather, the way of life of its people. This involves adopting the language and cultural and religious practices of the Harari, and being integrated socially through kinship, friendship and membership in a community observance association. As Harariness has long been associated with class-based prestige, enculturation is often considered desirable by Oromo and Somali who have lived in the urban Harari environment for generations, have already adopted many aspects of Harari culture, and have strong social ties with Hararis.

Hyenas, are, like outsiders, creatures with which interaction must be carefully managed. Their threat is omnipresent, but provided Hararis can show them respect, and feed them regularly they can maintain sufficient distance in order to protect themselves. Limiting and controlling contact with outsiders is more difficult, particularly where the Harari are now a numeric minority in the area. This is even truer in the diaspora, where

the Harari population cannot rely on their continued occupation of a place to support their claims to exercising power greater than their numbers might warrant. In the diaspora, alliances with other Muslims, create a sense of belonging to a much wider and more effective community—the *umma*, or brotherhood of Islam.

The verse above has come to serve as something of an allegory—a narrative device that alludes to historical circumstances and in certain senses can be used to refer to the current dispersal of the *Ge waldach*, the children of Harar. Exile from the city is likened to the *Hijra*, the flight the Prophet Mohammed and his followers were forced to make in order to escape persecution in Medina for their religious beliefs. The journey many Hararis have been forced to undertake has been a migratory passage over landscapes that have symbolic and moral meanings. To arrive in non-Muslim countries demands the creation of Muslim space—creating a separate social and moral universe within dominant society (cf. Metcalf 1996).

For Hararis, the notion that their rightful place is back in the city of Harar, is reinforced by the perceptions of racism against Muslims (and less often against Africans) in the North American environment, and particularly in the U.S. If there is a Y2K crisis, "I would much rather fold my arms and raise my own food in my own country, and even die there if necessary, than wait for a handout from racist institutions like the police, army and National Guard," wrote Mohammed. "I believe that the only reason we were welcome here (the U.S.) was to serve (their interests). When there is nothing for us to do we will be disposed of unceremoniously." In the paradigmatic diaspora, there is a belief, as Safran states, that people "believe they are not—and cannot be—fully accepted by their host country,"—a significant reason for the imperative to return to the homeland when the time is right (1991: 83-84).

Mohammed's parents, who fled from Harar to Saudi Arabia, where Mohammed was born, might beg to differ. Generational differences in experiences are reflected in people's conceptions both about North America and the homeland. Romance about the homeland among elders is based on a nostalgia, which their children cannot share. This nostalgia refers to the social rather than environmental aspects of Harar. Many older Hararis miss the tight sense of community made possible in the concentrated space of Harar, and the obligatory support between neighbours and extended family members residing in close proximity. Imagining the homeland in these terms is easier for the older members of this first generation of immigrants because, as Tölölyan states, first

generation immigrants "bear the homeland's and nation's marks in body and speech and soul" (1996: 29). Many older Hararis move with much less ease than do their children in North America. Often illiterate in English, limited in their spoken English, and with few relations with non-Hararis, they feel "alien" in a way their largely North Americanized children do not. This is particularly the case, as my work in Toronto suggests, where youth perceive of their environment as diverse and multicultural.

Parents embody the cultural signifiers—from the circumcised genitalia of women, to national dress— which their children opt not to carry. Where members of the younger generation do adopt signifiers they chose transnational symbols of Islam—the veil and modest dress—recognizable currency in North America that connects them to the broader community of believers. Having grown up here, their associations are not nearly as exclusively Harari as those of their parents and their relationships to other Muslims are made clear when they discuss their fears about anti-Muslim sentiment in North America. Although they are Black Africans they identify with the broad Sunni Muslim *umma*, rather than a more specifically African American Islamic consciousness.

Creating an Essentialist National Identity

In applying the concept of *Hijra* to the contemporary reality of Harari dispersal, and *jihad*, or holy war in defense of Islam as a reaction to anti-Muslim propaganda in the United States, people can make Muslim sense of contemporary circumstances and find support in a wider community. As Voll observes, for Muslim minorities everywhere, the interpretation of these concepts provides the basis for establishing principles by which Muslim life can be maintained in non-Muslim contexts (1991: 205).

Among Hararis, return is still phrased though, in the culturally specific terms of origin—"home" is Harar, rather than the spiritual heartland of Mecca, and the discussion about fears of anti-Muslim sentiment takes place between Hararis over the Internet, Hararis who, if they were simply Muslims, would only subscribe to Islam-Net. Through Muslim discourse, Hararis can simultaneously orient themselves in multiple landscapes. As part of the broader *umma* of Muslims in North America and worldwide they can establish allies in defence of racism in North America and refer to *jihad* as the fight against those forces which seek to demonize their religion and its followers. *Jihad* is a concept simultaneously employed with respect to the homeland—in terms of defending their holy city of origin, known as *medinat-al-awlia*, or

"the city of saints" (see Gibb, 1999b). The imperative of return is articulated in culturally specific discourse calling the children of the city to return from the black mountain, and this is framed by broader Muslim principles.

Eickelman and Piscatori write that "Muslims seem effortlessly to juggle local and multiple identities—villager, tribesman, woman, citizen—with the broader identity of believer and to legitimise them all by reference to the idiom of the cosmopolitan community of believers (*umma*) (1990: xiv). While I question the effortlessness of this balancing act, this perhaps could only be said to be true where each of those identities is Muslim by definition. This was not the case for Hararis in the Christian-defined Ethiopia, nor is it the case for Muslims who form a religious minority in North America and both sites consequently represent battlegrounds within which there are limits to the rights to Muslim expression. Interestingly, while young Hararis in the diaspora appeal to the idea of Hararis as a nation, it is at the level of nation-states, Ethiopian, and American and Canadian that reconciling multiple identities appears to be problematic.

Some Hararis do identify more strongly as Ethiopians in the diaspora. In part, this reflects the imperative of defining origin in national terms—population statistics privilege national origin over subnational or ethnic origin or religious orientation—and the fact that the designation Harari is for the most part unknown to anyone not of Ethiopian background. "But for those of you proud of being Ethiopian," writes Farhan, "do you know how we became Ethiopian? Do you know (the Amhara King) Menelik? Do you know Chelenko?"—the infamous battle at which Harari autonomy was lost. Many Harari children born in the diaspora have, in fact, never heard of either. This particular battle, used to support the current claims to Harari authority in Ethiopia, is the one historical episode most often referred to on H-Net. Historical references like this are being evoked in discussion on H-Net to ask questions about how to build a new Harari nation. As "long-distance nationalists" (Anderson, 1983: 12), H-Net members engage in regular debates around the questions of how the economy of Harar be revived; whether the Harari should employ their own currency as they did during the time of the Emirate; and whether the state should have an independent Harari army as it once did.

The romance of former autonomy and glory is not, however, a sufficient basis upon which to construct a new state in what is a complex, ethnically heterogeneous locale. Nor does the creation of an essentialist nationhood (Anderson, 1983; Appadurai, 1995) which uses ter-

ritorial claims to "assert their identity as an ancient, homogenous peoples" (Glick-Schiller, 1992: 52) address the fact that Harari has long been an assimilative category into which neighbouring Oromo and Somali have become enculturated to varying degrees. As Clifford asks, "How long does it take to become 'indigenous'?" (1994: 309). What if one is not a Harari, but an Oromo or Somali who has grown up in Harar and shared many aspects of Harari culture and is now resident in the diaspora? Is this person more of a "person of the city" than a Harari child who has never been there?

In some senses, Hararis in the diaspora have not had to deal with these issues. Given the economic and educational disparities between populations in Harar, very few Oromo and Somali from Harar have been able to settle in North America. When they have, they have associated themselves with their respective ethnic communities, as Sorenson's work on Ethiopian voluntary organizations in North America illustrates (1992). This suggests that being Harari is obviously much more than being of a specific place. For a dispersed community though, a territorialized, spatialized locale provides a fixed and tangible point of reference.

The discourse of Harari nationhood, which invokes a specific territorial and localized domain, is, ironically, largely being generated and debated in the deterritorialized space of hyperspace. Through the Internet a place may be relocated in virtual reality, and a community, constituted around a deterritorialized point of reference. Community ties amongst dispersed people may thus be redefined as networks of overlapping relationships, many of which have virtual dimensions, which may be defined by youth whose contact with their place of origin has actually been limited. Contemporary identity then, may not only be a hybrid, transnational or transmigrant formulation, but a phenomenon related to the creation of a virtual form of cultural and community existence—one which is exportable across, or despite the apparent limitations of time and space.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1 *Dergue* is Amharic for council, and refers to the Provisional Military Council, which ruled the country between 1974 and 1991.

2 For details of the atrocities committed under the *Dergue* see de Waal 1991.

3 The strictest definition, as Khachig Tölölyan notes, is that shaped by the Jewish paradigm, wherein "the desire to return to the homeland is considered a necessary part of the definition of 'diaspora,'" (1996: 14).

4 From the time of the revolution in 1991, until the first elections held in 1995, the country was governed by an interim government known as the TGE, or Transitional Government of Ethiopia. My original fieldwork in Harar took place during the last year of the TGE, through the elections, and into the first few months of the newly elected government.

5 The most famous of these is Sir Richard Burton, who in 1854, was the first non-Muslim to enter the city. In his *First Footsteps in East Africa: or, An Exploration of Harar*, he calls the city "forbidden" and "under a guardian spell" and writes that it is

> ... the ancient metropolis of a once mighty race, the only permanent settlement in Eastern Africa, the reported seat of Muslim learning, a walled city of stone houses, possessing its independent chief, its peculiar population, its unknown language, its own coinage, the emporium of the coffee trade, (and) the head-quarters of slavery.... (1987: xxvi)

6 For details of this history see Caulk 1971, 1972, 1977; Hassen 1980, 1990; and Zewde 1991, among others.

7 The major populations that have come to settle in Harar in order of their numerical significance.

8 The same could certainly be said of gendered differences, but this discussion requires room of its own. For a partial discussion of this issue see the article by Celia Rothenberg and myself, "Believing Women: Harari and Palestinian Women at Home and in the Diaspora," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, 20(2): 243-259.

9 For some discussion of gendered and generational differences please see Gibb 1999a; and Gibb and Rothenberg 2000.

10 This estimate is provided by Alfred Bardey, among others, who suggests that the population is derived from intermarriage between Arab immigrants and members of local populations (1897: 130-180).

11 This is roughly the estimate suggested by the first census of the new democratic era conducted in 1994.

12 See de Waal, 1991.

13 i.e., the Oromo, the largest single ethnic group in the country, the Eritreans, and the Tigrayans, another highland Christian elite with strong historical claims to regional dominance who currently form the basis of the new Ethiopian government.

14 The extent of the new government's commitment to democracy has, however, been subject to question since its inception. Major political parties such as the Oromo Liberation Front (representing the majority of Oromos in the country) boycotted the 1995 elections, suggesting that the current government is not truly representative of the diversity in the country. The current regime has also been criticized for reversing its stance on the freedom of the press and for continued aggression against Oromo nationalists.

15 The Transitional Government of Ethiopia (1991-95) originally proposed 13 regions on the basis of the ethnic majorities in various parts of the country. Four of the smaller southern states subsequently merged to form the Southern People's Region. Two of the remaining regions are city states given over to particular ethnic authorities: Addis Ababa as the Imperial Capital established by King Menelik, is now an Amhara enclave in the Oromo Region, and Harar and its environs have been delineated as the Harari Region.

16 For a detailed discussion of the subject of arranged marriages please see my forthcoming article, "Manufacturing Place and the Embodiment of Tradition: Muslim Africans in a Deterritorialized World" (2001).

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