

GEOGRAPHY:

The cosmopolitan city of Addis Ababa is the cultural and financial powerhouse of Ethiopia. It is situated in the center of the country among the Entoto mountains. Elevations vary from 2,300 meters to well over 3,000 in the more mountainous areas. The East African Rift, an active tectonic divergence, lies just a few miles west of the city. This rift is caused by the African tectonic plate splitting in two at a rate of seven millimeters per year.

CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL CONTEXT:

The Entoto mountains and northern plateaus have historically been home to Ethiopia's Amhara ethnic group, and this history is reflected in the demographics of Addis Ababa. Roughly half of the population identifies as Amharas, with the remainder split between Oromo, Tigray and Gurage. Christianity is the most practiced faith, with 82% of the city's residents practicing Ethiopian Orthodox. Islam is practiced by another 14%.

THE TYPE OF VISA/DOCUMENTATION STATUS:

Semhal immigrated to the United States on a F-1 student visa. Student visas have always held an unorthodox position in the context of immigration law. They are one of the oldest visa types, originally defined in the Carriage of Passengers Act of 1855. F-type visas are specified for full time students and their immediate families.

FOOD

Ethiopian cuisine has strong cultural ties to the people and the land, and the evening meal remains an important social event among the Amharic population. Traditional suppers consist of spiced meat or stew served over injera, a wide, flat sourdough bread. Food is eaten by tearing off a small piece of the communal injera and using it to pick up bites of the main course. A hand washing ceremony precedes any meals eaten with company wherein guests are given hot towels to clean their hands. This practice is still popular in formal settings. Instead of handshakes, greetings are accompanied by the touching of wrists in order to keep the hands clean. Much of the Ethiopian menu is united by common ingredients, such as nit'ir qibe, a form of seasoned butter, and berbere, a blend of herbs and spices native to the region. Social norms dictate the eldest at the table eat first. Dinner is traditionally followed by coffee, which is ceremonially prepared in full view of guests. The beans are roasted tableside and passed around the group to be smelled and savored before being brewed and distributed. Coffee holds significant cultural importance in Ethiopia, and has been drunk there since the 9th century AD. Records indicate that the use of coffee beans as a chewed stimulant predates ceremonial brewing by several centuries. Coffee farming remains a major industry in Ethiopia, accounting for 34% of the nation's total exports in 2006.

RELIGION

Ethiopia's religious background and current culture is rooted in the practices and values of Christianity and Islam. The nation's religious history is well-documented and ancient. Christianity has been recognized since the 4th century AD, when it was made the official religion of the Aksum Kingdom in modern day Ethiopia and Eritrea. This ancient form of Christianity continues today as the Ethiopian Orthodox church, known by its practitioners as Tewahedo. Unlike most of modern-day Africa, Ethiopia's strain of Christianity is not an imported European one, but a local interpretation of scripture that developed independent from colonialism. Two thirds of the population practices Christianity, with Ethiopian Orthodox and Protestantism being the primary sects. Islam was introduced to the country before 622 AD, and remains widespread today, with 33% of the population identifying as Muslim. Traditional African beliefs are still practiced in the more rural areas along the western border, comprising 2.6% of the total population. These ancient faiths are diverse and unique, with many deifying animals and the surrounding ecosystem. Religions are divided primarily along geographical lines, with Christianity being more popular in the urban areas of Addis Ababa and the northern highlands and Islam being more common in the southern lowlands. Although Christianity is not the official religion of Ethiopia, it is traditionally practiced by the nobility and other elites. Islam was disregarded by many of the nation's past leaders, although Emperor Haile Selassie I worked with Muslim leaders to address the persecution Ethiopian Muslims faced.

AMHARIC LANGUAGE

The Amharic language is a traditional language of Ethiopia. It is the primary language of the Amharas ethnic group endemic to the northern highlands, and is widely used as a lingua franca by populations in Eritrea and Sudan. Amharic is thought to have evolved from Ge'ez (itself a pidgin of the Semitic tongues of Arabia and the native Cushitic language) due to their lexical similarity and shared script. After the decline of the Aksum Kingdom in the 9th century AD, political power and social influence shifted to the Amharas, who went on to found the Ethiopian Empire that reigned from the mid-1200s to the Derg coup of 1974. While Ethiopia has no official state language, Amharic is the working language of the government. As a result, almost all primary and secondary schools teach in Amharic. It is most popular in urban centers and in the northern regions of the country, while the rural poor of the southern lowlands and western border tend to speak Oromo or traditional ethnic dialects. According to the 2007 census, Amharic is spoken as a primary or secondary language by nearly twenty million people in Ethiopia, with at least another 3 million outside of the country, making it the second-most spoken Semitic language in the world (behind Arabic).

RELATIONSHIP WITH U.S.

The United States and Ethiopia have had a mutually beneficial relationship since the early twentieth century. The official partnership began in 1903, when an envoy of then-President Theodore Roosevelt spoke with Ethiopian leader Menelik II. A trade deal was struck that lasted until Italy's attempted occupation in 1935. After the country was liberated from Italian occupation in 1941, the U.S. redoubled its political efforts. Treaties were signed to standardize trade and promise military assistance in the event of unrest. Kagnaw Station, an American communications and SIGINT base, was cemented as a strategic outpost that benefited both countries. The Ethiopian military also purchased a great deal of weapons and ammunition from American manufacturers throughout the 1950's. This military aid was supplemented by economic assistance to establish infrastructure and modernize the country, totaling \$366 million by 1978. Relations declined following the Derg revolution in 1974. The United States refused to offer military aid in the wars with Ethiopia and Somalia, and by 1978 the American government was outright arming Somali separatists. America's hardline stance changed when famine struck in 1983. Forty-five million dollars in food aid was pledged by the U.S. government in 1984, contrasting the Soviet Union's paltry \$3 million contribution the previous year. American intervention bought favor with the Ethiopian people, and once the communist junta collapsed the two nations gradually resumed positive relations. Today, aid is conditional, with regular checkups for possible human rights abuses and training on the laws of war.

DERG COUP & FAMINE

In 1974, the hugely popular leader of Ethiopia Haile Selassie I was overthrown in a military coup. This revolution abolished the monarchy and replaced it with a military junta known as the Derg. The Derg regime was a self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninist revolutionary front, no doubt inspired by similar movements around the world in the 1970s. This regime lasted until 1987, when it was replaced in little more than name by the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, which itself dissolved in 1991. During their time in power the Derg launched a variety of reformatory efforts, planting trees, increasing literacy and building villages to address overpopulation in the northern highlands. However, the rulers were intolerant of criticism, and tens of thousands of political dissenters and journalists were imprisoned or executed without trial as a result. Chronic mismanagement made otherwise solvable issues (such as drought) exponentially worse, and corruption was rampant among the leadership. All of this came to head during the early 1980s, when a perfect storm of drought, heat wave, government misinformation and conflicting interests came together to cause a famine that would cost the lives of over a million people. At least another 4 million were displaced. In an unusual example of cooperation, capitalist and communist countries the world over came together for aid, and the food shortages became a globally recognized topic.

CIVIL & SOMALIAN WARS

Between 1977 and 1991, Ethiopia was embroiled in several civil and international conflicts. As early as January 1974 mutinies were taking place among the armed forces, with enlisted men arresting and even executing their officers. The frequency and severity of mutiny increased over time. By summer of that year the civilian government was ineffectual as they lacked a functioning military. Negotiations ended with Emperor Haile Selassie ceding the rights to arrest government figures to the revolutionary force. With the former leadership imprisoned, exiled, or killed, the Derg was free to run the country. The new leader, Haile Mengistu, began a violent campaign to suppress dissenters known as Qey Shibir which lasted until 1977. That year marked the official beginning of the Ogaden War, when the recently-unified Somali army attempted to annex the contested Haud region along their border with Ethiopia. Colonial mismanagement had left the historically Somali Haud to Ethiopia, stirring nationalist ideology. The Somali dictator Siad Barre bolstered his government with Soviet advisors. He also employed the use of Yemeni arms and more than fifteen thousand Cuban soldiers. Despite these resources, Ethiopia effectively ended the Somali war effort in a climactic battle in the border city of Dire Dawa.

RESISTING COLONIALISM

Ethiopia is unique among the rest of Africa for having successfully resisted European colonialism. By the late nineteenth century, Italy had asserted itself as the predominant colonial power in north Africa. Access to Mediterranean waterways made shipping supplies and troops to the front an easy task. Aggressing Italians reached modern-day Eritrea in 1887, but were met with fierce resistance. The neighboring Ethiopians launched a successful counteroffensive in January of that year, and the precipitous Battle of Dogali hamstringing the Italian war effort. Fighting continued until autumn, and sporadic skirmishes characterized the next two years until Italy and Ethiopia signed the Treaty of Wuchale in 1889. The treaty established amicable terms between the two countries, but the peace would be short lived. An obscure, mistranslated clause designated Ethiopia as an Italian protectorate, and Emperor Menelik II denounced the treaty in 1893. Italy invaded again in 1895, attempting to forcefully colonize the state. Unbeknownst to the invading army, the Ethiopian government had anticipated such an invasion, and had been stockpiling arms and ammunition for years. After moderate success in the northern theater, the invaders were dealt a decisive defeat at the Battle of Adwa, where the numerically superior and better-equipped defenders routed their forces with relative ease. The Battle of Adwa was not only a military victory, but a cultural event that resonated all over the world; Ethiopians rejoiced and sent a message that European adventurism was not a death sentence. Italy, meanwhile, suffered widespread rioting, and the Prime Minister resigned one week later.