I was on my way to the town of Shashemene, about 250 kilometers south of Addis Ababa. Having worked in Jamaica, Shashemene was a place that I mostly had heard about in reggae songs. It was where I’d been told that Rastafari, who view Ethiopia as the Promised Land and themselves as Ethiopian, had developed a settlement on land provided to them by Emperor Haile Selassie I, who ruled the country from 1930 to 1974. At the time of my first visit, I had just finished volunteering with Habitat for Humanity on a project in Jimma, a town located in the west of the country. I had extended my plane ticket home with the idea of doing a bit of traveling. I thought it might be interesting to visit Shashemene and see the Rastafari town I had heard about. I had few further details. I sat at the back of the bus next to a young woman who introduced herself as Meskerem. After I said “yeqerta,” excusing myself for shimmying into the very last available space, she looked at me with a shocked look on her face. “Amarinya techeyalesh?” she asked, wanting to know if I spoke Amharic. I awkwardly told her that I had a little knowledge of the language: “Amarinya tenish tenish new yemechilew.” Delighted, we set up a bit of a “language trade” as the bus left Addis Ababa.

It takes nearly six hours to make the journey to Shashemene, including a lunch stop in Ziway, a little more than halfway to the final destination. I had lunch with Meskerem and asked for kitfo. Kitfo is raw, spiced ground beef, tossed in spiced butter. Worried about my stomach, I sheepishly asked for it “leb leb” or half-cooked. Apparently, however, this was quite a brave decision for a ferenj. Meskerem laughed at my choice, and told me that she was happy that I’d want to eat the “national food” and would be willing to have it less than well done! Kitfo is a
popular Ethiopian dish, the national food of the Gurage people, one of the over eighty ethnic groups in Ethiopia. The two other foreigners traveling with us waited on the bus. This was the third time I had been on a bus from Addis to somewhere—each time I had been offered food, drink, and conversation. It appeared, however, that the other foreigners, both of whom wore long dreadlocks and clothing emblazoned with red, green, and gold, did not receive the same treatment. These passengers had been noticed, however, as it was evident from pointing and whispering that there were a number of conversations featuring these two travelers as topic.

Again demonstrating my limited skills in Amharic, I pointed at the white-skinned, blond-dreadlocked, twenty-something fellow sitting halfway up the bus next to an equally dreadlocked black man. “And ferenj (meaning one white person),” I said, pointing at myself, “Hulet ferenjoch (meaning two white people),” pointing toward the white man. Meskerem shook her head. “Sost ferenjoch (meaning three white people),” she corrected, pointing toward both men. At that time, I had yet to hear an Ethiopian describe a black person as “ferenj.” I’ve since learned that the word, which some say derives from the adjective “French,” reflecting the nationality of early European visitors to the country, is the general term for any white person. It is simply not used for black people. Had Mekerem made a mistake? Or was she attempting to demonstrate that these two men, Rastafari who disembarked at one of the movement’s headquarters in Shashemene, have more in common with me, a foreigner, than with her, an Ethiopian? Meskerem’s comment led me into a new thought process regarding the construction of both “Ethiopian” and “foreign” identities. What was behind Meskerem’s categorizing? Did she mean that Rastafari had no business being there? Was it her opinion that Rastafari are just as out of place as white people in Ethiopia? Was she just pointing out what was obvious to her and everyone else on the bus?

Thinking through the situation, I began to analyze what had happened when Meskerem considered my identity and that of the other “foreigners.” In doing so, she had revealed a number of different trains of thought. From her perspective, I was a foreigner. Meskerem linked me to the two Rastafari on the bus and then decided how she related to the rest of us. Regardless of skin color, the two Rastafari and I were all
considered different from Ethiopians. Meskerem’s statement reflected back on her own sense of identity as Ethiopian. But the difference between the Rastafari and me is that I do not see myself as Ethiopian, unlike the Rastafari, who view Ethiopia as Zion and consider themselves to be Ethiopians. Clearly, however, Meskerem did not share this belief. We were all equally foreigners—ferenjoch. I began to wonder about Rastafari in Ethiopia. I had more questions. As an immigrant community, how do they fit in? How does the Ethiopian community treat the Rastafari community? What do Ethiopians think about this group of people who see their country as Zion? These questions ran through my mind as the bus got closer to Shashemene.

Shashemene itself is a bustling town. The present population is 102,062, with just over a quarter living in the urban area of the town and the balance in the rural outskirts. Of the diverse cultures in Ethiopia, the ethnicity of Shashemene’s population is predominantly Oromo. However, as anthropologist Mesfin Getahun reports, members of ethnic Amhara, Gurage, and Wolaita are “numerically dominant,” with “Kombatta and Tigray” people accounting for a “significant percentage of the population” (2001, 269). A brand-new Orthodox church has been built on the outskirts, but there are also a number of other Orthodox churches and Protestant places of worship. Mosques are evident too, demonstrating the religious variety in the town. Though Ethiopians from various parts of the country move to Shashemene for economic reasons, there are no particular immigrant communities—no groups of ferenjoch. Save for one.

About one kilometer away from the center of town, in an area called Melka Oda, lies a group of brightly colored buildings, painted in the red, green, and gold of the Ethiopian flag and featuring paintings of the conquering lion, symbol of Haile Selassie, the former emperor of Ethiopia. In this area there are restaurants where Caribbean food such as spicy curry goat or fried escoveitch fish can be had alongside the equally tropical rice and “peas” (kidney beans) and sweet potato pudding. Strains of reggae music can often be heard. This is the Rastafari part of town, known as the Jamaica sefer (meaning “area” or “neighborhood” in Amharic). Though this space has become known for its Rastafari inhabitants specifically, the land in this area was initially designated as a settlement for repatriated Africans in general. According
to the website of the Jamaican Rastafarian Development Community (JRDC), a Rastafari organization based in Shashemene, “exactly seven years after the liberation of Ethiopia and the return of the Emperor in 1941, the triumphant Emperor Haille Selassie [sic] I gave a gift to the black people of the west of 500 acres of land in Shashemene, Shoa Province.” The land grant was a gesture of thanks not only to the Rastafari, but also to the pan-African community at large for their continued support to Ethiopia and the emperor though the years of Italian occupation from 1935 to 1941. Representatives of the Rastafari faith have traveled to Ethiopia since the 1960s to take up Haile Selassie’s offer, settle on this land, and achieve what they see as repatriation to their home country.

But even after more than half a century of repatriation to and settlement in Ethiopia, Rastafari are still not considered citizens of the country they see as Zion. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, no Rastafari is an Ethiopian citizen, and very few even possess a residence permit. In 2003, the Ethiopian immigration minister analyzed the legal situation of 120 repatriates living in the Jamaica sefer. Of these individuals, 77 were in the country under a tourist visa, 13 had a business visa, and 31 had residence permits—not one was considered an Ethiopian citizen under the laws of the country (Bonacci 2008, 234). Repatriates began arriving in small numbers in the 1960s, but after the deposition of Haile Selassie and the installation of the communist Dergue military regime in 1974,7 the numbers of repatriates decreased. A handful of Rastafari reportedly arrived during the communist period. In 1991, the government of Mengistu Hailemariam was replaced by the Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front—Meles Zenawi’s government. This led to a rise in repatriate arrivals. There has been no recent census, but in 2013 the population of Rastafari in the Shashemene area was estimated to be between 250 and 800—depending on who was asked.8

After nearly eight hours on the bus due to some unexpected stops and mechanical troubles, the two Rastafari asked in English to be dropped off in this area—the Jamaica sefer—outside Shashemene proper, at the entrance to a large compound. I later came to know this large building as the Twelve Tribes of Israel Headquarters. The bus continued until I saw the road that led to my hotel—then owned, I later learned, by a Rastafari man who had moved to Ethiopia from Manchester, England. I called to the driver to stop by yelling the correct word in
Amharic: “Weraj!” My fellow passengers laughed at my use of the term and the bus slowed. I said goodbye to everyone I’d been sitting with, and I stepped down from the bus.

Along with the Rastafari travelers and the other Ethiopian passengers, including Meskerem, I had reached my destination in Shashemene. Meskerem had returned home from Addis Ababa. For some time Rastafari settlers had been coming home to Shashemene to settle in Ethiopia, the country they believed to be their Promised Land. Perhaps the Rastafari on the bus felt they were coming home as well. But Meskerem’s disconnect from the Rastafari travelers demonstrated that when she thought of home, she did not think of a shared home with Rastafari. Her home is not their home. The Ethiopian government’s lack of official recognition seems to reflect this disconnect as well. At that moment, disembarking from the bus, I realize now that I had already begun thinking about what would ultimately become this book. I wanted to know more about the Ethiopian perception of Rastafari and how these two groups related to each other.

Many travelers to Ethiopia, myself included, have been fascinated with the story of Rastafari, whose powerful belief system has led them to settle in this part of the world. Giulia Bonacci, who is both Rastafari and a historian of repatriation to Ethiopia, contextualizes Rastafari in a history of repatriate movements (such as to Sierra Leone and Liberia, as well as through the efforts of Marcus Garvey) in her book *Exodus! L’histoire du retour des Rastafariens en Éthiopie* (Exodus! The History of the Return of Rastafari to Ethiopia). Viewing Rastafari “returning” to Ethiopia as “heirs,” she delineates the trajectory of Caribbean peoples to Ethiopia and outlines the history of the Rastafari community in Shashemene. Although Bonacci’s work provides a strong, detailed, and thorough historical narrative, she herself has said, “We possess very little information on the real reactions of Ethiopians. A lot of rumours exist” (Mayer 2002).

Political scientist Horace Campbell, in his book *Rasta and Resistance*, provides a brief description of Bob Marley’s visit to Shashemene, and how this visit led Marley to see repatriation as more of a symbolic attempt at refocusing (or repatriating) the mind to an understanding and valuation of Africa. Many songs on Marley’s album, *Exodus* (1977), especially the title track, deal both with the issue of mobilization for freedom as well as a
desire for repatriation to Ethiopia. According to Campbell, Marley’s 1978 visit to the Rastafari settlement in Shashemene, Ethiopia, caused him to recognize “the problems of translating a dream [of repatriation] into reality” (1987, 143). Campbell argues that Marley’s disappointment with the settlement and the possibilities available in Ethiopia led him to encourage a more symbolic sense of repatriation, seen in his famous call to “emancipate yourself from mental slavery.” Marley witnessed the state of the settlement at the height of the communist Dergue regime, at a time when the land grant had been decreased and the settlers, not to mention the Ethiopian population, were dealing with a new government’s land arrangements. Marley’s subsequent music moved away from repatriation and turned more to African liberation (Campbell 1987, 144). Perhaps Ethiopia and Shashemene did not meet Marley’s expectations—perhaps he experienced some negative feedback from Ethiopians. We can only speculate.

Clearly, judging from the whispering, gestures, and finger pointing at Rastafari that I observed on the bus, Ethiopians do wonder about these newcomers to their country. In casual conversation with Ethiopian friends, many would say things such as, “It’s about time someone asked Ethiopians their opinion on the Rastas.” I hadn’t anticipated the fact that many people would be quite willing and eager to speak about Rastafari. This book presents the first study of these “real reactions.” It delves into what happens when a group of people searches for their Promised Land without understanding the people who already live there, and highlights the reactions of the native inhabitants to the arrival of those seekers. In essence, it argues that migrant and diaspora identities are the products of negotiation and it looks at the implications of this negotiation for concepts of citizenship, diaspora, and migration.

Newcomers arrive in a new country with a particular set of perceptions and are met with a whole other set of perceptions. The case of Rastafari in Ethiopia offers a particularly illuminating opportunity to examine both immigrant and diaspora identities. Though the Ethiopians view Rastafari as immigrants, Rastafari see themselves as returning members of the Ethiopian diaspora. This unique situation demonstrates that identity and belonging require navigation through sometimes conflicting sets of complicated perceptions—both positive and negative—and it offers insights into the challenges of gaining citizenship and belonging within migrant communities.
My Father’s Land: Narration, Identity, and Citizenship

Identity, historian Horst Möller writes, is constituted by collective memory—not only “real events” but also “myths and legends” (2007, 33). The way these real events, myths, and legends come to create collective memory is through stories, which are constructed from perceptions. This study of the Ethiopian perception of Rastafari takes as its starting point the value of listening to stories. These stories are what position the Rastafari repatriates as a case study that challenges and expands theories of immigration as well as discussions of relationships between continental and diaspora Africans.

The title of this Introduction, “My Father’s Land,” references a reggae song by performer Sizzla Kalonji. His lyric “Leaving out of Babylon, going straight to my father’s land” tells a story: it demonstrates Rastafari desire for repatriation to Africa and Ethiopia. Babylon, the Rastafari name for the repressive West, is the biblical home of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Rastafari escape from the captivity of Babylon to come home to the Promised Land, the “father’s land” of Ethiopia. Rastafari have narrated a specific Ethiopian identity and having done so, they consider themselves to be Ethiopian citizens.

Postcolonial literary scholar Edward Chamberlin suggests that our way of seeing or perceiving is based on what we see as true in the context of our lived experiences. This, he says, “is inseparable from the ways in which we imagine it” (2003, 2). In this way, through the statement “my father’s land,” what is important is what the speaker believes (or, in Chamberlin’s words, “imagines”) about his or her own homeland—informed by history, experience, and other people. These multiple narratives exist in Ethiopia, each coming together, overlapping, layering, connecting and disconnecting, helping to construct identities and a sense of citizenship.

Rastafari, however, have their own narratives. The two sitting on the bus that day had their own reasons for getting to Shashemene and their own “imaginations” informing their identities. As Chamberlin writes,

What Rastafarians have done is to make up a story—and I say this in high tribute—that will bring them back home while they wait for reality to catch up with their imaginations. It is an immensely powerful
story, and its influence through the music of reggae is a measure of that power. . . Rasta and reggae provide a ceremony of consolation and commonality even as they present a litany of suffering. They provide one example of the way beyond conflict and loss—through the very stories and songs that remind us of them (76).

What causes Rastafari to pick up and move to Ethiopia is a powerful narrative, one which “brings them back home” to Africa. This narrative is informed by the immense suffering found in the history and legacy of slavery and colonialism, a history and legacy that created the African diaspora. Ethiopia becomes a powerful source of meaning through this narrative. As religious studies scholar Ennis Edmunds has written, “The theme of repatriation is associated with the rediscovery of Africa. Looking to Africa/Ethiopia serves to give the Rastas a sense of common cultural and historical identity. Drawing on Jamaican national hero Marcus Garvey’s back-to-Africa campaign, Rastas have always made repatriation one of their tenets” (2003, 55). Edmunds is correct. Ethiopia provides a common cultural and historical identity, but this homeland, this place of repatriation, is also the native homeland and source of cultural and historical identity for Ethiopians. It is the land of the forefathers of Ethiopians. The phrase “my father’s land” is therefore a statement that is as much Ethiopian as it is Rastafari. Though the claim is mutual, Ethiopians and Rastafari make the statement based on different ways of seeing both themselves and others.

Rastafari and Ethiopia: A Brief Introduction

Before continuing with the Ethiopian perception and looking at the way in which Ethiopians and Rastafari relate and connect, a fuller introduction to Rastafari and their connection to Ethiopia, both materially and spiritually, will be useful. The basic tenets of Rastafari are difficult to list since it is a very open movement with many subsects. Though there are many differing types of Rastafari and a variety of different beliefs, some statements can be made about all adherents: first, belief in the divinity of Haile Selassie, and second, the view of Ethiopia as a Promised Land.

For Rastafari, Haile Selassie, the former emperor of Ethiopia who ruled from 1930 to 1974, is not simply a divinely ordained ruler—a belief
that is, in my experience, generally not denounced by Ethiopians—but he is understood to be the personification of God. Rastafari believe that Haile Selassie is not just divinely ordained, but divine. Each year on 23 July, Rastafari communities worldwide celebrate Haile Selassie’s birthday. In Shashemene, the date is commemorated with a large concert. Each performer to grace the stage declares the following: “God Bless Jesus Christ who came to us in the personality of His Majesty Haile Selassie. King of Kings, Lord of Lords, the Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah.”

The name “Rastafari” itself stems from Haile Selassie’s birth name of Tafari Makonnen Woldemikael. According to Ethiopian Orthodox Church tradition, Tafari was given another name at baptism: Haile Selassie. Ras is the Amharic word for a type of aristocrat, perhaps equivalent in English to a “prince” or “duke.” As an aristocrat, Tafari was Ras Tafari, hence the development of the term “Rastafari” and the use of “Ras” as a general honorific for Rastafari adherents. When he became emperor of Ethiopia on 2 November 1930, Tafari Mekonnen took his baptismal name as his regnal name. Alongside this baptismal name, which in Amharic means “power of the trinity,” and his title of “King of Kings, conquering lion of the tribe of Judah,” Haile Selassie connected his lineage to the biblical King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba’s son, Emperor Menelik I. One might call the crowning of Haile Selassie as emperor the climax of a perfect storm of elements that came together in Jamaica to create a new belief system. Combine the Christianity of the Church of England-influenced colony of Jamaica, the burgeoning anticolonial movements occurring on the island, and the promotion of back to Africa ideas, and the result is Rastafari, a new, Afrocentric faith based in biblical Christianity.

Ethiopia was the birthplace of prince Ras Tafari, but Jamaica was the birthplace of the Rastafari movement. Leonard Barrett, who wrote the first extensive study of the Rastafari faith, explains how, in the first part of the twentieth century, the combination of economic and political crises in Jamaica and the rise in Afrocentric belief systems as promoted by people like Marcus Garvey (and his Back to Africa philosophy) led to a belief in Haile Selassie’s reign as more than the continuation of Ethiopia’s monarchical government system: “A forgotten statement of Garvey . . . ‘Look to Africa for the crowning of a Black King; he shall be the
redeemer’—came back like the voice of god. Possessed by the spirit of this new development, many Jamaicans now saw the coronation as fulfillment of Biblical prophecy and Haile Selassie as the messiah of African redemption” (1997, 81). In 1933, the Anglican-born Jamaican Leonard Howell famously began preaching fulfillment of biblical prophecy in the form of Haile Selassie as the second coming of Christ and Ethiopia as the Promised Land.\(^{14}\)

By thwarting a white, European vision of Christianity—a religion implanted in Jamaica through English colonialism and the Anglican Church—and instead viewing Haile Selassie as the new messiah, the African consciousness of Rastafari allows for a tremendous level of empowerment amongst people for whom blackness and Africanness has historically been viewed as inferior. Rastafari speaks against historic racism; its ideas and concepts speak against oppression, both racial and socioeconomic. As theological scholar Leo Erskine writes, “It must be kept in mind that the discourse concerning the divinity of Haile Selassie and the claims concerning biblical warrants that justify this claim are being made in the socio political context in which the vast majority of Rastafari are at the base of the socio economic ladder” (2005, 74). The economic structure of colonialism led to a great gap between rich and poor, white and black—both in terms of the colonizing nations and the upper classes within colonial environments. Rastafari challenges this structure by placing blackness as rich and superior—Haile Selassie as leader and deity.

In addition to conceiving of the former emperor of Ethiopia as god, Rastafari view Ethiopia as symbolically or literally central to their faith—and not just because Haile Selassie granted them 500 acres of land. As anthropologist and scholar of Rastafari Carole Yawney writes, “The most basic and predominant characteristic of Rastafarian ideology is its Ethiopianism” (italics in the original, 1978, 87). Ethiopianism,\(^{15}\) an ideology that promotes Ethiopia as a space and source of black empowerment, however, stems from far before Ras Tafari’s coronation, Howell’s preaching, and the 1948 imperial invitation to settle.

Ethiopia has exercised the imaginations and figured in the stories of various cultural communities from Europe to the Caribbean, from the eighteenth century onward (Carnochan 2008). Sociologist George Eaton Simpson, whose fieldwork in the 1950s produced some
of the earliest research on Rastafari, has written that Ethiopia’s importance arguably began the moment the Christian Bible was introduced into Jamaican society, in the eighteenth century. The oft-quoted verse, Psalms 68:31, looms large over all Ethiopianist thought: “Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God” (Simpson 1985, 286).

References to Ethiopia in the Bible could potentially have held a “liberatory promise” from the moment the book entered the Jamaican consciousness. “[W]hen contrasted with the indignities of plantation bondage,” these mentions of Ethiopia “showed the black man in a dignified and humane light” (Shepperson, quoted in Chevannes 1994, 34). Here we see how Ethiopianism is not merely an interest in the history and narrative of the country, but a “philosophical orientation generally embodying notions of pan-Africanism and African liberation” (Yawney 1978, 87). Beyond simply being a nation-state, Ethiopia stands for freedom, liberty, and justice. Historian Fikru Gebrekidan (2005) demonstrates how Ethiopia has been viewed in this way by many groups in the African diaspora, one of them being Rastafari.

Ethiopia’s status as the Holy Land was confirmed for Rastafari when Haile Selassie was crowned emperor on November 2, 1930. The November coronation is marked by Rastafari worldwide, and the fact that many world leaders attended the event and paid attention is viewed as testament to Haile Selassie’s power. Rastafari see the coronation of Haile Selassie I, King of Kings, Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah as the formal acknowledgment of the emperor’s messiah status, and his land of Ethiopia as Zion.

Thinking about Rastafari Thinking

Though this work focuses on the Ethiopian view of the Rastafari movement, a basic overview of Rastafari thinking—especially with regard to their identity as Ethiopians—will ground further discussion. For Rastafari, establishing Haile Selassie as messiah and Ethiopia as the focal point in the quest for emancipation and redemption provides a possible answer to the postcolonial question of origins. When Barbadian poet Kamau Brathwaite writes in the persona of a “Rastaman” in the poem “Wings of a Dove,” he makes plain this empowered belief that
comes with a turn to Rastafari: “Rise rise / locks- / man, Solo- / man wise / man, rise / leh we/ laugh / dem, mock / dem, stop / dem, kill / dem an’ go / back back / to the black / man lan’ / back back / to Af- / rica” (1973, 43). The dreadlock-sporting Rastafari rises up, is descended from King Solomon, is wise and able to mock “dem”—the oppressors. Just as Brathwaite’s poem takes advantage of the object pronoun so as to return the subject position to the black speaker, so too does the faith of Rastafari.

In the Rastafari faith, the subject position, the “I,” is the seat of power. In terms of linguistics, “[t]he ‘I’ becomes a full speaking subject through its incorporation into the cultural structures of linguistic communication, where it becomes the subject who speaks and from whom knowledge apparently comes” (Weedon, Tolson, and Mort 1980, 196). For Rastafari, the “I” not only has the power to speak and produce knowledge, but as “I and I” (or “I n’ I”) it acts as a connection between “self, life and the world” (Nettleford, quoted in Pollard 2000, 7).

The “I” also has great import in what Rastafari scholars call “Iyaric” or “dread talk” (Kebede and Knottnerus 1998, 509; Pollard 2000, passim). Not only does this mode of speech allow the formation of a community amongst its speakers, but the language itself reflects the Rastafari belief system in its very words. The object pronoun “me” in dread talk is a means of enforcing subjectivity—the speaker is always the subject, never objectified, even through grammar. Through a history of slavery and colonialism African peoples were objectified, and the ubiquitousness of the object pronoun “me,” found in Jamaican Creole acting as both subject and object pronoun, is from a Rastafari perspective “a product of the slave era and denotes submissiveness” (Kebede and Knottnerus 1998, 510).

The pronoun “I,” on the other hand, “symbolizes subject, or personhood, as opposed to non-identity” (Kebede and Knottnerus 1998, 510). It links Rastafari with an “I” that is King Solomon, the God that exists for Rastafari in the personification of Haile Selassie, and Africa. This Africa, however, is both symbolic and literal, representing the continent itself as well as a sense of power and Afrocentricity that comes with Rastafari consciousness.

As Barrett writes, the “love” for Africa and Ethiopia is a major emphasis in Rastafari thinking:
Africa and Ethiopia are two “holy” places to most Jamaicans. Africa is often called Ethiopia—in fact, most Jamaicans confuse the two. This was true of the great lover of all things African—Marcus Garvey. To the Ras-tas, Ethiopia means that territory ruled by Haile Selassie, who is the God of the black people. It is through him that Blacks shall be removed from the far-flung places where they as Africans have been carried into slavery and, through repatriation, will be returned to their homeland. (1997, 268)

Ethiopia and Africa are, for Rastafari, often conflated. To refer to Ethiopia is to refer to Africa and vice versa. Ethiopia thus becomes a metonymic stand-in for the whole of the continent—it is the universal homeland for the African diaspora. The word Ethiopia comes from the Greek, meaning “the land of burnt faces.” This reflects the ancient reality in which anything south of Egypt was considered Ethiopia. But from the time of the birth of the Rastafari movement through to the present day, Ethiopia has been a country—one of the now fifty-four sovereign states existent in Africa.

For Rastafari, however, Ethiopia and Africa remain synonymous. Jesuit priest Joseph Owens spent time living with Rastafari in Kingston. He further explains this concept: “Africa for the Rastas is not . . . the same as Africa for ‘society’ people.” By “society people,” Owens means non-Rastafari: “Even as regards the name the brethren [i.e., the Rastafari in Kingston] stand apart, since they consider the proper name for Africa to be Ethiopia. Such it was called in the Bible, and, they maintain, only those who have an interest in concealing the truth about the Promised Land will give it another name” (1976, 223). The view of Ethiopianism as being connected with pan-Africanism (the view expressed by Yawney 1978) through the pan-African ideals of Haile Selassie (who established the United States of Africa), also connects Ethiopianist thought with Africanist or Afrocentric thought. All this allows for what some might call a historical inconsistency as regards the Rastafari belief of Ethiopia as a homeland. It could certainly be argued that the African diaspora in Jamaica, the birthplace of Rastafari, should historically speaking call West Africa the homeland, given the history of the heinous trans-Atlantic slave trade. Tanzanian scholar Godfrey Mwakikagile postulates that the Rastafari connection with Ethiopia constitutes a denial of origins in West Africa and is a “reflection of an inferiority
complex on their part, refusing to identify themselves with typical black—‘Negro’ Africa” and is a “delusion and distortion of history and reality” (2007, 64).

Cultural studies scholar Paul Gilroy’s argument regarding the various forms of connection to Africa experienced by the diaspora can be applied here to Rastafari. Specifically, Gilroy takes issue with the need to resurrect or reconstruct a narrative of Africanness based on authentic connections to Africa:

[T]he modern world represents a break with the past, not in the sense that premodern, “traditional” Africanisms don’t survive its institution, but because the significance and meaning of these survivals get irrevocably sundered from their origins. . . . It is proposed here above all as a means to figure the inescapability and legitimate value of mutation, hybridity and intermixture. (1993, 222–23)

Due to the trans-Atlantic slave trade, Jamaicans are distanced both geographically and temporally from their origins in West Africa. A direct connection to West Africa is difficult to track. Gilroy therefore wonders if an exact historical link to Africa is necessary. Rather, he asks, can we consider the fact that, based on being “irrevocably sundered from their origins,” the Rastafari belief system presents an equally “legitimate” connection to Africa and specifically Ethiopia, a place that represents resistance against the very colonialism that led to the sundering in the first place? Philosopher Tommy Lott writes that “Gilroy criticizes the Afrocentric doctrine for its commitment to a narrative of Western civilization that only couches a different set of political interests in the same terms” (2003, 172). Thus, to critique Rastafari for presenting a narrative that, by insisting upon Ethiopia as source denies history in some way, is to base the evaluation of the validity of Rastafari on a Western model of historical connection. For Gilroy, Rastafari is, in fact, “legitimate” in that it is a movement that has resulted from “mutation, hybridity and intermixture.” Ethiopia is important not necessarily because of its direct, legitimate connection to Jamaica, the birthplace of the Rastafari movement, but because of what it represents.

Ethiopia and Ethiopianism are fundamental to the development of black nationalism, pan-Africanism, and Rastafari. As Bonacci writes, “In
effect, Ethiopianism cannot be divided from work on race and raciality in the world: Ethiopia and Ethiopians serve, by analogy, to designate black people” (2007, 77). This point is underlined by the Ethiopian World Federation (EWF), founded in New York in 1937 by Dr. Melaku Bayen, Haile Selassie’s personal physician, alongside African Americans who supported Ethiopia during the Italian occupation. The EWF has grown to be a predominantly Rastafari organization, with representatives still functioning in Jamaica and Ethiopia, among other countries. According to the General Overview of the organization, the “major goal” of the organization is as follows: “The Ethiopian (meaning all black people), World (everywhere), Federation (autonomous groups working together), desiring to do all we can to restore the continent of Ethiopia-Africa to her former state of complete independence” (EWF 2008). By making this statement, the EWF attempts to establish the universal nature of the concept of Ethiopia and, also, the relationship between Ethiopia and Africa. An Ethiopianist focus therefore leads the EWF to suggest that work on the development of Ethiopia “effect[s] a social and economic betterment of the race everywhere” (ibid.). The EWF affirms that Ethiopianism is interested in the fight for social justice, equality, and economic betterment for members of the African diaspora. This is a collective project—a focus on unity: “all black people” and “autonomous groups working together.” But it is also a project with a direct connection to a specific place and a very specific piece of land in Shashemene, Ethiopia.

Land is of both literal and symbolic importance. According to Chamberlin, a desire for land and a sense of home and/or origins is at the center of the colonial conflict between “us” and “them”—a conflict that takes on multiple shapes and guises. Rastafari claim Ethiopia as a site of origins, a home. This claim is made regardless of the fact that by claiming Ethiopia as a home they might also be referring to the continent of Africa. A legacy of European colonialism, conflicts over land and the complete dispossession of much of Africa created, for diaspora Africans, a vacuum whereby “home,” and all the spiritual, cultural, and social meanings that the notion of “home” contains, was in multiple, varied ways destabilized, fragmented, and replaced by an external notion (or notions) of home. Ethiopia acts as a means of restabilizing and bringing together the fragments of identity, providing a common sense of origins.
In addition, the horrors of the trans-Atlantic slave trade enforced a system in which large numbers of people were denied any property or ownership rights whatsoever and experienced a complete lack of basic human freedom. Millions of people were forced to work the land—thus becoming intimately connected to it while simultaneously being denied any rights of ownership. For Jamaica, the place in which the faith that has become known as Rastafari originated, this is a major point. Erskine writes that “identity issues in Jamaica cannot be properly discussed without reference to land” (2005, 93). From a social, cultural, spiritual, and historical standpoint, this makes land a central concern. And it is Shashemene that transforms the Rastafari dream of a homeland and all the symbolic resonance of Ethiopia and Africa from being a symbolic concept to the actual reality of a place, a piece of land within Ethiopia. As literary critic Brent Edwards writes, “If black New World populations have their origin in the fragmentation, racialized oppression, and systematic dispossession of the slave trade, then the Pan-African impulse stems from the necessity to confront or heal that legacy through racial organization itself: through ideologies of a real or symbolic return to Africa” (2001, 46). The pan-African impulse of the Rastafari movement arises from the need to move from the fragmentation of Babylon to the unity of Ethiopia.

For Rastafari, there is no doubt about the importance of Ethiopia as a homeland. As Ras Tagas King, the resident country representative for the EWF in Ethiopia, says: “We see Ethiopia as our Promised Land. That's why we are here. There is no other place in the world we cherish more than Ethiopia, so it's special.” Concurring with this statement is Vernon Judah, a child of Rastafari who repatriated in 1975: “We believe that Ethiopia is our land . . . when I say Ethiopia, I mean before colonization, for instance, when Sudan was part of Ethiopia. . . . We believe Ethiopia is the Promised Land.”

This land has become an escape from Babylon, salvation from the oppressive system that exists in Jamaican society as well as in the West. By seeking independence from Babylon, Rastafari believe they can grasp the possibility of building a classless society that denies the divisions made so apparent within the colonial period. The postcolonial (or, more correctly, neocolonial) present still struggles with these divisions of race and class; by leaving the West behind and embarking on a self-sufficient existence in the Shashemene settlement, Rastafari believe they
can make real the emancipation from mental slavery of which Bob Marley sings in his famous “Redemption Song.” This ideal can be seen in utopian sensibilities regarding the space that is Shashemene.

Erskine writes, “Rastas seek in their living to preserve a rhythm between themselves and nature” (2005, 91). Life in Shashemene allows Rastafari living there to denounce oppressive Babylon and embrace what is often referred to as “I-and-I consciousness.” This Rastafari philosophy embraces oneness with all living things—there is no hierarchy: “There is no individual, no super Rasta man who is able to impose his will on organizations and groups” (91). Members of the Nyabinghi, Bobo Ashanti, and Twelve Tribes of Israel sects (referred to as “mansions”) of Rastafari till the soil and live off the land in Ethiopia, existing in communion with each other and with nature: an agrarian, subsistence lifestyle is possible in Shashemene. This suggests the possibility of an idyllic lifestyle for the few hundred inhabitants of the Rastafari community. Though the first repatriates settled in Shashemene, Rastafari have expanded to other parts of Ethiopia. There are Rastafari who live in the capital city, Addis Ababa, as well as in certain areas in the north of the country, specifically the city of Bahir Dar. However, due to the history of the emperor’s land grant, Shashemene is of particular importance and contains the largest population of Rastafari.

The problem, however, is that all that has been described above demonstrates that Rastafari themselves have a very specific view of Ethiopia/Africa. They see Ethiopia as homeland, as a liberatory space, a place in which “there is no hierarchy,” in which all are equal and unified. The dream of an actual place—a material piece of land that provides the opportunity to exit the racist, classist Babylon system—is provided by the existence of Shashemene. And Ethiopianism provides a mental space of acceptance alongside a unified, coherent sense of Ethiopian identity that can be taken on by the repatriates themselves. Yet, as an immigrant group, Rastafari are challenged by the reality of Ethiopia and the perceptions of Ethiopia’s people.

Migration and Diaspora

In deciding on an approach to analyzing the Ethiopian perception of the Rastafari movement, it makes sense to start by thinking about issues
of migration and movement. However, it is difficult to draw on Western studies of immigration and the perception of immigrants in other societies because of the uniqueness of the Rastafari situation. In *Strangers in African Societies*, anthropologist William Shack discusses how Ethiopia is and has been a society “with ‘closed’ boundaries” (1979, 43). Because of Ethiopia’s mountainous geography and its history of isolation from colonialism there have been few instances of migration to Ethiopia—especially by choice. Yes, there was a small but steady number of European missionaries, but as Shack describes, “whenever European strangers came dangerously close to posing a threat to the close morality and routine behavior upon which Ethiopian social life depended, they were expelled forthwith” (43). Shack has also discussed the relationship of African Americans with Ethiopians (1974). And although Fikru Gebrekidan has more fully fleshed out the historic relationship between Ethiopia and the pan-African diaspora (2005), his work does not cover the period of the present government, ending as it does with the fall of the Dergue regime. Both Shack and Fikru touch on the Rastafari repatriates, but they do not undertake a full treatment of the Ethiopian perception and neither of them deals with the present day.

There are no studies of the public perception of immigrants within the Ethiopian context. There has been some Italian, Armenian, and Greek migration to the country, but these constitute “pretty strange comparators.” Whereas Italians and Greeks settled in Ethiopia for economic reasons, Armenians settled there as a “homeland of substitution” (Adjemian 2012, 1). Ethiopians and Armenians share a faith (both groups are Orthodox Christians), and numerous Armenians were given citizenship by decree of Emperor Menelik in the early part of the twentieth century. But the goal of Armenians, unlike that of Rastafari, has not been to exist as Ethiopians. Armenians wished for their own homeland. For Rastafari, Ethiopia is that homeland.

Theories of migration tend to focus on economic impetus. As anthropologist Helen I. Safa writes, “most studies concur that migrants leave their area of origin primarily because of a lack of employment opportunities and in hopes of finding better opportunities elsewhere” (1975, 1). More recent discussions of migration focus squarely on economics as well (Massey et al. 1993; Bodvarsson and Van den Berg 2009). In addition, theorists point to the anxiety of host societies stemming from
economic self-interest in the face of an incoming labor force (Fetzer 2000, 13). Interestingly, however, Rastafari are often more wealthy than many Ethiopians and are viewed as potential business owners and development workers. Whereas this situation puts Rastafari in the position of foreigners—whether as investors or humanitarian workers—it gives them the opportunity to offer jobs and aid to the Ethiopian communities in which they live. Rather than entering the country as an incoming flood of workers competing for Ethiopian jobs, Rastafari offer the potential of new businesses and programs—that is, they open up new possibilities rather than posing a threat.

Additionally, Rastafari do not choose, either as individuals or as groups, to come to Ethiopia on account of the country’s economic potential. As we have seen, the reasons for their moving out of Babylon and coming to the Promised Land of Ethiopia are based in a belief system that helps them construct an identity of being Ethiopian. The Rastafari sense of already being citizens of, rather than immigrants to, the host society also causes them to challenge some of the assumptions made by theories of immigration. In the Rastafari context within Ethiopia, psychologist John W. Berry’s influential model of acculturation for immigrants seems to be a difficult fit (1980, 1997). Berry’s argument that immigrants confront a dilemma in balancing their traditional culture with the new culture of the host country is complicated by the Rastafari belief that their culture is that of Ethiopia. And then, further complicating the issue is the fact that Ethiopian identity is a variable and contested concept.

This being said, there are instances where the Ethiopian perception of and attitudes toward Rastafari are in keeping with those of the Western, multicultural societies discussed in the literature on acculturation and immigration. Specifically, Ethiopians do feel a sense of threat to their culture and values in the face of Rastafari and make a great many assumptions about this incoming population. Thus, integrated threat theory, which postulates that host societies perceive threats from the immigrant community—realistic and symbolic (Van Oudenhoven et al. 2006, 644)—can help to explain some of the worries that Ethiopians have about Rastafari. Contact theories suggest that these perceived threats can be resolved through personal interaction with immigrants (Fetzer 2000, 15). The Rastafari settlement in Shashemene therefore
becomes a significant site of analysis. But again, the fact that Rastafari claim land rights based on a grant by Haile Selassie complicates the issue, as Haile Selassie's land grants are no longer acknowledged by the Ethiopian government. But Rastafari continue to settle in Shashemene as a central location in Ethiopia. If Ethiopia is the Promised Land, Shashemene is the Promised part of the whole. Therefore, in order to further identify the relationship between contact with and acceptance of Rastafari in Ethiopia, analysis of the space of Shashemene itself became imperative.

This book is relevant to general theories of immigration, but it also provides a perspective that connects with studies of the impact or perception of members of the African diaspora who migrate to Africa. Perhaps, thinking back to Meskerem's delineation of foreignness as regards the Rastafari travelers on the bus, this perception was a reflection of a divide between continental Africans and Africans in the diaspora. Obiegale Lake describes the difficulty of African diaspora integration into Ghanaian society and "suggest[s] that [the] ideological separation of indigenous and diaspora Africans is a result of and is consistent with the hegemonic forces that inhered during the European extraction of Africans from their motherland" (1995, 21). Though the references are limited, in the field of African diaspora studies some scholars have studied the meeting of indigenous African and diaspora Africans, such as the above-mentioned work by Lake and Strangers in African Societies edited by William Shack and Elliott Skinner (1979). Even these and similar works deal very marginally with the integration of the "stranger" in Ethiopian society, being more concerned with postcolonial African states. For example, Jennifer Jackson and Mary Cothran (2003) analyze the relationships between Africans, African Americans, and African Caribbean people, though the Africans in question are limited to people from Nigeria and Ghana and the study took place not in Africa, but in the United States.

South-south connections such as those between Bob Marley and Ethiopia, Gabon and Zimbabwe, as investigated by Grant Farred (2003), and the work of Guyana's Walter Rodney in Tanzania, as addressed by Viola Mattavous Bly, have produced examples of the "relationship of Africa and its diaspora" (Bly 1985, 129). Both Farred and Bly present images of negotiation between Africa with the diaspora, while avoiding
“illusions” (Bly 1985, 129). Elliot Skinner asks for the “restoration of African identity for a new millennium” (1999, 28). In the contemporary Rastafari community located in Ethiopia, we have an example of attempts at such “restoration,” described and historically recorded in Bonacci’s work. But the response of the surrounding community has yet to be explored. With the relationship between Rastafari and Ethiopia, we have an opportunity to analyze a negotiation. Key to the construction of Ethiopian identity (or identities) is Ethiopia’s status as a historically independent nation, positioned as unique amongst African nations and disconnected from the European colonial project. Rastafari negotiate between an imagined, idealized, anticipated Ethiopia and the lived experience of life there.

Paul Tiyambe Zeleza writes that “[t]he challenges of mapping out the dispersals of African peoples over the last millennia are truly daunting. Also extremely difficult to delineate are the changing engagements between these diasporas and Africa” (2005, 63). Understanding the great challenges, I hope through this book to engage with these “changing engagements” and contribute to the field of diaspora studies interested in intersections between indigenous and diaspora Africans, in this case between Ethiopians and Rastafari.

The Book

This book is based on intensive fieldwork in Ethiopia between 2007 and 2008, as well as a number of shorter periods from 2004 to 2013, and explores the Ethiopian perception of the Rastafari movement as well as the Ethiopian engagement with Rastafari culture and vice versa. In terms of the scholarship on Rastafari, there is an obvious gap in the research. There is little explanation or discussion of how Ethiopians perceive Rastafari. The interplay between Ethiopians and Rastafari has yet to be fully investigated.

Most studies of Rastafari discuss the reasons for and philosophy of repatriation, as well as the sense of what Ethiopia symbolizes, but they do not explore the reality of what happens after repatriation. These studies examine the contribution of Ethiopianism to the development of the movement, its philosophy, and worldview (Owens 1976; Chevannes 1994; Barrett 1997; Erskine 2005), but not Rastafari settlement in
Ethiopia. Rastafari who wish to travel to or live in Ethiopia and Africa in general are sometimes mentioned (Chevannes 1994, 34; Erskine quoted in Terrazas 2006), but the lived reality of what this means for those who do actually repatriate is not discussed. Shashemene seldom appears in the indexes of books about the movement. Little work has been done on the repatriate community, and even less has been done to document relations between Ethiopian and Rastafarian communities in Ethiopia.27

As part of the narrative establishing the history of the repatriates and the land grant, in Exodus! Bonacci describes briefly how Rastafari “find themselves more directly confronted with hostility from Ethiopians than many other foreigners in the country” (2008, 463)28 and observes a “lack of understanding between the populations [of Rastafari and Ethiopians]” (463).29 These observations meet with little analysis regarding the meaning or significance of the Ethiopian perception. This is understandable, as Bonacci’s primary objective is to present a history of the land grant and the community of repatriates themselves. Bonacci’s work fills a gap in that it provides a very complete look at the lives of Rastafari in Ethiopia as opposed to other parts of the world. However, questions as to how Ethiopians process their experiences of those who engage in this spiritual migration are left unanswered.30

Rastafari have been settling in Ethiopia for more than fifty years on land that was granted to the pan-African community, of which they are a part. The irony is that this land grant has never translated into citizenship rights. This book historicizes and contextualizes this situation, demonstrating that there are disparities in understanding between Ethiopians and Rastafari. Indeed, as noted, in many respects Ethiopians’ attitudes toward the incoming immigrant Rastafari community resemble those of Western countries toward their immigrants, judging from extensive studies of the public perception of immigrants in the West. Interestingly, even in the literature on immigration there is more focus on immigrants themselves than on the host communities.31 This volume recognizes the importance of the host community in the acculturation of immigrants.

This book expands our knowledge and understating by turning to the Ethiopian perception, adding to the breadth of work on Rastafari by dealing with the effects of the ongoing existence and impact of the
Rastafari community in Ethiopia. In so doing, it provides insight into the ways in which migration and claims of citizenship can challenge narratives of cultural and national identity. The relationship between the Ethiopian perception of Rastafari and Rastafari attempts to belong in Ethiopia reflect the wider reality of identity negotiation between immigrant and host community, African diaspora and Africa, historical narrative and present reality, among other factors.

This being said, the Rastafari case differs fundamentally from most research on attitudes toward immigration and thus sheds light on the need to address the perceptions of the host community. For scholars of immigration, this book offers an opportunity to explore multiple migratory experiences. The ways in which Rastafari see themselves versus the ways they are seen means that this book is as much a study about immigration as it is about a diaspora return home. It also offers an analysis of south-south migration, movement that is becoming increasingly common. It provides a new and unique perspective on migration and the relationship between migrants and their host countries as well as diaspora and home.

This study deals with a group of migrants to a non-Western nation, while most studies deal with Western nations (see Fetzer 2000). Moreover, Rastafari enter Ethiopia with a particular understanding of the country and their own sense of Ethiopianness and homecoming that is very different from the outlook of most immigrants to a new land. In the minds of Rastafari, they are not immigrants but Ethiopians returning home. This self-perception of being Ethiopian meets a population which for the most part does not acknowledge their Ethiopianness. Indeed, the Rastafari understanding of Ethiopianness is very different from an Ethiopian understanding of Ethiopia and Ethiopianness. I argue that this disjuncture is based on different narratives of the post-colonial Rastafari versus the noncolonial Ethiopian and how they come to communicate and dialogue with each other. For Rastafari, Ethiopia is the utopian Promised Land. Rastafari consider themselves Ethiopians. This singular self-definition is challenged by the reality of Ethiopia as an incredibly diverse and contested nation-state.

The data that informs this study of the relationship between Rastafari and Ethiopians was collected largely within Ethiopia. I formally interviewed over ninety people, primarily in Shashemene. These individuals
included high school and college students, farmers on the outskirts of the town, and teachers at local colleges and high schools as well as teachers who had worked for a Rastafari-run school; merchants who owned businesses in the area; local NGO workers; businesspeople who have worked with Rastafari; journalists from both print and broadcast media; government officials at the level of municipal government; musicians and artists; members of Haile Selassie’s family; and Orthodox priests and Protestant pastors, among others. Though my main focus was on the Ethiopian perspective, 10 percent of my interviews were with Rastafari repatriates, many involved in business and humanitarian initiatives in Ethiopia. In the course of my fieldwork I learned more about their attempts to integrate into Ethiopian society. I collected pamphlets and tracts, as well as music and artwork. I gathered Ethiopian media coverage of Rastafari, as well as academic and religious writing on the subject. Through this wide range of sources collected in Ethiopia, I became aware of the fact that Rastafari receive a varied reception—both positive and negative—in the country.

Moreover, by making connections between the interviews and written documents, I gained a sense of the context and meaning of interactions between Ethiopians and Rastafari. The multiplicity of perspectives was extremely wide-ranging and revealed a heterogeneous view of the Rastafari immigrant community as well as a view of Ethiopia and Ethiopianess. The Rastafarian belief system is challenged by the reality of Ethiopia, a country in which the issue of origins is very different. Rastafari in Jamaica, for instance, look outside the island and to Africa as a homeland, whereas Ethiopian discussions of home relate to Ethiopia itself.

My approach was multidisciplinary and multisited. From Addis Ababa to Shashemene, I looked into the concept of Ethiopian identity from a historical perspective and also engaged in narratology, analyzing individual stories told about Rastafari. I made use of theories of space to investigate Shashemene itself and the contact between Ethiopians and Rastafari, and used an approach from media anthropology to examine the coverage of Rastafari in the Ethiopian media. I also turned to Ethiopian-created, Rastafari-influenced art and music to uncover the Ethiopian perception of Rastafari. Finally, I turned to Rastafari themselves, whose desire for recognition and citizenship has caused them to develop a range of integration strategies. Theories of cultural
citizenship inform this work, helping to explain how Rastafari initiatives work toward acceptance in the eyes of everyday Ethiopians as well as the Ethiopian state.

There is a large variety of both reactions and perceptions to Rastafari in Ethiopia, which provide a commentary on narratives of identity, nationality, and citizenship. This investigation into the relationship between Ethiopians and Rastafari ultimately presents a case study of multiple narratives of meaning coming together, both conflicting and negotiating with one another. While this relationship may be based on historical narratives, it also reflects the contemporary stories that the Ethiopians tell about Rastafari. In addition to providing an analysis of the specific context of the Ethiopian perception of repatriate Rastafari and the Rastafari movement, this book offers insights into the dynamics of immigrant/host relationships and the conceptualization of citizenship—be it a political claim for representation or a cultural claim for acceptance. Diaspora is a concept that is negotiated—who is defined as diaspora and who engages in this act of definition? The book illustrates how notions of citizenship, identity, and belonging develop, how the pan-African diaspora relates to the continent of Africa, how immigrants are perceived within a country more accustomed to outward migration, and how the reality of repatriation impacts both the repatriates and the host population of the country they wish to settle.

This book expands the current literature on immigration by presenting a case study of a unique relationship between immigrants and a host society, and by engaging in a conversation about perception and immigration as well as pan-Africanism, identity, and citizenship. Looking into what happens when the Rastafari pan-African worldview and sense of repatriate identity meets Ethiopia and both the historic and contemporary reality of what it means to be Ethiopian allows for an analysis of how different communities navigate the notion of citizenship and the dynamic nature of the concept.

Outline of the Chapters

Chapter 1 looks at how Ethiopia challenges the Rastafari perspective on Ethiopian identity. It begins to frame an analysis of the relationship between the way Rastafari view the meaning of Ethiopianaess compared
with the way Ethiopians definite themselves. It introduces the disjunction between the Ethiopian perception and that of Rastafari regarding this sense of identity. I present the Ethiopian perception of Ethiopianness, building on a historiocultural approach and explaining changes that have occurred in Ethiopia during the past century. The chapter looks at the ways in which identity has been formed and reformed, and the conflict resulting from various government initiatives as well as ethnic constructions. After establishing the competing notions of Ethiopianness, chapter 2 turns to stories that Ethiopians tell about Rastafari, analyzing these perceptions and presumptions, and situating them within the context of the history and religion of Ethiopia. Using the framework of integrated threat theory, it also demonstrates that Ethiopians reflect behaviors toward immigrants demonstrated by other multicultural societies.

After chapters 1 and 2, which speak generally about the different notions of Ethiopianness and illustrate individual perceptions, chapter 3 looks at the issues of contact between Rastafari and Ethiopians by investigating the space that is Shashemene where the majority of Rastafari have settled. This chapter provides an analysis of Shashemene, discussing the issue of land and space and the meanings that stem from this space—specifically how the space and the meanings drawn from it reflect the difference between the Rastafari population and that of the inhabitants of Shashemene.

Chapter 4 takes a much broader view of the perception of Rastafari by turning to the Africa Unite celebration of what would have been Bob Marley’s sixtieth birthday. The series of events took place in February 2005 and was covered extensively by the Ethiopian media. There were varied reactions in the media as well as in other sources, such as those of Protestant denominations—institutions that profoundly question Rastafari. These reactions can be compared to the stated goals of the Bob and Rita Marley Foundations. Through this process, further light is thrown on the Ethiopian perception. Chapter 5 explores the popular perception of Rastafari by looking at music and artistic representations of the faith. Ethiopian artists and musicians have been able to integrate some of the elements of Rastafari in ways that both reflect the movement but also present a version of Rastafari that is acceptable to their own Ethiopian identities.

Finally, chapter 6, after looking at the many ways in which Ethiopian perceptions have interacted with Rastafari, turns to how the Rastafari
themselves deal with their lack of integration, in particular their lack of political recognition and right to citizenship. Rastafari have harnessed the potential of grassroots development initiatives. Acting as development workers within Ethiopia, Rastafari demonstrate how further integration into Ethiopian society may be achieved. Unlike traditional development workers who stay an average of one or two years, Rastafari wish to settle in Ethiopia. They have founded NGOs in Shashemene, established development initiatives, and opened hotels and businesses. This chapter confronts the fundamental obstacle confronting the Rastafari population, namely, their nonrecognition as citizens regardless of how long they have been living in Ethiopia. At present, the laws of Ethiopia do not allow for such recognition; there is simply no official policy on Rastafari and citizenship in Ethiopia. The challenge, therefore, is not only to find a way to negotiate such recognition, but also to recognize diverse conceptions of national identity—yet another negotiation. By looking at projects and initiatives undertaken by different groups of Rastafari, it becomes evident that citizenship, though officially denied to the Rastafari population, might be culturally within their grasp. Investment and development are part of the Ethiopian government's model for the country. Chapters 6 and 7 provide a framework for understanding the potential for connection between Rastafari and the surrounding community as well as presenting matters for further investigation into Rastafari humanitarian and business projects and plans for future integration into the community in Shashemene and Ethiopia in general. Chapter 7 takes a specific look at recent strategies for citizenship and acceptance. Finally, the Conclusion discusses the resonance of Ethiopian and Rastafari experiences with regard to wider issues of immigration, integration, and identity.

This volume, as the first in-depth investigation into the impact, role, and perception of Rastafari within Ethiopian society, offers those who study the movement a broader understanding of the implications of repatriation. Repatriation is a powerful theme that runs throughout the history of the Rastafari experience as well as in Rastafari thought and praxis. This book provides another piece to the puzzle. It not only can help increase our understanding of the global reach of Rastafari, but can also aid individual Rastafari wishing to make the move to Ethiopia by presenting repatriation as a process of negotiation between
communities. The dream of the Promised Land is juxtaposed with the reality of an Ethiopian trading center, a dusty crossroads town known for high rates of poverty and drought. Understanding the dream of living in the space is one challenge, while navigating the reality of the relationship with the surrounding community is another.

But this book is as much, if not more, about Ethiopia and Ethiopians. As a contribution to the study of Ethiopian culture and society, especially since the transition to the EPRDF (Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front) government in 1991, the subsequent establishment of ethnic regions, and the focus on development, this book provides a view of the Ethiopian conception of Ethiopianness—what it is to be Ethiopian. By presenting Ethiopian perceptions of Rastafari, this book also presents Ethiopian perceptions of themselves. The ethnic variety of the country complicates the Afrocentric notion of Ethiopianness that is key to the conception of Rastafari. My research demonstrates that the myriad nationalities and ethnicities intersect with Rastafari attempts to become Ethiopian citizens. What results is a desire by Ethiopians for Rastafari to represent a specific ethnic identity, when in fact Rastafari represent numerous nationalities themselves. It is difficult for the sense of Ethiopianness developed by Rastafari to connect with this concept of multiple nationalities, for it is based on a very different history, one that views Ethiopia as a symbol of unity and solidarity.

The Rastafari experience in Ethiopia provides a site for the analysis and discussion of new topics regarding citizenship, migration, and diaspora. Rastafari challenge Ethiopian notions of citizenship, and in turn Ethiopians challenge the Rastafari sense of social and political belonging. By looking at the Ethiopian perception of the Rastafari movement and at Rastafari repatriates themselves, we also have the opportunity to observe the impact of south-south migration based on Rastafari spiritual choice rather than economic or social factors. The integration of the Rastafari repatriates through culture as well as development initiatives demonstrates how Ethiopians negotiates a relationship with newcomers. Notions of diaspora are also confronted: how does the Rastafari identification of themselves as members of the Ethiopian diaspora reflect the need to engage with the potential of pan-African involvement in Africa? To engage with these discussions, my research required a great deal of listening.
Note on Method: Situatedness and Shashemene

I am making daily experiments now and I find I am able to take passing horses at a lively trot square across the line of fire... spokes well defined—some blur on top but sharp in the main... please notice when you get the specimens that they were made with the lens wide open and many of the best exposed when my horse was in motion. (Ondaatje 1991, 5)

I have visited Ethiopia thirteen times for periods as short as one month and as long as six. As an interdisciplinary scholar, I have drawn from numerous approaches in order to discern and discuss Ethiopian opinions of Rastafari. My educational background in literature, communications, and cultural studies has led me to collect oral narratives as well as written documentation; I have also engaged in ethnographic experiences in the collection of data.

During my research, I spent four months teaching at a local college in Shashemene and speaking with members of the Ethiopian community in Shashemene as well as additional informants. I engaged in interviews with Ethiopians and Rastafari, both in Shashemene and Addis Ababa. The interview process involved my providing questions to the interviewees, which were translated into Amharic or Afaan Oromoo or conveyed in the original English. I obtained release forms approved by the Research Ethics Board at McGill University, and made sure that all interviewees signed these documents after I had explained my project as clearly as I possibly could. Some interviewees requested confidentiality. I have tried to provide for that here, understanding that sometimes anonymity within one's own community is difficult to achieve. This point was made to interviewees. In addition, I did research at the Institute for Ethiopian Studies at Addis Ababa University, and along with my research assistant Salamawit Kidane, gathered media coverage.

Though my research was based primarily on data collection, including collecting documents and conducting interviews, I involved myself in participant observation by working alongside teachers at the college, attending various college-related events and Rastafari gatherings. I also volunteered as a kindergarten teacher at a local NGO’s school. Being in Shashemene for an extended period also allowed me to gather both observations and experiences, often of everyday life and the daily
goings on of the town, providing relevance to the Ethiopian perception of Rastafari.

While doing these different types of fieldwork, I was involved in what might be referred to as a type of ethnography, an anthropological method which became a major part of my collection of information. Perhaps I should say that my work is not an ethnography, but that my research is ethnographic in nature. According to anthropologist Vered Amit, “anthropology, at best, collapses the distinction between micro and macro and challenges reifications of concepts such as diaspora, state, globalization and so on, which, in their geographic, political and social reach, can easily appear distant and abstract” (2000, 16). This theoretical discussion of anthropology and its methods is important. Questioning my research, my positionality, and my site of research involves dealing with many of the same challenges and raises many of the same points of discussion. I deal with abstract concepts of “diaspora, state, globalization and so on,” but also their lived reality, to which I gain access through discussions with people and engagement with media and other documentation.

But my access is filtered through my positionality. When beginning my research I needed to think about how my identity as a white, female, Canadian researcher might impact the research process. I wished to be clear about my position as a researcher and make use of elements of the anthropological method of ethnography, aware that my position and the way I presented myself would influence the information I received.

First, I must recognize a series of allegiances. I moved from being a tourist on my first trip to Shashemene, to being an NGO worker who worked with teams of volunteers with a specific purpose and even more specific itinerary that had been carefully developed by myself and the kind people at Habitat for Humanity Ethiopia's National Office, to being a researcher who made many subsequent trips with the specific purpose of looking at the Ethiopian perception of repatriated Rastafari. There are implications to having worked with Habitat for Humanity. Although I regard it as an effective and valuable humanitarian organization, it is driven by its own needs and mandate. Through my involvement with Habitat, I was viewed as having a specific purpose in Ethiopia in general and Shashemene in particular—at that point my identity was that of a development worker. Because there was always a reason
for me being there, I did not have to deal with the assumption that I was in Shashemene as a tourist, and therefore only interested in the town’s unique Rastafari population. This made interviewing Ethiopians very easy, as they saw me as disconnected from Rastafari.

The staff at the Habitat Office were aware of my research interests. They knew that I planned to spend an extended period of time in the country, specifically in Shashemene. But when I began the ethnographic experience, I felt like I was entering new territory. Although I knew a number of people in Shashemene and the surrounding communities, my identity was no longer that of development worker or volunteer, but that of a researcher. Instead of having a specific material project such as a housing development or water and sanitation initiative, I had to explain the intellectual project on which I had embarked.

I have a working knowledge of Amharic, but I was not competent enough to deal with the complexity of ideas and perceptions. I worked with a translator, Genene Tasew, a local teacher and business owner whom I had come to know very well over a period of three years before I began interviewing for my research. I had explained my project numerous times and we discussed the research often, so he had a good idea of the reasons for the types of questions I was asking. I cannot deny that the language barrier played a role, but I attempted to speak Amharic to the best of my ability. My work as an English teacher meant that many people wanted to be interviewed in English as a means of practicing the language. Some of these interviews were less valuable than others. I interviewed as many people as possible so as to gauge when they were trying to provide answers they thought I would want to hear—sometimes verbally doubting themselves as having anything important to say—as opposed to simply answering questions.

As Amit writes, “ethnographic field workers [exploit] intimacy as an investigative tool” (2000, 3). Given my initial work in Ethiopia with and for an NGO, I developed close relationships with various people who became, for research purposes, “informants.” I recognize that participant observation is “uneasily perched on the precipice between the inherent instrumentalism of this as of any research enterprise and the more complex and rounded social associations afforded by this particular method” (Amit 2000, 3). The personal and the professional are therefore very close here. Certainly, I do not expect to completely
separate myself from my experiences and my identity, but I believe that social anthropologist Judith Okley’s call for “autobiographical reflexivity” (1996) is an important element of research. The sense of reflexivity means that I accept that I am always a part of my observations. I want to make sure that I am consistently questioning and re-questioning myself and my research so as to ensure that issues of representation are never far from my mind—“representation,” as theorist Gayatri Spivak demonstrates, “has not withered away” (1994, 104).

In writing this book, I am speaking for others. In doing so, I remember the words of philosopher Linda Alcoff, who warns that “the practice of speaking for others is often born of a desire for mastery, to privilege oneself as the one who more correctly understands the truth about another’s situation or as one who can champion a just cause and thus achieve glory and praise” (1995, 116). Like Rastafari, I cannot help but see Ethiopia as a very special place, but my role is not to define Ethiopia or to champion the cause of either Ethiopians or Rastafari. This project does not wish to judge, nor did I set out to present a certain image or “truth” about any population. The multiplicity of ideas and images that my informants expressed in my interviews demand additional research—this project is by no means complete.

In addition, undoubtedly my position as a white, English-speaking female foreigner afforded me privileged access to individuals and sources. For instance, though I never offered money nor was asked for money for any interview, my position allowed me to volunteer as a teacher, which in turn allowed me to make connections and obtain valuable interviews. Being Western and having connections to expatriates in Ethiopia enabled me to make contact with the community of Ethiopian returnees who had migrated elsewhere (to the United States, Canada, and England, most often) but had returned to the country as adults. My position as a researcher also enabled me to access materials from the Institute of Ethiopian Studies at Addis Ababa University as well as to forge a relationship with Selamawit Kidane, my research assistant, who gathered media source material describing the events of the Bob Marley Africa Unite Concert. After completing my Ph.D., I was able to access further resources that were initially unavailable when I was but a student researcher. The fact that elements of the research have taken place over a period of almost a decade means that people’s views
may have shifted, so I make no claim of a static evaluation of Ethiopian perception.

I emphasize my positionality and my experience as I entered into this research project. I make no claims to completeness, and I understand the limitations of my experiences. As cultural studies scholar Keya Ganguly writes, “our accounts of the world (as well as ourselves) are inherently incomplete interpretations, rather than unmediated descriptions of the ‘really’ real” (1992, 61; emphasis in the original). I do, however, feel that what I have done here is, as Ondaatje writes in his introduction to The Collected Works of Billy the Kid, a book which attempts to describe the identity of the famous outlaw, to delve into multiple perceptions and layered experiences. The resulting “photograph” has “some blur,” but is “sharp in the main.” This is my aim: looking at as many perspectives as possible, recognizing that there will always be blur, but that I may provide the first steps toward a general portrait of the Ethiopian perception of Rastafari. I recognize that this book may be received by a diverse readership ranging from academics in fields as disparate as diaspora studies and African history to those with a general interest in Rastafari and/or Ethiopia. Dealing with perceptions means dealing with as wide a range of narratives as possible. I hope that in my desire to present the Ethiopian view of Rastafari I have remained thoughtful, been respectful of my research participants, and avoided simple generalizations. This will continue to be a work in progress, based on the reality of the topic and the changing, layered, complex notion of identity, especially within Ethiopia. I have therefore aimed to keep my “lens wide open” and acknowledge that the “best exposed” take into account “motion”—the dynamic nature of Ethiopia, Ethiopianness, and Ethiopians, who have experienced so much change and adaptation even within the last half-century.