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**ENGAGING WITH HIGHER EDUCATION BACK HOME:  
EXPERIENCES OF ETHIOPIAN ACADEMIC DIASPORA IN THE  
UNITED STATES**

Dissertation

by

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May 2020

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## **Abstract**

Ethiopia has long been affected by the out flow of its educated citizens. In major host countries, like the United States, the Ethiopian diaspora constitutes a considerable number of highly educated professionals, including those who work in academic and research institutions. Meanwhile, the fast-growing Ethiopian higher education severely suffers from lack of highly qualified faculty.

In recent years members of the Ethiopian academic diaspora have been engaged in various initiatives towards supporting the emerging Ethiopian higher education. Yet, these initiatives have been fragmented, individually carried out, and challenged by the lack of a systemic approach, among other things. Further, there are only few studies examining diaspora engagement in the Ethiopian context, much less specific to higher education. The purpose of this research is, therefore, to offer deeper insight into the formation and implementation of transnational engagement initiatives by the Ethiopian academic diaspora. The research explores the motivation for and the modalities of engagement, as well as the enabling and challenging factors.

This study employs phenomenological approach and Bourdieu's Theory of Practice as a lens to analyze data from in-depth interviews with 16 Ethiopian diaspora academics in the US. The research departs from previous works by examining the issues from the perspectives of those who have first-hand experience of the phenomenon. Its findings reveal that transnational engagement among academic diaspora is shaped by complex and multi-layer personal, institutional and broader environmental factors, which transcend common considerations in addressing brain drain.

## **Acknowledgements**

I wish I could name and thank each of my research participants who generously shared their time to tell me their stories, without which this thesis would not have come to be. I am deeply grateful for sharing not only their experiences of engaging with Ethiopian higher education institutions but also life lessons and wisdom from which I have gained in so much more ways than I thought I would going into this process.

I am also deeply thankful to my dissertation committee Professor Hans de Wit, Dr. Andrés Castro Samayoa and Dr. Gabrielle Oliveira. Thank you for your guidance, support and mentorship. The support from the CIHE family was immeasurably important for me. Especially my dear comrades Edward and Lisa, without you on my side, these past four years would have been much more difficult.

There are so many people family, friends and colleagues who have supported me in many ways: connecting me with the right people and resources, helping me with transcription, patiently listening to me as I navigate my own thoughts, encouraging me and so on. Thank you all.

## Table of contents

Abstract .....	i
Acknowledgements .....	iii
List of tables .....	vii
List of figures .....	viii
Chapter one .....	1
Framing the research agenda .....	1
1.1. Introduction .....	1
1.2. Statement of the problem .....	3
1.3. Research Questions .....	6
1.4. Theoretical framework .....	7
1.4.1. Why theory of practice? .....	14
1.5. Significance of the study .....	15
1.6. Definition of terms .....	17
Chapter two .....	19
Engaging Academic Diasporas: A Literature Review of Concepts and Practical Approaches ....	19
2.1. Introduction .....	19
2.2. Diaspora: Meaning of the concept .....	20
2.3. The study of diaspora .....	23
2.4. A paradigm shift in the study of diaspora .....	29
2.5. Diaspora engagement .....	32
2.6. Diaspora engagement policies .....	41
2.7. A special kind of diaspora .....	46
2.8. Academic diaspora .....	48
2.9. Engaging the academic diaspora .....	51
2.9.1. Forms of engagement .....	53
2.9.2. Challenges of engagement .....	57
Chapter three .....	62
Research Design .....	62
3.1. Qualitative Research design .....	62
3.2. Phenomenology as a methodological approach .....	64

3.2.1. Why phenomenology? .....	66
3.2.2. Interpretive versus descriptive phenomenology .....	67
3.2.3. Leaning on post-intentionality and bridling.....	68
3.3. Sampling and participant selection .....	73
3.4. Data collection .....	81
3.5. Data analysis .....	85
3.6. Ensuring trustworthiness.....	88
3.7. Research context and researcher positionality .....	90
Chapter Four .....	96
Getting to know the research participants.....	96
4.1. Arrival to the US.....	96
4.2. Disciplinary backgrounds .....	101
4.3. Academic and career profiles.....	103
Chapter Five.....	105
The nature of engagement: the how and the why .....	105
5.1. Time/timing of engagement.....	105
5.2. Beginning of the engagement relationship .....	107
5.3. Choosing institutions to work with .....	110
5.4. Modes of engagement .....	118
5.4.1. Teaching.....	119
5.4.2. Research.....	122
5.4.3. Services .....	128
5.5. Why engage with Ethiopia? .....	131
5.5.1. Professional reasons.....	132
5.5.2. Social and cultural connections .....	134
5.5.3. Love of country.....	136
5.5.4. If not me, then who? .....	139
5.5.5. Outcomes .....	143
5.5.6. Brain drain, what brain drain? .....	146
Chapter six .....	151
Enablers and challenges.....	151
6.1. Borderless (general) factors .....	151

6.1.1. Resources .....	152
6.1.2. Political environment .....	157
6.2. Factors on the US side .....	163
6.2.1. Personal circumstances .....	163
6.2.2. Racial relations in home institution .....	167
6.2.3. Support from home institution .....	174
6.2.4. Intermediaries .....	176
6.3. Factors on the Ethiopian side .....	180
6.3.1. Policy environment .....	181
6.3.2. Bureaucratic environment .....	185
6.3.3. Institutional mechanisms .....	187
6.3.4. Politicization of higher education .....	192
6.4. Dynamics of interaction .....	198
6.4.1. Expectations and encounters .....	199
6.4.2. Power relations .....	205
Chapter Seven .....	213
Discussion and implications .....	213
7.1. Summary of findings .....	214
7.2. Discussion of findings .....	221
7.3. Implications for policy .....	235
7.4. Limitations and implications for further research .....	240
7.5. Conclusion .....	243
Reference .....	244
Appendix A: A case in point Revamping pharmacy education in Ethiopia .....	279
Appendix B: Informed Consent Form .....	283
Appendix C: Interview guideline .....	287

## **List of tables**

Table 1 – Proliferated terms designating different diaspora.....	25
Table 2 – Bonding Mechanisms and policy instruments .....	43
Table 3 – Typology of diaspora engagement policies.....	45
Table 4 – Types of diaspora engagement with African higher education institutions.....	55
Table 5 – Patterns of arrival in the US.....	97
Table 6 – Fields of specialization of research participants.....	101
Table 7 – Profile of research participants by position and tenure status .....	103
Table 8 – Forms of engagement across university functions.....	131

## **List of figures**

Fig. 1 – Habitus: formation, influence and recreation .....	224
Fig. 2 – concentric visualization of environmental factors .....	231

## **Chapter One**

### **Framing the Research Agenda**

#### **1.1. Introduction**

For centuries, humans have been moving from one place to another either in search of a better life or forced by eminent threats (Cohen, 1997). People moved across borders permanently settling in places other than their original ‘home’ – creating diaspora communities, in the broad sense of the word. Aspects of globalization that encourage and facilitate free movement of people, improved communication and transportation technologies, and consequences of war and natural disaster, among other things, have significantly increased transnational mobility of people (Alexander, 2017; Butler, 2001; Kasasa, 2001). These same forces also dramatically enhanced the age-old practice of diaspora communities keeping connected to their home countries.

This phenomenon, however, created winners and losers in the global competition for skilled manpower. The outflow of skilled labor from developing countries, dubbed as ‘brain drain’ exacerbated the knowledge divide between rich and poor countries. Therefore, national governments of severely affected countries and their international development partners opted to use different initiatives that would attract members of their diaspora to permanently return to their country of origin in order to offer their advanced skills (Chander, 2006). As one of the countries seriously affected by brain drain, Ethiopia was among those which pursued the return option. In the 1990s initiatives supported by International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) targeted on returning highly educated members of the Ethiopian diaspora in different parts of the world.

This approach, however, proved to be ineffective in many places. Instead, what is known as the diaspora option (Meyer, 2001; Meyer et al., 1997) gained increasing currency. The diaspora option entails the establishment of legal and institutional instruments, along with various incentives, to engage high skill diaspora members, from wherever they are, in the development endeavors of their country of origin. This approach is enabled by the advancement of communication technology.

Around the turn of the century, Ethiopia shifted from the return option to the diaspora option, as did many other countries. In 2002 the country promulgated a proclamation that laid down the legal basis for its diaspora engagement initiatives. The proclamation (No. 270/2002) entitled “*Proclamation to Provide Foreign Nationals of Ethiopian Origin with Certain Rights*” (Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia [FDRE], 2002), specifically focused on rights and privileges for Ethiopian born foreign nationals and their descendants, which excluded Ethiopian citizens residing in foreign countries. The proclamation was followed by two major steps: the issuance of a regulation, in 2004, to elaborate on particulars of the provisions of the proclamation, and the establishment of a department for diaspora affairs within the Ministry of Foreign affairs, which also extended to Ethiopian embassies and missions.

The celebrations of Ethiopian new millennium in 2007 (year 2000 in the Ethiopian calendar) presented another milestone in diaspora mobilization. A call upon the diaspora members by the Ethiopian government to join the celebration attracted a significant number, creating a new stimulation in the relationship between the Ethiopian government and the diaspora, which was largely clouded by the wretched events in the aftermaths of the 2005 election. This was followed by another even stronger impetus when, in 2010, Ethiopian

government unveiled its five-year Growth and Transformation Plan (GTP) in which the diaspora is once again called upon to contribute its share.

During this period, diaspora engagement did not have a proper policy, while quite a few regulations and directives addressed diaspora issues in areas of investment, import/export and remittance (Chacko & Gebre, 2017). In the fragmented mobilization initiatives, no meaningful emphasis was given to the professional or intellectual resources of the diaspora. Belai (2007) and Bishaw (2010, 2011) stressed not only the need to develop comprehensive diaspora engagement policy and strategy, but also to explicitly target the intellectual wealth in the diaspora towards the country's development. It is only in 2013 such a policy was finally published.

The current diaspora policy which aims to subsume various directions, institutional arrangements and services under one overarching and coherent document, specifically mentions enhancement of knowledge and technology transfer as one of its major goals. However, as Ogachi (2016) observed that there remains a considerable gap between the aspirations stated in the policy and the practice of diaspora engagement in Ethiopian higher education. As Zeleza (2013) noted in Ethiopia, as elsewhere in most of Africa, engagement of the academic diaspora is, more often than not, handled individually through informal connections. Hence, very little is known about the details and its practicalities.

## **1.2. Statement of the Problem**

As of 2014, the estimated 251,000 Ethiopian Diaspora in the US stand in par with the general US population in terms of educational attainment. About 20% of the Ethiopians in the US, aged 25 or above, have bachelor's degree as their highest academic credential, while 12% of them have master's degree, PhD or an advanced professional degree, (Migration Policy Institute

[MPI], 2014). This is a considerable wealth of professionals, especially considering the very high unmet demand Ethiopia has for highly skilled professionals (Amazan, 2014). Although no proper documentation is available, it is generally believed that a significant number of Ethiopian-born academics work in various US universities and colleges.

In 2012, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) reported that, in a conservative estimate, there were about 1,600 PhD holders among the Ethiopian diaspora in the US and Canada. The number is likely to have sharply increased since, as the outflow of highly educated Ethiopians has seen a considerable rise in the past few years, according to some reports. It is baffling to note that this is only in the US and Canada. The United Kingdom, Australia, Germany, Netherlands, Norway and Sweden are also among the top destinations for highly educated Ethiopians. This figure starkly compares to the number of Ethiopians with PhD level qualifications in the entire higher education system for the same year: 1,196 (Ministry of Education [MoE], 2012). Those with PhD accounted for only 5.7% of the total academic staff, and close to half of them (44.1%) were at Addis Ababa University. The UNCTAD (2012) report ultimately concluded that there were “more Ethiopian full professors working in the United States than in Ethiopia itself, in spite of the strong need of Ethiopian universities for very highly skilled people (p. 99).”

Meanwhile diaspora engagement initiatives in the past years, both by the Ethiopian government and its international partners, largely emphasized on foreign direct investment and remittance than brain circulation and professional development. The 2012 policy on diaspora engagement has acknowledged the importance of knowledge and technology transfer as a development tool, and encourages members of the Ethiopian diaspora with professional trainings to engage in such activities (Ministry of Foreign Affairs [MoFA], 2012). Nonetheless, the level

of the attention given to the academic diaspora as a force of change in the higher education sector is nothing more than tangential. No clear outline is provided for how the academic diaspora may engage with the Ethiopian higher education institutions. There are no policy instruments and organizational settings in place.

In its grand Education Sector Development Program (ESDP), the MOE (2015) has acknowledged the chronic shortage of highly trained academics as one of the most serious challenges in the Ethiopian higher education. While expanding graduate education, particularly at doctoral level, and the employment of expatriates are identified as solutions to address the problem, nowhere has the document considered engagement of the academic diaspora as alternative strategy.

On the other hand, the limited research available on the Ethiopian Diaspora in the US, demonstrates the prevalence of strong desire among the Ethiopian diaspora to engage with their home country (Alemayo, 2010; Kebede, 2012). In higher education, individual efforts of different kind, particularly in teaching and graduate student advising are commonly observed (Amazan, 2008; Bishaw, 2010, 2011). However, these efforts are fragmented and not systematically utilized for the advancement of higher education in the country.

Therefore, understanding how and why members of the Ethiopian academic Diaspora engage with higher education institutions in Ethiopia is the first step in systematizing their engagement and coordinating their contributions with the contemporary development agenda in the higher education sector.

### 1.3. Research Questions

The framing of the research questions for this study draws on the following three premises. [a] there are a considerable number of highly educated Ethiopian and Ethiopian descent individuals living in the US (MPI, 2014), a considerable portion of them working in academic and research institutions; [b] the Ethiopian higher education severely suffers from shortage of qualified staff (MoE, 2015), which partly can be addressed by effectively engaging the intellectual resources in the diaspora; and [c] the Ethiopian diaspora in the US has a strong link and engagement with their home country (Alemayo, 2010; Kebede, 2012), although not much is known about its involvement in higher education.

With the overarching purpose of understanding the experiences of Ethiopian academic diaspora in the US engaging with higher education in their home country, this research sets out to answer the following questions.

1. How do Ethiopian academic diaspora in the US engage with Ethiopian universities?

This question is further cascaded into sub questions: What forms and modalities of engagement are commonly employed? How do they choose the institutions to work with? What channels of communication do they use? How are connections created and sustained?

2. How do Ethiopian academic diaspora in the US make meaning of their experiences of engagement with Ethiopian universities? The sub-questions include: What motivates them to engage? What moral, philosophical, social or any other values explain their engagement?
3. How do research participants assess the enabling forces in their engagement? Here, enabling forces are understood as the set of institutional and policy frameworks that

members of the academic diaspora interact with in the course of working with Ethiopian universities. There are three dimensions of this. First is the enabling environment in their own institution – policies and norms that encourage and support their engagement. Second, the readiness on the Ethiopian side expressed in terms of policy instruments and institutional structures in place with in universities and relevant ministries. And third, the role of intermediary agents in promoting diaspora engagement such as civic society organizations, diaspora networks, professional associations, etc.

4. What are the perceived challenges and factors that contribute to the persistence in the engagement of the Ethiopian academic diaspora?

#### **1.4. Theoretical Framework**

One of the most significant contributions of Bourdieu is his attempt to reconcile between the dualism of structure and agency (Walther, 2014). Structures, the institutionalized and often formal domains of social life, such as market, state, civic society and so on determine the context and pattern of how an individual would think and behave, according to the structuralist view. On the contrary, the agency or volunteerism view holds that individuals are free to determine their actions by choosing from a range of alternatives they have (Hays, 1994). Bourdieu, in his theory of practice, transcends this duality by explaining practice or strategy as a product of the complex interplay between forces that are grounded in both the structural and agency domains.

Bourdieu's (1972/1977) theory of practice maintains that everyday life is the result of countless interactions – e.g. discussions, transactions, conflicts, negotiations, etc. – which are shaped by our internal dispositions and the position we assume in the broader social space. Understanding these interactions, and hence the theory of practice, requires understanding the

context and the interconnected factors behind their production. These are, in the words of Bourdieu, *habitus*, *capital* and *field*. These three are not only inextricably interdependent, according to Thomson (2008), they are also co-constructed where none takes primacy over the others, nor may it be considered causal.

In his seminal work, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Bourdieu (1972/1977) conceives habitus, which are the product of the basic structures of a particular type of environment, as:

systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations which can be [...] objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them. (Bourdieu, 1972/1977, p. 72)

Tracing the development of the concept of habitus over Bourdieu's decades-spanning career, Swartz (1997) notes that not only has Bourdieu used a variety of phrases in reference to the concept, but its scope has also broadened over time to encompass the physical as well as cognitive basis, and the inventive as well as the habituated forms of action. The various designations, however, share the conceptualization of habitus as "a set of deeply internalized master dispositions that generate action (p. 101)." Emphasizing (a system of) dispositions in the definition of habitus, Bourdieu (1972/1977) himself notes that the term designates "a way of being, a habitual state, [...] a predisposition, tendency, propensity, or inclination (p. 214)." It is therefore possible to see the behavior (or "practice") of an agent as the product of habitus (Bouveresse, 1999) which can be broadly understood as the way of thinking and doing things,

and the way of seeing the world each of us acquire and exercise individually and in groups. Habitus thus incorporate our beliefs, values, expectations, prejudices, and more.

Two points are important to note. First, habitus is not the same as the common notion of habit, which refers to the structured (and often passive) exercise of actions determined by repetition. Strand (2001) emphasizes that Bourdieu's conception of habitus centers on the active engagement of the social agent in the construction of social reality. Second, the durable nature of habitus does not preclude its evolving character. Continued process of adjusting to changing context while reinforced by, and reinforcing, further experience (Mayrhofer et al., 2007) is characteristic of habitus. Noting this evolving and persistent nature of habitus, intertwined with history, Bourdieu (1999, p. 109) writes that habitus is "a product of history, [which] produces individual and collective practices – more history – in accordance with schemes generated by history."

While individuals may share class habitus (Bourdieu, 1979/1984) which originates from their belonging to a particular social class, or group, the difference in the habitus individuals exhibit is rooted in the singularity of their social trajectories which correspond to the series of experiences each person goes through (Bourdieu, 1999). For the Ethiopian academic diaspora in the US, the respective social and cultural settings of their upbringing (one notes that Ethiopia is a diverse country), their paths of coming to the US (some might have come through scholarships while others might have arrived through family reunion, or as asylum seekers), their disciplinary differences, the state and the institutions where they are currently based, etc. are some of the determinants of group and individual habitus.

Field denotes the space or social setting within which habitus operates towards “the production, circulation and appropriation of goods, services, knowledge, or status” (Swartz, 1997, p.117). Field serves as the arena of practice (Chudzikowski & Mayrhofer, 2011), organized of a set of circumstances in which social agents live, act and experience. Field is not universal; many fields and subfields exist (Winkel-Wagner, 2010) each with their respective rules, cultural logic, designation of value to resources, power structure, competitions/struggle, and structures for control (Bourdieu, 1989; Swartz, 1997; Walther, 2014).

Agents and institutions in a particular field interact with each other according to the field-specific rules (Bourdieu, 1997 cited in Walther, 2014). The rules, which are tacit than formally structured (Wacquant, 2011), are important in determining how well an agent would perform in the competition/struggle. Understanding and internalizing the rules enable the agent to anticipate changing trends and opportunities in order to develop and execute appropriate strategies and practices necessary to succeed in the specific field (Bourdieu, 1999). There are no universal rules that apply to all fields. Field specific, unique rules can only be mastered by understanding the specific field (Walther, 2014). For this reason, Bourdieu (1966 cited in Walther, 2014) sees fields as autonomous, although the autonomy is relative as each field is embedded in the wider social space. It is also possible to see that fields influence one another, and may have areas of overlap. This relationship is captured in Bourdieu’s analogy of social space with physical space:

... we can compare social space to a geographic space within which regions are divided up. But this space is constructed in such a way that the closer the agents, groups or institutions which are situated within this space, the more common properties they have; and the more distant, the fewer. (Bourdieu, 1989, p. 16)

The boundaries of fields, with in the social space, can be understood as the settings where the effect of the rules of one field fades and begin to be replaced by those of another field (Iellatchitch et al., 2003). Boundaries are not formal, predefined or static; they change.

In summary, fields can be understood as structures of positions where agents are engaged in perpetual struggle, in the form of competition and conflict, to assume dominance, through the practice and strategy, employing the field specific rules and deploying their respective resources (capital) guided by their habitus.

Diaspora academics operate in multiplicity of fields and sub fields, which sometimes might even have contradictory rules. Although they share the field of academe with all of their colleagues, they experience a peculiar trajectory characterized by its additional layer of challenge that comes with navigating unfamiliar culture, academic traditions and higher education system (see Nesbitt, 2003; Hutchison, 2016). Further, in their effort to engage with the Ethiopian higher education, Ethiopian academic diaspora entangles with duplicate fields – politics, law, economy, academe, etc. here in the US and in Ethiopia.

The third element in Bourdieu's theory of practice is capital. Capital denotes the various resources agents need to have, in specific form and quantity, in order to be able to enter and operate in a particular field (Bourdieu, 1972/1977; Walther, 2014). Different fields designate different values to different type of capital, in accordance with their specific rules, in such a way that a kind of capital of high value in one field might not be of the same level of currency in another (Winkle-Wagner, 2010). Bourdieu generally identifies three distinct but interrelated types of capital: *economic*, *cultural* and *social capital* (Bourdieu, 1986).

Economic capital, which Bourdieu builds on from the Marxian understanding, presents itself in the form of one's wealth. It can be relatively easily measured, converted into money and can be institutionalized in the form of property rights (Bourdieu, 1986). Economic capital is also unique in that it can be more easily converted in to other forms of capital than the reverse (Postone et al., 1993) – for example, money can be used to get a training and educational qualification, effectively buying a cultural capital.

Cultural capital, which refers to the long lasting dispositions of one's mind, their possession of cultural goods and educational qualifications, is the primary driver in the allocation of positions and status in society (Moret, 2018; Swartz, 1997). Cultural capital may be found in three forms (Bourdieu, 1986). The *embodied* state represents the sustained dispositions of a person or their intellectual or human capital, which requires in person (of oneself) labor of inculcation and assimilation. This may refer to how one is socialized in a particular understanding of culture, norms and traditions pertinent to a social class. This form of capital has a profound effect on the integration process of diaspora academics in their new environment, because as in the case of the inculcation process, unlearning one and replacing it with another takes a lot of time and discomfort. The *objectified* form of cultural capital is constituted in material objects such as books, instruments, paintings, etc. These are physically transferable and can be easily converted into economic capital. Lastly, the *institutionalized* form of cultural capital is signified in certificates of competence, such as of academic qualifications, presented and protected by formally recognized institutions.

Social capital refers to one's lasting social relationships and networks, which afford them access to potential and actual resources and information (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, 1986; Swartz,

1997). Social capital may be acquired and/or legitimized through membership in different social groups.

Symbolic capital, which sometimes is characterized as a fourth type of capital (e.g. see Walther, 2014), rather represents the status of the other types of capital when they are recognized and acknowledged as legitimate by peers and the competition in a field (Bourdieu, 1997 cited in Walther, 2014). Therefore, symbolic capital is not a type of capital in and of its own. But, social, cultural and economic capital may be converted into symbolic capital in so far as they are recognized and valued in accordance with the specific rules of the field where they are applied (Bourdieu, 1972/1977; Swartz, 1997). It is also important to note that capital is not the same as mere resources. Resources become capital when systematically mobilized by an agent towards improving social position in a particular field (Savage et al., 2005).

Diaspora academics, in their interaction with respective fields in the US and in Ethiopia, accumulate and use different forms of capital. In the two domains they are likely to be positioned differently – as an ‘immigrant’ and as a ‘diaspora’, for instance. Similarly, their capital is likely valued differently in the two spaces. For instance, a mediocre academic and researcher in a US research university might be an ‘influential academic’ in the Ethiopian higher education environment. The two spaces, therefore, will starkly differ in the power differentials they offer. It can be argued that the capital one can garner in the two spaces is the product of the negotiations between his/her multiple identities.

In general, in Bourdieu’s theory of practice, the interplay between habitus, field and capital produces practice (or strategy). Habitus (internal dispositions) guide one’s strategy towards shaping practice by deploying the right type and amount of capital (enabling resources

that determine one's position) in accordance with the specific rules of the field (an arena of interaction in the social space) and the desired outcomes (position in the field).

Bourdieu stresses the dialectic relationship between structure and agency in habitus and in field, whereby habitus is produced – or at least shaped – by social structures and the rules that apply in fields, while practice, guided by habitus, confirms and reproduces objective structures (Bourdieu, 1999; Walther, 2014). Further, Bourdieu (1979/1984) also warns that practice should not be oversimplified to derive singularly from current conditions, which may seem to be immediate causes, or past conditions which form dispositions. Instead practice emerges from the interrelationship between habitus and field at a particular point in time (Bourdieu, 90; Swartz, 1997), given the agent's capital.

Therefore, the study of practice, as Swartz (1997, p.142) puts it, should situate the field within the broader field of power; identify the different forms of capital specific to the field and the relative positions of individuals, groups and institutions constituent of the field; and analyze the habitus individual agents bring into the field, in light of the social trajectory they pursue.

#### ***1.4.1. Why Theory of Practice?***

My rationale of using Bourdieu's Theory of Practice as a theoretical framework partly emanates from the inadequacy of other theories commonly used in studying the transnational mobility and engagement of people. On one hand such theories (as globalization, neoliberal/market, household, etc.) tend to use groups, than the individual, as a unit of analysis. On the other hand, these theories focus on external structures, such as market, global trends in economic and political relations, household characteristics, regional and global economic inequalities, and policies of sending and receiving countries to help explain

transnational/diasporic movement and relations. As such, on both accounts these theories come up short in addressing the individual and experiential aspects of the transnational engagement of foreign born academia, as stipulated in the research questions of this study.

In contrast, theory of practice, not only conceives the individual as a unit of analysis, it also offers an integrative framework that connects the individual and the social, and the agential and the structural. With its broad view and through its elements – habitus, field and capital – theory of practice affords the space for a phenomenological inquiry into the complex multifactor experiences of the Ethiopian academic diaspora in the US in their transnational engagement with higher education in Ethiopia.

### **1.5. Significance of the Study**

Broadly speaking this research will add to the current conversations on how brain circulation can be utilized to the benefit of advancing higher education in developing countries. The findings of the research can also be extrapolated to other sectors where the engagement of highly skilled diaspora members is sought. Meanwhile, although diaspora engagement, including of academic diaspora, has become a common phrase in policy discussions both at African Union and national levels, there is a very limited research on the topic. Therefore, this study will be a very important addition to the existing knowledge on diaspora engagement in higher education in African countries.

Taking a unique combination of Bourdieu's theory of practice as a theoretical framework and a phenomenological approach as its guiding methodology, this study employs an unfamiliar spectacle. As such it advances a fresh approach to look at the question of transnational engagement in higher education.

In the very limited research available concerning Ethiopia's diaspora engagement, overarching system-level analyses on policies and government approaches are covered, with particular emphasis on investment, remittance and other economic activities. This study for the first time takes the individual [academic] diaspora as a unit of analysis to explore the phenomenon through their personal experiences.

In addition to illuminating the current state of diaspora engagement in the Ethiopian higher education, the findings of the study will have practical implications to both sides of the transnational relationship. The findings will highlight where Ethiopian higher education institutions and the ministry of education need to make improvements towards more efficient utilization of the intellectual resources in the diaspora. Similarly, those intermediary actors, such as civic associations and diaspora organizations, which facilitate engagement in higher education, will get a better picture of how engagement is working, and the gaps where their participation can make the utmost difference. This is particularly important at this time, given the extreme need of Ethiopian higher education for a critical mass of highly educated personnel to drive its development forward.

In addition, the phenomenon of diaspora engagement being common across many African countries, these lessons have possible transferability to institutions and actors in other countries across the continent.

Lastly, the study will add to the current understanding on the professional and personal lives of foreign born academics in US institutions. It helps not only in understanding the multi-layer challenges of foreign born academics but it will also shade a light on how foreign born academics can be mediators of partnerships between their home institutions in the US and

institutions in their home countries. US institutions can benefit from this understanding in strengthening their internationalization and global engagement initiatives.

## **1.6. Definition of Terms**

The purpose of defining terms is to offer a common understanding of what is being studied, who are the participants and what the research context is like. Nonetheless, when it comes to the definition of the major phenomenon of interest, it is important to note that the definition provided at this stage is only for the purpose of framing the research. This definition is not to cement in a manner that inhibits the researcher from grasping the individual experiences of the participants with respect to how they conceive their engagement.

*Engagement* is any form of intentional relationship/interaction between the research participant and any higher education institution in Ethiopia, which relates to their professional activity. This excludes interactions that one might perform in their capacity other than being an academic. Engagement, in this context could be in any form, modality or scope, and might have any motive.

As Zeleza (2013) noted it could fall into the teaching, scholarship or services functions of higher education. Student exchange, study abroad, curriculum development, short courses, summer classes and supervision of graduate students generally constitute the teaching aspect. Scholarship takes different forms including collaborative research, grants development, review of manuscripts and publication, building databases, etc. Services are highly contextualized in the setting of the respective higher education system of the country of origin. Some form of augmentation to the national capacity development effort, by way of consultancy or direct

involvement in the establishment and governance of institutions, centers and foundations is common.

Engagement may also constitute individual contribution or could take in the form of institutional collaboration; it could involve material support or could ultimately depend on services; it may take a form of scant interaction or could be continuous and intense. The options are limitless - there can be as many different forms of engagement as there are different groups and individuals interested in engaging. Belai (2007) has identified several modalities of diaspora engagement including: permanent returns, short-term assignments, virtual participation, resource mobilization, professional networks, and institutional linkages.

*Diaspora*, while defined in a number of ways, in its general application refers to a community that lives outside of country of origin. According to Butler (2001) diaspora characteristically defines itself based on a set of values that originate from, and keeps it connected with, its 'home' (the place of origin). It often sees itself as part of the 'home' through its connection politically, socially and economically.

*Ethiopian diaspora* constitutes Americans of Ethiopian origin and Ethiopians who currently reside in the United States.

*Academic diaspora* refers to members of the Ethiopian diaspora who are employed in teaching and research positions in US academic institutions; it does not include those who work in administrative positions, despite their qualifications.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Engaging Academic Diasporas: A Literature Review of Concepts and Practical Approaches**

#### **2.1. Introduction**

In the past four decades, the study of diaspora has gone through a remarkable transformation. Conceptually, it has moved from predominantly representing the particularities of the Jewish dispersion to the broader study of transnationalism among the countless immigrant communities across the globe. Since the mid-1990s the study of diaspora has departed from its classic orientation to examine the ethnic, social and cultural elements of the identities of immigrant communities to the nature and role of the relationship those communities have with their countries of origin. The specific attention given to the issue, mainly by international development agencies, in early 2000s further introduced a new dimension to the area of study: the nexus between migration and development. Particular emphasis was given to the outflow and reclaim of skilled human capital through engagement schemes. As such ‘diaspora engagement’ became a common phrase in the lexicon of policy at national, regional and international levels.

This paper begins by exploring the concept of diaspora in its early application. It maps the evolution in diaspora studies and its emergence in the policy domain; and elaborates how global economic and technological changes facilitated the flow of skills across borders, calling for diaspora engagement as a strategy for human capital enhancement in developing countries affected by skilled migration. With this as a background, the paper then specifically focuses on a special kind of diaspora – academic diaspora. Taking the African context, the distinct features, forms and challenges of engaging the academic diaspora are discussed. Finally, by way of

framing the research issue, the paper briefly shows the shortcomings in Ethiopia's engagement of its academic diaspora.

## **2.2. Diaspora: Meaning of the Concept**

In its simplest form the word “diaspora” can be understood as the dispersal of people from their original homeland (Butler, 2001). Etymologically, the word is derived from the Greek verb *diasperien*, which itself is made of two words: *dia* meaning “across” or “over” and *sperien* which means “to sow or scatter about” (Reis, 2004). According to Tololyan (1996) the Greeks popularly used the word in reference to the destruction of the city of Aegina, and the uprooting and scattering in exile of its population in the aftermath of *The Peloponnesian War* (431-404).

In a more recent history, the word “diaspora” was almost exclusively associated with the Jewish Diaspora (or simply the Diaspora) and, though not as much, with those of the Greek and the Armenian. As Sheffer (2003) noted, the association of the word with the Jewish Diaspora in particular was so strong that dictionaries often referenced to the Jewish case not just to illustrate but to define the word. In the post World War II period the use of the word started to expand. In the 1970s and 1980s some scholars, particularly from the field of political science, offered wider definitions of diaspora which related the word with ethnic minorities that are displaced from their homeland or who do not have a territorial base (Armstrong, 1976; Connor, 1986). As such the word diaspora was gradually applied to describe different minority groups, or as Tololyan (1991, p. 4) described it, it started to share meanings with “words like immigrant, expatriate, refugee, guest worker, exile community, overseas community, and ethnic community.”

In his 1991 seminal article William Safran introduced a new systematic definition aiming to help identify which minorities can be identified as diaspora. His conceptualization built on

Connor's (1986, p. 16) definition of diaspora as "that segment of a people living outside the homeland". Safran saw that this definition was too broad that it could describe any group living outside their homeland and is, in effect, close to losing all meaning. Therefore, he proposed that the concept of diaspora be reconstituted to describe a group of people who have the following characteristics (Safran, 1991, pp. 83-84):

1. they, or their ancestors, have been dispersed from a specific original "center" to two or more "peripheral," or foreign, regions;
2. they retain a collective memory, vision, or myth about their original homeland—its physical location, history, and achievements;
3. They believe that they are not—and perhaps cannot be—fully accepted by their host society and therefore feel partly alienated and insulated from it;
4. they regard their ancestral homeland as their true, ideal home and as the place to which they or their descendants would (or should) eventually return—when conditions are appropriate;
5. they believe that they should, collectively, be committed to the maintenance or restoration of their original homeland and to its safety and prosperity; and
6. they continue to relate, personally or vicariously, to that homeland in one way or another, and their ethno-communal consciousness and solidarity are importantly defined by the existence of such a relationship.

Safran's definition, and several others who followed him, was highly centered on the experiences of the Jewish Diaspora (Reis, 2004). While Safran is credited for introducing a useful criteria based definition of diaspora, his conceptualization was largely limited to identifying few groups as legitimate diaspora – including Armenian, Maghrebi, Turkish,

Palestinian, Cuban, Greek and Chinese diasporas as well as the Polish diaspora in the past. He underscored, however, that none of those fully conformed to the golden standard of the Jewish Diaspora, which he called “the ideal type” (Safran, 1991, p. 84).

This limitation in Safran’s definition was noted by scholars who tried to refine the concept (e.g. Clifford, 1994; Cohen, 1997; Totolyan, 1996). Clifford (1994), for instance, acknowledged the usefulness of Safran’s definition in terms of providing a common understanding on the range of experiences represented by the term, or where it does start to lose meaning. However, he also mentioned his reservation to the full application of the criteria, noting that no society can possibly fulfil all requirements throughout its history. Hence, it was inevitable that the meaning of diaspora would change with time and the circumstance of the specific group under consideration (Totalyan, 1996). It was further argued that the term diaspora need to not only symbolize transnationality and movement, but also to capture the nuances of “political struggle to define the local, as distinctive community, in historical contexts of displacement” (Clifford, 1994, p. 308).

Cohen (1997), on his part, developed his own criteria by tweaking some of those in Safran’s list and by adding some new ones. He expanded the conceptual model of diaspora to include nine common features: (1) dispersal to at least two places often traumatically, and/or (2) expansion from a homeland looking for work, trade or colonial ambitions, (3) holding a collective memory about a homeland, (4) idealization of the homeland although it might not necessarily be a territorially distinct one, (5) possibility for a creative and enriched life in host country, (6) continuous movement for return, (7) a strong ethnic consciousness or sense of distinctiveness, (8) an unassimilated relationship with host societies, and (9) a sense of empathy and solidarity with co-ethnic members through a network. Safran (1999) of course challenged the

assertions of Cohen in such areas as Cohen not being specific as to how long it takes for an expatriate group to develop ethnic consciousness, under what circumstances would an expatriate community lose its diasporic identity and how that loss is related to the homeland-hostland relationship.

In what can be seen as a considerable departure from preceding conceptualizations of diaspora anchored in the Jewish experience, Cohen (1997, 2008) introduced different types of diaspora based on the nature of dispersal. Accordingly, *victim diasporas* are those that have been pushed out of their ancestral homeland (Jews, Africans, Armenians, Palestinians); *labor diasporas* are those who migrate internationally in search of employment opportunities (Indians are typical examples); *trade or business diasporas* (such as the Chinese and Lebanese) are those who travel to foreign land for trade and establishing businesses; and the *imperial diasporas* are those who have settled in regions where they went for colonization (Britons, French, Spaniards, Portuguese). This typology has brought a new extended insight into how the concept of diaspora is understood.

### **2.3. The Study of Diaspora**

The study of diaspora took a new course in the 1970s and 1980 when a new conceptualization, other than the traditional view which focused on the Jewish Diaspora was introduced. The 1991 launch of the influential interdisciplinary publication *Diaspora: A Journal of Transnational Studies* opened a new era for the academic development of the concept. In the inaugural issue, the editor Khachig Tölölyan noted that the journal would be a platform for the study of transnationalism that was continuously growing to cover a range of different kinds of communities living abroad. The study of diaspora was growing so quickly that after five years Tololyan (1996) observed the sporadic use of the term and called for a more stringent definition.

Over the next two decades as the term continued to proliferate its meaning has stretched to apply to different cultural, political and intellectual agendas (Brubaker, 2005).

The number and diversity of groups that are identified and self-identify as diaspora has grown exponentially. Not only has the number of foreign-living communities that consider themselves diaspora has increased to cover new countries, the traditional ethno-national basis to define diaspora has extended to linguistic categories (as Francophone or Lusophone ‘communities’) and religious communities (such as Muslim, Buddhist or Catholic diaspora) (Brubaker, 2005). A unique category of diaspora which Brubaker (2009) called ‘accidental diasporas’ refers to Russian nationals who suddenly found themselves within the boundaries of newly independent Baltic states after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Diaspora studies has diffused into a number of fields and subfields such as history, literature, anthropology, sociology, education, philosophy, art history, women’s studies, religion, communication, folklore, dance, music and theater (Brubaker, 2005). Today, the word diaspora has also become commonplace in the media and popular culture (Alexander, 2017).

Academically, Tololyan (1996) observed that the theory-driven advancement in the humanities was at the center of the disciplinary and trans disciplinary growth in diaspora studies. On the other hand, the overall increase in the global movement of people, the advancements in communication and transportation technologies, the changing global economic relation, warfare that create large population of refugee, the changing role of physical boundaries, new dimensions in the global geopolitical relations, and the role of religion – especially Islam, and the growing realization of countries the potential benefits in their migrating citizens all have contributed to

the proliferation of self-defined diaspora groups (Alexander, 2017; Brubaker, 2005; Butler, 2001; Cohen, 2007).

This growing diversity in the use of the word diaspora is encapsulated in the ironic title of Rogers Brubaker's 2005 article *The 'diaspora' diaspora* in which he referred to the dispersion of the word diaspora itself. The proliferation of terms related to the concept of diaspora which are used in different forms to designate its different aspects can be summarized in the following table.

**Table 1**

*Proliferated Terms Designating Different Aspects of Diaspora*

Designation	Word/phrase
collectivity	diaspora
condition	diasporicity, diasporism
process	diasporization, de-diasporization, re-diasporization
field of inquiry	diaspology, diasporistics
stance /position	diasporist
attribute/modality	diasporic, diasporan

*Note.* Adapted from “The ‘diaspora’ diaspora,” by R. Brubaker, 2005, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28(1), p. 4.

In response to the ever growing diversity and complexity of the issue, scholars have been trying to systematize the study of diaspora from historical and methodological points of views. One of the pioneer scholars in this regard, Cohen (1997; 2008) proposed that the study of diaspora can be understood to have gone through four phases. The first phase, Cohen calls the ‘classical’ use of the term is when the word was used in capitalized ‘Diaspora’ and represented the Jewish experience, while the Greek diaspora made an off-stage appearance. During the

1960s and 1970s the use of the term started to expand to refer to the dispersion of Africans, Armenians and the Irish. The second phase, which began in the 1980s is marked by Safran's (1991) argument that the term had become a metaphoric designation to describe a vast array of peoples who, because of their diverse experiences and historical relationships to their homelands and host-lands, were seen in varied cluster of diasporas. The third phase, starting from the mid 1990s, is influenced by postmodernist views which challenged two of the crucial components of the diasporic idea – namely 'homeland' and 'ethnic/religious communities'. The postmodernist argument held that identities have become deterritorialized and constructed and deconstructed in flexible ways depending on circumstances. By the turn of the century, the fourth phase of consolidation set in. The postmodernist views of deterritorialization and flexible identities were accommodated while the concepts of homeland were reaffirmed and held strong position.

Reis (2004), took a similar approach to classify diaspora studies into two broad categories, as classical and contemporary. The body of literature that is considered classical heavily depends on the Jewish experience as a starting point to examine others that have faced forced exile from their homelands such as the Palestinians, Armenians, Africans, etc. The contemporary diaspora literature positions migration within the context of globalization and the precarious state of world affairs. The reasons for migration are not necessarily forced (e.g. Kasasa, 2001) while the patterns of movement and relations to homeland are multifaceted, making diaspora studies more dynamic and multifaceted. New areas of inquiry, the economic contribution of diaspora to their homeland in the form of remittance (Gillespie et al., 1999; Orozco, 2002), for instance, have become major parts of contemporary diaspora studies. The contemporary diaspora study has, therefore, become multidisciplinary in nature.

Butler (2001) took more of a methodological approach to examine the study of diaspora. Butler noted that the common practice of studying particular diaspora groups – often through an ethnographic spectacle – is limited in its contribution to the development of theories that can help explain issues across different diaspora groups. Therefore, she proposed a model that articulates different dimensions of research in diaspora studies aiming to capture the specific as well as the common attributes and experiences of diasporas regardless of size or type. The five dimensions Butler (2001, p. 195) proposed are: (1) Reasons for, and conditions of, the dispersal; (2) Relationship with the homeland; (3) Relationship with host-lands; (4) Interrelationships within communities of the diaspora; and (5) Comparative studies of different diasporas. This model is meant to distinguish diaspora study from the traditional ethnic studies while it also expands on earlier attempts to develop specific criteria to determine whether a particular group is a diaspora or not.

In summary, it can be observed that certain defining elements of diaspora are persistent in the works of prominent scholars over the years (See Alexander, 2017; Ben-Rafael, 2013; Cohen, 2007; Safran, 1991; Tololyan, 1996; 2007). Brubaker (2005, pp. 5-7) maintained that the constitutive elements of diaspora can be distilled down to three. First is dispersion. The very essence of the formation of diaspora begins with the dispersion of people across physical space, and beyond borders. Differences remain unresolved on whether forced or traumatic dispersion is a requirement for the formation of diaspora, although in recent years this difference is fading away, more so in policy discourse than in academic.

Homeland orientation, the second constitutive element, considers real or imagined homeland as the ultimate source of identity, values and loyalty. Some scholars (e.g. Anthias, 1998; Clifford, 1994) deemphasized the importance of homeland taking more of a social

constructionist (Cohen, 2007) view of identity formation. Besides, these scholars argued that homeland and the desire to return do not hold for some of the biggest diasporas such as the Caribbean and South Asian diasporas. The counter argument, however, challenges that an imagined (not physically specific) source of collective identity is at play to form and maintain the diaspora.

The third constitutive element is, as Armstrong (1976) called it, boundary-maintenance. Boundary-maintenance assumes deliberate efforts by the diaspora community to preserve its distinctive identity vis-à-vis the host society. Sometimes the preservation of identity might be a result of exclusion by the host society, than by the active effort of the diaspora community. In other instances, boundary-maintenance is challenged by the various policies of host countries towards social, cultural and political integration of immigrant communities. France provides an example of such initiatives with its aspiration to create sociocultural homogeneity (Ben-Rafael, 2013). This strategy expected newcomers to endorse the public norms of socio cultural practices, putting aside their singularities into their private sphere.

Boundary-maintenance is not only a means to create a distinct community, it is also the glue that holds together members of diaspora in different countries into a ‘transnational community.’ Nonetheless, concepts such as hybridity, fluidity, creolization, and syncretism also surface in the discussion of diaspora identity. Finally, it is worth noting that boundary-maintenance must be observed over extended time period – over generations (Brubaker, 2005). It is otherwise expected that migrants themselves would likely preserve their identities. This is also at the center of the question if some migrant groups that have well assimilated into the host society can still be considered a diaspora.

## 2.4. A Paradigm Shift in the Study of Diaspora

In the late 1990s the literature on the study of diaspora started to shift its focus – from definition and analysis of the characteristics of diasporas to exploring the nature of transnational relationship with homeland. As a result, a subset of diaspora studies, transnationalism, started taking root. In its broader sense, transnationalism is best captured by Faist (2000 p. 189) as the “sustained ties of persons, networks and organizations across borders across multiple nation-states, ranging from little to highly institutionalized forms.” Looking closer, we can see that transnationalism is studied from different perspectives. Some scholars focused on the nature of the relationship itself while others studied the factors contributing to it and its outcomes.

Ben-Rafael (2013), for instance, has summarized the diaspora-homeland relationships into four different models. The *nationalist perspective* gives the homeland the ultimate importance in determining the identity and experience of the diaspora, individually and collectively. The homeland, thus, remains to be the legitimate source of social and cultural values. The *bifocal model* considers both homeland and the diaspora as centers where identity, culture and experience are anchored simultaneously. This model is likely to face difficulties caused by growing differences on understanding common issues and rivalries for dominance. The *diasporic model* asserts diaspora as the source of ‘advanced’ values emanating from the ‘modern and civilized’ host communities it interacts with on daily basis. The diaspora through its influence projects its conviction on the homeland, which it looks down on as ‘narrow-minded’. The last model, the *opposed outlook* or *the nativist*, takes a radical view in favor of the homeland which sees diasporas as increasingly growing foreign to their original culture and identity. It portrays diasporas as deserters and encourages breaking links with them.

These different models are important in understanding the underpinning assumptions that dictate the diaspora-homeland relationship. The motivation, the driving actors, the institutional arrangement and the underlining justifications for the transnational relationships are all dependent on the assumptions of the model in play.

Parallel to the shift in the academic discussion, in the practical sphere there was increased mobilization among the diaspora and growing interconnectedness with the homeland. Cohen (2008) explains this dynamic from the perspective of macro global environmental forces. The increasingly globalized economy which creates more opportunities for skilled individuals through greater connectivity; new forms of international migration which made it easier not only short and intermittent visits but also for longer stay and adoption of new citizenship; and growing cosmopolitanism in popular destination countries that decreases the alienation of new comers are some of the major global forces that played positive roles.

It is also possible to look at the increased transnational diaspora mobilization from two vantage points. On the one hand the diasporas, prompted by opportunities in the advancement of communication technologies and the desire to remain connected with their family and social networks at home, as well as the aspiration to contribute to their homeland, keep close communication with home, organize themselves, and provide coordinated support (Dufoix, 2011; Portes, 2001; Vertovec, 2004). This is captured in the view of transnationalism that individuals in the diaspora belong to more than one place by living in their host societies without being uprooted from their original home (Levitt & Schiller, 2004; Vertovec, 2001). Different kinds of formal and informal organizations with in the diaspora, constituted around various themes are crucial elements of diaspora mobilization (Morales & Jorba, 2010).

On the other hand, countries realized the useful resources that lie in their citizens abroad and their descendants in their efforts of development and international relations (de Haas, 2005; Nyberg-Sorensen et al., 2002). Therefore, proactive measures have been taken by many countries to connect with their diasporas and to make it easier for their citizens abroad to perform transnational communications and activities (Mahroum et al., 2006). Indeed, as Chander (2006) documented, some countries were far ahead of others in recognizing the role of their diaspora and accordingly establishing institutions and developing instruments to coordinate activities and to offer incentives. Following the undisputed place of Israel, the Philippines (1980) and Greece (1983) are among the pioneers to establish government agencies concerned with their respective citizens abroad. Later, such initiatives were propelled at the global stage by advocacies of international organizations (Kamei, 2011; Mangala, 2017).

This paradigm shift underpinned by the notion of transnationalism, and mobilization and networking at its center, is epitomized by Sokefeld's (2006, p. 265) argument that "the formation of diaspora is not a 'natural' consequence of migration but that specific processes of mobilization have to take place for a diaspora to emerge." Further, since the late 1990s the word 'diaspora' is increasingly associated with the "networks that groups of migrants build in order to take part in the development of their countries of origin, as well as to possibly supporting, maintaining, or even creating a link between expatriates and their homeland" (Dufoix, 2011, p. 4).

In the academic literature, from 2000 onwards, a more functionalist perspective has come to prominence which made transnationalism a common framework in the analysis of migration and its relationship with development (Tejada et al., 2013). Similarly, methodological nationalism, the assumption that the nation state is the natural political and social structure of the modern world, slowly gave way as the predominant approach of analysis in social sciences and

particularly in migration studies (Wimmer & Schiller, 2002). On the other hand, Levitt and de la Dehesa (2003) have shown how these changes redefined the conceptualization of the state and its territorial boundaries, and in effect, reframed the conventional notions of sovereignty, citizenship and membership.

More importantly, by the turn of the century, the term ‘diaspora’ has crossed over well into the policy domain. It referred to a political-administrative sphere in which more and more countries articulate ways to mobilize their citizens abroad or a body of people that includes the citizens and their descendants (Dufoix, 2011). This involved the development and implementation of policies and strategies at different levels, to attract and effectively work with the diaspora. Establishment of institutions, crafting of legal instruments, forming agreements with host countries, provision of incentives, recognizing and supporting diaspora organizations and networks, and the like are constituted in this process called diaspora engagement. As a result, diaspora engagement policy or simply diaspora policy became common in the lexicon of national and international policy dialogue.

## **2.5. Diaspora Engagement**

The shift in the conceptualization of diaspora as well as in the practical interaction between diaspora and homeland, directed diaspora research towards engagement. Diaspora engagement evolves in different ways for different countries. The dispersion, size, main location and other characteristics of diaspora shape the process and nature of the engagement for the respective countries. What is certain is that for governments (both sending and receiving) the movement of people in considerable size has both practical and principled implications (Ben-Rafael, 2013).

The idea of diaspora engagement is predicated on the understanding of mutual interest and benefits for the diasporas and their home countries that can be derived from the interaction. Pursuant to the interest and responsibility of countries to interact with their citizens abroad, today diaspora engagement has become a commonplace in policy discourse. A review of literature shows that there have been various forces in play that have led up to the emergence of diaspora engagement in mainstream policy practice. The major forces can be summarized under the following five categories.

***a) Role of international organizations:*** Cognizant of the positive impact of diaspora as transnational development agents, in the past fifteen years or so international organizations, intergovernmental agencies, development aid partners and other global actors have been strongly advocating for more and better diaspora engagement. According to Mangala (2017) the establishment of the United Nations Global Commission on International Migration (GCIM) by the then UN Secretary General Kofi Annan in 2003, marked a turning point in the way migration was portrayed in the global development conversation. Migration became (positively) linked, with a broad range of international development issues such as health, human rights, trade, humanitarian response, and development aid.

Following up, the UN published the GCIM report in 2005 and conducted high-level dialogue in 2006. The UN rallied not only its own branches but also other influential international actors such as the International Organization for Migration (IOM), the World Bank, major development donors and regional intergovernmental organizations such as the European Union and African Union (Dufoix, 2011). Consequently, a number of consultations were conducted, a large volume of publications was produced by think tanks, academic institutions, international organizations and national governments.

In the case of Africa, a series of consultations and EU-Africa ministerial conferences since 2005 have resulted in various initiatives, joint strategies and partnership programs (Mangala, 2017). On the other hand, the African Union (AU) undertook several of its own initiatives related to diaspora engagement. Its initiatives are justified by its new mandate for the comprehensive development of the continent as it transforms from Organization for African Unity (OAU), a politically driven organization established during liberation from colonialism (Adisa, 2017). The animated diaspora initiatives of the AU, after several consultations and publication of policy documents on migration and development, culminated with the adoption of the Declaration of the Global African Diaspora Summit in 2012 in South Africa, also known as the magna carta of the continental diaspora process, a grand policy document to guide diaspora processes at continental level (African Union, 2012).

AU's conviction in the potential contribution of the diaspora is manifested in its recognition of the diaspora as the "sixth region of Africa" at the AU Summit in Addis Ababa in 2003 (Kamei, 2011). This recognition helped to incorporate diaspora engagement into the formal development framework of the AU.

As such it was imperative that countries were to follow the leads of these global and regional initiatives to develop their own programs as well as to participate in regional and international initiatives. Although several countries already had some initiatives coming either from mobilizations by the members of diaspora or from national governments, the advocacy by international actors, and the volume of knowledge and resources made available gave strong impetus for national strategies and programs.

***b) Potential contribution of remittance:*** One of the most widely recognized benefits of transnational diaspora is the economic value that flows in the form of remittances. All major international actors – including the IOM, the World Bank the United nations, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and IMF – seem to agree on the economic benefit of transnationalism. Ratha (2005) reported that as of 2001 remittance to all developing countries – 72.3 billion US dollars in total – was an important and sustainable source of external development finance standing only second to Foreign Direct Investment (FDI). Using 2004 data, Mahroum et al. (2006) have shown that countries such as India, China and Mexico had annual remittance in tens of billions of US dollars (21.7, 21.3 and 18.1 respectively, to be exact). They also noted that for smaller countries such as Tonga, Moldova and Lesotho remittance constituted a significant share of their GDP – more than 25% in all the three cases.

Today, the World Bank report indicates that in 2017 Sub Saharan Africa alone has received 38 billion US dollars in remittance. While Nigeria gets by far the largest amount at US\$ 21.9 billion followed by Senegal and Ghana US\$ 2.2 billion each, for countries like Liberia, the Gambia and Comoros remittance contributes a significant share of their GDP (Ratha et al., 2016). These figures indicate the amount that was transferred through formal channels. Owing to high transfer cost and better exchange rate in black market a considerable amount of remittance flows into Africa via informal channels. One report puts the number at about 5% of the continent's GDP and estimates that the amount transferred informally is about four to five times the amount in the formal channel. Therefore, the actual amount of remittance to Africa could be as high as US\$ 120 to 160 billion (Mangala, 2017).

Besides, as Nyberg-Sorensen et al. (2002) keenly observed, remittance can be targeted at the poor, not any less than development aid. This is perhaps because remittances are sent by

specific individuals to specific recipients and often diasporas prioritize sending to those individuals and families that need it most. Moreover, it can also be argued that the social and family networks that are used in remittance transfer avoid the administrative and bureaucratic hurdles between the source and the target. As such, remittance can avoid overhead and administrative expenses that development aid cannot get rid of. Overall, general and country specific studies have over the years documented the positive impact of remittance, and by extension, of diaspora on development of their country of origin. Thus, countries cannot afford not to pay attention to, not to encourage and not to steer remittance to more economically sensible frames.

**c) *Loss of human capital:*** with the changes in the global economy and advancement of communication and transportation, the global pattern of peoples' movement also changed. More and more people engaged in mobility for work, study or temporary visit. A new class of people, educated in a range of different skills started to search for better working conditions and more opportunities. Unlike their predecessors, who were often forced out of their home countries, the new mobile people articulate information and carefully select their destinations based on analysis of political situations, conditions of laws and human rights, job opportunities, etc. As a result, selective migration opportunities in Canada, Europe, the USA and Australia surpassed the traditional destination that were predominantly based on colonial relationship (Cohen, 2008). Those who settled in their new host countries also try to pull their families. Opportunities attracted people, and people attracted people.

Developing countries lost a considerable amount of their highly skilled workforce in which they have made substantial investment as educated and skilled citizens were leaving for developed or better opportunity countries. Africa alone, according to some estimates, lost more

than 20,000 skilled individuals per year between 1990 and 2000 (Woldetensae, 2007). Countries had little to no chance of restricting their citizens from leaving. Brain drain became a major global phenomenon. In the meantime, developed countries used different incentives to lure skilled migrants from developing countries (Boucher & Cerna, 2014; Kaba, 2009; Kapur & McHale, 2005).

To mitigate the negative effects of brain drain, countries explored two options – the return option and the diaspora option. The return option offers incentives to attract the diasporas to permanently resettle in their country of origin in order to utilize their enhanced human capital. Taiwan and China are good examples of success in attracting their diaspora back (Chander, 2006), but this did not have much success elsewhere. The diaspora option is the attempt of working with diasporas from wherever they are for productive engagement they can have with the development of their home country (Meyer et al., 1997). The main feature of the diaspora option is the establishment of networks and connections between skilled diaspora and their countries of origin through social, professional and institutional links (Kuznetsov, 2006; MacRae & Wight, 2006; Meyer, 2001). The diaspora option was found much more convenient, effective and economic (Ellerman, 2006; Ite, 2002; Meyer, 2001). Therefore, crafting engagement strategies, particularly targeting highly skilled members of diaspora became a common approach adopted by most countries to ameliorate the impact of brain drain.

**d) *International relations:*** Pointing in two directions – between host and home countries – is not just contemporary functions of diaspora (Cohen, 2008). Diasporas are well positioned to bridge and mediate between their homeland and host-lands. In democratic systems, as diasporas grow in number and settle in their host societies, they gradually develop their own constituency. Put simply, as diasporas grow in number and gain the right to vote, they empower themselves

and become important to politicians. As politicians pay more attention, they make demands in line with their interests and try to influence the decisions of public officials. In time they start to use their voices to influence policies towards their home country (Laguerre, 2006; Soysal, 2000).

Countries thus opt to work with their diasporas in major democratic states towards favorable decisions and policies by the later. They try to garner the influence their diasporas generate in their host countries. Israel and the Israeli diaspora in the US and other western countries can be a typical example. Ostergaard-Nielsen (2001) elaborates this using the example of Turks and Kurds in Germany and the Netherlands.

It is also important to note that diasporas have often strong influence in their home countries. A 2011 World Bank report underlined that since the end of the Cold War, and particularly in post 9/11, diasporas have become key players in their respective home countries in wide range of policy-making areas in political economy, global security, human rights and democracy (World Bank, 2011). Besides, since most diaspora communities are stronger in western democracies, their role as champions of liberalism in their home countries should not be underestimated. Countries, therefore, engage with their diasporas, among other things for effective international relations and political influence on the global stage.

e) ***Domestic politics:*** empowerment of diasporas explained above has made it a reality that they are important players in global conflict and conflict resolution processes. Some diasporas in western countries are created because of conflict or repression in their home countries (Lyons, 2006). Their experiences and their aspirations to return to their countries of origin at the end of the conflict or the repressive regime make them direct and important stakeholders. Enoh (2014) gives the example of some African countries where democracy has

failed to take roots. In these countries criticism against the powerful does not come from within for fear of prosecution. Therefore, diasporas have the power, and the moral responsibility one might add, to expose and denounce political, social and economic injustices taking place within their respective home countries. The power to do so emanates from their economic wealth, and the exercise of freedom of expression and influence on governments of their host countries (Roth, 2015). This is further facilitated by the growth in communication technology (Lyons, 2006) and, it can be argued, the vast platform of direct interaction social media has created.

Diasporas might have both constructive and destructive influences in conflict resolution and peace building. Kellas (1998, cited in Safran, 1999), for instance, argued that diasporas often take ethnic conflicts to where they settle, and as such internationalize conflicts. Diasporas may be staunch supporters or fierce opponents of governments in their home countries. They can also be source of ideological, financial, and political support (Tololyan, 1991) to different groups and their movements. Examining the role of Irish, Kurdish and Somali diasporas, Roth (2015) noted that it is important to view diaspora groups as separate actors in conflicts, often with their own motivations. Shain (2002) also hypothesized that diasporas should be viewed as separate third parties whose involvement in domestic and interstate conflicts can be influenced by a number of different factors, including situations in their host countries.

Scholars have documented how diasporas can play roles in peace/conflict process in different countries. Some examples from Africa include: Zimbabwe (Pasura, 2012), Burundi (Turner, 2008), Ethiopia (Lyon, 2006), Cameroon (Enoh, 2014), Liberia (Reilly, 2014), and Somalia (Kleist, 2008). Therefore, recognition of the influence of diaspora in domestic politics and in improving or worsening conflict situations, gives unignorable imperative for countries to engage them. Political powers compete for the support of diaspora, while government structures

provide those in power to use the leverage of policy and other instruments to attract and mobilize diaspora around their agendas.

These historical and situational factors have made diaspora engagement imperative in the global stage. The above listed forces are by no means exhaustive, nor they are uniform across different countries in terms of the nature and extent of influence they had causing countries to develop diaspora engagement initiatives. Some scholars have provided explanations of instrumental benefits as to why countries engage with their diasporas. Baubock, for instance, argues that the reasons for sending countries and their political elites to be so interested in staying connected with their citizens abroad can be summarized in three instrumental categories: “human capital upgrading, remittances, and the political lobbying of receiving-country governments” (Baubock, 2003 p. 709). Other scholars have taken a more theoretical approach to explore reasons for diaspora engagement. For instance, Ragazzi (2009) draws on the work of Michael Foucault and the ‘Paris School’ to make the case that the shift in the conceptualization of the state authority from governing the physical territory to governing citizens, wherever they may be, is at the core of the prominence of diaspora engagement initiatives. Gamlen (2008) sees two main reasons behind diaspora engagement: state interest and state obligation. The first refers to the tendency of the state to engage with its diasporas for the purposes of tapping into resources, while the second rests on the assumption that the state has obligations to its citizens (constituencies) regardless of where they are physically. Gamlen indeed underscores that this assumption does not hold true for all countries. It can also be argued that this depends on the political, institutional and economic strength of the countries under consideration.

For one or another reason, in proactive or reactive manners, since the 1990s more and more countries have followed the footsteps of the pioneers to frame their rhetoric, mold

mechanisms and craft specific instruments to tap into the power and resources in their diasporas. Cognizant of the immense positive impact of diasporas, today it has become a worldwide norm for countries to develop diaspora engagement policies.

## **2.6. Diaspora Engagement Policies**

The way countries try to interact with their diasporas is called by different names – diaspora management, program, strategy, etc. The phrase diaspora engagement policy (or sometimes simply diaspora policy) provides a wider and inclusive framework that covers different institutional, legal and practical arrangements pertinent to the issue. This is best described in Alan Gamlen's (2006) argument that:

diaspora engagement policies should not necessarily be seen as part of a unitary, coordinated state strategy. Rather, they form a constellation of institutional and legislative arrangements and programs that come into being at different times, for different reasons, and operate across different timescales at different levels within home-states. (p. 4)

This argument rightly implies that sometimes diaspora engagement policies might not necessarily be recognized as such, or designed with goals of diaspora engagement. For instance, a legislation about foreign direct investment might have a clause that encourages investment from citizens who reside abroad. This legislation might not be recognized as a diaspora engagement, might not have a separate institutional support for diaspora, engaging diaspora might not be one of the stated goals, but, in effect it creates a field of interaction with the diaspora. A diaspora policy may be a collection of such provisions and practices.

A broad definition that captures this variation is one that sees diaspora engagement policies as “state institutions and practices that apply to members of that state’s society who reside outside its borders.” (Gamlen, 2008 p. 3). Further, Gamlen’s elaboration encompasses the notion of part of the state machinery that extends beyond physical territory. While this definition can accommodate variety of components, it lacks in addressing a crucial element in the essence of diaspora engagement – reciprocity. The anticipation of benefits that flow in both directions is among the constituting elements of diaspora engagement, which should also be reflected in the appropriate policies<sup>1</sup>.

With major emphasis on the changing nature of the idea of citizenship, and the relationship between countries and their citizens, Barry (2006) identified legal, economic and political instruments that apply to diaspora. In a very similar descriptive examination, Chander (2006) identified political, economic and cultural policies, and policy instruments, along with how bonding between states and their diasporas take place in these three major areas. These self-explanatory bonding mechanisms are further detailed in table 2 below with specific instruments used by different countries.

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<sup>1</sup> While the above definition, and the common conception by most scholars, associates diaspora engagement policies with the activities and legislations by home countries (sometimes also referred to as emigrating countries or sending countries) some, like de Haas (2006) have a different view. Considering policies implemented in host (destination/ residence) countries and international development organizations such as the UN and IOM, de Haas sees the phrase diaspora engagement policies from a different angle.

**Table 2***Bonding Mechanisms and Policy Instruments*

Bonding methods	Instruments
Political	Dual <i>Nationality</i>
	Absentee Voting
	Direct Representation of non-residents
	Diaspora Visas
	Diaspora Membership documents
Economic	Diaspora Bonds
	Direct Support of Development Projects
	Foreign Direct Investment
	Encouraging Return
	Pension Transfers
Cultural	Recognition
	Diaspora Ministries
	Protection of Citizens Abroad
	Youth and Retirement Programs

*Note.* Adapted from “Homeward Bound,” by A. Chander, 2006, *New York University Law Review* 81, p. 79.

A more analytical typology of diaspora engagement policies was proposed by Gamlen (2006) who reviewed policies in over 70 states across the world to identify three major areas of engagement, each with variety of specific elements. The first area relates to capacity building, which can further be elaborated by its two goals: a) creating a transnational identity relating to the home country; and b) creating the institutional apparatus to reach out to and manage relations with the diaspora. The first goal is often challenged by the multiplicity of diffused identities that might resist homogeneity. The second might require strong coordination effort to bring together dispersed diaspora stakeholders and institutions. Gamlen (2006 p. 6) calls these two capacity building policies symbolic nation building and institutional building, respectively, necessary for transnationalizing the governmentality.

The second area of policy involves the extension of rights to citizens residing abroad. Political inclusion of diaspora through the means of dual citizenship or voting rights, and eligibility for civil and social rights are top examples in this policy category. States often consider the risk of extending rights, such as the financial burden of extending social and civic services, and the possibility of influence and even interference in domestic matters by states that are host to a significant diaspora group (Gamlen, 2006). The risk can be even more for countries, like many in Africa, which not only have diaspora groups decidedly in opposition to the government (Enoh, 2014), but also lack the economic and institutional capacity to extend rights to several locations abroad.

The third and last area of diaspora policy is what Gamlen (2006) calls extracting obligations, which are designed by governments to generate and maximize benefits from resources of their diasporas. Gamlen argues that the extraction of obligations from diasporas are largely influenced by the reciprocal benefits that are offered to them. If a country starts with only extracting obligations, this imbalanced relationship can sustain only for some time before it becomes inevitable for different kinds of benefits to be extended to the diasporas. Investment and remittance policies, co-development (the direct contribution for development projects), expatriate lobbying, provision of professional skills and other human resources are among the common examples in this category.

**Table 3***Typology of Diaspora Engagement Policies*

Capacity Building	Symbolic nation-building	Inclusive rhetoric & symbols; Cultural promotion & induction; Shaping media & PR; Conferences & conventions
	Institution building	Ministerial level agency; Dedicated bureaucracy; Monitoring efforts; Building transnational networks; Consular and consultative bodies
Extending Rights	Political incorporation	Special membership concessions; Dual nationality (no vote); Must return to vote; Embassy voting; Postal voting; Indefinite, unconditional vote; Parliamentary representation; Can run for office
	Civic and social rights	Tourism services; Welfare protection
Extracting Obligations	Investment policies & lobby promotion	Mandatory payments; Special economic zones; Remittance and FDI capture; Knowledge transfer programs
		Promoting expat lobby

*Note.* Adapted from “*Diaspora engagement policies: What are they and what kinds of states use them?*” by A. Gamlen, 2006, Working Paper No.32, Centre on Migration, Policy and Society, University of Oxford. P. 9.

It can be discerned that the policy instruments described above broadly offer mechanisms of engaging with diasporas. More specific and targeted policies and strategies might be needed depending on the peculiarities of the diaspora group targeted and the needs and priorities of the home country, within the broader circumstances. One of the specific areas where many developing countries are devising mechanisms of engagement targets highly educated members of diaspora.

## 2.7. A Special Kind of Diaspora

Scientific diaspora, intellectual diaspora, knowledge diaspora, academic diaspora, high-skill diaspora, and scientific and technical diaspora are some of the phrases used to describe the highly educated groups in diaspora. In diaspora studies one of the most emphasized and debated issues in the past three decades is the migration of educated and skilled individuals often from the so called developing to the developed countries – or as it is often referred to as brain drain.

Brain drain was seen as a catastrophe to developing countries which deters their potential development by taking away the most talented from their limited pool of human capital. Consequently, highly qualified emigrants and foreign educated students who opt to remain where they studied were perceived as a ‘loss’ to their countries (Dufoix, 2011). Acknowledging the high volume of skilled migration from developing countries, some prominent scholars like Bhagwati (1976) suggested that a certain form of tax should be applied in the host countries which will be used to compensate the developing countries for the loss of their promising workforce. Several reports showed the magnitude of brain drain and its negative consequences, and proposed solutions. The World Health Organization (WHO), for instance, repeatedly reported on the migration of health professionals from Sub Saharan Africa, showing how this phenomenon is harming the region. WHO later developed the Code of Practice on the International Recruitment of Health Personnel, which was adopted by all its members in 2010 (Siyam & Dal Poz, 2014).

The debate on brain drain is an ongoing one (Bailey & Mulder, 2017; Commander et al., 2004). Critics emphasize the loss of resources invested in the trainings of skilled migrants as well as their potential contributions to the economic and social development of their respective countries of origin (Docquier et al., 2007; Varma & Kapur, 2013). Proponents, on the other hand,

argue that in the globalized economy, the movement of skills across borders is not only inevitable but also necessary to keep low- and middle-income countries linked to the global market (Beaverstock, 2012; Lowell & Findlay, 2001). More importantly, with proper policy responses, and to a certain optimum extent, skilled migrants can be key partners in development (Bakewell, 2008; Lowell et al., 2004; Newland, 2010; Tejada, 2012; Tejada & Bolay, 2010; Wickramasekara, 2011).

Pursuant to the argument that highlights the benefits in skilled migration, since the mid-1990s brain drain analysis slowly gave room to contending notions, mainly known as brain gain and brain circulation. Brain gain is indeed an older concept which was used to describe the advantage that developed countries gained from the arrival of skilled migrants from developing countries (Dufoix, 2011). Its application in the context of sending countries – which presents skilled migration as an opportunity for developing countries (e.g. Hart, 2006; Rahman, 2010, Rahman, 2013; Straubhaar, 2000) - it can be argued, is not quite accurate. In trying to engage with their skilled diaspora, developing countries are attempting to reclaim returns from the investment they once made in the human capital development of their citizens. Brain circulation, on the other hand, refers to the trend that skilled migrants in developed countries engage in different ways with their countries of origin to professionally contribute in a manner that benefits the later, while maintaining their professional home base in their host country (Gaillard & Gaillard, 1997; Saxenian, 2005; Teferra, 2005). More simply, it refers to the free movement and use of expertise between the home and host countries while experts maintain their base in the host country.

The emergence of terms such as ‘scientific diasporas’ and ‘intellectual diasporas’ in the academic discourse (Kaplan, 1997; Kapur, 2001) and the advocacy for the diaspora option (e.g.

Meyer et al., 1997, Tettey, 2002) as a viable alternative to counterbalance brain drain, in combination with advancements in communication technologies (Teferra, 2003; Tejada, 2012), have significantly contributed to the popularity of brain circulation and its successful transition into the policy domain.

However, it is important to note that despite the general consensus on the importance of brain circulation, there is lack of systematic and detailed evidence on the extent to which it contributes to development of sending countries (Tejada et al., 2014). This implies the need for more research the area. Meanwhile, according to reports by major international organizations, such as OECD, World Bank and ILO, the share of skilled migrants relative to the overall migrant population has been continuously increasing (Bailey & Mulder, 2017). This is happening in the face of the different policy incentives by developed countries targeting the attraction and retention of the most talented from developing countries (Boucher & Cerna, 2014; Kapur & McHale, 2005). Recognizing the combined effect of these trends – i.e. the growing knowledge gap between the global North and South, today more than ever – there is pressing need to facilitate more brain circulation, by closely studying the cultural, social, professional and technological aspects of the movement of skilled migrants, and their engagement with home countries (Tejada, 2012; Tejada et al., 2014).

## **2.8. Academic Diaspora**

In the context of the underprivileged conditions of African higher education, an even more specific type of diaspora – academic diaspora – is relevant for discussion. Academic diaspora, constituting specifically those in the academic career, can be understood as a subset of the broader skilled, scientific or intellectual diaspora.

Taking a 1999 data from the National Study of Postsecondary Faculty as a starting point, and owing to the high rate of skilled migration from the continent since (e.g. Kaba, 2009; Mpinganjira, 2011; Ogilvie et al., 2007; Woldetensae, 2007), Zeleza (2013, p. 6) estimated that the number of African born academics working as faculty in American colleges and universities could be between 20,000 and 25,000. Seen from the perspective of African higher education institutions, this is a significant number of academics, in one of the best higher education systems in the world.

The paradox in the chronic shortage of qualified academic staff in African higher education and the increasingly growing number of African academics in developed countries is best captured by Paul Tiyambe Zeleza, a Malawian historian and a prominent scholar of African diaspora, when he noted: “the African born academic diaspora in Canada and the United States constitute the sharp edge of Africa’s unusually high rates of skilled labor migration, the highest in the world for a region with the world’s lowest stock of skilled workers” (Zeleza, 2013, p. 4). This contradiction is central to understanding the dynamics in the African academic diasporas. As elaborated later, it can be argued that this is also one of the defining factors that shape the relationship between these specific diasporas and their counterparts back home.

The African academic diasporas should be understood in the context of the multiplicity of their constituents which they have to engage and negotiate with (Zeleza, 2004). As academics of color, they have to survive through the complex systemic and individual challenges of the racialized American academy. As immigrants, they have to make social adjustments while they face challenges of legal requirements, more so today than before. Meanwhile they have to find their positions in society through negotiating their relationships with the native born American society as well as diasporas of different origins. As emigrants, they have to live with the straining

demands from home, both real and imagined. This ranges from the more personal expectation for material and moral support to family and friends to the more abstract burden of having to defend Africa, in an environment where things African are routinely demonized.

Another way to better understand the African academic diasporas is through typologies and classifications. A compelling typology was presented by Nesbitt (2003) who outlined that his typology is underpinned by the perceived contradictions: among the African academic diasporas; between their high academic achievement and the inferior position they assume in the racially charged American higher education; and between their alienation from their countries of origin (often condemned for having abandoned their country) and the struggle and desire to come to terms with their African identity in their host societies. According to Nesbitt's typology, the *comprador intelligentsia* use their identity as Africans to authenticate the status quo of the global order, and come as cynical towards African countries in reference to corruption, tribalism and so on. The *post-colonial critics* act as mediators between Africa and the West by interpreting the African knowledge system and experiences in the postmodernist context. The *progressive exiles*, on their part, use their position to champion a dignified place for African knowledge and they struggle to the liberation of the diaspora as well as their countries of origin. It is important to note that these typologies are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

Zezeza (2004) suggests that other typologies may also be devised, two of which are considered here. A straightforward classification can be based on disciplinary orientations as humanists, social scientists, scientists, etc., which can further be specified to particular fields of specialization. This typology is practically useful to identify networks of knowledge communities (Coe & Bunnell, 2003) in the diaspora and to match them with those in Africa for collaborative engagements. Since different disciplines have their own intellectual and

institutional traditions and practices, transnational engagement has the potential to be more efficient.

Another typology Zeleza (2004) proposed is based on the scope and content of the academic practices, research and publication of the academic diaspora. This way he suggested three broad groups namely the *Pan Africanists*, the *Americanists* and the *globalists*. Those in the first group are rooted both in Africa and the US to drive their research agendas and for their publications and teaching practices. The Americanists are, as the name indicates, focused on issues of the US, while the globalists have multiple sites of reference and practices. This typology, though unfortunately not further developed, could be useful for identifying key persons in planning and organizing engagement with African academics (e.g. Pan Africanists can be assumed to be more instrumental in engagement initiatives than the Americanists).

## **2.9. Engaging the Academic Diaspora**

It is intuitive that the general argument presented earlier in support of engaging high skill diaspora in the development of their country of origin works here too. African higher education institutions are in the periphery of the global knowledge system (Goujon et al., 2017; Teferra, & Altbach, 2004; Visser, 2008). Nonetheless, there are positive developments that come both from reform agendas within the continent as well as the increasingly shifting interest from the rest of the world (Jowi, 2012; Mohamedbhai, 2014; Singh, 2011; Teferra, 2010). This puts the African academic diaspora in a uniquely important position to mediate the relationship between Africa and the advanced higher education systems they belong to, towards bridging the center – periphery divide (Welch & Zhang, 2008). In reference to the increasingly positive interest the African higher education is attracting and the role of academic diaspora therein, Teferra (2010) notes that:

As Northern institutions and organizations seriously consider engaging with African institutions, they will often find that diaspora members are the main interlocutors in establishing such partnerships. Many Northern institutions are slowly recognizing the value of their foreign-born intellectuals in expanding their reach within in a region, and are committing their own resources, while some grant-making bodies are funding institutions that are willing to engage diaspora members in such partnerships. (p. 93)

One such important force is the internationalization efforts of higher education institutions across the developed world. As Africa continues to grow economically, with its considerable young population, it increasingly becomes a target market for international higher education. (China is a very good example of this.) Hence, the African academic diaspora becomes instrumental in facilitating this shift.

The scholastic, visibility and political capital of the academic diaspora is an indispensable resource (Teferra, 2003) in the aspiration of African higher education to ascend in the global knowledge system. Diasporas also have much stronger leverage to raise resources for academic and research activities from western sources, be it their own institutions, foundations or international organizations (Zezeza, 2013). This may partly be understood as a manifestation of the bias of western institutions trusting only their own for better quality and efficiency. Nonetheless, it is clear that engaging the academic diasporas is of unmistakable benefit to African higher education. Agunias and Newland (2012) have underscored that engaging experts in the diaspora can cut cost (some volunteer to work at no fee while others cover all of their costs. See Zezeza, 2013), linguistic and cultural competence of the diaspora adds strength to collaborative projects, and engagement could be a starting point for permanent return.

The good news is that there are a number of engagement initiatives, although they are often individual and occur in fragmented manner. Amagoh and Rahman (2016) in the case of Nigeria and Foulds and Zeleza (2014) in broader Africa have noted the considerable benefits the engagement of academic diaspora is generating. Similarly, Teferra (2010) has observed that generally there is strong interest among the diaspora to work with institutions in their home countries, because most acknowledge the benefits in professional contributions while staying close to home.

There could be different reasons for why academic diasporas would be motivated to engage with institutions in their countries of origin. Besides the ease for international practices facilitated through familial, social and cultural ties, the burden of nostalgia is another main factor (Amagoh & Rahman, 2016). Or as Zeleza (2013, p. 8) puts it, there are “affective, professional and ideological reasons.” The affective motivations relate to the sense of guilt and obligation the highly educated diaspora carries. Further, the benefits of engagement at the individual level can be seen in light of job satisfaction and intellectual advancement (Amagoh & Rahman, 2016; Rahman, 2010; Zeleza, 2013).

### ***2.9.1. Forms of Engagement***

Different scholars use different approaches to analyze the forms of engagement between academic diasporas and their countries of origin. Analyzing cases across several countries, Agunias and Newland (2012) for instance, identify three general categories based on the role of the engaged academic in the host country. (a) *diasporas as practitioners who fill critical knowledge gaps*: This requires identifying priority areas where there is critical gap of expertise locally, and identifying experts in the diaspora in the specific field to offer them incentives and convince them to provide their services. (b) *diasporas as partners/collaborators*: This approach

promotes collaborative engagement in research and other projects between local and diaspora academics. Here institutional and professional networks are important. One example of this form of engagement, the authors noted, is the Chinese 111 project which allows top scholars in the diaspora to team up with local researchers to work in selected innovation centers across the country. (c) *diasporas as members and leaders of scientific and technical networks*: Different countries establish networks around various scientific, technical and business issues composed of local and diaspora experts. This is often done through web based and online communication to bring together the experts to deliberate and work towards different issues of the country. There are also cases where countries establish advisory boards to government offices/departments in which diaspora academics can play crucial roles sharing their expertise.

Paul Zeleza in his 2013 study of African academics in the US and Canada used the major functions of the university – teaching, research and service – as a framework for identifying the different forms of engagement. Some of the different specifics identified under each of the dimensions of the higher education enterprise can be summarized as follows.

**Table 4***Types of Diaspora Engagement with African Higher Education Institutions*

University function			Types of engagement
Teaching			student exchanges, study abroad programs, short courses, summer classes, curriculum development, supervision of graduate student dissertations
Scholarship and professional activities	and		joint research and grants, publishing and manuscript reviews, donations of books, journals and equipment, building data bases and digital archives, performance evaluations for promotion cases and as external examiners, and mentoring
Services (for higher education)		higher	establishing or providing critical leadership for higher education institutions and networks including centers, institutes, foundations, and universities

*Note.* Adapted from “*Engagements between African diaspora academics in the US and Canada and African institutions of higher education: Perspectives from North America and Africa*” by P. Zeleza, 2013, Carnegie Corporation of New York, p. 10.

Zeleza (2013) also emphasized that these different forms of engagement should not be thought of separately. Often engagement, even at individual level, occurs in multiplicity of different activities with different purposes and functions, involving interaction with several different people and institutions.

Teferra (2010, pp. 91-93), for his part, used a mixed approach of the roles and specific purposes to classify engagements of academic diaspora. He identified five major forms of engagement: (i) *Joint research programs*- expanding the limited research collaboration between Africa and the developed world can help build a critical mass of researchers in African diaspora. (ii) *Contributions to publications* – to elevate the status of local publications members of diaspora can help by contributing articles and serving at different capacities in the publication

processes. (iii) *Sharing knowledge resources* – universities in Africa generally suffer from lack of relevant and current publications and other resources. Academics in the diaspora can be key in collecting and sharing current information in their respective fields, and can also be engaged in mobilizing knowledge resources on behalf of institutions in their home countries. This has become easier and cheaper due to recent advancements in communication technology. (iv) *Professional guidance and advice* – members of diasporas can be on professional advisory boards and support local academics in their activities by providing them access to their expertise and networks. (v) *Endowment programs and chairs* – endowments and chairs are rare practices in Africa. Universities may encourage members of diaspora to establish such schemes that target on motivating local scientists and channeling resources in this unique form.

Analyses on the forms of engagement, currently practiced among the African academic diaspora and elsewhere, exhibit three essential elements that need to be underscored. First, most engagement initiatives start at individual level through personal connections that might be established in professional, personal or social links (Teferra, 2010; Zeleza, 2013). These existing relationships are important resources around which formal and institutional partnerships. Striking a working balance between the personal and the institutional, and the formal and informal is important. Second, the role of communication technology is essential for any form of engagement (Amagoh & Rahman, 2016; Teferra, 2003; Zeleza, 2004). The physical and temporal divide between diasporas and their home countries has been diminished by the use of communications technologies. Therefore, countries that make better investment in communication technology infrastructure, and institutions with better facilities are likely to reap more from the engagement of the academic diaspora. This difference can even go to the level of

individuals: those who are more adaptable to the use of technology can have better access to academics in the diaspora and their resources.

Third, the important role of professional and diaspora networks is unmistakable. It has long been established that networks are instrumental in the flow of knowledge and other resources from migrants to their home countries (Findlay, 1990). Although maintaining networks is often difficult (Meyer, 2001) they remain crucial in facilitating easy communication between experts and coordinating collaborative projects. Experts connected through professional networks can easily find each other and easily identify who to work with based on existing interactions through the networks. Cognizant of the vital benefits, Aikins and White (2011, pp. 55-58) suggested a four-stages approach to managing networks of diaspora academics towards effective engagement. First is to *research* to identify members of the diaspora who are better connected and have the drive to mobilize others; second *cultivation*, is the process of creating awareness and informing of interests and initiatives; third comes *solicitation*, which is recruiting key diaspora members who can be passionately involved and be able to use their social and professional stature to mobilize others; and finally, *stewardship*, communication, feedback, measuring outputs and recognition to the work done, etc. to maintain networks and improve performance.

### **2.9.2. Challenges of Engagement**

While it goes without saying that challenges are specific to engagement initiatives and their respective contexts both in the countries of origin and residence, researches indicate that some predicaments are common across boundaries. Infrastructural, logistical, economic, political, social and cultural factors all contribute in different ways to the challenges, as they do to the success of engagement initiatives (Teferra, 2005, 2010). Taking this into account common

challenges in engagement of academic diaspora are presented here in four major categories: focus of initiatives, institutional processes, environmental and attitudinal issues.

***Clarity of focus:*** Emphasizing the importance of clarity of focus in engagement schemes, Wickramasekara (2010) highlighted the need to distinguish between the euphoria in acknowledging the potential of diaspora from the practically real scope for contribution. Despite the broad consensus on the potential resources in diasporas their actual contribution depends on different factors, among which is the level of focus the engagement plan works with. Not everyone who belongs to the broad category of diaspora has the necessary level of sense of belongingness or the necessary preconditions in their own environment to make meaningful contributions. A common reason for initiatives to fail, according to Aikins and White (2011), is their inability to identify specific individuals who champion and stick with the initiative through challenges. They call this “the ‘mile wide – inch deep’ versus ‘inch wide – mile deep’ conundrum” (ibid, p. 14). To address this Lerner (2007 p. 341) has suggested to use a proper mix of the ‘alumni model’ which mobilizes the mass around an agenda, and the ‘overachievers model’ which focuses on small number of very motivated and committed individuals who have the social and professional weight to rally others around them. Clarity of focus can also be seen with regard to prioritization of areas important to the home country.

***Institutional processes:*** very often engagement of academics with African higher education is characterized by its dependence on informal and individual relationships initiated by the diaspora (Ogachi, 2016). Effective and sustainable engagement can be ensured with proper institutional infrastructure that can continually accommodate changing circumstances (Tejada, 2012). Diaspora academics have reported of their frustration in the differences between what they are promised and what they get when they arrive at African universities (Zezeza, 2013).

Necessary arrangements, access to facilities, and so on are not consistently managed as expected because of lack of institutional backing. Formulating institutional level diaspora engagement plan and integrating that into the overall operations of the university is a necessary step to attract, retain and make proper use of the diaspora expertise.

***Environmental challenges:*** Environmental impediments can be either in the context of the home or the host country. In the home countries, in addition to the challenges posed by the absence of clear articulation and institutional support, poor infrastructure, political issues, lack of good governance, high level of corruption, lack of rich information system, and the like are deterrents of effective engagement (Modupe, 2016). In the host country numerous environmental factors including the policies of the host country and the extent to which the diaspora member is well established have considerable bearing on their motivation and practical capacity to engage (Tejada, 2012; Tejada et al., 2014). In his 2013 study Zeleza identified that career trajectories, gender, and the pattern of diasporization are factors that largely determine the engagement of African diaspora academics in the US and Canada. Senior or tenured professors have more time, and access to resources to work with than those who are adjunct and pre-tenure who have a lot to prove. Also, those who work in large research focused institutions with internationalization strategy are more likely and capable to engage than those in small and teaching focused institutions. Female academics, on the other hand, have to deal with additional responsibilities of motherhood and the subtle gender bias in the system. Those with traumatic experiences such as political exiles are less likely to be interested in engagement than others. It is, therefore, important to take a good account of the fact that diaspora academics work in an environment over which they do not have much control.

***Attitudinal issues:*** Attitude of both the diaspora themselves and of the academics in home countries can be obstacles to effective engagement. As mentioned before it's not uncommon for the academic diaspora to show strong interest in the idea of engagement only to lack the real commitment to take it into action. Even when actions follow, it might not necessarily be driven by altruistic motives (Teferra, 2010). Engagement with Africa could be added to research projects and sabbatical plans only to increase one's competitive edge for grant or promotion, and not necessarily with a genuine interest of helping African institutions. As Nesbitt (2003) noted some African academics in the west have fallen in the trap of neo colonial mentality that simply takes everything western as a synonym for high quality. Coming from privileged higher education systems academic diasporas may have unrealistic expectations from African institutions and colleagues.

On the other hand, a much more common and strongly held attitudinal challenge comes from the African academics at home (Agunias & Newland, 2012; Modupe, 2016; Teferra, 2005; Zeleza, 2004, 2013). First, there is the feeling of resentment towards diasporas that they have abandoned, or even betrayed, their country when things were tough (Skeldon, 2008; Zeleza, 2004). The lack of trust and insecurity that the diaspora academics would look down on those in Africa for the underdeveloped academic culture (e.g. lack of publication, conference participation, research grants, etc.) they operate in, creates another layer of friction. This compounds with the feelings that the diasporas, often sponsored by government programs or by international organizations, unfairly earn much more than the locals, although there are ample cases, like in the MIDA program, where diaspora members work only on voluntary bases or only with coverage of their basic expenses (Agunias & Newland, 2012). Modupe (2016) has documented the experiences of those who were frustrated by the attitude of academics they

worked with in Nigeria who expected to make money out of each step in the interaction. The academics, as well as institutions, have unrealistic expectation regarding material resources diasporas are supposed to bring with them. The difference in understanding as to how research grants are obtained and used, is reported to be a cause of disagreement. The friction gets to a point that it would be very difficult to make an academically honest critic of the work of colleagues in African institutions (Zezeza, 2013). All in all, it can be summarized that views on patriotism and love of country, power dynamics, and issues of material resources are at the center of these frictions posing challenges to effective engagement.

In general, it is safe to assume that the importance of engaging the academic diaspora in the development and capacity enhancement of institutions in home countries, is convincingly established among all stakeholders. However, there are several challenges that need to be addressed in the design and implementation of engagement initiatives.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Research Design**

This qualitative phenomenological study seeks to gain better understanding of the engagement between Ethiopian born academics in the US and higher education institutions in Ethiopia. In this chapter I outline the research design by first touching on few points related to the use of qualitative approach and discussing phenomenology as a methodological choice. In subsequent sections I present my sampling strategy, procedures for data collection, measures of trustworthiness and finally the data analysis of the study.

To recap, the research intends to answer the following questions: (i) How do Ethiopian academic diaspora in the US engage with Ethiopian universities? (ii) How do Ethiopian academic diaspora in the US make meaning of their experiences of engagement with Ethiopian universities? (iii) How do research participants evaluate the enabling forces for their engagement? (iv) What are the perceived challenges and factors that contribute to the persistence in the engagement of the Ethiopian academic diaspora?

#### **3.1. Qualitative Research Design**

The research employs qualitative design to study the experiences of Ethiopian academic diaspora in the US working with Ethiopian higher education institutions. The nature of the research questions, which deeps into experiences of individuals and seeks better understanding of a phenomenon – diaspora engagement – sets a clear path to the choice of qualitative research design.

As Lecompte and Pressile (1994) have noted, in qualitative social science studies differences among research designs are not precise and definitive. Permeable boundaries which

often overlap and change their shape depending on the purpose and context of the study characterize the distinction between different research designs in the qualitative domain.

Qualitative research, generally speaking, is a process of inquiry which takes a broad approach to study and understand human or social issue in its natural settings, than a controlled one (Creswell, 1998; Rossman & Rallis, 2012). According to Creswell (2013) qualitative approach draws on individual perspectives than collective or aggregate data and analysis, as an effective way for exploring a problem or an issue. Within this general approach, however, a choice of specific methodology entails making decisions on the following four major aspects of a research design (Maxwell, 2005).

1. Negotiating research relationships: the researcher is not only the person to gather and analyze data but also one who determines the access, acting as a gatekeeper. The relationship negotiation targets on using this gatekeeping authority to ethically obtain data that can answer the research question.
2. Site and participant selection: this involves the selection of the specific settings, groups, individuals, or activities to be observed/studied. Qualitative research does not bow to the necessity of randomization. Often sampling is done purposefully depending on factors such as accessibility, logistical imperatives, potential access to the desired information, and so on.
3. Data collection: data is the means to answering the research question. Designing the appropriate data collection instrument, and effectively executing the data collection is an essential part of the whole process. Instruments, therefore, have to be designed in a way that can ensure the best possible understanding of the experiences and perceptions of the respondents.

4. Data analysis: this is perhaps the weediest part of the qualitative research process, for Maxwell. Distilling the realities of the experiences develops mainly from the researcher's awareness. The researcher, therefore, must be reflective to find meaning in the experiences of the interviewees.

These decisions are not only interdependently tied to the central theme of the inquiry and the methodology employed, but also have implications to the paradigmatic and epistemological positions of the researcher and the research. Cognizant of this, and having noted the caveats of permeability in qualitative research, a qualitative phenomenological approach is chosen to address the research questions of this study.

### **3.2. Phenomenology as a Methodological Approach**

Phenomenology is a unique concept in social science research as it encompasses both a philosophy and a particular methodology of inquiry. Having its roots in the German philosophical traditions credited mainly to Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), phenomenology is a type of philosophy that studies the “structures of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view” (Smith, 2003, Par.1), accompanied by pertinent background and conditions of experience. According to Sokolowski (2000), phenomenology can be understood as “the study of human experience and the ways things present themselves to us in and through such experience” (p. 2). In other words, phenomenology is the study of phenomena, things, events or objects as they appear in our experiences, or the ways we experience them, and therefore the meanings things have in our experience (Smith, 2003).

Phenomenology, as a methodological approach, is concerned with helping us “see and understand things in new ways” (Vagle, 2018, p. 10) through the study of first-person experiences aiming at creating a full description of the world as it is presented through those experiences (Luft & Overgaard, 2012). It is dedicated to understanding and describing the structure of lived experience from the perspective of those who experienced the phenomenon (Creswell, 1998; Dahlberg, et al., 2008). Or as Smith and Bekker (2011) posit, phenomenology is the practice of exploring a phenomenon in order to understand its distinct and particular meaning for those experiencing it.

It needs to be noted that phenomenology does not treat individual experiences in isolation. Nor does it take singular introspection as an ultimate explanation of the phenomenon represented by that experience (Vagle, 2018). Instead, phenomenological research seeks the reflection of several participants on their experiences to distill the individual experiences to create an understanding of the general essence or the very nature of the phenomenon. This understanding consists of description of what is experienced and how it is experienced (Cresswell, 2007; Gallagher & Francesconi, 2012; van Manen, 1990).

The epistemological pursuits of phenomenological research tend to focus on meaning and understanding, than developing abstractions and theory (Flood, 2010). This notion is better captured in the following excerpt from Van Manen (1990, p. 9):

Phenomenology aims at gaining a deeper understanding of the nature or meaning of our everyday experiences... [through questions such as] ‘what is this or that kind of experience like?’ ... it attempts to gain insightful descriptions of the way we experience

the world ... not offer us the possibility of effective theory with which we can now explain and/or control the world.

He further notes that enriched phenomenological understanding of everyday experience is possible from the interplay between the two types of meaning – the cognitive and the non-cognitive (van Manen, 1990). Cognitive meaning is related with the informational and conceptual aspects of text, or the linguistic meaning that caters for social understanding, while the non-cognitive meaning includes the expressive, transcendent and poetic aspects of the text. The combination of the two enables sharing common experiences and meaning.

### ***3.2.1. Why Phenomenology?***

Since the study seeks to understand how Ethiopian academic diaspora in the US engage with universities in Ethiopia, their own framing of the concept and experiences with engagement are at the center of the inquiry. The research tries to create an understanding of the phenomenon of diaspora engagement through the spectacles of academics in the Ethiopian diaspora. Hence, phenomenological research design affords the space for the participants of the study to describe, interpret and critically self-reflect on their own engagement (Rossman & Rallis, 2012).

On the other hand, data for a phenomenological study is collected mainly through continued interaction between the researcher and the participants, often in the form of a series of interviews. (Indeed, other forms of data collection methods are also used, mostly supplementary to interview data.) This is another reason phenomenological approach is suitable to this study as it provides for an elaborated understanding of the issue under question, through a convenient instrument of data collection. Seidman (2006) suggests that in-depth phenomenological interview shall take three separate sessions, each with a particular purpose. The first interview is

meant to establish the context of the experience. Often this takes biographical perspective focusing on the participant. Once the context is laid down, the second interview would help the participants reconstruct their experience with the phenomenon in question. The third interview focuses on reflections of the research participants exploring what meaning their experience holds for them.

### ***3.2.2. Interpretive Versus Descriptive Phenomenology***

There are generally two predominant types of phenomenological study: the interpretive and the descriptive (Creswell, 2007; Gill, 2014, Vagle, 2018). The two approaches are different, among other things, in terms of the [position and] role of the researcher in explicating experience – to interpret or to describe. The interpretive (or hermeneutical) phenomenology, pioneered by van Manen (1990), does not shy away from making the researcher the interpreter of the lived experience. Here, the worldviews, assumptions and prior knowledge of the researcher are inevitably part of the interpretation process. This is evident in how van Manen (1990) conceives the phenomenological research process as the result of interplay between major research activities. To begin with, the researcher has to focus on phenomenon in which they have ‘serious interest’, and to which they are committed. Throughout the process the researcher shall maintain strong commitment to the subject of investigation while reflecting on the major themes and describing the phenomenon “as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it (p. 30).” As such the interpretation of the lived experiences is mediated by the researcher, whose experience is also accounted for in the process.

The descriptive, also known as the transcendental, phenomenology prioritizes the description over the interpretation of experiences of research participants (Giorgi, 2005, 2012; Vagle, 2018). Instrumental to the descriptive phenomenology is Husserl's concept of *bracketing*.

Bracketing entails that researchers as much as possible set aside their prior experiences and understandings of the phenomenon to take a fresh perspective and focus on describing the experiences of the research participants (Moustakas, 1994). While it is reasonable to question the possibility of bracketing in a qualitative research setting, Giorgi (2012) reminds us that we should not necessarily rule out all forms of interpretation. Interpretation supported by evidences only from within the data itself is, for instance, an acceptable means to resolve ambiguities.

Moustakas (1994) outlined that, in descriptive phenomenology, the researcher, among other activities in the process, analyzes data by reducing the gathered information into essential quotes which are then combined into themes, and developed into textural description of the experience (the what of the experience) and structural description (or the how of the experience – the conditions or context). The holistic essence of the experience can be understood as the combination of its textural and structural aspects. It is worth noting that descriptive phenomenology assumes that a phenomenon has an essence that can be described.

While the descriptive and interpretive are the two major traditions in phenomenological methodology, having their roots in Husserlian and Heideggerian philosophies respectively, Vagle (2018) stresses the plurality of approaches within phenomenology. He notes that there is no “one single way to design and carry out phenomenological research (p. 10)”, nor there is a need to confine oneself to one camp or another.

### ***3.2.3. Leaning on Post-intentionality and Bridling***

Vagle’s notion that phenomenological research is “in a constant state of becoming” (Vagle, 2018, p. 11), calls upon researchers to build on, stretch, or draw from aspects of established approaches. Following this invitation, I draw on two important concepts – *post-*

*intentionality* (Vagle 2009, 2010, 2015) and *bridling* (Dahlberg, 2006; Dahlberg et al., 2008) – to underpin my approach to this phenomenological study. Both of these concepts build on the fundamentals of both descriptive and interpretive phenomenological traditions, but downplay the importance of the descriptive vs interpretive debate (methodologically, not philosophically speaking). This is consistent with my own stance. I position myself broadly in the phenomenological domain, but not with in one of the subsets in the descriptive - interpretive dichotomy. I draw on certain aspects of both and employ concepts from different phenomenologists that help me advance my inquiry (e.g. post intentionality and bridling).

At the core of it, post-intentional phenomenology “draws on the post-structural commitment to knowledge being partial and ever changing” (Vagle & Hofsess, 2016, p. 334). This can be seen in contrast to the notion in the traditional phenomenology which seeks the holistic essence of phenomena, as Moustakas (1994) puts it, through the textural and structural aspects of experiences.

Central to understanding Vagle’s departure of post-intentional phenomenology, is the concept of intentionality – a concept difficult to grasp as Vagle (2010) himself admits. While intentionality is conceptualized in different ways, the key to understanding it is to step away from the literal meaning of the word intention. Intentionality does not signify our deliberate choices, plans, or actions we take, instead it denotes “the inseparable connectedness between subjects (that is, human beings) and objects (that is, all other things, animate and inanimate, and ideas) in the world” (Vagle 2018, p.28). More broadly intentionality attempts to capture how we are meaningfully connected to the world in those *in-between* spaces between humans and the world they experience (Vagle, 2009).

In phenomenological research, since the researcher is motivated and driven by a considerably significant interest and commitment to the phenomenon under investigation (van Manen, 1990), there is always an intentional relationship between the researcher and the phenomenon of interest. This also extends to the “dynamic intentional relationships that tie participants, the researcher, the produced text and their positionality [positions of power] together” (Vagle, 2010, p. 399).

Post intentionality can therefore be summarized by the idea that “the researcher can never decide to invoke intentionality nor escape it; the researcher can only try to make some fleeting sense of it as he or she reflects on it (Vagle, 2009, p. 586).” As such, a post-intentional phenomenological research approach resists static intentionality while it “embraces intentionality as ways of being that run through human relations with the world and one another (Vagle, 2010, p. 400).”

Thus, for this research the rationale to draw on the concept of post-intentional phenomenological approach is twofold. First, the phenomenon of interest for the research – diaspora engagement – is comprised of several constructs that could potentially be understood, interpreted and experienced differently by different individuals. National and institutional laws, policies and strategies, philosophies and approaches of top managements of concerned institutions, mechanisms of communication put in place, and a score of other mediating factors typically represent components that not only are prone to subjective interpretation but they also fluidly change with time. The search for a ‘holistic essence’ of the phenomenon in this case appears to be a questionable endeavor as the constituting components of the phenomenon could (and should) be best understood as how they are experienced than how they were intended by

policy/decision makers. Therefore, the post-structuralist inclination of the post intentional phenomenological approach strongly resonates with the underpinning premises of this research.

Second, as further discussed in the ‘researcher positionality’ section of this chapter, my own background and interest in the subject of the current inquiry puts me undeniably in strong intentional relation with the phenomenon being investigated. I have long pondered about the issue, I have written and spoken about it in public, I have varying level of personal and professional relationship with individuals who are on both sides of the relationship in the type of engagement under consideration; and even more, I have my own hypothesis concerning apparent challenges and potential remedies pertinent to the issue. As such my positionality in relation to the main research topic would inevitably sneak into all aspects of what Maxwell (2005) identified as major areas of methodological decisions (i.e. negotiating research relationships, site and participant selection, data collection, and data analysis). Thus, the post intentional phenomenological approach provides me the accommodative space to embrace my intentional relation with the phenomenon where – to borrow the words of Vagle (2009, p. 586) – I shall try “to make some fleeting sense of it as [I] reflect on it.”

This is where the second important concept I draw on – bridling – comes into play. According to Dahlberg et al. (2008) bridling provides the researcher a mechanism to control the influence of his/her preconceived understanding, experience or judgement throughout the research process. In contrast to bracketing, bridling is an ongoing process of examining one’s judgements. “Like tightening and loosening the reins when riding a horse, the phenomenologist tries to do the same with their judgements.... The goal of bridling [is] becoming much more familiar with one’s judgements so they do not compromise one’s openness to the phenomenon (Vagle, 2018, p.14).”

Having so much vested interest in, and coming with preconceived notions regarding the phenomenon of diaspora engagement, acknowledging and embracing my own judgements is a crucial step in this phenomenological research. With a controlled approach bridling helps me find a balance between freely letting my prejudgments interfere in exploring and understanding the phenomenon from the perspective of the research participants on one end, and the act of imposing on myself the arduous task of bracketing my judgments on the other.

Therefore, in keeping with the concept of bridling, I look at Dahlberg et al. (2008) for guidance, who propose that a phenomenological researcher shall restrain his/her pre-understandings, practice disciplined interaction and communication with both the phenomenon and the research participants in order to avoid “understandings too quickly, too carelessly or too slovenly (p.130).” they also stress that the researcher needs to maintain a positive attitude of bridling towards allowing the phenomenon to present itself, as opposed to focusing on struggling to keep back prejudgment (as in bracketing).

More practically, I also refer to Vagle (2010, p. 403), who in his post intentional approach, recommends the use of a bridling journal “as a space to wonder, question, think, contradict oneself, agree with oneself, vent, scream, laugh and celebrate.” He encourages that the researcher should start writing the bridling journal as early as possible, beginning with the initial bridling statement as much honest and articulately as possible. The bridling journal entry shall continue throughout data collection and analysis, organized in a systematic way to later consider it as a data source in crafting the text.

Thus, following Vagle I have been keeping notes in the form of bridling journal starting from the early conversations with colleagues and supervisors. Along the way I had discussions

on the topic of my research with several people some of whom later became participants, and others who only helped as sounding board. Throughout, I have kept notes as frequently and detailed as possible. Not only did I take the main points but also included divergent opinions and my own reflection on the pertinent issues. This exercise, which I continued to the last stage, has been very helpful in articulating my own understanding of the inquiry. For example, while I have a conversation with a colleague about something completely unrelated to my research, the structure of the conversation or the arguments we consider might help me articulate my own thought on my research, or help me look at my data in a new way. Thanks to the multi-device accessibility of OneNote, which I use for keeping notes, I would jot down some key words and phrases which I would later on elaborate into a detailed note.

### **3.3. Sampling and Participant Selection**

Taking account of the specific research questions, Ethiopians and Ethiopian born academics in US higher education institutions constitute the target population of this study. Although the nature of the research questions can naturally be extended to highly educated members of the Ethiopian diaspora who can make knowledge related contribution to the advancement of the Ethiopian higher education, or even the whole economy for that matter, this research is mainly concerned with those with academic job positions.

The anthropologist Kebede (2012) broadly classifies the Ethiopian diaspora in the US into three major categories corresponding to their time of arrival in the US and the path they came through. The first group constitutes those who arrived as refugees of war in the 1970s and 80s and settled by the US government. The second group is of those who came since the 1990s through the Diversity Visa lottery, family reunion, education and other means, while the last group constitutes those born in the US from Ethiopian parents. It is worth noting that this is not

an exhaustive classification. There are variations although constituting smaller numbers. For instance, among the research participants are those who arrived in the US as students on government sponsored scholarship programs in early 1970s. While these groups are reported to have differences not only in their experience as immigrants but also in their overall world view and their relations with issues in Ethiopia, the third group is said to be more divergent. Therefore, this research targets the first two groups which have more socio-cultural ties with Ethiopia, and hence are believed to be more involved with Ethiopian issues and institutions.

More specifically, by Ethiopian academic diaspora (or Ethiopian and Ethiopian born academics) in the US, I refer to Ethiopians and naturalized US citizens who were born and raised in Ethiopia who currently hold academic positions in US institutions. The important denominator here is having been socialized as Ethiopian to the socio-cultural norms which foreground the relationship between the individual research participant and Ethiopian higher education. Moreover, by academic here I mean anyone who holds teaching or research position in any higher education institution, regardless of the status of their employment or the type of the institution they work for. Research participants include academics who hold additional administrative positions, but those who have exclusively administrative responsibilities were not included.

The common claim in policy discussions and elsewhere, that there are a significant number of Ethiopian academic diaspora in the US, is not supported by any reliable data as to its exact number. This is reflective of the estimates of Ethiopian origin migrants in the US – in different sources the number is put anywhere between a quarter to two million. The claims for high number of Ethiopian-origin academics in the US are often substantiated by fragmented reports of brain drain as well as the statistical estimation that the Ethiopian diaspora in the US

has a more than national average proportion of educational attainment. The only available data, a 2012 UN estimate, reported that by a conservative estimate there were more than 1,600 doctoral level educated Ethiopians in the US and Canada. From this it is possible to presume that (a) a significant number of those terminal degree holders would likely be employed by universities; (b) looking at the immigration patterns of Ethiopians, a significant majority of these are likely based in the US; and (c) considering that the immigration of educated Ethiopians has seen increase in the past few years and that the return rate of Ethiopians who study in foreign universities, in general, is very low, it is possible to anticipate increase in this number since the date the report was published.

Since no database was available, to get an accessible population to work with, and possibly to get sense of the number and distribution of the Ethiopian academic diaspora by discipline and state of residence, I created a database of my own. For this purpose, I used two sources as a starting point:

- a) The Fulbright Scholars directory. From the Fulbright Scholars directory, I collected Ethiopian names of those who traveled to Ethiopian universities over the past 12 years. It is to be noted that the Fulbright Scholarship of this category applies to US citizens only. Therefore, the list can only provide Ethiopian born or Ethiopian origin academics who have US citizenship.
- b) A website listing of 'Ethiopian Professors'. Built by a member of the diaspora, this site puts together a short list of Ethiopian academics in the US and elsewhere who have given their permission to be contacted for providing advice and assistance for young Ethiopians who would like to apply to US universities and scholarship opportunities. Besides being created

over twenty years ago, this list included academics from different countries. Therefore, it required a significant amount of filtering.

Building on, I used a variety of other sources – such as news items, media interviews, social media listings (particularly LinkedIn, ResearchGate and Academia.edu), professional and social institutions of the Ethiopian diaspora, references in academic publications, and any other form of public interactions – to find more academics of Ethiopian origin. For all the sources, once I get the names, I searched for each one and verified details from the websites of their respective institutions. I collected such details into my database as names, gender, position (including additional administrative position), contact information, discipline and field of specialization, department of affiliation, name and address (state and city) of institution, and, by extension, state of residence.

This method is considered only as a remedy to the challenge, and it cannot possibly cover everyone who belongs to the definition of the Ethiopian academic diaspora. It includes only those whose names I came across in different ways of searching, and whose information is publicly available on the websites of their respective institutions. Therefore, the final list could only provide the *accessible population* of 167 academics, while the *target population* remains much broader and unknown for exact number.

The study employed a purposeful snowball sampling strategy. Purposeful sampling, as Suri (2011) noted, provides for the inclusion of information-rich cases in order to undertake an in-depth study of a phenomenon. Following Patton (2002), *intensity sampling* which consists of information-rich but not extreme cases (p. 234) frames the general criteria of inclusion for this study. This strategy is selected to purposefully identify individual respondents who have

experience of engagement with Ethiopian institutions, whose experiences can bring diverse and deeper understanding of the phenomenon.

Phenomenological research enjoys a high degree of flexibility with respect to sample size. Dahlberg et al. (2008) note that in general the question of sample size entirely depends on the nature of the phenomenon being studied – the more complex the phenomenon the larger the number of participants needed to get sufficient understanding. Vagle (2018) concurs and suggests that researchers should find what makes sense to them - whether it is to spend more time with fewer participants or shorter time with more participants, depending on the nature of their study.

Creswell (2007) also notes the variability of sample size in phenomenological studies and suggests interviewing a broad range of 5 to 25 individuals with direct experience of the phenomenon. Morse (1994, cited in Guest et al., 2006) suggested that phenomenological studies should have at least six participants. Reviewing a range of methods literature, Guest et al. (2006), and Gentles et al. (2015) show that no consensus is found on the question of sample size in qualitative research.

Nonetheless, Guest et al. (2006) recommend that researchers apply measure of *theoretical saturation* which represents the point at which additional interview would not result in new information (or ceases to generate new codes), but instead repeats what is obtained from other participants. In this research, I applied the concept of theoretical saturation to reach the optimum number of research participants. Having a first-pass listening of each interview and making a note of emerging themes in the responses to each question, 17 interviews hit the theoretical saturation point (of which 16 were analyzed). This number is consistent with the

different suggestions in the literature for a phenomenological study, as it is well with in the 10 to 25 estimation in the proposal which considered a reasonable degree of commonality of experience in the phenomenon of diaspora engagement for academics.

To be able to conduct interviews face-to-face, logistically it seemed reasonable to limit the geographic distribution of sample selection. The fact that the Washington DC Metropolitan area has the highest concentration of the Ethiopian diaspora in the US (MPI, 2014) is also reflected in the distribution of Ethiopian academic diaspora in my database. The Washington DC Metropolitan area along with its adjacent counties in the states of Maryland and Virginia – or the DMV area, as it is commonly known among the Ethiopian diaspora – together account for a fifth of the 167 academics in my list. In addition, being based in Boston and with the concentration of higher education institutions in the area, Massachusetts appears a natural choice to cover. Combined, the DMV area and state of Massachusetts provided a pool of 46 academics (27.5% of the list).

Because I used snowball sampling, in order to avoid sampling bias that comes with one person leading to an all-connected sample, I used three entry points into the sample selection. First, I began by sending email to all the potential interviewees in the selected areas. In the email, I introduced the research project and asked recipients if they had any engagement with Ethiopian universities, and if yes, whether they would be interested in participating in my research. Those contacted, whether they agreed to participate or not, were asked to recommend others who might fit the research purpose.

Second, I paralleled this process by asking references from universities in Ethiopia, the Ethiopian embassy in Washington DC and Ethiopian diaspora organizations and associations in

the US. From these institutions, I asked if I could be connected to Ethiopian academic diaspora who are known to have different engagements with Ethiopian higher education. However, the response through these two methods was much lower than my anticipation. Therefore, I moved to a third option, which produced a better result.

Following Singh and Wassenaar (2016) who appreciate and explain the role of gatekeepers in social science research as a pathway to access research participants, I sought the help of two individuals who could connect me with those who potentially fit the profile of the research participant I am looking for. During my travel to Ethiopia, I approached a high level official in the Ministry of Science and Higher Education with whom I discussed my research. Appreciating the importance of the research for his ministry, the official asked if there was any way he could help me. Knowing his knowledge of the issue at a macro level, I asked if he could connect me with some of the people from the diaspora in the US who, at that time or before, worked with his ministry. Consequently, in a brief email he introduced me with a group of nine people, some of whom were in my database.

Similarly, I reached out to a well-known and well-connected academic in the diaspora with a similar request to connect me with potential research participants. This person, a professor of higher education himself, who studied and worked in the US for several years, has a broad engagement with diaspora academics as well as with Ethiopian higher education institutions. He gave me the name and email address of several potential interviewees who he certainly knew had some sort of engagement with Ethiopian universities, some of whom, again, I had already contacted. As he suggested, I sent (or re-sent) emails with a subject line that included his name.

The response for my request through the ‘gatekeepers’ was much better. The introduction and the ‘name dropping’ were effective ways to attract the attention of those academics who certainly receive a large number of emails every day, perhaps a considerable number of which with similar requests for interview, survey, or other forms of solicitation for response. It was important for me to make sure that every participant understood that the involvement of those two individuals was only to establish the connection. Therefore, starting with the first email, I made sure that I provided enough information about the research and explained the purpose of the research and how the two individuals (and anyone else, for that matter) were not involved with the research, except in connecting me with potential participants.

On the other hand, knowing that the referrals were to individuals who are known to have ample engagement to be a good source of rich data, I broke away from my plan to limit my coverage to the Massachusetts and the DMV area. Similarly, in an effort to include more female participants, I approached all 13 female academics in my list, despite their geographic location. In the end I had only three participants outside of the geographic area I initially planned to cover. Also, unfortunately, I ended up recruiting only two female participants. Nonetheless, despite my interest, this number is reflective of the overall picture. In my list of 167 academics, for instance, there were only 13 (7.8%) females, whereas in the list of 28 Fulbright Scholars of Ethiopian origin (who spent time at Ethiopian institutions) only four (14.3%) of them were female. Two out of 16 (or 12.5%) does fairly compare with those figures.

Overall, in order to maximize diversity of views in the sample, I have made deliberate efforts to mix the sample in terms of gender, disciplinary backgrounds and between the two groups identified earlier (Kebede, 2012). Intensity of information superseded geographic location as a determinant factor in sample selection.

### **3.4. Data Collection**

As a phenomenological study this research used interview as a major instrument of data gathering. A semi-structured interview was employed with each participant separately. Semi-structured interview is preferred as it enables flexibility and allows for broad and deep, interactive, conversational exchange (Holstein & Gubrium, 1997) that goes beyond a structured question-and-answer format. Participants were able to tell their stories the way they wanted and I, as a researcher, was able to explore certain areas of interest at a deeper level using follow-up questions. As diaspora engagement is a phenomenon that involves multiple dimensions of the personal and professional lives of the research participants – in Bourdieu’s language as it operates in multiple fields and involves leveraging different types of capital – it was difficult to predetermine all the interview questions that would be adequate for rich enough information. Therefore, with the semi-structured interview as a guide to enable answering the research questions, each conversation grew organically.

Following Seidman (2006), the semi-structured interview protocol was set to have three major components. The first part focused on the biographic information of the research participants. This helped to create the context and to establish rapport with the participants. This part included questions related to the backgrounds of participants, their academic and career trajectories, when and how they came to the US, how they landed where they are – in academic job and the institution they work at.

The second part elaborated on the engagement of the research participants with Ethiopian higher education. This targeted on understanding the nature and processes of the engagement experience of participants. It included questions that explore the form and modality of their engagement, the various forms of communication they used in the process, how long they have

been engaged, with which institutions, how they choose the institutions or the modality of their engagement, whether they had engagements with institutions in countries other than Ethiopia, how they mobilize resources to their activities, and so on.

The third part of the interview focused on reflections that connect the first two parts. The way and extent to which the individual biographies influenced their decision to engage, and their experiences throughout were explored in this part of the interview. Questions that seek the reflections of the participants on their experience such as how they understood the policy and institutional environment, the nature of relationships they have with Ethiopian universities and their management, how they work with academic and administrative staff in Ethiopia, what they find to be the most rewarding and fulfilling experience, what motivates them and what factors keep them engaged or otherwise, how they interact with intermediary agencies – if at all they do, etc. were included in this part.

In advance of the interview, the selected participants were contacted via email, initially, and by phone afterwards for those who preferred such communication, to make the necessary arrangements for the interview meeting. From the outset, potential participants were given a complete description of the nature and goals of the research, and they were sent the consent form and a copy of the interview protocol, to help them in their decisions. They were also informed of how and why they were selected for the interview.

Considering its advantages for the nature of the research, conducting the interview face-to-face was strongly sought. Since the interview involved participants' perspectives on personal matters, as well as opinions toward political processes, institutions and individuals, I presumed that they would be more comfortable to share their points of views in person than through a

distance form of communication. Besides, the face-to-face arrangement also enabled me to pick up on gestures, facial expressions or participants' interaction with their environment during the interview. Such non-verbal signals were not only used to prompt follow-up questions but were also recorded as field notes, as addition to the main data from the interview.

However, I was able to conduct face-to-face interviews only with 10 of the participants. The rest were conducted via zoom (audio with video options used only with one participant) or by phone. For three of them who were in states other than the initially targeted Massachusetts and DMV regions, this appeared logistically apparent. The remaining three who are based in the DMV area were traveling or engaged otherwise in the week I spent in the area conducting interviews. Therefore, we had to make other arrangements afterwards.

Timewise, the interviews were conducted between April and July of 2019, but 13 of them only in the month of May. Between 16 and 23 of May, I spent a week in Washington DC conducting interviews with participants in that area. Interviews varied in duration from 50 minutes to 2 hours and 34 minutes. A mix of factors contributed to this difference. Overall, face-to-face interviews lasted longer, as they were more open to follow up questions and sideline conversations. The extent of engagement experiences of the participants and language are the other factors, where interviews exclusively in English lasted relatively shorter. Meanwhile, some participants tend to give brief answers, and sticking to questions without pivoting unless prompted.

Most interviews were conducted in the offices of the participants, where artifacts like photos and artworks on the wall were useful as conversation topics before the beginning of the interview creating a good segue way, or as a cues of reflection in relation to the subject matter of

the interview. Others chose cafeterias or hotels, in all cases out of consideration to save me from traveling a long distance to reach their offices. Obviously interviews in offices were relatively longer and focused, in the absence of environmental distraction.

While IRB approved consent form was sent to the participants in advance, at the beginning of each interview I provided additional explanation about the research, as well as the code of ethics and confidentiality protection applicable to the research process. Given that the participants are all academicians, they were familiar with the procedure and the IRB protocol. I proceeded to explain anyway, stressing on how intended to maintain their anonymity. Only one participant opted to postpone signing the consent form until after knowing how the data from the interview was going to be reported.

Although the interview protocol was prepared in English, and questions were probed primarily in English, all but four interviews were conducted in a mix of Amharic and English. After having the preliminary pre-interview conversations in Amharic, once I started recording, I introduced the research in a mix, and ask the first question in English. I then follow the lead of the research participant to let them speak in what makes them comfortable. As it is common among the Ethiopian diaspora, most participants naturally continued switching between Amharic and English as they go. The language mix seemed to provide the necessary flexibility for effective expression and to capture nuances of socio-cultural and psycho-social elements crucial to the experience.

At the end of each interview, participants were asked for supplementary sources of information. Letters, email exchanges, audio and video recordings, photographs, links to websites, reports or publications that came as a result of their engagement, and so on. Quite a

few offered such additional information, mostly in the form of physical publications and website links.

### **3.5. Data Analysis**

It is not uncommon to hear data analysis in qualitative research described as a ‘black hole’ (or ‘black box’) signifying the difficulty of explicitly and specifically explaining the process of analysis (St. Pierre & Jackson, 2014). This expression also speaks to the fact that data analysis is done in many different ways depending on the specific nature of the inquiry, the research approach employed, the paradigmatic assumption and the experience of the respective researchers, among other things.

This was partially true in the case of this research as well. At the proposal stage a loosely defined analysis plan was developed to offer a general guideline, recognizing that modifications might be applied along the way. The analysis plan drew on three important works in qualitative research: Miles and Huberman’s (1994) *Qualitative Data Analysis*, Saldaña’s (2009) *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, and Vagle’s (2018) *Crafting Phenomenological Research*. Following the pre-defined plan with the necessary adjustments introduced, overall, the data analysis process can be summarized in the following step-by-step process.

Step 1: For easier management, first I converted the recorded interview into MP3 format (if it was not already recorded in that format) and saved it with a file name that included the code name (not the pseudonym) for each participant and the recording date.

Step 2: Wrote down field notes while I did a first pass listening of each interview. As taking a note during interviews was potentially distracting for both the research participant and myself, I took notes only after the completion of the interview. By writing down the notes as

shortly as possible after conducting the interview, I took advantage of having fresh memory. Meanwhile listening to the interviews while taking the notes helped refresh memories of the overall environment, expressions of the interviewee and my own observations during the interview. Similarly, I used the first round listening to determine if the interview appeared complete, if I missed a major question I had to ask, or how much suitable information the interview contained. In one case, for instance, I had a difficulty of keeping the participant on topic. He kept giving very broad answers that did not necessarily relate to my questions. After a few attempts I did not want to continue interrupting him to redirect the conversation. This was even more difficult as the participant was an elderly person. Therefore, after first listen I decided to exclude the interview from analysis, putting the number of interviews at 16, from the original 17. In another case, I reckoned there were a couple of follow up questions I should have asked during the interview, and therefore I called the participant to follow up.

Step 3: I identified those interviews that were conducted exclusively in English, and transcribed them using a free online transcription service from otter.ai. However, the bilingual interviews took quite some time to finalize. It was difficult to find an online transcription for the bilingual interviews as the automatic transcription services did not include Amharic. Although I tried to hire secretarial services in Addis Ababa to do the audio-to-text transcription, the only two service providers (formally registered businesses) were very expensive. While I could have the service for a cheaper price at informal small businesses, I could not have confidence in them to maintain the confidentiality of the data. Therefore, with help from family members, I had all the interviews first transcribed in hand writing. Then, I sent the handwritten document to Addis Ababa where it was typed and emailed back to me.

Step 4: I did a holistic reading of the entire transcribed text taking additional memos, checking accuracy against the audio file and correcting typographic errors. The purpose of this step was to further familiarize myself with (making a general sense of) the data and clearing the data for aberration that might have come from the data collection phase.

Step 5: The cleared data was added to a qualitative data analysis software package (NVivo 12). Entering into the software, field notes and memos were juxtaposed with the interview data.

Step 6: Coding. Based on the themes that emerged from the pilot, a first round of coding was done identifying major categories and concepts relevant to the research questions. Consequently, the coding was refined by going over the initial codes where new codes were created and some were merged. Developing a mapping of the codes was helpful to create a holistic view and to see how it can further be sharpened. The mapping also helped visualizing the relationships between the codes and the various factors that are identified to have impact on the engagement experience of the research participants. Throughout the process, I have kept annotations of my thinking about the creation of the codes and their relationships.

Overall, this step-by-step process is a simplified presentation of what in reality is a complex process of back and forth. Final synthetization of codes to identify the salient themes, relations, patterns, explanations, etc. within the data continued throughout the process, even during the write up phase.

One of the major challenges was the bilingual nature of the data. Initially, I had considered the option of translating the data into English as I transcribe, possibly making it easier for analysis. However, at the pilot stage one of the interviews was bilingual and the attempt of

translating the data as I do the transcription proved to be a difficult task. It is not only that it took a long time, but the word for word translation could also compromise the quality of the data. Therefore, I opted to use the data as it is, and to contextually translate only those parts that were taken into the write up. Besides the issues with transcription, some functions of NVivo do not work well with the data that is recorded in Amharic.

### **3.6. Ensuring Trustworthiness**

Controlling data quality and ensuring rigor in qualitative research have always been challenging. Following prominent scholars in the field, Toma (2011) notes the multiplicity of approaches and methodologies practiced by qualitative researchers, making the case that in qualitative research uniform and standardized measures of rigor are neither achievable nor desirable. This is not, however, to rule out all efforts towards rigor. Instead it is an invitation for researchers to consider all and any – and to invent – options that are suited to their specific inquiry (Freeman et al., 2007; Toma, 2011).

In qualitative inquiry Lincoln and Guba's (1985) broad notion of trustworthiness provides for different measures that ensure the overall quality of research. While there are no strict rules as to how to achieve trustworthiness, paralleling the criteria of rigor in quantitative research, Lincoln and Guba draw specific attention to actions pertinent to credibility of the research (how true it is in the eyes of peers and research participants), its transferability (the potential to generate ideas that can be applicable in similar settings), dependability (it accommodates change), and confirmability (that it can be confirmed by someone else; it is not too tilted with bias of the researcher).

Acknowledging this general framework, for this study, I paid attention to the following measures in an attempt to ensure quality and rigor.

***Piloting:*** the data collection instrument was tested in order to ensure its accuracy in terms of obtaining the desired information. Piloting was done with two academics, interviewing one in person and another over the phone. The interview helped me testing the both the interview instrument and my own approach of interviewing. Then the data went through the same process of transcription and analysis described above. The piloting revealed some limitations in the instrument, and importantly in my interviewing strategy. It helped me to see instances that led to dead ends and drift from the main point of the conversation.

***Member checking:*** Member checking is employed as a means of ensuring the accuracy of data. As promised to my research participants, I have sent the draft of the final report to the participants to see if they agree with my presentation of the information they provided. However, I did not receive response from all participants. This is understandable as the chapters in their entirety are relatively long, and some of the participants from the very beginning have stated that they would not need to read the final report for this purpose. Some have responded with confirmation of the information presented in the respective chapters and a couple of them with corrections to the details of the information I presented. Akin to the notion of credibility, I have also used the disinterested peer debriefing with colleagues in my cohort to see how their view of the information might be different from mine, thereby revealing the extent to which my own reading and interpretation of the information has interfered.

***Thick description:*** rich description of the research context and settings, and details of the research process is provided in as much as it does not give away the anonymity of the research

participants. I also have presented a series of direct quotations to show the way the research participants presented their views as it is, as opposed to my understanding and interpretation of the data.

***Diversity of data sources:*** Phenomenological research primarily relies on interview of those who have experienced the phenomenon as the source of data. That is also true to this study. However, slightly deviating from this phenomenological tradition, I have considered data from other sources such as interview with leaders in the Ethiopian higher education, conversations with representatives of diaspora organizations, news artifacts, historical records, institutional and national policy resources (documents and websites), conversations with representatives of Ethiopian embassy in Washington DC, publications by the research participants, etc. It is important to note that neither these sources are the primary sources of data, nor the information obtained from these sources is considered for the purposes of triangulation. Instead, the use of supplementary information from these sources is explained by providing broader context within which the major research question is investigated and the engagement of the academic diaspora is situated. In addition, as the research ended with outlining implications for policy, broadening understanding and perspectives from different angles was important to do so.

### **3.7. Research Context and Researcher Positionality**

The Ethiopian political landscape is diametrically divided in a “with us or against us” form of dichotomy. This has lasted for decades since the popular movement in the 1960s. The Ethiopian diaspora in the US, owing to its experience of living in a democratic system and its access to information and media, has long been active in voicing the political positions on both sides of the aisle.

As Lyons (2006) documented the polarization of political groups has very much intensified since the contentious general election in 2005, which resulted in country wide protest, clashes between protestors and government forces, and ultimately the death of hundreds of civilians. During the election, and since then, the diaspora was instrumental in supporting and mobilizing for both the ruling party and the oppositions. The fallouts subsequent to the election aggravated the spite that has been accumulating for decades. And this is by no means a simple difference of political opinion. For many it is associated with torture and imprisonment they themselves or their family members suffered, death of loved ones, the impoverishment of their home towns and localities. Ethiopian politics in the diaspora is marred with melancholy and bitterness.

As those in the opposition camp have been migrating over the years since the ruling party came to power, and even before, the opposition has a much stronger base in the diaspora. Therefore, members of the diaspora who are identified to be in support of, or even in good relationship with, the government back home and its institutions are met with strong social and economic sanctions from the diaspora community.

Engagement with institutions in Ethiopia is done with in such a context. Some try to neutralize their engagement by making distinction between serving the country and serving the political power; some do it being willing to accept the consequences; some prefer to do it unofficially; others suppress their desire to engage in fear of the consequences. This backdrop of engagement has been reflected in the conversations, where participants explained how the political situation both in Ethiopia and in the diaspora has affected their engagement. For some, it was discernible how they were trying to avoid questions related to politics, while others seemed agitated talking about their unpleasant experiences as a result of the political context.

In anticipation of this, I have tried to build a rapport with the research participants in pre interview conversations where we talked about many things including the state of politics. In those conversations I signal that, as a researcher, I am interested only in the inquiry and that I do not have any interest in their personal opinions beyond within the context of the research. I deliberately tried to show them that I do not have any affiliation with any of the political sides, although I realize how difficult that might be for them to believe. However, this effort was necessary to try and convince the research participants that my questions are not informed by any value judgement of their political position. In addition, I have tried providing sufficient explanation of my professional and ethical responsibilities as enshrined in the IRB process.

Acknowledging that open statement of political opinions could have social or professional consequences, including impact on the participants' future engagement, every effort is made to maintain the anonymity of the participants. To that end, I have taken three measures.

- a) Participants are assigned pseudonyms. As politics in Ethiopia is extremely infused with ethnic tensions, ethnically identifiable pseudonyms could mislead readers by inviting them to make socio-political assumptions about the participants, just from their names. Therefore, the choice of pseudonyms is meant to be neutral to any ethnic identification. Similar effort is also made to avoid religious connotations. Besides, shorter easy to read names are chosen, taking account of non-Amharic speaking audience. One exception that needs to be noted is a research participant who preferred to be, and is, identified by his real name. At the time of member check, this participant responded that he confirms all the information presented about him is accurate to the details discussed in the interview and has no issues with it being revealed. However, he also added that he prefers to be identified with his actual name

in the final write-up not only because that it would be easy for anyone who knows him to associate the story with him, but also because he has “nothing to hide, but to be proud of.”

- b) The Ethiopian academic diaspora in the US is not very big population. Despite the pseudonym, if participants are identified with their field of specialization the time they came to the US, the type and location of their institution, etc. they can easily be identified by someone who is familiar with that segment of the diaspora population. For instance, a tenured professor of Ethiopian origin, who came to the US in 1986, specializing in microbiology and teaching in a four-year private institution in Massachusetts, could not be difficult to identify. This is particularly the case for those who have a specialization in an area that is not very common among Ethiopians, for those who are women (because they are quite few), and those who are popularly known for their publications, advocacy or any other form of media/public engagement. Therefore, I have refrained from presenting multiple of the identifying attributes all at once. While it is clear that it helps readers to have an overall picture of the characteristics of the participants, visualizing them altogether would jeopardize the anonymity of participants. That is why participants are described in terms of the various characteristics as a group. The different attributes of the individual participant are mentioned only when they seem directly relevant to the subject matter of the discussion.
- c) In cases of potentially sensitive information – e.g. discussions related to political environment or other challenges – participants are not explicitly identified by name (pseudonym). Instead they are referred to in generic terms as ‘one of the participants’.

Meanwhile, I acknowledge my own positionality (and subjectivity) in this inquiry (Pillow, 2003), as a person and as a researcher. As a politically conscious citizen, and as someone who has had unpleasant experiences as a result of their political opinion, I too have predispositions which might have subtly manifested in the intricacies of the research process. Despite my conscious effort, this could be the case particularly in the interaction I had with my research participants. Presumably it could have potentially interfered in an interaction with a participant who has views different from mine and make the conversation less pleasurable and less revealing. But it could also have interfered in an interaction with someone of similar views and experiences, where the conversation could become conformational than authentic examination of the issues.

On the other hand, as someone who is not only interested but also strongly committed to the betterment of higher education in Ethiopia, I have strong opinions regarding the current state of affairs, including the manners in which diaspora engagement is working. For instance, I believe that even the very limited diaspora engagement in Ethiopian higher education is mismanaged and could have been better handled. Coming to the research with such mindset, focused on my professional goal of contributing to the improvement of Ethiopian higher education, could have potentially precluded me from appreciating the circumstances and experiences of.

Acknowledging one's subjectivity is only the first step. Dealing with it in a manner it would not mislead, but instead contributes as an integral element to, the research process is the other (important) half. I turned to Dahlberg et al. (2008), and Vagle (2010) who advocate the concept of bridling subjective elements of the researcher to keep prejudgments in check during the research process.

Another aspect of my positionality that needs to be accounted for is that as a novice researcher conducting reflective interviews with academics accomplished in their respective fields, is a daunting task. This could be seen as further exacerbated by the fact that I as well as my research participants come from a patrimonial socio-cultural arrangement where power is vertically distributed based on, among other things, age and educational achievement.

Lastly, as I have done most interviews in a mix of Amharic and English, I also had the role of being a translator of the raw data. Despite presenting blocks of quotations for a thick description of experiences of the research participants, I remain in the position of translating the conversations where my own understanding of what I hear the participants saying could permeate into the data. Therefore, despite the effort it is practically unimaginable to ensure that my own voice is not mixed up in the presentation of the experiences of the participants. This could be ameliorated through member checking, and paying attention to broader context of conversation than to specific statements.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Getting to Know the Research Participants**

Factors such as type of immigration, length of stay in the host country, disciplinary background, academic rank and tenure status, type of home institution, gender, family conditions and other personal considerations are found to have bearings on academic diaspora's engagement with their countries of origin. Therefore, as a prelude to understanding their efforts and experiences of engaging with Ethiopian universities, this chapter briefly introduces the research participants. However, as explained in section 3.7, protecting the anonymity of the research participants requires avoiding the comprehensive presentation of all attributes of each participant individually. Accordingly, this chapter introduces participants as a group in terms of the time and pattern of their arrival to the US, diversity in their disciplinary backgrounds, and their academic and career profiles. Explanations that underpin the trends in these aspects are also offered.

#### **4.1. Arrival to the US**

The 16 research participants arrived in the US over a period of nearly four decades. There is a 37 years gap between the earliest (1971) and the latest (2008) arrivals. This has a strong relevance to their transnational engagement in a number of ways. Not only that it is indicative of their career stability and family situations, but it also reflects on generational differences that affect the decision to come to and/or stay in the US, and ultimately their socialization in the host and relationship with the home countries (Kebede, 2012). Over this period circumstances within which transnational engagement takes place have considerably changed both in the US and in Ethiopia. For example, in the US immigration laws and racial dynamics in academia have changed considerably, while in Ethiopia the political atmosphere and the size and development of higher education have all evolved creating different context for the research participants to

operate in. In other words, the push and pull factors relevant to one's decisions to study abroad, and/or to stay after completing their study program as well as the enablers and challenges of engagement have considerably changed over the indicated period.

Arthur (2000) has identified four reasons why Africans migrate to the US. These are educational pursuit, economic reasons, to join family, and fleeing political repression. These reasons, however, are not mutually exclusive. In total 13 of the 16 research participants came to the US to pursue further studies, while the other two came through family connections and one participant won the Diversity Visa (DV<sup>2</sup>) Lottery. Eight of those who came for studies arrived in the US in the 1970s and 80s. Those who came earlier appear to share the story that they came to the US because opportunities were not available in Ethiopia and mostly with the intention of returning back after the completing their studies.

**Table 5**

*Patterns of Arrival in the US (n=16)*

	Time of arrival				Type of entry			To the US	
	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	Study	Family	DV	After Europe	Direct
<b>No.</b>	4	6	3	3	13	2	1	6	10
<b>%</b>	25	37.5	18.75	18.75	81.25	12.5	6.25	37.5	62.5

Reta, Ferede and Abera, for instance, all of whom arrived in the US in early 1970s, share remarkably similar stories. They came through US government scholarship programs, with the permission and support of the Ethiopian government. Before they completed their [master's

<sup>2</sup> Established by the Immigration Act of 1990, the Diversity Visa (DV) program offers visa for 50,000 individuals each year (reduced from 55,000 in 2000) from countries underrepresented in the US. Eligible since its establishment, Ethiopia is one of the countries with the highest number of beneficiaries.  
<https://www.americanimmigrationcouncil.org/research/diversity-immigrant-visa-program-overview>

level] studies the 1974 revolution took place and the whole political environment changed forcing them to stay longer despite their strong desire to return. This is how Reta remembers it:

The king of kings was removed from his throne and the *Derg*<sup>3</sup> took power, and the whole system was shaken to its core. The progressive leftists were divided on minor issues and rose up against each other. The military government, on the other hand, started consolidating its grip on power. Soon enough the country was in chaos and killings became commonplace. I have lost most of my friends from high school and college. But anyway, I wanted to go back and be part of whatever was happening. Some people I know who have been studying here in the US returned and joined the struggle... of course some of them were killed or imprisoned. When my relatives knew that I wanted to return home, they thought I was crazy... they begged me not to...so here I am.

Abera recounted a similar story about the time he had to make the ‘hard’ decision to stay in the US.

When I finally finished my studies and was ready to go everyone thought I was out of my mind... But then I heard that the Derg killed my friend, my former roommate. He was guilty of being found with a propaganda paper from the opposition. A lot of my friends were either killed or in prison. You know, I myself was involved in one of the student associations that was linked with the leftist opposition. So, there was no way I could have

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<sup>3</sup> A group of military officers which came to power in 1974 through a coup d'état to establish a military government that stayed in power until it was removed in 1991. The Derg (the name also refers to the entire regime) is known for its autocratic mode of governance that kept the country under strong arm (Clapham, 2009). The entire regime was characterized by internal conflicts, draught and civil war that claimed the lives of tens, if not hundreds, of thousands of people, and resulted in the imprisonment and exile of even more.

gone at that time and be safe. But I did not give up... although it is only in 1992 after the military government was removed that I finally went home...19 years after I left.

These political developments affected not just their decision to stay in the US but their entire academic and career trajectories. As Ferede jokingly remarked he was almost ‘forced’ into doing his PhD. It was similar for Reta and Abera as well. They decided to continue their studies while they were waiting for things back home to improve. Abera even had to change his field of study.

For the kind of visa and government scholarship we had, we were committed to go back and serve at least for two years. But the US government appreciated the situation in Ethiopia and allowed us to stay in the country on temporary basis with a permission that needs to be renewed every year. Therefore, I thought I might as well apply for a PhD while I wait... But then I realized that Ethiopia had become a socialist country and my degree in finance and marketing from a US university had just become much less relevant. So, I had to switch to something more universal, something I can use when I go back. And that is how I ended up studying industrial and operations management. But I had to take several additional courses in preparation.

While these are the stories of those three who came to the US in the 1970s, the sentiments are largely shared by those who arrived in the 1980s and later. For instance, Maseb said that his childhood dream of studying in the US came from being socialized to his father’s colleagues who have studied in US universities and often told him stories about their time in the US. He managed to come to the US for his PhD in mid 1980s, after having studied in Ethiopia and in Europe, and applications to several US institutions, but “because of the political situation back

home [he] was not able to go back and complete the circle like those guys”. The similarity in the interest to return home might have originated from the level and strength of sense of duties students were socialized with. During those years there were only limited number of people who would pursue higher education, having been selected for that privilege came with strong burden of going back and serving.

This can be seen in contrast with the late comers of the 1990s and 2000s who, for the most part, chose the US as their destination attracted by the academic and career opportunities it offered. Four of the six research participants who came to the US in the 1990s and 2000s have studied and lived in Europe before they chose to come to the US. All four agreed that it is fair to say that they came to the US having considered the possibility of staying on a long-term basis. Sisay, who came for a PhD in one of the most prestigious US universities, after studying and working in Europe, makes the case for his choice by citing the US’s position in the global knowledge regime. “The cutting-edge research happens here, and it is fascinating to be in the middle of it; even my professors in Europe wanted to come to US universities.” Wolde shared a similar reasoning to explain his decision to come to the US for his post-doctoral fellowship after completing his PhD in one of the most prestigious research institutions in Europe.

These nuances, however, should not be construed as dismissing the role of politics in the formation and experiences of the Ethiopian diaspora in contemporary settings. It is appropriate to appreciate the circumstances of many Ethiopians who are unable to go back to their home country for the fear of persecution for merely holding a political opinion. Political developments in Ethiopia have always been and remain among the major factors driving the decision to go and stay abroad, more so in the field of higher education than anywhere else.

In summary the arrival of the research participants in the US varies both in terms of time and pathways. For those who came for education, it is observed that over time there is an increasing inclination to having made a deliberate decision to stay in the US after completing studies. Besides socio-political circumstances that reinforced individual decisions, it can be argued that the tendency among the research participants is a reflection of the increased trend of mobility of academics at the global stage enabled by technological changes and advanced communication, within the realm of globalization (Alexander, 2017; Butler, 2001; Kapur, 2001).

#### 4.2. Disciplinary Backgrounds

Equally distributed between public and private institutions (and only one of the public institutions being a two-year), the majority of the research participants are from the natural sciences. Represented fields in this category include medical sciences, physics, information technology and engineering. Within the social sciences category a variety of fields including education, economics, law and management are represented.

**Table 6**

*Fields of Specialization of Research Participants*

	No.	Areas of specialization
<b>Natural Sciences</b>	10	Nanophysics, pharmacy, immunology, physiology, neurology, material sciences, electrical engineering, computer engineering, information technology
<b>Social Sciences</b>	6	Education, economics, public administration and policy, law, business management, environmental studies

Admittedly there is a lack of representation for fields in the humanities. This imbalance can be seen as a reflection of trends in Ethiopian higher education. In the past decade the Ethiopian government has been pursuing a policy of strengthening and expanding higher

education programs in the natural sciences. Not only has it opened two science and technology universities, it also established institutes of technology within other universities, designated as ‘centers of excellence’. These measures were embedded in the highly disputed policy of 70:30 – which targeted to have 70% of the student population in the natural sciences fields, and the remaining 30% in social sciences and humanities (Salmi et al., 2017; Teshome, 2017).

This expansion created an unprecedented demand for highly trained university academic staff in those fields, which the country did not have. Appreciating this constraint and acknowledging the limited involvement of the diaspora in different universities, the government issued open calls for enhanced engagement from members of the diaspora. In addition, it created a program that specifically incentivized the employment of expatriates particularly in the two science and technology universities, which also extended to the Ethiopian academic diaspora. Universities also used different formal and informal means to reach out to their alumni and other Ethiopians who were teaching in universities abroad. Slowly responses from the Ethiopian academic diaspora started to improve (Bishaw, 2011; Ogachi, 2015; Warnecke, 2015). This specific focus of the government on natural science fields has resulted in more demand and consequently more engagement in those fields.

On the other hand, it can be conjectured that the availability of more funding and other forms of support in the natural sciences than in the social sciences and humanities (MoE, 2015), may have contributed to the disciplinary imbalance in transnational engagement. More than half of the 10 research participants in the natural sciences field – as opposed to only one third in social sciences - have obtained some form of financial support from internal or external sources. Research grants, study abroad and student exchange programs and other forms of institutional initiatives in internationalization are some of the ways such global engagements are made

possible. This is in addition to the Fulbright Scholars Program which is a commonly used across disciplines to finance individual engagement initiatives. The selection of research participants is therefore influenced by these trends of more engagement in the natural sciences, as there are more to select from.

### 4.3. Academic and Career Profiles

Twelve of the participants (nine full professors and three associate professors) are tenured. Two others are assistant professors one of whom is on a tenure track while the other opted not to disclose any information regarding his tenure status. Two participants are non-tenure track adjunct faculties with a fulltime career elsewhere. Both were selected for their extensive engagement with Ethiopian universities, despite their distinct career profile. While their experience of working with Ethiopian universities is not much different from the others, their perspectives on issues related to support from home institution, the impact of racial and power dynamics in academia and the like are different (and less relevant to the topic).

**Table 7**

*Profile of Research Participants by Position and Tenure Status*

		Tenure status				Total
		Tenured	Tenure track	Non-tenure track	Undisclosed	
<b>Position</b>	Assistant Professor	-	1	-	1	2
	Associate Professor	3	-	-	-	3
	Full Professor	9	-	-	-	9
	Adjunct	-	-	2	-	2
	Total	12	1	2	1	16

On the other hand, three of the research participants are currently serving at an administrative position in their respective institutions. Two are department chairs and one holds a

university wide high level administrative responsibility, which he accepted just few weeks before my interview with him.

Gender wise, despite my effort to increase the number, only two of my research participants are female, both of them full professors. Although this appears quite a small proportion (12.5%), it stands much higher than the proportion of female academics (7.8%) in the total pool (n=167) from which the selection was made. This is by no means a claim of any statistical accuracy. Instead it is only a proxy to get a sense of the gender distribution in the Ethiopian academic diaspora in the US.

Overall, this chapter has shown the fairly diverse group of academics who participated in the research. Explored aspects such as immigration to the US, disciplinary background, career profile and gender are relevant to the reflections obtained from the research participants as it relates to their experience of engaging with Ethiopian universities. The following chapters go in depth to exploring those experiences.

## **Chapter Five**

### **The Nature of Engagement: The How and the Why**

Responding to two of the research questions this chapter explores the different ways diaspora engagement take place and examines what underpins the commitment of the academic diaspora in engaging with Ethiopian universities. The earlier focuses more on the practical aspects of the engagement endeavor related to the different forms and modalities in place (Zezeza, 2013). What activities constitute engagement? In which areas of the university function do engagements often happen? How do engagements get initiated and formed? What does the timing of engagement activities look like?

The second half of this chapter looks behind the scene to unravel what motivates the research participants to commit their time and resources in forging and sustaining relations with Ethiopian universities. The different outcomes of their engagement – practical and emotional – as well as professional and personal reasons are found to justify continued efforts. Values and perceptions that explain the relationship of the research participants with Ethiopian institutions, as opposed to institutions elsewhere, are also examined.

#### **5.1. Time/Timing of Engagement**

While physical visit during the summer months is the most common arrangement, it is evident that the duration, frequency and timing of engagement often vary. Some plan for a less frequent but more intense engagement, such as using sabbaticals and summer breaks. One of my research participants, a professor of educational leadership who spent a year with a Fulbright scholarship based in one of the major universities in central Ethiopia, has served four universities during his stay. In addition to his host institution, he traveled to three universities in different parts of the country, for one month at each one of them, to give a course in his area of

specialization. In each of the four universities he also organized a research workshop and delivered a talk. He further said:

In Addis Ababa I also organized training workshops for experts of the Ministry of Education on school supervision. In fact, the ministry organized the training and I asked them to give me some time to share the state of the research on the subject and the art and science of the practice in different parts of the world. I also delivered training for faculty and administration at the university... I utilized that year so much that it actually affected my own research. It was too much traveling, preparing and delivering workshops and trainings, giving courses, exams and grades, advising some students and faculty...

This is an example of a highly concentrated engagement possible with a longer stay in Ethiopia. Maseb, on the contrary, says that he has been unlucky in making such a longer-term arrangement. Twice his planned trips to Ethiopia, each time intended to last a full academic year, failed to materialize. The first time there was a communication breakdown on the part of the hosting Ethiopian university and his Fulbright application could not come through. The second time a security crisis erupted, and Ethiopia became under a state of emergency. Although he tried his summer breaks, “during the summer there are no students on campus, you can only interact with faculty and even most faculty do not come to campus unless they have something specific to do”. He is more interested in interacting with and mentoring students. Therefore, as a solution he has now redirected his efforts through a US based diaspora professional association to organize summer schools and to remotely mentor graduate students.

Others maintain more frequent shorter travels that sustain over the years. Kasa, for instance, has been traveling to Ethiopia “[almost] every three months in the past few

years...Each travel is for a short period, but I maintain constant contact with students by email.”

So has Bisrat. But Bisrat had a multi-year grant in which his host institution in Ethiopia had been a part of. This enabled his travels not only in terms of financing but also integrating his trips into his schedules during the academic years. The importance of time/ timing and finance as determinants of the scope and continuity of engagement resonated with all participants.

## **5.2. Beginning of the Engagement Relationship**

Some twenty years ago Reta was sitting in a conference room with his colleagues around the table. They were discussing the successful conclusion of the conference they organized. It is an international conference by a professional organization he belonged to, held every other year rotating in different cities in Africa. When they moved to choosing the next location, for the year 2001, he casually suggested Addis Ababa. He remembers that he did not think it would be the beginning of something that lasts this long; something that would have such an impact on his professional career. Not only was Addis Ababa selected as the next host city, he was also given the responsibility to lead the organization of the conference. In the course of organizing the conference he would travel back to Ethiopia for the first time in 25 years; he would work with Addis Ababa University (AAU), the local partner of the conference; and have the opportunity to engage in discussions with members of the academic department that was concerned with the topic of the conference. These discussions were the starting point of his long lasting engagement with the University, which later extended to other universities as well.

They were then planning to start a master’s program, and they asked me to help them. I said ok. We developed the curriculum; it went through the regular process and we launched the program a couple of years later. I continued to be involved with the program. Then few years down the line the department was once again interested in

developing a PhD program and they asked me to take a lead.... When the PhD program started there were limited number of senior faculty to teach the courses. Especially in some areas of specialization there was no one to teach the courses, therefore I stepped in. I took a sabbatical for a semester and went there to teach the first cohort. For the subsequent batches I was only able to go there during the summer, where I gave crash courses. This continued for several years, and I was also a dissertation supervisor for a few students. My involvement with AAU also connected me with other universities which invited me to help in their own programs.

This is an example where a one-off event like a conference serving as a gateway to a more sustained and impactful engagement. Belay shared a similar story. He was invited to a conference, the details of which he does not remember with certainty. However, for him, as it was for Reta, participating in the conference opened up the opportunity to interact with faculty members from Addis Ababa and other universities across the country. This interaction led to a lasting relationship where he is currently appointed as an honorary professor at one of the universities, while he also has extensive engagement with several others. It can be noted that inviting academics and researchers in the diaspora to participate in different academic events, and creating networking opportunities between participants – local, foreign and diaspora – can lead to fruitful and lasting engagements, as well as to institutional partnerships.

The entry points for engagement are quite diverse. Moges recalls a series of fortunate events leading him to his first engagement with AAU.

Someone I know who is from the city of Bahir Dar approached me and said he is collecting books to send them to Bahir Dar University. I gave him some books I had and

a couple of hundred bucks. But he got me thinking about what he was doing and the circumstances he described to me about the lack of resources in Ethiopian universities. While this was lingering in my mind, fortunately, I ran into an old friend of mine who was in the US for a short training. He is a faculty member at AAU. He told me that his department is starting a new program and invited me to teach there. I was hesitant but I said ok. When he returned, he sent me an email saying that the program in his department was still under development, but he wanted to put me in touch with another department where I could teach...that is how it started.

Others like Desta and Bisrat took advantage of funding opportunities to include Ethiopian institutions as partners in their or their department's grant applications. Abera used the opportunity from Transfer of Knowledge Through Expatriate Nationals (TOKTEN) – a UNDP initiative that supports diaspora engagement – to go back to Ethiopia right after the fall of the military regime in 1991.

As I was not able to go to my country for more than 19 years, I was very eager. So, I thought I should do something when I go instead of just going to visit. I applied to TOKTEN which covered my ticket and gave me 100 US dollars a day to cover my expenses... Facilitated by the Ethiopian Management Institute, I was able to give training for over 150 government officials. That was my first point of contact.

Taye, Maza and Habte were invited into it. Taye was invited by the department where he used to teach before he came to the US. When the department was developing a PhD program in his area of expertise, they contacted him and asked him to help in reviewing documents and refining the curriculum “because they knew me as most of them were my former colleagues, and

some of them even my students”. Similarly, Habte was invited “to assist in the development of PhD programs” by the then vice president of AAU. In a unique scenario, Maza was invited by the US National Science Foundation (NSF), along with a couple of other colleagues from other institutions to develop collaboration between US and African scientists, with specific focus on East Africa. The program had started in Ethiopia, continuing to other countries in the region. This gave Maza an opportunity to return to Ethiopia and to work with colleagues from Ethiopian universities.

In general, there is no one common way that engagement relations could be formed. Relationships originate at different points and develop through different paths. Some come from formal departmentally endorsed programs, others use external funding agencies as initiators and/or enablers. Some take off from a seemingly one-off event as their starting point, while others are the result of invitation by host universities, or their departments, in the partner country. Others are the product of continuous attempt by the diaspora academics who at their own time and cost go to the universities to offer their services.

### **5.3. Choosing Institutions to Work With**

What institution one engages with is likely to determine how smooth and effective the whole process could be. Characteristics of the institution including its location, reputation, staff composition, infrastructure and facilities, and institutional experiences all matter. Ethiopian universities across the four different generations<sup>4</sup> are quite different in many of these aspects.

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<sup>4</sup> Public universities in Ethiopia are classified in four groups (generations) according to their time of establishment. In the 1990s the country had only two Universities and several other junior institutions. The government launched its expansion program by the turn of the century adding six more universities by upgrading junior institutions, creating the eight-member first generation universities. With the launch of each five years education sector development program since, the government established a batch of universities with the latest (the fourth generation) being introduced in 2015, most of them starting to admit students in 2017/18 academic year.

Similarly, the institution's approach to diaspora engagement with respect to how it is positioned in the institutional structures and strategies makes a difference. Therefore, it is important to ask how diaspora academics choose the institutions they engage with. What criteria, if any, would they use to select the institution?

Research participants have indicated that they have chosen their partner institutions for different reasons. For quite a few of them it was easier to reconnect with their alma mater, where they knew the institution and possibly some of the faculty members. This works more for those who left the universities relatively recently. Wolde stresses the ease and benefits of going back to his alma mater by comparing it with his effort to establish relation with another university. He said:

When I went to AAU it was difficult for me to find the right people or to get a positive and quick response. I don't have any connection there... But when I went to my university, it was different. I know everything there: I know most of the faculty members who were my teachers, I know the administrative staff, I know the buildings, I know where to go or who to talk to when I need something.

Wolde leveraged his connection to establish a good relationship between his US institution and his alma mater, and he managed to redirect part of his institution's study abroad program (and the associated resources), from AAU to his alma mater. Four of the participants not only studied at the university they are currently working with, they also held teaching positions there before they left for the US. Therefore, as Taye puts it, they work with "former colleagues some of them even [former] students", making the whole interaction easier for them.

Going back to one's alma mater provides a critical resource – social capital – to deploy towards successful engagement. However, having a connection is not the only reason one may prefer to go back to their former institution; it could be an emotional one too. Abera shared one of his gratifying moments from the days he was a Fulbright scholar teaching a course in an Ethiopian institution:

I taught graduating students. And on the last day of the course as we were concluding, it just occurred to me that it was exactly 40 years ago that I was a senior getting ready to graduate, from the same institution. I told the students that and it was a nice way for me to give them some words of advice and encouragement...It was also a good moment for me personally. I always wanted to go back to AAU, and at that moment that realization meant a lot to me.

Quite a few other participants had some personal connections – a friend, a classmate, or a relative – who invited them into the institutions they end up having relationship. Lemlem recalls that “I knew the chair of the department [in my field]. He is related to me; he is actually married to someone in my family. When I went to Ethiopia to visit, he said ‘why don’t you come and give a talk’ and I said yes...That is how it all started”.

A personal connection to the area where a university is located provides another rationale for the choice of institution to engage with. One of my participants nostalgically told me that he very much wanted to teach at a university in his hometown, Ambo, but the university does not have a program in his area of expertise. Another participant, who is considering permanently settling in Ethiopia after retirement, is building a relationship with a university in the Amhara regional state, after working with AAU for a long time. Rationalizing his choice, he said that the

university is close to where he grew up, where his siblings and other relatives still live, and he hopes that being there will get him closer to ‘home’.

But he also raised accessibility as an important factor. He pointed out the convenience of the university as a base, being at reasonable distance from other major universities in the region. He sees that as an opportunity to share his knowledge and experiences with more than one institution. Besides, “there is flight to Addis Ababa three times a day”. Accessibility was also considered in Maza’s case. But for her, the choice was made by her institution – a top tier research intensive university - as her engagement was institutionally sponsored and externally financed. She explained how the Ethiopian institution she worked with was chosen:

[my university] would like to find what they consider a top institution. The view was that well, if we're looking for the top STEM institution, it should be one of the new science and technology universities either in Addis Ababa or in Adama. And because this was specifically [in my field] then Adama Science and Technology University was the one that had a program in [that area]. And also from [my institution’s] perspective, a university that's also close to Addis Ababa, in case people want to go there and you know, communicate and actually share in person, or you might expect power to be maintained at all times, all of those reasons.... so, we want to be either in Addis Ababa or close to Addis Ababa... So, it was based on more of a strategic university alliance.

It was similar for Wolde, who, when he moved to his current institution, there was already an established relationship with AAU. He joined the program for few years, until he managed to forge a better relationship with his alma mater. These two cases show that while institutional partnerships can be one way to embark on a transnational engagement, without the

individual faculty having to work through the process of forming and stabilizing the relations, the individual effort can reshape the institutional choice of partners as much as it is the case the other way around.

The only participant who said that he was deliberate and elaborate in choosing an Ethiopian institution to work with, was Ferede. When he planned to apply for a Fulbright Scholarship, he wanted to divide his time mainly between teaching and doing research. Besides, he wanted to involve Ethiopian students and faculty in his research project. Therefore, he carefully chose to find the institution that has a matching program where he can teach in his specific area of expertise and also where the research interest of the faculty was aligned with his project. His decision was based on where he could contribute the most. Explaining his choice, he shared:

I spent quite some time researching. I looked at university websites, I emailed people who could help me with information, I contacted departments. It took me really a long time to get to a decision. Then once I have decided, it was not easy to get the department to complete their side of the requirements... AAU is my alma mater, and I had worked there, I know several people there. I also have a lot of family in Addis. It would have been easier for me to go there. But I did not want to do that.

Another research participant whose engagement is coordinated through a US based diaspora professional association he belongs to, emphasized the role of the reputation of the leadership of the university they chose as a partner. His association is organizing a summer school in Ethiopia for graduate students. The way they chose the institution to host the summer school is largely influenced by the reputation of the university leadership, particularly the

president (now former president). When members of the association who had individual level engagement with Ethiopian institutions were invited to provide inputs, an overwhelming majority of them suggested Gondar University, citing the commitment of the leadership, and the president who was described as “proactively engaged” and “responsive and practical to different requests”. This is a clear example of the importance of a deliberate and proactive measures on the part of the university leadership to attract engagement from the diaspora. However, it has to be noted that this rested on the individual, not the institution. Now that the president has been replaced, it is relevant to ask whether the university will continue to maintain its reputation.

Speaking of reputation, a different kind of reputation makes AAU favored as a destination for engagement of the diaspora. One of the common ways of choosing an institution to engage with – going back to one’s alma mater – for instance puts AAU in clear advantage. As the oldest institution in the country AAU has produced a significant number of well-established academics in the diaspora, compared to most institutions that are established in the past decade or so. Just half of my research participants, for example, have studied at AAU.

Other factors that privilege AAU include its location. Addis Ababa is the economic powerhouse of the country, and the seat of the federal government, many diplomatic missions, international, government and non-government organizations, etc. It has a better record of accessibility, safety, and internet connection. These factors make AAU preferred for diaspora academics, who during their visit want to take care of multiple business, parallel to working with the university. Staying in Addis would make it easier for them to remain connected with their home institution, or to stay active in their professional and social responsibilities in the US. In addition, the international visibility of AAU as a national flagship institution, makes it more attractive for engagements through institutional partnerships and third party financed projects.

This AAU's advantage is encapsulated in the words of Maza who explaining the decision of her institution noted that they basically "want[ed] to be either in Addis Ababa or close to Addis Ababa." In fact, her institution initially established contact with AAU as a potential partner and later redirected because AAU did not have a program in the desired specialization. Indeed, this advantage is also, to some extent, shared by the other first-generation universities which are located in major cities across the country. In reference to his experience of working with AAU, one of my research participants remarked that "because they have too many partnerships and everybody keeps going to them, I think AAU has a fatigue. They are difficult to work with. They do not pay attention to the individual partnerships, especially when they are small like ours." Later he managed to take his partnership to Jimma University, where he said he received a far better reception.

In the current circumstances, particularly owing to infrastructural differences and disparity in the number and profile of their alumni, first generation universities would likely continue to benefit from diaspora engagement more than the newer institutions. This was one of the concerns for few of my research participants, expressed differently. Some have indicated that they wanted to connect with universities in their hometowns as they see sentimental and practical reasons of benefiting the local communities. Others want to see a more equitable distribution of the support that can be garnered from the diaspora. However, this has been challenged either because of the locational disadvantage of the institutions, the lack of matches between the specialization of diaspora academics and the programs in the preferred institutions, or limited capacity on the part of the institutions. Articulating this, Sisay shared:

So [this] has been one of the challenges. When you want to help, there are the universities that you feel like you want to help, especially the newer, less organized and less

resourced universities. You feel like there is more need there and you want to help. But they actually don't have the organizational maturity to take help. And it's universities like Addis Ababa University, and others who are rather well established that have a clear sense of what they need and what they don't need...Some of the universities that you think you should help, they can't... they don't have the capacity to take the help...Even if you offer your help they are too disorganized, or they don't differentiate between what they have and what they don't have, what they need and what they don't need. They give you a rather ambitious response. They will say like, well, we need help with everything, and then they would leave you like to make a plan for them and then you end up not being able to do anything about it.

This challenge resonates with others as well. One of the participants, for instance spoke about what he called “disoriented institutional priorities” in one of the second-generation universities where he spent a semester. His effort to link the university with key resources in the US was not as successful as he intended because the university could not give attention to some small details. The institution not only lacked a clear vision of how to respond to the resource deficiencies that are challenging it, but it also failed to pursue an already established relation that could have generated a considerable resource to help in improving a newly established graduate program. Instead the research participant noticed that the leadership of the institution was much more concerned with the parallel political process within the university to which a greater deal of time and resources were dedicated. He has witnessed the university organizing a series of festivities all celebrating political events, while he could hardly find anyone in the university to respond to the “small amount of resources needed to mobilize a considerable resource and to build a lasting relationship”. This is observed in other instances as well where universities are

occupied in activities that are tied to political currents, sometimes even at the expense of their primary duties.

These reflections are constitutive of a paradox for the newer institutions: they need all the support they could get because they have limited capacity, but then they can hardly tap into the potential available through diaspora engagement because they have a limited capacity to do so. This is not only a lost opportunity, but it is also a destructive force as it minimizes the experience of the diaspora academics who have engaged with those institutions, and inhibitive to those who aspire to do the same.

#### **5.4. Modes of Engagement**

During his semester in Ethiopia, Ferede taught classes, facilitated a series of seminars for graduate students, engaged in collaborative research with Ethiopian students and faculty, mentored young faculty on producing publishable materials, and advised the leadership of the department and the university on key issues. Meanwhile, he has also mobilized resources in the form of a research grant from his US institution, benefiting participating faculty and students in the form of per diem, and the whole department with the purchase of laboratory equipment and supplies. While similar stories are shared by those who had a relatively longer time to stay in Ethiopia, all the research participants have reported being engaged in multiple activities, mostly occurring in parallel. When they travel to Ethiopia to teach a crash course or leading a group of students for study abroad, for instance, they also organize seminars on specific topics in their area of expertise, they engage in conversations with (advise) graduate students, and more often than not they also take some books to the host department. In addition to activities within the universities, some have also offered their services (e.g. training and advisory) to various government and non-government agencies.

Diaspora engagement takes different forms across the three major functions of higher education institutions, namely teaching, research and services. Additionally, the diaspora academics also support Ethiopian institutions in other areas such as mobilizing resources, creating networks, and offering advisory support for the leadership. While it is possible to identify and characterize specific forms of engagement, at least for the purposes of discussion and policy considerations, in practice it is important to stress the multiplicity and overlapping nature of these activities.

#### ***5.4.1. Teaching***

Teaching is an area of the higher education function where the highest level of engagement is observed among the research participants. The most common form of engagement in this category is instruction or delivery of courses, often in graduate programs where senior faculty with the right specialization are in short supply. Courses would be scheduled to be delivered in a condensed and intensive manner, manageable for short travel by the diaspora academics. There have been times when classes were arranged for four hours a day six days a week to complete a course in two or three weeks which otherwise would have taken a whole semester. Although it has made it possible to make effective use of time to take advantage of the expertise of the diaspora academics when they “go home even for a short vacation”, it was also problematic in some cases.

There are two aspects to this particular challenge. First, the nature of the courses delivered might require some time between classes (or different components) to practice and internalize before moving on to the next level. Second, the level of preparedness of students was a source of concern for most of the research participants who taught courses. This is indeed an overall concern repeatedly reflected about the Ethiopian higher education. Sisay recalls an

incident when he agreed to teach a course which involved heavy quantitative analysis and requiring some programming component.

In the spring I emailed the department chair asking if the students have taken a course that was a prerequisite for the one I was going to teach in the summer. He responded that they were taking the course in the spring semester... When I got there, on the first day I tried to recapitulate some of the major theories in the prerequisite course. But the response from the students was very cold. I thought they just finished this course and maybe they were thinking that I was kind of patronizing them...you know. So, I decided to jump into the content of my course. But soon enough I realized that they really don't know all the important theories from the previous course which were very necessary to move forward...Long story short, I had to take the first week to cover the basics of the theory course, and I ended up extending my vacation by one week, I even had to change my flight...But I am not sure about the benefit of such an arrangement.

The next time he gave this course in the same arrangement, Sisay said he sent some materials as a required pre-class reading. But this too did not work out for him as there was some communication breakdown and the students did not get the readings in time. So, he had to go through the same process. He describes his experience as frustrating.

It made me doubt my entire decision. I planned for it, I paid ticket and went there, while I could have done something else, you know I could have done some work which will have some other kind of impact on my career, like a research for publication...so I decided to go there and I am standing in a class where I could not be sure if the students were

getting anything from me. I could not be sure if I am getting some contents across, or if I am just wasting everybody's time.

Participation in curriculum and program development was another common form of engagement directed at improving teaching. Reflective of the general expansion process, Ethiopian universities have launched numerous graduate programs in the past decade or so (Bishaw & Melesse, 2017; Semela, 2011). As a result, expert support in new areas of specialization was needed in order to make these programs as up to date as they could be. Just about half of the research participants have, one way or another, contributed in program/curriculum development or review. Taye, Bisrat, Reta, Ferede and Habte had extensive involvement in this regard. Bisrat's experience is different from the others not only in its scope but also its coverage of undergraduate curriculum.

Study abroad and student exchange programs are other ways diaspora academics seek to support teaching efforts in Ethiopian universities. Quite a few of the research participants took advantage of such programs organized by their institutions, in some cases they initiated one. For instance, when his department was planning for an international collaboration program that included research and student exchange at graduate level, Desta strongly advocated for Ethiopia to be included among the prospective partner countries. He finally managed to have AAU to be included as a partner institution. What is unfortunate is that while 18 students from Desta's institution traveled to AAU, there was only one student in the other direction. While financial constraint has an undeniable bearing, Desta believes that this serious imbalance is mainly the product of lack of responsiveness on the part of AAU.

AAU students are expected to cover only their tickets, everything else was covered by the program [which is externally funded]. There were also some other external opportunities to tap into if there was a proactive push for it from AAU's side.

But the program was beneficial for AAU in other ways. Desta himself on his couple of tours, and few other American colleagues of his were able to be involved in giving classes, delivering talks and conducting research seminars. This has been the case for others as well. During their trip with students, they get involved in different activities, while they take advantage of their cost covered by their institution, or through external funding. As such the delivery of lectures, seminars, workshops etc. has become one of the most common forms of engagement made possible by the short time requirement.

#### **5.4.2. Research**

In general research and scholarship, compared to teaching, are underserved through diaspora engagement. Nonetheless, there are different activities in this area including research collaboration, graduate student supervision, mentorship, and organization of summer schools. Only a couple of examples are noted by the research participants as efforts in collaborative research, both of them unsuccessful. The idea for both attempts was for diaspora academics to partner with Ethiopian faculty, in collaboratively produce research. Ferede had a small research grant from his institution in the US with which he attempted to involve Ethiopian faculty and graduate students during his sabbatical. Similarly, Taye planned to conduct research and produce a publication with Ethiopian counterparts at AAU. However, the process did not move forward beyond an agreement on the basic idea. Both initiatives stagnated after some time without producing any meaningful outcomes. Among other things, the lack of attention to research in the

Ethiopian academia, and the association of any efforts with immediate financial return are cited as the causes of the difficulty in pushing forward with research collaborations.

Partnering with recent doctoral graduates to help them further develop their research into a publication has been another form of engagement reported. This is indeed more of mentorship than a research collaboration. Belay has a noteworthy experience of mentoring an emerging faculty in his area of specialization (in the medical field). He describes how they work together as:

When she comes across a difficult case, she sends it to me describing the conditions and symptoms of the patient, the diagnosis they thought, the treatments they tried, etc. all the necessary information. Then I share that with colleagues who are from different universities and hospitals here in the US and in Europe, it is more of an online community for this purpose. So, we discuss and suggest the best course we think. And she takes that and discuss it with her team and also bring it to her class.

Practically Belay is connecting his mentee with the online community of learning he is a part of and plays the key role of bridging the Ethiopian context with the practices elsewhere.

On the other hand, while she receives emails from Ethiopian students seeking her guidance, and that she is interested in mentoring, Maza notes that one of the biggest challenges is that she does not get emails with specific questions.

If I were to receive an email saying this is the research I do, this is where I am and this is the thing I am struggling with what do you suggest I do, or something like that, you know a specific research question, that would be interesting. Of course it would be difficult for

me to help them remotely because I would have to know how they did their experiment, still that would make a good conversation. But often I receive a very generic email saying something like ‘can you provide me advice?’ I would think advice about what, you know? I would simply write them some general words of encouragement.

This can be taken as an example of lack of communication skills on how students and faculty could seek mentorship from diaspora academics.

Two research participants also have ongoing initiatives of organizing a summer school/advanced studies institute. Both are focused on STEM education and target advancing research among graduate students and faculty. Both have funding support from American institutions and are open for graduate students as well as faculty members. One of them occurs on a rolling basis (once in Addis Ababa and then in other East African cities) while the other is permanently at Gondar University.

The most common engagement in the area of research and scholarship is in the form of graduate student supervision. In addition to being heavily involved in the design of the program Taye has taught and supervised doctoral students at his alma mater. He recounts his impressive achievement, with a very humble tone.

After the program was launched and the course work was finished, there was the challenge of finding dissertation supervisors. What I did was I asked four other colleagues of mine here [in his US institution] and they agreed. So, the five of us took two students each, the first cohort was 10 students... Since then I was chairing at least two students every year, and actually I have chaired a little over 10 students to completion.

Many others (e.g. Desta, Lemlem, Ferede, Habte, Kasa, Abera, and Reta) have all supervised graduate students. A major short coming in the process is, however, the lack of systemic approach to use diaspora engagement to improve in house capacity for graduate student supervision. This would have been possible through pairing diaspora academics and local faculty. Such an approach could have at least two benefits. First, it could be a training opportunity for junior local faculty who would be co-supervisors with a more senior academic from the diaspora. Through the process, the in-house supervisory capacity can be bolstered with more experience to junior faculty. Second, by letting the local junior faculty take more responsibility related to the day to day supervision, there would be less burden on the senior ones, so they could take up more students.

Nonetheless, one of the challenges in this regard was related to disparities in institutional rules. Some diaspora academics were required by their home institutions to have some form of affiliation with the Ethiopian universities where they intend to supervise students. The Ethiopian universities – particularly the two science and technology universities – were requested if they could offer an adjunct appointment for members of the diaspora academic. The universities did not offer and clear actionable response, perhaps because they did not have a clear institutional guideline on the specific request. In addition, some Ethiopian universities do not have the practice of co-supervisorship, which made the pairing of diaspora-local faculty difficult. As a result capacity building through pairing of local and diaspora academics in student supervision could not be realized to its potential.

Another challenge was related to how to bring the graduate students and the supervising diaspora together, particularly for those fields that are equipment intensive. Sisay, who had an extensive involvement as a coordinator of a network of academics in the STEM fields, remarked:

For teaching classes, you could go and do intensive teaching, in weeks, may be a month. But for research, a lot of people felt like, you need to spend a minimum length of time with your graduate students, making them familiar with your research direction, having them learn from your lab and things like that; getting them on board. And you could do this one of two ways. One is to take some university faculty or researcher from here to Ethiopia for an extended time, like, say, six months. That was impossible, because the people here have their regular life and responsibilities with their institutions. Unless you take a sabbatical, summer is as much as you can take, right? And you cannot rely on sabbaticals to these ends. And the other alternative is, once the student is done with coursework bring him/her to the lab of the professor here, say for six months or a year, and once the student is good enough to do things with minimal supervision, they can go back to Ethiopia and continue remotely.

Both of these arrangements, however, assume that the Ethiopian institutions would have the required equipment and the necessary infrastructure for remote engagement. For many that is doubtful. Besides, with the second option brain drain was a major concern. University officials were skeptic that such an arrangement would open the door for faculty members who might choose not to return to Ethiopia, especially after having stayed in the US or Europe. As a compromise another alternative was proposed from the Ethiopian side (by the Ministry of Science and Technology<sup>5</sup>) to include a third country university – from India and China – as a

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<sup>5</sup> As part of its plan to improve the role of science and technology in the country's development, in early 2010s the Ethiopian government established two universities of science and technology which were put under the purview of the Ministry of Science and Technology, while other public universities are generally under the Ministry of Education. As of 2018 all public universities are organized under the newly established Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

collaborator. Students would then have a block of research experience in those universities before returning to Ethiopia to continue their project with remote supervision from the diaspora academic. As Sisay continues to explain, this also had some issues:

This would have been a logistical challenge. Because, if you want someone in the Ethiopian diaspora, say a professor in a US university, to do this, you would expect them to go to the Chinese or Indian lab to join and train the student. Right? Otherwise the Chinese or Indian professor who would be the temporary supervisor must be doing a very similar work with the one in the US... So, the most convenient option, which would also have been more beneficial to the students was to send them to the US or Europe for some time as research scholars or visiting scholars... And, we were discussing about reaching out to some universities here ask them set up some kind of tuning agreements to do this, but the Ministry was against it, because they were afraid students would just not return. And that kind of infuriated some of the people back here.

This whole discussion was interrupted by the political turmoil in Ethiopia which not only discouraged collaborations between the diaspora and the Ethiopian government, but also due to the continued interruption of internet making communication very difficult. The attention of all government bodies was also on responding to circumstances in the country and hence follow up became infeasible. Since the change in administration the two science and technology universities are reorganized under the newly formed Ministry of Science and Higher Education, effectively resetting all previous communications with the Ministry of Science and Technology. Nonetheless, the experience of this group of academics remains a valuable lesson for future endeavors.

### **5.4.3. Services**

Training is a typical example of service delivered through diaspora-higher education engagement. Nega, Taye, Desta, Bisrat, Kasa, Belay and Abera have all been involved in offering trainings, through their engagement with Ethiopian universities. Trainings geared towards the professional development of faculty members are commonly offered in parallel with other forms of engagement. Nega and Bisrat can be typical examples with the ‘training of trainers’ they offered in their respective fields for representatives of multiple universities from around the country. Both of have been enabled to carry out national scale initiatives through funding from US sources.

What can be seen in the same light is the advisory services diaspora academics provide to university administration, either at institutional level or to its units. Taye, Reta and Belay are good examples in this regard, who have served at different advisory services. Ferede serves on the review committee for the annual in-house research conference at one of the universities where he had his sabbatical.

Other forms of services to universities include mobilization of resources and building networks. Mobilization of resources extends from the practice of donating books, journals and other materials (which is common for all research participants, some of them in far significant amounts), to the building of computer centers, to the purchase of a power generator and to the donation of state of the art lab equipment for all universities in the country. Similarly, diaspora academics leverage their position in their US institutions to build networks and connect Ethiopian universities with their US colleagues. A good example is Taye, who, as indicated earlier, managed to convince four of his colleagues to volunteer to remotely supervise doctoral students at AAU. So did Bisrat; for years his American colleagues have been involved in

teaching graduate courses in a newly established program, until Ethiopia had that capacity in-house. Others are involved in professional networks, associations and organizations, and use their position there to help in resource mobilization and networking towards support for graduate programs.

Services beyond the higher education institution, on the other hand, can take different forms. Diaspora academics get involved in the community service mission of the university when the latter is aligned with a cause they are personally committed to. Financial support to students from the lowest economic background, girls' education, community health services, support for orphan and vulnerable children, etc. have been identified as some of the areas where diaspora academics have initiatives, in which partnership with Ethiopian universities is viable and efficient.

Trainings targeting government employees from different agencies have been delivered through tripartite agreements involving third party development partners such as the World Bank and UNDP. Desta and Abera have been involved in large scale trainings supported by the two organizations respectively, as part of the civil service capacity development programs of the government of Ethiopia. In the past few years Kasa has been partnering with universities and government agencies in offering free training to technocrats and bureaucrats that could lead to internationally recognized certification. (the training is free, but participants need to pay to the concerned certifying institution to take the exam and obtain their certification, should they wish to do so.) Habte, for his part, has spent more than a decade supporting the automation of public services.

In the last two years, following the changing political circumstances in the country, different ministries are becoming more open to the participation of the diaspora, particularly for professionals and academics. As such, ministries are creating different arrangements through which members of the diaspora can offer their services. One good example of this – and a pioneer at that – is the Advisory Council of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. The advisory council is composed of local and diaspora academics (including some of the participants of this research), and it is headed by a professor of higher education in the diaspora. Its nine working groups are each co-chaired by one local and one diaspora academics. It has created a platform not only for the diaspora to offer its services but also for the local faculty to engage in meaningful conversations where they can provide a more concrete contextual knowledge and their diaspora counterparts can share their experience of practices in their respective areas. Together they can help the ministry direct its activities well informed by both local realities and global trends.

In summary, as indicated in table 8, engagement across the teaching, research and services functions of higher education institutions takes different forms. Acknowledgement of this diversity of forms is crucial for creating the negotiated space that can help find the most suitable and agreeable timing, format and areas of delivery. Engagement in teaching, although a more common form than the other two, has issues that can be addressed through adopting flexible institutional practices. Engagement in research is undermined by the overall reality that research has limited practice in Ethiopian higher education. The system is not designed to reward those who produce research, as there is also limited resource allocated for research.

**Table 8***Forms of Engagement Across University Functions*

Teaching	Instruction/course delivery, student exchange/study abroad, curriculum/program development or review, lectures, workshops, seminars
Research	Research collaboration, graduate student supervision, mentorship, summer schools/advanced institutes
Services	Trainings, community engagement, advisory services, building networks, mobilizing resources, developing facilities,

There are several ways services are offered by the diaspora academics either to the universities, or through the universities to the broader society. The latter often require the involvement of third parties internal or external to the national system. In what appears to be a reflection of the trend at a system level (Legesse et al., 2019), research participants have noted the limited opportunities for services within and through universities. There are limited resources and wavering institutional commitment to service, compared to the other major functions of higher education. As such research participants have indicated that more often than not, they offer their services unsolicited. Even when they do so, they do not always receive an encouraging response.

**5.5. Why Engage with Ethiopia?**

In order to better understand how diaspora academics make meaning of their engagement, I asked them what their motivation is. Particularly acknowledging the different challenges, both in their engagement with Ethiopian universities as well as their career and personal life here in the US, I inquired about what gets them going, and underpins their

continued commitment to Ethiopia. Obviously, the first question is what drives such transnational engagement, regardless of where the engagement is directed to.

#### ***5.5.1. Professional Reasons***

Understandably, passion for one's profession, and the desire to see it developed across different geographic areas, is one strong driver. Sisay attests to this: "generally, I am interested in engineering and science education. And especially I'm passionate about providing good undergraduate education, irrespective of the country. That is one reason I am involved in all of this." Bisrat has a similar opinion. When he traveled to Ethiopia and noticed that students were taking a curriculum which can only be considered 'outdated' here in the US and elsewhere, he took it upon himself to do something about it. He remarked:

When I saw what they were teaching them I noticed that it is the same thing I studied a long time ago when I was a student there. But that is no longer taught elsewhere; it is outdated... Students learn only theories and they graduate with out getting any practice...I was concerned about that.

On the other hand, transnational engagements have a positive impact on one's professional development. As an assistant professor on a tenure track Wolde is keenly conscious about that. "Evaluation for tenure is based on teaching, research and service. I can consider this [his engagement with Ethiopian institutions] as service." Senior professors concur. Abera noted that transnational activities, especially through prestigious and competitive scholarships as the Fulbright, are important for promotion, although by the time he went on Fulbright he was already tenured and full professor.

Ferede talks about how happy his school is with his international engagement, because it adds to their international reputation. He cites this recognition of his school as one of the factors that helped him secure university level faculty research grant multiple times. Consistent with the literature (Leask, 2013; Proctor, 2015; Rumbley & DeWit, 2019) he also makes the point that his international engagement enriches his teaching. He said “it is also very useful for your teaching and for your students. You will be able to bring them your diverse experiences, not just what you read, but also what you know practically. That makes the class more interesting.”

Two points can be noted here. First, professional development is not always a top priority. An overwhelming majority of the research participants are tenured professors. Even for those who are not there yet, getting tenure and being promoted is not the only goal. After acknowledging that he could potentially use his engagement with Ethiopia for his promotion, Wolde remarks that this is not his main motivation, implying something more being of effect. Second, professional reasons do not necessarily associate one with their country of birth, and therefore do not explain the specific focus on Ethiopia. Several of the participants have noted that they do have occasional engagements with countries other than Ethiopia. However, Ethiopia is indisputably their priority with far more intensive, persistent and deliberate engagement. As Desta puts it:

You go all these places [listing some of the countries he has had engagements] mainly for the professional benefits, to get exposure, to interact and network with others in the field, to sometimes form collaborations, or may be to get some financial benefits out of it. But going to Ethiopia is different. It is far beyond all these things...

This is a notion shared by other participants too. It follows, therefore, to ask why engaging with Ethiopia is unique for them, and what helps them persist.

### ***5.5.2. Social and Cultural Connections***

The possibility of combining social and professional activities all in one trip is a clear reason of convenience for the Ethiopian academic diaspora to prefer Ethiopia as a destination of their international engagement. Several of the research participants have confirmed that they concurrently plan for professional engagements when they travel to Ethiopia for social or personal reasons, or vice versa. Maseb's experience could be a good example, although a failed attempt.

Back in 2005/06 I was hoping to spend my sabbatical in Ethiopia. I waited for seven years since becoming a fulltime faculty to apply for Fulbright. I was in contact with AAU to be my host. But one day, while I was in California at NASA Ames doing a summer fellowship, a lady from Fulbright called me and told me that they did not get a strong response from AAU. She asked me if I wanted to go to other African countries. I said I only wanted to go to Ethiopia. You know, that was the plan to take my wife and my son. I wanted my son to spend one school year in Ethiopia, to learn the language and the culture of his parents. So that was where I wanted to go, not anywhere else. But it did not work out.

Maseb ended up spending his sabbatical at a US Army research facility. The presence of a social incentive juxtaposed with the professional one made a strong enough appeal for him to choose to go to Ethiopia. But when the social incentive was no longer viable, he rather chose to stay in the US.

Maza, has worked with institutions in quite a few countries in Africa. When I asked if working with Ethiopian institutions is easier for her, she notes that she feels she is much more popular in Ethiopia than in other places. “If I have to email someone, there is a better chance that I would be recognized in Ethiopia. You know something like ‘oh this is professor Maza I should respond to her’. But this has changed only in the past few years.” She counts on her social and cultural capital to have an easier time working with Ethiopian institutions where she said she knows a lot of people on a personal level and if she doesn’t know who to reach out to looking for something, she would ask for referrals. She had several instances that she gets no response from the individuals she contacted, and she would email someone she knows with the case and that person would call the concerned individual to get the communication going forward. Besides, her knowledge of Amharic has also been “of great assistance, despite fairly limited”.

Others refer to the uncomfortable experiences in their social and professional life here in the US, as a point of comparison to see the benefits of engagement with Ethiopia. Being socially and culturally a stranger here makes them realize how accepted they are in Ethiopia. Habte said:

Over here in the US you are always being questioned; you are always the other; you are always the foreigner, especially in the south. Making a bigger impact is limited by those deficiencies... My name alone will generate questions... So, you are always being second guessed. In Ethiopia, you do it in full.

The lack of social and cultural belongingness in the US, reinforces one’s desire to get more attached with their home country. One way of strengthening this attachment, is through a professional engagement where one could garner better results not only because it happens in an

unsaturated environment, but also because the external socio-cultural barriers that undermine their productivity and achievement are not in force. Therefore, the social and cultural connection with where one's international engagement occurs, tends to maximize their professional satisfaction.

### ***5.5.3. Love of Country***

When I asked Ferede why he engages with Ethiopia, he responded with the typical Amharic expression, *eh'e!* (አሁኑ!), which can only be translated as 'isn't it obvious/ how do you even ask?'. This is more or less a common response I received from most of the participants. He paused for a moment as I waited for a response, perhaps thinking how to frame and verbalize his answer. "Let me tell you a story" he said and began by recapping how he came to the US in early 1970s, how he was forced to stay despite his wishes to return, and that he lives with guilt about not being able to go back and serve his country in his 'prime age'. He continued:

I love my country but due to my involvement with the student movement, I could not have gone back to Ethiopia as long as the Derg was in power. I missed my country so much that in 1988 I decided to do the second best thing: to get as close as I could. At the time I was working on a book and I decided to make part of it on Ethiopian refugees in Sudan. There were many of them due to the civil war. So, when I was studying for my PhD I had a Sudanese classmate who later returned to his country and took a position as a vice chancellor of a university. So, I reached out to him, I applied for a research leave from my institution, and coordinated my travel. I went there and stayed six months. I traveled to the refugee camps and the rebel bases by the border, I interacted with many people among the refugees, aid workers and even rebel fighters... At one point I even had a chance to travel into Ethiopia, to parts of the country that were controlled by the rebel

groups... But few hours before we reached our destination, Naqfa [present day Eritrea], an air strike started, and we had to return back.

Ferede uses this story to establish that his love of country that drove him into the Sudanese desert is still what is driving him to do what he does. While his case is a peculiarly elaborate one, love of country is a common theme running through all the conversations I had with research participants, although differently expressed. Many of them told me that the love of country and commitment to serving society are values they grew up with. Among other things, Reta particularly credits his childhood memories of conversations he had with his father about patriotism and love of country to have shaped him. He strongly attaches these values with his ‘Ethiopianness’, and his duties to preserve it.

You would not understand the significance of Ethiopia until you go to other African countries that have lived through colonialism. Everywhere you go you would see the high regard African brothers, and even African Americans, have for Ethiopia... But this is not to mean that Ethiopia is a finished project; it doesn’t mean it is problem-free.

He goes on to say that to help build this country is to help preserve its significance in the world. Lemlem, on her part associates her strong sense of service with two major aspects of her childhood. As the oldest of a large family with 11 siblings, she has started taking care of serving their interests from early on. She says she learned the importance of service as she had to help her mother, who otherwise “would have not been able to sustain the family”. In addition, in a time when girls were meant more for marriage and motherhood than for a career, her progressive father encouraged and supported her to take her education seriously telling her that it was the way she can help her country. She shared:

When I finished high school, the country was in political turmoil and university students were at the forefront. My father did not want that for me. So, he wanted me to go to Europe for university education. I got a scholarship. When I left for Europe, he wrote a note and gave it to me as a reminder of what is important for me to keep in mind as I struggle in a new place. It was about the importance of country, that I should return and serve my country, my people...I will show you the letter... After six months of intensive language training I had to decide what I wanted to study. The biggest question for me then was what should I study so that I can be of the highest service when I return back to Ethiopia...That is how I decided to join medical school. It was difficult because I had to spend more time studying academic language before I started the program, but it was important for me.

She opened her phone and read to me part of the two pages letter her father wrote to her some 45 years ago (which she recently scanned into her phone). She then told me that few years later while she was still in Europe studying, she received the news that her father passed away.

It was devastating. But I swallowed it and continued taking my exams. I passed. Barely, but I passed... I have this strong upbringing that follows me even today as an academician...I always carry the message: 'you should come back and give people not your money but your knowledge'... I tell this same thing to my daughter, you know.

This is demonstrative of the impact of upbringing which is also shared by others. For some it comes from reading and hearing war stories, for others from inspiring teachers, for others from family interaction, and for many from the recognition that their success is the product of many people who have helped them along their way.

#### ***5.5.4. If not Me, then Who?***

Ten of my research participants specifically said that they feel ‘indebted’ in reference to the fact that they have received free education all the way from kindergarten to college. At the face of it, this speaks to the public and academic debate about free higher education, particularly whether higher education shall be considered a public or private good (Hensley et al., 2013; Marginson, 2007, 2011). The provision of free higher education is commonly seen as grounded in its public nature. Hence, it is implied that whoever gets free education is expected to pay back, among other means, by serving and paying tax. This conception is reflected in the views of the research participants. As Sisay puts it: “Wherever I am now, I spent my formative years in Ethiopia, I was educated at no cost and I still identify myself as an Ethiopian. I feel like I am indebted, and I need to pay back”. This comprehension is further magnified by two factors, which are well summarized in the following statement by Moges:

We had free education at the expense of the taxpayers, most of whom were very poor. Even today more than 85% of the Ethiopian population lives in rural areas, mostly uneducated, and barely making a living. But they pay taxes with which they offer us free education. I remember even people who did not have children paid education tax. You would realize the importance of this especially when you come here and see how much people pay for education, when you see the burden of debt graduates come out of college with... Well, if we have received such generosity from the older generation, we should also pass it on to the next one with all the knowledge and the expertise we have.

This is an understanding that resonated with many others, despite the lack of consensus in the literature (e.g. Hübner, 2003; Psacharopoulos & Papakonstantinou, 2005) to ground this transactional view. Few of the participants went further to say that even if they had paid for their

education, it wouldn't have changed their sense of duty to serve. They made the point that education is only one aspect of a person's formation. Many people remain behind not because they are not smart enough, but because they are paying sacrifice for the few of us to succeed, Lemlem stressed.

Some of the research participants connected their sense of duty to specific aspects of their personal experience. Kasa remembers his time in high school when he had to be at the gate of his school library so early in the morning to get access to some books. He shared:

I remember when I was in 11th grade we had a physics reference book we all wanted to read. The problem is that we had only one copy for the whole school. We need it, those who were preparing for school leaving exam [grade 12] need it. And there is no way we could have accessed it other than through the school library – no internet, no public library, nothing. So, some days I used to go to the library to queue as early as 5am in the morning, so I get a chance to work with that book for two hours.

Going to Europe and seeing the abundance of books and other resources formed his motivation “to be in service of others in [his] capacity”. Nega shares a similar story from the time he was an engineering student at AAU.

Because laboratory equipment was limited, every class had a two-hour shift per week to access the lab. Until the next week, if a student wanted to try something, or if he/she had a question, the only thing they can do is to imagine it, to contemplate it in their heads. Otherwise, they cannot go and try it in the lab. Even for that two-hour per week, there would be five or six students per station, sometimes even more depending on the size of the class. So, some of the students would only stand there and see while others use the

equipment...when I came here, I saw that the labs are open 24 hours, students can go and use the equipment any time they want.

Having gone through such resources constrained learning environment became a drive for these diaspora academics to try and make it easier for others. Later, Nega applied for an NSF grant to introduce a newly reengineered, low-cost version of that same lab equipment to Ethiopian universities. He managed to distribute the trial-stage equipment and provide training on its use to 30 Ethiopian universities.

At a broader scale, some of the research participants have indicated that their motivation to engage with Ethiopia originates from what they perceive to be problematic in the elitist Ethiopian public space. For example, quite a few of them have noted that ethnic politics is driving the country into increasingly complicated problems. As Lemlem shares:

Everything is ethnicized these days, even the universities. It is becoming a source of so much violence. I never knew such a thing growing up...I hate it, it is terrible...So, I thought to myself: what can I do about it? I know what I can do might not change a lot, but it is better than simply sitting and being unhappy about it for ever

Wolde refers to the problem in education. He noted that the quality of education has alarmingly declined, and we all complain about it. "If we, those who are educated, do not do anything about it, then there is no point in complaining." Ferede concurs. "When we were in university, we marched for the causes of the public. That was what the student movement was all about... There is no reason we should stop so far as those problems persist...but may be not in the same way." The underlining idea here is that as the educated elite of the country, diaspora

academics could leverage their position to engage with the country – through universities and beyond – to contribute their share in addressing major problems of the country.

Overall, the narrative of making the world a better place is an ultimate motivator for people. Having had the privilege of receiving higher education in a society where access to education is extremely limited, the research participants seem to carry the burden of having to contribute. The question of where, specifically to focus one's effort of doing so is dictated by several factors: personal, social, cultural, intellectual, political, etc. The question is, however, philosophical as much as it is practical. For instance, does it make more sense to put one's efforts in a country with which they have some connection or in a country with the highest need? Maza eloquently grapples with this dilemma as follows:

Because so many people contribute to the country that is close to them and not necessarily the one that is most needy, if Ethiopians in the diaspora don't contribute to Ethiopia, then no one else will. And therefore, it will be left out. Because, you know, the Mexican Americans are going to be contributing to Mexico and the Nigerians in Germany are going to be contributing to Nigeria... because there is that nationalism sort of ingrained throughout the world, then in a way one has no choice but to also be somewhat nationalistic. Otherwise, your country of origin will be left out... The other thing is that I can speak Amharic and I can travel the countryside with reasonable ease. I can get doors open to me in Ethiopia, in a way that I could not if I tried to contribute to Bangladesh or Peru, right? I mean, no one's going to pay attention to me in those places. So, I might as well leverage what I have by contributing to Ethiopia... Now, philosophically I am of the view that we should contribute ultimately to the most needy country. But I also see that my effectiveness is going to be highest in Ethiopia, and if

people like me do not contribute to Ethiopia, because other people do not have the same view of the world as I do, then Ethiopia would get left behind.

Inherent in this dilemma is the tension between the defining characterization of diaspora as having strong ties with and continued commitment to home country (Cohen, 1997, 2008; Safran, 1991), and the notion of borderless knowledge as it is widely and rhetorically advocated for. While diasporic nationalism can be articulated within the global knowledge diaspora who perform cross-cultural and cross-national interactions (Kim, 2011) it is increasingly becoming a strong theme in the global stage. This is increasingly exacerbated by the growing sense of populism – with nativism at its core – which is challenging the wavering global knowledge economy (Roberts, 2009) by further setting barriers for free mobility of knowledge and people: students and academics (Altbach & DeWit, 2015, 2017; Hammond, 2016; Mathies & Weimer, 2018). However, this tension is not entirely negative, one might argue. It can be seen as generating stronger ties between [developing] countries and their knowledge diaspora.

#### **5.5.5. Outcomes**

Anticipated and realized outcomes of engagement efforts constitute another set of incentives that shape the experience of engagement. Several of the participants refer to the outcomes of their engagement efforts as to what motivates them to keep doing it – the number of graduate students they advised, number of people they have trained, the classes they taught, the resources they mobilized, the successful conferences and seminars they organized, etc. They underscore that the outcomes of engagement with Ethiopia are magnified and become more attractive and meaningful, compared to what one can do here in the US. This is how Habte described it:

In the US, you can make a student learn, you can make a department better. I teach new courses all the time. I'm, for instance, currently teaching [a course that is the first ever] in my university. You make a difference, but when you do it in Ethiopia the impact is significantly larger...maybe tenfold.

Taye also agreed with this. He explained that:

This country has all the expertise you can think of, so unless you have a uniquely new idea, a groundbreaking one, you have little to no chance of making recognizable impact with what you do. In Ethiopia, everything is new, everything is a virgin. You can really make a huge impact with small effort.

In addition to this relativity of outcomes, the personal, social and cultural connections the research participants have with Ethiopia, as discussed earlier, give another magnifying effect to the outcome of their engagement. Their efforts are often reinforced by rewarding interactions they have with the beneficiaries of those engagement activities. Most research participants emphasized the energizing effect of positive feedback from students. Desta said, “When a student tells me that he has learned a lot from me, and that he wouldn’t have gotten that if I did not go there, that is the ultimate satisfaction that keeps me hooked”.

The overall consensus is best captured in Habte’s expression that “there is no greater joy in life than impacting somebody else's life”, and that impact is significantly multiplied when it is in Ethiopia. Therefore, it can be posited that the pursuit of happiness through making a meaningful impact in the lives of one’s countrymen and women is at the core of the transnational engagement of the Ethiopian academic diaspora.

It is important, however, to note that engagement for the research participants is not a source of only positive emotional rewards. It has its costs: financial as well as emotional. At times it could be a source of frustration, dissatisfaction and embarrassment. Taye said:

Sometimes you have to scale down your ambition because the reception you get from the other side does not match your aspiration. I have tried to work with several faculty members in Ethiopia and I noticed that their priorities do not match my motivation to engage with them. It is hard to find someone who goes beyond what is expected of them... And it is important that you go in their pace, you don't want to stretch things too much...I feel very bad that I could not have contributed as much as I want due to this and other reasons.

It is not uncommon for diaspora academics to be misunderstood as pushing for personal gains as they try to make contributions. Habte recalls the time he was accused of squandering public money when he invited 15 professors from different countries to participate in a conference which included the launching of the PhD program they had been working together to develop. "I literally cried" he said. But when the conference was started and they saw what has been done they came and apologized to me".

Some research participants went out of their way to convince their American colleagues to help in their effort to support academic initiatives in Ethiopia. There were instances when those efforts were met with no satisfactory response from the Ethiopian side. This was the case with Ferede and Desta, for instance. In addition to the emotional cost, such circumstances damage the social capital and professional credibility of those involved. The various challenges

discussed in chapter six indicate that engaging with Ethiopian institutions is frustrating in many ways, as it is rewarding.

#### **5.5.6. *Brain Drain, What Brain Drain?***

Noting that brain drain is deemed to be a serious problem to many developing countries, including Ethiopia (Commander et al., 2004; Docquier et al., 2007; Tettey, 2002), I asked my research participants if they see themselves as part of it. This question is asked in the context of discussions related to their motivations to engage, and hence stipulates that seeing themselves as part of the problem would reinforce their motivation to engage with and contribute to Ethiopian universities. The responses were split three ways. The first group acknowledge that brain drain is a real problem and consider themselves as part of the phenomenon. They see themselves living and experiencing the phenomenon. Desta said:

I teach about brain drain in class. I give these very big examples about China, India, Greece, and about the impact of the European free trade agreement on smaller East European countries etc. and I feel too self-conscious not to mention myself. So, I give an example of myself as a product of brain drain... It is not a good feeling, but you know...

He then moves to pointing why he finds it difficult to return home – personal and economic matters – while he also acknowledges that this is one of the reasons he tries as much as he can to remotely contribute. Others share similar thoughts. Three of the respondents specifically used phrases equivalent to “living in regrets” to express how they feel about their position. Wolde recounts that a significant majority of his cohort have left the country while the few remaining in the country are in the non-government industry on jobs that are not directly related with their training. From a cohort of 63 “maybe seven or eight of them are still doing

what they are supposed to do” he remarked, in a way which implies that he might have felt differently if the numbers were not so high.

The other group of respondents took an opposite position. While they acknowledge the phenomenon, they try to see it not as a problem, rather a global reality that different parties have to deal with differently. Maseb noted:

When I study nano physics, I do not necessarily think of a particular country, I think of contributing to the whole world to the betterment of humanity. Through physics research, we can discover new science that will be implemented into technology sooner or later for the betterment of society and for the continuation of humanity. Your phone for example [pointing to my phone I was using to record the conversation] has some components of the invention from my research or that of my colleagues. What we do is put into use in improving health, communication, agriculture, etc. across the globe. So, there is that international aspect. But there are also ways of helping one's own country while you are within or outside, you know, I do feel that I have to contribute to the country which gave me free education.

I pushed back a little bit saying that although I see the truth in his statement, the US will be the primary owner of the technology and invention that comes out of his research. He was quick to respond that “but I am doing the research here. I wouldn’t have been able to do this kind of research if I were in Ethiopia. I simply could not have the resources”. This is a common argument shared by others. Had it not been for the free movement of human capital that created brain drain, they wouldn’t have been where they are today, intellectually. But because they are where they are now, they are able to help others pursue their dreams. Bisrat argued that for the

first decade or so after coming to the US, he has been building his own capacity – doing his PhD, taking professional development trainings, getting his license, getting himself financially stable, etc. – to better serve his country today. He recites what he has been able to achieve in the past ten years through his engagement with Ethiopian universities and makes the point that he would not have had the capacity to do any of that if he did not come to the US and stayed. Some, like Belay, indeed had stronger reaction to the use of the word brain drain to describe their circumstances. They implied the notion that they are doing more than most people who are based in Ethiopia, and to think of them as ‘drained brain’ is not fair.

In the third group are those who either are somewhere in the middle, or do not see the relevance of the question itself. Taye, for instance said that he recognizes brain drain as a serious problem, he thinks that he is also part of that problem but he embraces his circumstances because he is compensating for what Ethiopia has lost due to his decision to build his career in the US. Like others, he notes that he wouldn’t have done what he is doing in Ethiopia now, if he stayed there. “The fact that I am here is not necessarily a brain drain as long as I am connected to my country and I am doing what I can to help others” he asserts.

Maza, for her part, questions the relevance of the question. She said she always gets the question about when she would be returning to Ethiopia, which she finds as a ‘nonissue’. She shared:

There is much going on in the current era, I mean, people have now started to use this term brain circulation as opposed to brain drain. Communications are easier, travel is easier... So, it doesn't even make sense to talk about someone as being here or there. You know, we're all in the quantum state of two places at the same time... So I would just

really hope that the people on the other side could think of other ways of engagement than me, you know, living in Addis Ababa where I can't do any of the things that I can do here.

Overall, there are differences among the research participants as to whether brain drain is a driver for them to engage with Ethiopia. However, most seem to be of the opinion that they could not have been where they are today in their career, if they did not come to the US or if they did not decide to stay. Their current position is what is enabling them to engage with Ethiopian universities and to make positive contributions. It is worthwhile to note that those who acknowledge brain drain as a problem are mostly from the social science fields. It can be argued that this is perhaps because research in the natural sciences is facility and technology dependent and the research participants in those fields credit the movement of skills for getting them where they are - in advanced system of state of the art research in their respective areas. On the contrary, social science fields are very context heavy and in most cases practice and research in the US have limited relevance to addressing problems in Ethiopia.

In summary, this chapter has shown that there is a considerable diversity among diaspora academics in terms of their preferred arrangement for the formation and execution of engagement initiatives. Relationships often grow from informal contacts and professional networks as it may also emerge out of one-off events. Similarly, the choice of institutions to work with may take different paths. Some come from existing relationships while others are mandated by institution to institution relationships. More often the consideration of convenience, both with respect to access to facilities, transportation and internet, as well as the ease for taking care of parallel businesses, dominate the choice of institutions. Engagement is shown to take different forms across all three functions of higher education: teaching, research and services.

Meanwhile, the motivation to engage is credited to a variety factors including professional aspirations and personal experiences. Engagement also constitutes tension between national orientation and the commitment for free flow of knowledge (as also implied in the varying perceptions regarding brain drain), as well as between the positive and negative outcomes from initiatives.

## **Chapter Six**

### **Enablers and Challenges**

Diaspora engagement is influenced by several factors. Environmental forces both in the host and home countries play a crucial role in the way engagement efforts are formed, structured, implemented and to what extent they become successful (Fongwa, 2018; Langa et al., 2018; Tejada, 2012; Teferra, 2010; Zeleza, 2004, 2013). Addressing two of the research questions related to the enabling forces and challenges of engagement initiatives, this chapter explores the different environmental factors that enable or challenge transnational engagement in the specific case of the Ethiopian academic diaspora in the US.

While it is impractical to try and present all factors that have bearings on diaspora engagement, in this chapter I argue that four major areas of considerations can be identified, each with related factors. Some factors, such as resources and the political climate, are not limited by boundaries. Their influence is of material impact both in Ethiopia and among the diaspora in the US. The next includes factors on the US side constituting personal and environmental (focusing on institutional) variables. Then, environmental factors on the Ethiopian side are explored including the policy environment, the responsiveness of the overall bureaucratic structure, the institutional mechanisms in universities and other concerned entities, and the politicization of higher education in structure and practice. Finally, some issues related to the actual interaction between the diaspora academics and their Ethiopian counterparts are discussed.

#### **6.1. Borderless (General) Factors**

Some of the factors that carry a significant weight to the overall success of diaspora engagement initiatives are not limited to geographic boundaries. Resources and political circumstances are the two major factors that emerged from data for this research. As discussed in

this section, both are identified to be critically important while prevalent both in Ethiopia and in the US.

### ***6.1.1. Resources***

It is uncontested that resources are key factors in the success of any diaspora engagement initiative (Fongwa, 2018; Mavhunga, 2018; Ogachi, 2016). This has been repeatedly reiterated during the interviews for this research. Volunteerism is indeed at the center of the engagement initiatives of the diaspora academics in the research. Many of them have, for years, spent their own personal money and time to engage in different activities with Ethiopian universities. Often, they plan to align their personal visits with the work they do with the universities. This reduces the financial burden of the work. However, even when driven by the altruistic sense of volunteerism, resources – financial, facilities, infrastructure and the like – play a critical role in enabling and sustaining the efforts. Those participants who had funding for their initiatives agree that the availability of resources has made their engagement much easier and successful by garnering more enthusiastic collaboration from the Ethiopian faculty, among other things. Bisrat, who had run a multi-year project through funding from the US government, testifies to this reality.

Part of the grant money goes to the participating institutions, to the specific schools. So, they were happy about it. We hired full time coordinators who would facilitate relations between institutions and external stakeholders. In addition, in each of the participating institutions we had faculty coordinators who would be responsible for matters internal to the school and who also work with the full-time coordinator. Others also get some financial benefit. We gave them a top-up on their salary, about 500 USD, which is, if you think about it a lot of money, you know considering how much the university pays and so

on...So, they give it a priority. I communicate with them from here and they do a lot in coordinating with our full-time employee. When I am about to go, I tell them what I am looking for and outline what I would be doing when I travel there... when I (or my colleagues) arrive there, things will be ready...it was much easier for me.

While the faculty are involved in the substantive component of the project and support to it – e.g. duplicating necessary materials and so on, the full-time coordinator is concerned with external matters such as organizing meetings with stakeholders, booking a hotel, renting a car, etc. Such arrangements ensured that Bisrat himself, his colleagues from the US and the local faculty who are part of the project spent more time on the substantive work.

Desta, Wolde, Belay, Habte and Maza had similar experiences with externally financed projects. The fact that the concerned schools and involved faculty have some benefits to expect, makes it easier for members of the diaspora to be more assertive in what they expect for the project to be successful. Both Bisrat and Habte articulated this comparing it to the slowdown after the project finance run out. It became difficult to get things done; bureaucracy was heavy, and people were much less responsive. While it is helpful to get things going, this assertiveness needs to be taken with care. It has the potential of polluting the relationship. Desta was cautious of this, although he was not actively involved in the administration of the project (the project was managed from an office external to the university). He noted that things were “made ready” for him which he thought might have impact on the morale of the faculty members who were involved from AAU’s side. He said “few years earlier some of these people were my professors. I don’t know how they felt seeing that I am so catered for while they are not...although we are working in the same project.” This is a relevant point further discussed in section 6.4.2. in the context of power dynamics between diaspora and local faculty.

In addition to grants from external sources (e.g. from NSF, the World Bank, American International Health Alliance [AIHA], and Swedish International Development Agency [SIDA]), scholarships have also been a common source of financing academic activities in Ethiopia. Several participants have taken advantage of the Fulbright Scholarship programs, as some are considering making use of Ambassador's Distinguished Scholar Program<sup>6</sup>. Internal financing opportunities from one's institution were also used as source of financing travels to Ethiopia. Study abroad programs and faculty research grants present some of the common sources of internal financing used by the research participants.

Ethiopian universities are mandated to allocate financial resources for activities related to diaspora engagement. However, there is no clearly earmarked resource, nor a guideline as to how. Universities are generally allowed to hire foreign faculty from their own budget, if they could not find a qualified person in the country. And the engagement of diaspora, with respect to resources, is treated as such. There are two issues with this arrangement. First, there is no clarity on commitment of resources for engaging the diaspora for a time period less than a semester (for a semester or more they can be hired as foreigner on contractual basis). Therefore, practically the decision is left to the discretion of the university leaders which varied across institutions and across time as the university leadership changes. There is hardly a common understanding and practice even within an institution. Second, there is no clarity as to whether members of the diaspora (who hold a non-Ethiopian passport) are to be considered Ethiopians or foreigners. There were cases of two Ethiopian-born Americans who were hired (on a long-term basis) with

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<sup>6</sup> Ambassador's Distinguished Scholar Program is supported by the US embassy in Ethiopia to sponsor scholars to spend time in Ethiopian institutions as full time faculty engaged in teaching and research. The program aims to support the capacity development endeavor in Ethiopian higher education institutions.  
<https://www.iie.org/Programs/Ambassadors-Distinguished-Scholars-Program>

the same salary that is paid for Ethiopian faculty members. However, when they realized that there was a different rate, they claimed to be paid as expats, to which the universities refused to oblige. Due to this disagreement, one of them resigned her position and returned to the US, while the other one took the case to the court, which, as of July 2019, was pending.

Another aspect of resources which attracted attention was the availability of facilities and infrastructures necessary to carry out the engagement activities. As discussed in chapter five, the availability of well-equipped laboratories and research facilities is one challenge in research collaboration and graduate education. Conforming with the work of other scholars (Boateng & Tutu, 2018; Teferra, 2003), in this research, engaging remotely through online technologies is considered one of the most favored options, given its convenience and cost effectiveness. Nonetheless the poor state of facilities and internet connectivity have made that very difficult. Habte wanted to get a decent internet connectivity for the graduate program he helped to establish. Sharing his experiences, he said:

The program involved several faculties from the US and other countries in Europe. Therefore, connectivity was essential. We got two separate lines because the university lines are not dependable. Even with additional two lines there are more days without internet than with. Electricity goes out, or the internet goes down... forget the standard university line. Even with three lines it is next to impossible to do any work. When we conference, they [government officials] always say they have enough connection. They never admit the problem. They swore that there is adequate connection and they tell you what the capacity is and so on. But there is none. It is embarrassing, because everyone knows the problem... We often had to email materials for the students because they do

not have access to research resources. But they can seldom open their emails and download the attachments...But like I said, this a national problem.

Sisay had a similar observation when it comes to the challenge of admitting the problem. In a network he is a member of there was a proposal to develop an online repository for course materials and to create videos, etc. which students can use to fulfil basic requirements which would be supplemented by online or in person class contact followed by assignments and online supervision. Officials from the two universities of science and technology and the ministry were excited about this and they promised the universities have good connection to make this possible. He told me that they shared their concerns with the officials who didn't budge.

...they insisted. But let me tell you... I gave an assignment to a class I taught and after I returned here students wanted my input on their project. That would require a good connection because we have to work together, I needed to see their screen to follow their work as they explained it to me and so on. This was practically impossible with the university internet, so they went in a group to an internet café and they tried to talk to me from there, which was a madness with all the commotion, and music and so on in a commercial place, and they have to pay by the minute, and the connection was not any better. So, one of the students took photos of the screen of the computer and sent it to me via Viber. Fortunately, I was able to locate the syntax error and help them fix it. Luckily, it was a short code. But this is on Viber, imagine that... We finally agreed that for each university there will be a dedicated room with separate data line and a standby generator, because power outage is frequent...but nothing happened. Months later when we ask them, they say 'oh, we put a bid out for supplying the generator; oh, we are talking to an engineer to do this', etc. It never happened.

As Habte noted, this is a broader problem. But through coordinated efforts between universities and the telecom provider<sup>7</sup> these are issues that can be addressed. Noting that some international development partners pay expats' salary for Ethiopian universities in the name of capacity development, Taye suggested that it would be a wise move for the government of Ethiopia to convince its partners to redirect these resources to building better infrastructure in order to facilitate better engagement with the diaspora.

As far back as 18 years ago the International Telecommunication Union (2002) reported that in Ethiopia few institutions including the UN Economic Commission in Africa (UNECA), the World Bank Ethiopia Office and the Civil Service College (now University) were authorized to have their own independent satellites (VSAT) to secure a much more reliable internet connection compared to the rest of the country. Over the years this has been extended to a handful of organizations, while strict control remains under the government monopoly (Gagliardone & Golooba-Mutebi, 2016). This precedence is in line with the general notion that if there is a will from the government, there is a possibility for universities to have better internet that would enable a more reliable and consistent involvement of the diaspora. This could also help with the sustainability issue with externally financed project-based engagement of the academic diaspora.

### ***6.1.2. Political Environment***

Ethiopia is a politically divided country. Across regimes politics has been cited as one of the major reasons why Ethiopians leave, or stay out of, their country (Koehn, 1991; Lyons, 2007; Tefera & Castro, 2016). The diaspora has always been a stronghold of opposition to the regimes,

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<sup>7</sup> Ethio telecom is the government owned monopoly to provide telecon services in the country.

including the current one which came into power in 1991. In 2005 the country's general election was very animated with unprecedentedly strong challenge to the ruling party, the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). The opposition at that time, and since, enjoys unwavering support from the diaspora. The election turned out to be very controversial. In its aftermath, violence erupted, hundreds of protestors were killed, and the opposition leaders were jailed (Abbink, 2006; Lyons, 2006, 2007; Lyons et al., 2007). Both locally and in the diaspora, this incident marked the further intensification of the dichotomous – or as Abera puts it “all or nothing” – nature of the political space.

In the past years locally banned political organizations have been operating in the diaspora and ‘struggling from afar’. The diaspora supports these and other locally based opposition parties financially, morally and diplomatically. Commonly the diaspora organize a series of demonstrations in different major cities across the world to expose and protest against political situations in Ethiopia, and to put pressure on the governments of the countries where they live to exert their diplomatic and economic power against the government of Ethiopia. The US is the seat of the largest of the Ethiopian diaspora and the hot spot of its political activities. It is within the context of this intense relationship that the research participants have been engaged with Ethiopian universities. Therefore, politics has an enormous bearing on their efforts in both spaces – in the diaspora and in Ethiopia.

In the diaspora, the public discourse is so much preoccupied with issues of politics that there remains little chance for anything apolitical to be a subject of discussion. Lemlem has noted how the diaspora professional organizations she participated in were stuck in looping discussions focused on political problems. Belay, Kasa, Reta, Abera and others have expressed similar experiences. Talking about the many meetings he went thinking that he would have a

chance to professionally connect, Belay remarked that “it is as if there is nothing else in the world other than politics”. For many of them being politically active and fighting for a cause one believes in is noble, but it becomes a challenge when it is perceived to be the only way. Abera’s point below summarizes this point.

Those who are interested in political involvement can and should be politically organized and contribute. That is one way of contributing, and it is a good one. They can use different mechanisms to influence the political situation in the country. But it is not the only way for all of us. Our community has an ‘all or nothing’ kind of attitude. I try to stay clear of politics because it hinders my efforts in other ways.

Having anything to do with the Ethiopian government, or its institutions is generally frowned upon. Working with public institutions, including universities, is popularly considered as a way of legitimizing the actions of the government. Therefore, many people refrain from any involvement in fear of the consequences – being labeled as a supporter of an autocratic system, which in turn has a hefty social cost. Many of the research participants have expressed their frustrations with such interactions in their social and professional circles, sometimes even from close relatives. The following experience of Reta is one of the common ones.

As I told you I was involved in developing a PhD program at AAU. After holding the workshop in Addis, I came back here, and I thought of people who can contribute critiquing the curriculum and also possibly being involved in teaching. So, I sent out a proposal asking prominent scholars in the diaspora consider this. Very few took it to heart and gave me positive feedback; others just kept quiet and they kind of started avoiding me; but some others were outright telling me that I was doing wrong because I

was strengthening the EPRDF government. One of them in fact told me to my face that I am going back and forth because I was expecting to be appointed to a government position... It sank my heart... you know I was going to Ethiopia paying my own ticket.

Others also have faced such backlash for their involvement. Habte argues that this is primarily because many people can hardly differentiate between politics and development. He said: “I am not interested in politics. I'm interested in development. People who say this, they cannot differentiate the two. It'd be a nightmare to have a discussion with such a person to try and convince them to go with me”. Others also concur that making a distinction between helping a political party in power and helping the country are two different things, and the latter is what drives them. Kasa said:

People always criticize me for supporting the EPRDF government. And I keep responding that teaching these young people is not helping the politicians in any way. If we educate the new generation, if we help create a thinking and reasonable generation, they will change the politics someday. And that is what is happening.

In reference to students in the PhD program he was a part of, where most of the enrollees were junior university teachers, Taye adds:

If we help produce one person with a PhD, that person will touch the lives of many more in the future. Regardless of who is in the political leadership, I'll continue to do that. I think we need that kind of mindset. We can't just resign from our duties just because we do not like, or agree with, who is in power.

They all stress that this is not to mean they don't have any political opinion or any sympathy for the people who are suffering because of the political situations in the country. It is rather to make a distinction between the different ways one can contribute to the betterment of their country.

On the other hand, the political environment in Ethiopia has different dimensions that play in the engagement of the diaspora in higher education. Research participants for instance mentioned that they feel they are scrutinized for their 'political motive'. Belay stressed that generally there is no trust towards whoever goes from abroad. Sometimes it is like you are being investigated. Fifteen years ago, when Habte first went to Ethiopia and said he wanted to help with his expertise, the first question from a high-level government official was 'why'. "It is not a why as in I want to know what inspires you, but a why as in what is your agenda", he recalls the interaction. Moges said, "even at the embassy the treatment is different for people who have expressly stated their support to the government, and those who didn't. Because, you know, if you are not a supporter, you are the enemy." This has resonated with others as well. Abera expressed his suspicions that even when he applied for Fulbright, there would be some sort of background check to sort the political position of the person, before the possible host university writes a letter. Maseb has a similar feeling that this could have been one of the reasons that folks at the university he wanted to go to hesitated to write him a support letter, as they do not want to take the risk of inviting someone the government deems a political opposition. This was indeed particularly heightened in the period of the post-election controversy when he applied.

When I asked him how politics played in his effort of working with Ethiopian universities, Desta said that because he has some connections who know his position regarding politics, he doesn't have a problem. It shows that connections are important not only for

establishing relations, and navigating through the bureaucracy, but also to secure a validation on one's political stand, as an approval that he/she is not politically a threat.

On the other hand, the fragile nature of the overall political stability of the country has always been another challenge. In recent years this has become more frequent resulting in travel bans, internet shutdown, and tensions in the university environment. Reta and Maseb had their travels canceled after all schedules were set up due to the travel warning the US government issued at different times. Political incidents have caused change of mind for many resulting in cancellation of their plans. The leader of TASFA-EDSI for instance told me that in the summer of 2019 they had planned a big event in Addis Ababa including a multidisciplinary conference with several breakout sessions, and professional trainings for local government employees. Many people were excited about the opportunity and made a commitment to participate at their own expenses. However, two months in advance of the event some political incidents happened prompting many people to drop out. The organizers were forced to cancel several components, for example reducing the breakout sessions of the conference from 15 to four.

Similarly, a coordinator of the STEM Network told me how political instability interfered in their plan of launching a new master's program that took a couple of years in preparation.

We had this plan to start a masters in Geo Informatics with Adama Science and Technology University. For quite a while we did a lot of preparation working on the documentations, commenting on the program, curriculum, etc. We recruited people to teach courses from the diaspora here, in Canada and Europe. We finally set a date for one last video conference to hash things out with the management at the university. Then a week before the scheduled meeting the internet was shut down in the entire country due

to the riots...this is before the former prime minister resigned...so, for months there was no communication at all.

These problems are perceived to be more prevalent in regional universities outside Addis Ababa. Political instability continues to be a challenge. Universities and their leadership are preoccupied with addressing the safety issues of the students and faculty, that the work with the diaspora becomes of no priority.

## **6.2. Factors on the US Side**

This section considers Immediate environmental factors pertinent to the personal and professional circumstances of the research participants, which can have a notable impact on their decisions related to the engagement they may have with Ethiopian universities. In addition to personal and family related considerations, the overall circumstances in their home institution, the support they receive, and the role of intermediary organizations (non-profits and professional networks) that link the diaspora and Ethiopian institutions are explored.

### ***6.2.1. Personal Circumstances***

Situated within the broader environment, one's personal circumstances play an important role in shaping, enabling or challenging the success of engagement initiatives. One of the most commonly cited considerations is family. The support of family members to such activities is identified as one of the major enabling forces. Belay, for instance, credits the support and commitment of his wife not only in shouldering much of the household responsibilities enabling him to enjoy more time and flexibility, but also her sustained involvement in the community service aspect of his engagement with Ethiopia.

Stage in children's education and the requirement for continued presence of parents make up the other aspect of personal circumstances. The youngest research participants said that their children's education has been a factor in their decision to travel to Ethiopia. Twice Maseb wanted to spend his sabbatical in Ethiopia at times that were conducive given the circumstances with his children's education, although it did not work out for him both times. The first time his sons were in kindergarten and he indeed wanted them to spend a year in Ethiopia learning the language and culture of their parents. The second time he applied his kids were in middle school. He said "that was a transitional time, so it wouldn't have been a problem to take them. Now they are in high school and I want them to stay stable until they finish". Similarly, Taye and Desta emphasized how they have a well-established routine that revolves around the education of their children, which significantly reduces their flexibility to travel.

This becomes much more complicated if one has administrative responsibilities. That was the experience of Reta when he took chairmanship of his department while raising two small kids and also traveling to Ethiopia to teach courses. He said, "I could not refuse the chairmanship, so I had to pause my travels to Ethiopia". This resonates with Desta who is a father of two and currently serves his department as a chair.

Conversely, the more senior research participants mentioned the fact that they have their children having gone to, or completed, college as giving them more time and flexibility to travel. Ferede, explaining why his engagement with Ethiopia has not been consistent, he said that he was so focused on career that he was late to get married and start a family. "So, until the kids went to college, I really had very limited options of traveling".

The clear implication of this realization is that for those who are tied to stay locally, a technology supported engagement plan could be a more viable option. Taye, for instance, said that supervising graduate students, as opposed to teaching courses, has been more suited for his circumstances. He said:

My younger daughter is 13 and she spends a lot of time with me. I want to spend as much time with her as I can. So, traveling is really difficult. But advising students is flexible; I manage my time so I will spare some hours for reading and commenting on the papers. Of course, it competes with my research time and it is a lot of work given the poor writing and research skills of the students. But I have managed to take two students every year for the last seven or eight years.

If appropriate technology is put in place, other types of engagement discussed chapter five, including teaching courses can be possible without having to travel to Ethiopia. That was one of the targets of STEM Network: to build an online resource where faculty here can create content in the form of videos, notes, exercises, etc. and to livestream lectures. Nonetheless, this plan has not yet materialized due to different reasons, not least of which is poor technological infrastructure on the Ethiopian side.

On the other hand, economic reasons have also been raised as important factors. Financial constraints are said to have series implications not only because of the opportunity cost of the time that could have been spent on income generating activities, but also because, in the case of non-funded activities, one would have to cover their own expenses. This was mentioned by most research participants. The common trend is that in the years after completing one's

studies the primary focus is on securing career and economic stability, which mostly go together. As one of the research participants said:

While academia is not really a great place to make good money, it gives you the time freedom. So, for years I have spent my time building my economic capacity. Now I have quite a few businesses. What I get from the university is perhaps one quarter of my overall income... So, now I am not financially that much constrained in my engagements with Ethiopia. I consider it as a donation, as I am giving back to my country.

One possible option that avoids the back and forth traveling between the US and Ethiopia could have been a longer-term engagement or a permanent resettlement in Ethiopia. In this regard, once again, economic factors are raised as detrimental. Desta used the example of his colleagues to make the point.

I know some colleagues from my department who left their position here to resettle in their home countries, particularly India and China. But the thing is they will be compensated enough to make a middle class living by Indian or Chinese standards. That is impossible in Ethiopia. You can't put your children in a good private school on your salary as a professor. And there all other expenses. It is just not possible... perhaps those people who are planning to retire could consider that as they will have more financial and time freedom.

To Desta's point, this was also an issue that came up in other discussions with officials and university leaders. It is widely acknowledged that the salary paid at government institutions is very low to be competitive. As a remedy the government of Ethiopia has allowed universities to pay up to 3,000 USD for expatriates. Realizing that this was not good enough to attract high

quality faculty, later the two universities of science and technology were given permission to pay up to 5,000 USD per month. Even this could not attract the diaspora in who are mostly in European and US institutions. Although the effort is to learn from countries like China, those countries have the economic capacity to make substantial investment both in improving the institutions and in attracting the talent (Cai, 2012; Welch, 2015), as government officials also acknowledged.

At least three of the research participants have indicated that they are considering resettling and working with universities in Ethiopia after retirement. Ferede and Reta, for instance, consider this as an opportunity they have missed in their prime years of youth. Having all their children completed college and securing their retirement as a subsistence, they consider this a suitable situation to be based in Ethiopia with travels to the US as required.

### **6.2.2. Racial Relations in Home Institution**

The overall environment of the institution the research participants belong to constitutes another important dimension of what makes for effective transnational engagement. While institutional environment is broad and constitutes numerous factors, racial relations emerged as one of the most common themes. Research shows that racism has always been a negative force in the American higher education environment (Harper, 2012; Kim et al., 2012; Patitu & Hinton, 2003). In works like *Experiences of immigrant professors: Cross-cultural differences, challenges, and lessons for success* edited by Hutchison (2016), several individuals have also documented their experiences of racism, in its different forms, as they navigate their way through the US higher education as foreign born faculty. Whether it occurs in blatant discriminatory practices or in the form of microaggressions, it negatively affects the quality of experiences and the success of both students and faculty (Kim & Kim, 2010; Pittman, 2012).

The research participants have all experienced racism in different forms. Taye, who had his first faculty position in a Southern institution recalls how he struggled to fit in the system. Having studied in Northern US, his own difficulty to understand the Southern accent contributed to his suffering in the first semesters. He added:

Despite having publications and years of experience as a teacher back in Ethiopia I had the research skills, perhaps better than my colleagues at the same career stage. But because I look and speak different no one asked me to be on their committee, let alone their chair. The next year as students slowly come to me for advice, they started to see how I support them and that I actually can do it... Then people start to line up... But it was different when I came to the DC area. This is diverse, it is a cosmopolitan area and people have a much better awareness on racial relations.

A common experience among many of the research participants was that their abilities were constantly questioned. They were simply assumed to be incapable of even doing their jobs properly. Wolde, who did his PhD in Northern Europe before coming to the US for his post-doctoral studies, says that he realized the subtle nature of racism after he came to the US. He acknowledges that of course he does not mean to imply that Europe is perfect, but maybe he was too focused, or unaware that he did not realize it. But after he came to the US it was more visible.

It took me quite some time to prove myself as a researcher. My boss was a smart guy with a lot of international exposure. He has had several international students and post docs. I did not have any problem with him. But the colleagues I worked with in the lab,

were condescending. It took me some time to prove that I am equally qualified to be there.

Similarly, Ferede shared his experience of being looked down on. Until his first article was published on the most influential journal in his field, his colleagues did not take him as a serious scholar, he realized in retrospect.

My work came out as a lead article on this journal and it was a big deal. That got me a lot of positive reaction...After some time I expanded on some of the points in the article and wrote a book, my first book. Incidentally, the day I received a copy of my book I had a meeting with my dean. I was so happy I wanted to take the book with me and show it to him...It was not the reaction I expected. He was completely baffled that I published a book. I could see the shock on his face. After a moment he said some nice things, but he could not wipe the look from his face. He must have assumed that I was just an affirmative action hire [he was but hired after me]. That look, I will not forget.

When he became a director in an all-white unit, Bisrat received some reaction from colleagues. He noticed that some were not even speaking to him. But he said, “I felt bad for them, because I thought it was just some kind of social awkwardness. I even tried to be friendly and to interact with them...It is after quite a while that I even realized it was a case of racism. Especially these two people were pissed that I was appointed to the directorship.”

Experience with racism had different layers. For example, those who did both their undergraduate and master’s degrees in Ethiopia, came with lower awareness of the issue. It took them a while to even recognize the dynamics. As Maseb said, “now I know that I should have been more assertive, but I even realized what was going on in the group very late. It was too late

to be assertive, so I simply kept going”. On the other hand, those who have had some experience in multiple institutions, at least one being in the South, noted that where the institution is situated matters a good deal. At least for two of them this was a specific reason to move to other institutions in the North. Besides, being a foreigner adds to the challenge of being a person of color. Language skills, accent, lower comprehension of the cultural norms, etc. add to their own share. Women had it even further complicated. Maza’s case, for example, captures multiplicity and intersectionality the challenge.

I think it's well known that there's biases against people of color, biases against women, and for me in particular, I look young too...When I go to conferences it is not unusual that people simply assume I am some grad student interning with the organizers...So when someone looks down on me or behaves in a certain bad way, I don't know which biases is at play. Maybe all at a time. I have given up trying to figure out.

It is fair to point out that it is not always gloomy. There are those who had better experience. For some it was luck. Abera says that he has been lucky because in his first years he had a foreign-born colleague who was a chairman of their department. Having gone through a similar experience, Abera reckons that the chairman was very protective of him, and that shielded him from a lot of trouble at his early career years, at least within the department. For others, it is the nature of their field. Sisay has it that way.

To be honest, I think maybe because of my field, I feel like I have been shielded. Already in grad school, a significant number of students and faculty in science and engineering are not American. So, you get into this environment where you actually don't feel like an outsider. In my current group, out of nine of us, I think only two are born Americans. The

rest of us are either on H1B visa, Green Card or naturalized citizens. So, it is quite a nice environment. But interaction with clients is a different story.

For some institutional diversity initiatives help ease their experience. Reta says a lot has changed since his undergraduate years in the 1970s. Acknowledging “the ultimate price paid by our African American brothers”, he appreciates how institutional diversity initiatives helped change the overall atmosphere of the institution he has been with for the last more than 30 years. Moges was at the center of his institution’s diversity initiatives. He, among other colleagues, not only fought to establish the initiative, but also served as a leader for several years and helped increase the proportion of minoritized population among staff and faculty by many folds. Lemlem says diversity initiative was very bad for her. When diversity initiative was introduced in her former institution, she had hoped that it would create a more comfortable environment. She did not see the other side of it. As she puts it:

As I was the only black person, who also happens to be female, I was called upon to be in every committee, because that is how they thought they would show diversity. After a while I woke up and I said to myself, ‘this is not good for me, I’m not benefiting out of this, I am not going to get my career anywhere with this much time for committee responsibilities’. Then I started to look for some other opportunities, and I came here.

This experience of Lemlem demonstrates that the institutionalization of diversity initiative is not sufficient in its own. It could indeed become a burden more than a source of empowerment. Two of the research participants who work in Historically Black Institutions have indicated that the challenge persists in those types of institutions as well. One of them moved from another white-dominated institution, hoping that they would not face similar challenge.

However, they noted that there is the language and the culture and sort of competition, some sentiment that “we are here to take what is theirs”.

While different people have different mechanisms of coping with racism, two things emerged as common denominators for all the research participants. First is a level of immunity that comes from being an Ethiopian – a country with no history of colonial control and no experience of racism. Research participants have in common that they often do not see racism in the first few years of their arrival. Most, even today, miss some of the subtle cues and microaggressions, until it is too late or until they see someone else react to them. It can be argued that this can possibly make them inadvertent culprits to the problem. Most of them also say that it does not affect them, that they manage to ignore it. While some invoke their Ethiopian pride enabling them not to personalize racist incidents, Maza juxtaposes her experience as Ethiopian vis a vis her African American colleagues.

My experience [of growing up with Ethiopian values] certainly gave me that internal strength to overcome racism that I don't think I would have had had I been born here. I think it's much harder for African Americans who were born here than it is for Ethiopian Americans, because we've had the luxury of seeing a country run by you know, people of color, whereas here that is hardly a common experience.

Common response also referred to the US being a country governed by law and using the law when one is deprived of what is legally theirs, as much as they have to abide by the laws in their institution or the country at large. There have been a couple of examples where research participants invoked the law to fight for their rights. Lemlem, for instance remembers when her superior reallocated a research fund that she was entitled to. Despite the advice of her colleagues

and friends that reporting a senior, well respected white professor is not going to work for her, she brought the matter to the concerned body in the institution. She was given her money back. She considers that as a crucial moment for her career as she asserted herself as a scholar, not as a black person or as a woman. She goes on to say that assertiveness also requires owning to one's mistakes and weaknesses, as she did once. She said:

Nobody said anything to me, but I can sense that they were all judging me. I also know that it is going to be used against me someday. So, one day in a meeting I detailed the mistake and apologized for my part. I told them that I make mistakes just like any one of them. That diffused the situation and earned me the respect of my colleagues.

She, like others, stresses the importance of accepting criticisms with positive mind and to build on them through hard work – the second common theme. Overcoming racist and discriminatory situation requires shining through hard work, most of the research participants assert. There is a consensus that being recognized requires achieving above the average person in the department, which in turn requires working more than the average. As Taye puts it “as an immigrant you know that you start from less privileged background, and to balance for that you must work twice as hard”. Nega stressed the importance of being focused. He said:

You have to show results, and that takes a lot of work. You cannot be good at everything, and everything does not equally matter for your career. Therefore, you need to set your goals, identify what is important to get you there and stay focused on what it important. You might have to two or three times more than the others, but you can make it count if you are strategic.

Many of the research participants gave examples of how hard work and commitment produced results that were hard to ignore. But quite a few of them also acknowledged how it took a toll on their personal life. Ferede said that he was so focused on building his career he spent a good part of his adult life as a single. Others spoke about less times to spend with family and their desire to work more with Ethiopian universities being sacrificed. For most of them the onerous effort of securing career and being recognized has the opportunity cost of not being able to engage with Ethiopia as much as they would have wanted. It took them years to get ready.

On the contrary, for some, the alienating environment pushed them to seek emotional refuge in their connection with Ethiopia as their 'home'. On the one hand the emotional dividend of time and effort spent working with Ethiopian institutions is much higher. As Taye puts it, the impact of one's effort here is limited by the fact that it is academically a saturated environment. Therefore, the time and energy spared to engage with Ethiopia is a source of professional satisfaction. That is more of a pulling factor. On the other hand, Habte asserts that the racially heightened environment would have any immigrant second guessed. Therefore, this comes as a push factor, or as a driver, where the otherization of the institutional environment triggers and reinforces the search for another more rewarding affiliation.

### ***6.2.3. Support from Home Institution***

Another component of the institutional environment that emerged as having a major impact is institutional support. Institutional support for transnational engagement can be scaffolded in the internationalization or global engagement strategies of the institution and materializes in the form of different initiatives and projects. It was apparent from the interviews that the dominant trend is that institutional support is guaranteed as far as faculty members bring in external funding. This worked for all research participants. Other than that, the main form of

international engagement for most institutions is in recruitment of students, followed by the signing of memorandum of understanding (MoU) with partner institutions abroad, which may or may not translate into practical projects.

Most research participants are not clearly aware of the policy of their respective institutions with regard to international engagement. They mostly spoke of their own department or school where their response for whether they receive sufficient institutional support, was is a resounding no. This does not imply that those institutions do not have any strategy. It might as well be the case that the strategies are not well communicated and embedded in the work of the different academic units. Hence, active plans and actions to promote internationalization of teaching, research or services is not perceived by the research participants. Institutions have shown interest for initiatives that contribute to the building of the reputation of the institution – as one of the research participants simply put it “only if it brings money or comes on the news”.

However, this shall not be interpreted as institutions being completely withdrawn. Institutional activities can be enablers of engagement. Few examples were given by the research participants how they aligned their engagement initiatives with study abroad programs by their institutions. Similarly, broader institutional collaborations at a level of MoU could create a space for faculty members to propose specific initiatives that can fit in the context of the MoU. In fact, it has to be noted that concerning the engagement of diaspora academics with institutions in their home countries this approach works only when a collaboration happens between their institution and a counterpart in their home country. Lastly, initiatives that have already considerably progressed have also a stronger appeal to gain institutional support. When Reta organized a major conference in Ethiopia, he was given some funding from his institution to finalize the process of organizing and for publication and distribution of the proceedings. Ferede had a book

project with which he already has progressed significantly before he could get support from his institution for the final work. As a research professor, Habte enjoys the support of his institution in the form of flexible scheduling and funding for travels.

Overall, it can be observed that institutional support comes in different forms, but mostly not in an intentional and well-planned manner. The absence of internationalization strategy as a broader framework, limits academic units from offering sufficient support for their faculty in their transnational engagement. Individual efforts are key drivers of engagement, that can be aligned with institutional activities.

#### ***6.2.4. Intermediaries***

As shown by Mekonnen and Lohnert (2018) in the case of Germany and Campbell and Afework (2015) in the case of Britain, intermediaries or diaspora organizations, such as professional associations, networks, and other forms of non-profit organizations based in the US make a significant contribution in connecting the diaspora with Ethiopian institutions and enabling engagements. A simple search in the website of Internal Revenue Services (IRS), with the keywords such as ‘Ethiopia’ and ‘Ethiopian’, turns more than 550 registered non-profit organizations. Most of them are indeed religious organizations and community centers, perhaps followed by development organizations that include education or exclusively focused on education development. Many of them are small organizations that do not have substantial activities. Among those focused on education, nearly all of them are focused on k-12 education. While there are few that focus on higher education – in such activities as financial support for university students from low income backgrounds – the following demonstrate the crucial role of intermediaries enabling diaspora engagement in higher education.

Ethiopian Physics Society in North America (EPSNA) was established in 2008 and has 143 members. As a reflection of its increased activities in recent years, it is currently developing its ten-year strategic plan. With its membership from across universities and research institutions in North America EPSNA is connecting the diaspora with Ethiopian institutions, faculty members and students. For instance, EPSNA has a two-week summer school program which piloted in 2019 at Addis Ababa Science and Technology University. It plans to hold this event every year in different universities across Ethiopia, and with better participation both from Ethiopia and North America. The society also has a mentorship program where academics in North America are paired with graduate students in Ethiopian universities. It works with its counterparts in Ethiopia (the Ethiopian Physical Society [EPS]) and in the US (the American Physical Society [APS]). It was able to secure some resources from APS to support its activities in Ethiopia. As such it is bridging not only between professionals but also institutions in the two countries.

Ethiopian Scientific and Academic Network (ESAN) is a virtual network of Ethiopian students and professionals aiming to share information and exchange ideas on different aspects of education and research that can have impact on the careers of members as well as institutions in Ethiopia. Besides promoting the exchange of information, ESAN is involved in different activities including supporting schools and universities with books and other resources. One of its flagship activities is what it calls Ethiopian Educators Without Borders (EEWB). Every year EEWB mobilizes academics and high-level professionals, mostly in the science fields, from around the world to a tour of lectures, seminars and other engagements in Ethiopian universities. EEWB events are organized during winter or summer breaks and each year are hosted by different universities in Ethiopia.

Another virtual network of professionals worth mentioning is the Ethiopian STEM Network which brought together academics and senior industry professionals specifically to support graduate education in the two science and technology universities in Ethiopia. The network, which is mostly from the engineering fields, took years recruiting volunteers and negotiating with the slow bureaucratic process in Ethiopia, only to finally have all its plans put on hold due to political circumstances in the country. Nonetheless, it is one of the most promising intermediaries with a strong potential to support higher education in Ethiopia through diaspora engagement.

People to People (P2P) is US based non-profit established by the Ethiopian diaspora that has extensive engagement with Ethiopia. While the organization is broadly concerned with health issues and undertakes several projects, most of its activities involve Ethiopian medical schools and constitutes support to medical education. From the US side a considerable number of the Ethiopian diaspora in the health field participate in the various projects of P2P, along with Ethiopian professionals and colleagues from the US and elsewhere.

Another recently established organization promoting diaspora engagement is Teach and Serve for Africa (TASFA). TASFA is a generic multi-sector organization that attempts to provide the platform for professionals in the diaspora to serve Africa. Under its Ethiopian Diaspora Service Initiative (EDSI) TASFA facilitates opportunities for diaspora professionals who volunteer to serve Ethiopian institutions. While only in existence for a little over a year, TASFA-EDSI has been extensively engaged in connecting diaspora professionals with Ethiopian counterparts. Higher education is one of its major areas of emphasis where it engages in organizing conferences, hosting public lectures and seminars, coordinating collaborative research projects and facilitating support to universities, among other things.

While these are some of the very active US based organizations and networks, it is important to note that there are other similar initiatives in different countries. For instance, the UK based Global Knowledge Exchange Network (GKEN) has, among other things, programs supporting graduate education in Ethiopia, with which some of my research participants were involved.

The experiences of the research participants with intermediating organizations in the diaspora are divergent. Some are keenly appreciative of the opportunities these institutions create, which otherwise could be very difficult to secure, and the synergetic effect of coordination. Some are even founders and active participants in the leadership of those institutions. Meanwhile others prefer to handle their activities individually. The main reason provided by those who distance themselves from intermediaries is that there is too much focus on political issues which takes the time and space away from professional engagement. The following comment from Lemlem sums up this opinion:

I'm a practical woman and I hate it when people waste my time with irrelevant things. In the few times I went to meetings of such organizations I noticed that people were preoccupied with the same discussions about challenges and difficulties and quickly turns into politics...I know the fellowship is important, I know people want to be heard, and that is good. But it takes a lot without any effect, and I want to be focused on my career... I want to help but politics is not my thing.

Desta, who works with GKEN, shared a similar opinion. He said that most organizations in the diaspora are about the politics, and he prefers to work on his own. But when some

organizations come with something very practical, like GKEN did, he is willing to be involved with them.

However, it was apparent that intermediaries have a critical role of creating the platform for diaspora members to support higher education in Ethiopia. Doing so, they address the gap created by the inadequacy of the current policy and institutional instruments on the Ethiopian side. Their effort is also augmented by the occasional involvement of professional associations in Ethiopia, such as the earlier mentioned EPS, Ethiopian Economics Association, Ethiopian Pharmaceutical Association, and others.

By creating platforms, the intermediaries offer individuals to engage at much less effort as they do not need to trudge through the bureaucracy. As one of the coordinators of STEM Network said, when they presented the idea, “many people said it was great because their individual efforts were mostly waste of time”. In addition to coordination for bigger impact, organized approach also creates opportunities to mobilize resources. Those non-profits that have a 501C status can apply for funding and can offer incentives for individual members of the diaspora to use their platform for the purposes of tax exemption.

### **6.3. Factors on the Ethiopian Side**

Environment in Ethiopia, where the actual interaction takes place, provides the context in which engagement can be encouraged. Among the numerous macro environmental situations, factors such as the overall policy environment and the responsiveness of bureaucracy are highlighted as having considerable influence. Besides, factors within institutional settings, particularly the creation and smooth operation of institutional structures mandated to handle issues of diaspora engagement have also emerged as a major theme.

### **6.3.1. Policy Environment**

The policy environment for diaspora engagement sets up the broader playing field for initiatives in higher education. Similar to trends in Africa and elsewhere, the government of Ethiopia has been paying increasing attention to the potential developmental contribution of its diaspora (Chacko & Gebre, 2017). The publication of the national diaspora policy in 2012 was a watershed moment that symbolized this increasing interest in diaspora engagement. Among other things, the policy document set ‘enhancing knowledge and technology transfer’ as one of its major goals. The policy has stipulated that the government encourages and incentivizes the involvement of diaspora professionals, at different stages of their career, to be involved in the various priority sectors, including higher education (MoFA, 2012).

The policy was, however, not subsequently followed by a more detailed guideline to govern the engagement of the diaspora in higher education. The ministry of education, as a responsible government organ, did not follow up by incorporating diaspora engagement as part of its grand strategy – the education sector development plan that comes out every five years. In a brochure published on its website (not dated, but from the context perhaps in 2012) the ministry calls upon “Ethiopians living abroad to come and serve in higher education institutions”. While the document explains that the ongoing expansion plan of the government made it imperative to seek the support of the diaspora, it did not make any reference to what institutional and policy instruments are in place to govern their engagement. Instead it lists the details of contact persons from all public universities, most of whom were presidents of the respective institutions. This implies that engaging the academic diaspora is left under the purview of the respective universities, but it also suggests that it is placed at the highest level

within the university structure. But universities are recognized to have different degree of openness to initiatives from the diaspora, reflecting the attitude of their leadership.

The absence of a coordinating body with clear mandate and dedicated resources, or a guideline outlining the delegation of this responsibility to specific units in the universities, has posed challenges in the practical implementation of the policy objective. From his successive discussions with officials of the ministry and university leaders, Sisay observed that.

The ministry sent us to the universities. They said the universities have everything they need to proceed with the details. But when we went to the universities, what happened was... we started communicating with people who seemed very interested, which was nice at the beginning. But it just doesn't have any progress. It never gets institutionalized, it doesn't produce any practical outcome, it just doesn't go anywhere. We have been pushing the university leaders to no clear outcome... I am not sure what is holding them. It was just communication that kept going on and on, without any action. After a while, the number of people on our side started to drop because folks were tired of meetings that do not produce results.

This sense of inability to take action was also noted by other participants. This might not be surprising considering the lack of autonomy among Ethiopian universities, where commonly decisions are channeled from the center (Akalu, 2014; Gebru, 2013). In the absence of clear guidance from the center, university leaders could be reluctant to take action in fear of the possible repercussions. In addition to the centralized system, Belay observes this to be rather a rampant problem at all levels, caused mainly by the way accountability is conceived. He said, "there is some common notion that you would not be in trouble unless you have done something

wrong”. There is no accountability for not doing anything, but for doing the wrong thing.

Therefore, people at different levels of decision making prefer not to do anything unless they are given a clear ‘go’ from above, or unless it is clearly stated in their mandate.

Few years ago, an office was set up under the Ministry of Science and Technology to coordinate diaspora engagement in support of graduate education in the STEM fields. But this was specific only to the two universities of science and technology. While the office was mandated to coordinate activities between the two universities and networks of the diaspora in concerned fields (the allocation of resources still under the purview of the universities), it was shortly interrupted before its effects could be assessed. Due to political turmoil communication was shut down and later the two universities were reorganized under the newly created Ministry of Science and Higher Education.

The absence of a coordinating body and a guideline to offer a direction in the area has practical implications. Initiatives would remain dependent on informal connections and fragmented fail to make as much impact as they could have if coordinated and supported by policy instruments. Engagements would continue to lack a blueprint creating confusion and bottlenecks. Importantly, there would be no clear understanding about where the most needs are and how the diaspora can contribute. This sentiment is reflected by the research participants.

Moges stressed the need for specificity:

This general call like ‘get involved, contribute to your country’ and so on cannot work. It might work for something generic like [Diaspora] Trust Fund<sup>8</sup>. Well, even for that it is

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<sup>8</sup> The Ethiopian Diaspora Trust Fund is an initiative that was established in 2018, upon the call by the new Prime Minister to the Ethiopian diaspora worldwide to contribute one dollar a day to support development in the country. Making the call the Prime Minister stipulated that the estimated three million Ethiopian diaspora can contribute the

not going great, but you can just ask everyone and whoever wants and whoever has the capacity would give you. Even that requires some arrangements in place, like you need to know where to make your contributions, and the organization to administer it... But when it comes to professionals you can't just make a call and expect it to go on its own. First of all, who is in the diaspora? Where? How many? In which areas? With what sort of expertise and experience? Etc., you know, then you need to know what is needed on the Ethiopian side – in which institutions? In what areas, how many people are needed? And so on. Then you create a mechanism to match them. Otherwise, if you just tell me to contribute to my country, well, how? Do you need my kind of expertise? Where should I go, talk to whom? Do I email every university? Or ...

To Moges's point, the literature on diaspora engagement also appreciates the importance of clear focus in policy and institutional settings. Some initiatives could be done at a mass scale but with limited expectation from each participant, while others need clear and narrower focus but a deeper involvement in that niche area (Aikins & White, 2011). Similarly, Maza emphasized the need for clarity. She noted that one of the most frequent questions she gets asked is when she will be moving to Ethiopia. She finds that a pointless question and a reflection of the lack of understanding of how the diaspora can contribute. She said, "somebody needs to figure out what the country wants from the diaspora... in a practical manner".

These reflections are indicative of the insufficiency of the way the country's diaspora engagement demands are articulated and communicated. The current practice is discouraging

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same amount which will be a significant injection into the struggling economy of the country. However, the actual contribution was far below this expectation. As of January 17, 2020, the total amount collected was 5.8 million USD with only less than 26,000 individuals contributing. <https://www.ethiopiustrustfund.org/>

involvement because it takes unnecessary time and effort for the academic diaspora to navigate through the clutter to determine where and how they can make their contributions.

One recent breakthrough in the policy space, that can potentially address these issues, is the establishment of an autonomous agency responsible for diaspora affairs. For many years diaspora affairs was under the purview of a department within the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Officially launched in March of 2019, the Ethiopian Diaspora Agency has, among other things, the responsibility to facilitate and coordinate participation of the diaspora in the country's development. Pertinent to higher education, the agency prioritizes mapping the knowledge diaspora in major destination countries around the world. In addition, it has set in motion an initiative to develop a national guideline for the engagement of diaspora in knowledge and technology intensive sectors.

### ***6.3.2. Bureaucratic Environment***

While the establishment of the agency is a reason to hope for better direction and coordination, reforms limited to the issues of diaspora are not enough. The overall bureaucratic environment poses different impediments. Referring to their experiences of dealing with such government bodies as customs, immigration, revenue authority, and other ministries, the research participants noted that the bureaucratic difficulties were cause of frustration, and at times a complete failure in their initiatives. Ferede, for instance, remembers an incident at the immigration office, with the annoyance still fresh in his sound.

I had a research project that I did while I was in Ethiopia during my sabbatical, also involving a few faculty and graduate students. I had to get a paper from the local authorities as I travel in the rural areas for data collection. At the local office, someone

noticed that my yellow card<sup>9</sup> had few more weeks to expire and needs to be renewed before the authorization paper could be issued. So, I flew to Addis Ababa to get my card renewed... Towards the end of the process I had to get some signature from an office where the woman told me to return the next day. I told her the process is almost done, and that it needs that signature to finalize it. I pleaded with her telling her my situation that colleagues are waiting for me to finish this paper, and so on. Pointing with her pen to a paper posted on the wall, and in a very disrespectful tone she said ‘man, can’t you read?!’. The paper on the wall said that they see costumers only until 4pm. And it was 4:15 probably 4:20... I was speechless, I just left her office...

Nega shared a similar story where he was scheduled to offer training of trainers on a new lab equipment for representatives of five universities from around the country. He shipped the equipment in advance, so that by the time of the training every participant will be able to work on their own terminal, and then after the training they would take them to their respective institutions. However, processing the machines through customs took way too long, so much so that they were released from customs six months after the training was conducted (few machines he previously took with him were used for the training).

These are only two examples of many more. The slow interface with services, the difficulty of accessing information and officeholders, challenges to access data even for research purposes, and the like pose challenges that could build up into frustrations. Such experiences not only hinder the specific initiatives, but also discourage future engagements. On the other hand,

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<sup>9</sup> Yellow Card is an identification issued for Ethiopian born foreign citizens, which enables them enjoy benefits and rights given to Ethiopian citizens with the exception of participating in political processes (voting and running for office) and serving at high level government positions pertinent to national security and defense.

had the bureaucratic process set to be fast and responsive, it would have helped in facilitating diaspora engagement initiatives by saving the time and resources to be focused on the main work of the initiative, instead of dealing with the bureaucracy (as it is the case now).

### ***6.3.3. Institutional Mechanisms***

Institutional mechanisms meant to support diaspora engagement within universities, or their absence thereof, could affect the experience of involved diaspora academics, and determine the efficiency of their efforts. In what appears to reflect the situation at the national level, Ethiopian universities lack proper institutional mechanisms in place to address issues relevant to diaspora engagement. Due to this, diaspora engagement remains largely dependent on informal relations.

Nearly all the research participants have leveraged their personal connections in trying to form relationships with the institutions where they had engagement activities. Personal networks are positive forces that enable engagement and help smooth relations. Nevertheless, in the absence of a formal structure there are quite a few reasons why this is of concern.

First, personal connections can only work for those who have them. Someone who does not have a reliable personal connection in the higher education sector, or does not want to leverage such relations, will have a much harder time navigating through the bureaucracy. As Moges pointed out where does even one go to start the process? To the department, the school/college, to the higher management? In a case where there is no institutional approach to the issue, even such a fundamental question would be very difficult to answer. There have been individuals who tried all these different parts of institution as point of entry with different level of success.

Second, lack of ownership to the process results in the issue of the diaspora engagement left out of strategic focus. Having spent years as an individual volunteer as well as a coordinator of a professional network in the diaspora, Sisay had extensive communication and negotiations with higher education institutions in Ethiopia. He observes that universities hardly have a clear statement of what they are looking for from the diaspora. Diaspora engagement is hardly discussed at a strategic level as a means of filling skills gaps.

When you go and ask they will often say that they do need the diaspora to be involved, but they would not tell you how many people they need in what areas, etc. because basically they don't know. They hardly do inventory to determine what is missing and what means will be used to address the gap. To be fair, this is mostly in graduate programs. For undergrad, they seem to have it covered. But graduate programs continue to grow. Sometimes programs are opened at whims of one person, who perhaps studied a particular specialization and wanted to have a master's program in his name. Or something like that...so they don't necessarily know what they need.

If there was an institutional body with the responsibility of planning and implementing diaspora engagement initiatives, this could have been addressed much more effectively. The concerned body could collect data on the skills gaps from the different academic units and coordinate with stakeholders, such as the intermediaries, to plan and manage the engagement of the diaspora. Sisay also sees the challenge in the routines. He noted that some details, simply because they are not attended to by anyone become a hurdle for diaspora volunteers to get by.

For example, some official will tell you that they are going to send you a car to pick you up to come to class, and then the driver may arrive two hours late, you know. Like for

those who stay for longer period, they might need a library card so that they can access some books, or they might need an office where they meet with students... not an office really, but just a desk somewhere. You can't keep meeting your students at the cafeteria for a whole semester, you know. These things are not really big, but they are big enough to frustrate you, or distort your experience that you would not want to go back.

Many others share the idea that the internal bureaucracy of the universities is very difficult to navigate. In my interactions with university leaders I also have inquired about who in the institution is responsible for issues of diaspora engagement. Mostly it is the external [and international] relations office. But not because it is articulated to be so, but because by default someone coming from abroad falls in the 'external' or 'international' category. These units are inclined to focus on institution to institution partnerships than individual volunteers. A discussion with a director of external and international relations at one of the prominent universities, for instance, confirms the points raised by the research participants. He said that his directorate does not maintain any data on who from the diaspora is involved with the university. Besides, when someone directly contacts his office, they would refer them to the concerned department. It is only when the department requests services like ticket or hotel and so on they would purchasing those services, once authorized by management.

Third, the absence of institutional mechanisms also inhibits follow up on details for high level agreements. The following story from Desta captures the essence of this challenge.

A couple of years ago a high-level delegation including the chairman of the board of directors of [a prominent university] came to visit my university. When they received the request to visit my university's management involved me in the process, because they

knew that I am from Ethiopia. They came, and there were many discussions. One of the outcomes was that my university said they would share their online resources with [the Ethiopian university]. I was not even sure; you know copyright and all... but they said it is ok they can share but only for faculty. This is huge; I was excited. But after they returned, I tried and tried to follow up and get this going but there was no response from the Ethiopian side. I emailed, called, reached out to some people I knew there...nothing. I was so embarrassed, every time I came across anyone who was in that meeting, I try to give excuses, I would say something like they are discussing it... These people came all the way here and they could not have anyone to follow up with this, and the opportunity was missed, just like that.

Others have shared similar concerns that the high-level discussions wind up with very general statements but minimum to no effort to follow up. Maza expressed worry:

Everyone wants to talk about the grandiose vision of what we can do. People would say something like ‘we can do great things if we cooperate’ or ‘let us put our efforts together and help our country move forward’ and so on. But nobody wants to talk about the nitty gritty. Nobody seems to like the details which bring those visions into action.

Maza also told me how an initiative she runs was difficult to get off the ground because of the lack of responsiveness to the details. Every now and then, after trying few times, she would email someone she knows in a different university, more than 1000 kms away from the one she is in contact. “And I'd say, I haven't heard from so and so at such institution; he will track them down and place a phone call. Then they respond to me.” Such personal connections need to come into play to help move things forward because the institutional system is either not

in place or failed to deliver – in this case the earlier. However, this kind of communication can be neither effective nor sustainable.

Fourth, another common concern among the research participants was the lack of consistency due to high turnover. When people move from their position, all the relationship built through them will be disrupted, not only because it is usually built on the premises of personal relations but also because there is no institutional practice that can guarantee continuity. Moges noted:

To undertake a project even one that looks straight forward like shipping books, requires continued communication for a couple of years. I was once working with a department chair. I went there, I was involved in a couple of things and we were discussing more activities to launch. Suddenly I lost contact with him. I tried all means possible for me and did not get response. It is after a while that my daughter who heard me talk about this tracked him on social media and it appears that he has moved to a different university, according to his updates. I finally managed to speak with the new person who replaced him, but she did not know anything, and to be honest she did not sound interested, maybe she has other priorities for the department.

Sisay agrees. This has happened to him and his colleagues at least twice. After long communications they reached an agreement with the department head and then few weeks before the launch of the project, the department head was reassigned.

Most administrators don't even have or use a university email, they use their personal emails for communication. So, when that person leaves, there isn't even a record of your conversations. And he probably did not even involve other people in the department on

this, so you have to start telling the new person from scratch. Who you are, what you do ... it is a whole new process ... We had a couple of projects that went right this way.

Overall, the absence of institutional mechanisms inhibits universities from effectively streamlining diaspora engagement as a strategic opportunity. Lack of organized data and coordinated planning and implementation of activities downplay the potential resources in the diaspora. Importantly, without institutional means purposeful efforts to identify and tap into such resources will be unrealizable. On the other hand, for the academic diaspora, engaging with universities has been difficult and far less efficient than it should have been due to lack of institutional practice on the Ethiopian side. Organized efforts through professional associations, networks and other organizations is not met with a commensurate institutional counterpart. This situation makes the experiences of those engaged difficult, in effect discouraging them from continuing and others from getting involved.

#### ***6.3.4. Politicization of Higher Education***

The infusion of politics into the Ethiopian higher education, which can be seen as the extension of the overall political environment discussed in section 6.1.2., has several faces pertinent to the engagement of diaspora academics. One aspect of the dynamics between politics and higher education is the limitation on academic freedom. In a reflection of the overall political environment, expressions are limited in universities (Assefa, 2007; Ayalew, 2011). Many of the research participants, particularly those in the social sciences have observed this in their interaction with students. In class students tend to be very reserved and refrain from commenting on different issues, but outside the class, one on one, they are often much more critical in their views. One of the participants shared this story which reflects the challenge with academic freedom:

I was once in a group email where a university president sent e-mail to invite us to be involved with his university. I know most of the people in the email from our professional networks and participation in conferences. A few of us are from the same cohort in undergraduate. The person who sent the email was also part of our cohort, but different field of study. After a few back and forth, some expressing their interest and the university president thanking them and encouraging the rest of us, someone sent a simple question that killed the whole communication. He asked if he could teach and say whatever he wanted and if the university can guarantee that. It simply was the end of the conversation. The university president stopped responding.

Another research participant, a professor of law, told me that some years ago he taught international criminal law course in Ethiopia. At the end he asked students to write their final paper explaining why or why not Omar Al-Bashir (former president of Sudan) should be indicted at the international court because of the situations in Darfur. He added: “reflecting back, I think that is what got me disinvited for the next year. I was not careful. My thinking was that if you are studying international criminal law you need to do hypothetical cases”<sup>10</sup>.

Another common theme that emerged in almost all conversations was the replacement of merit by political and ethnic qualifications in the appointment of leaders at all levels – from department chair to university president and board. This assessment is consistent with what the limited literature in the area reveals, including appointment at the board level (Bishaw & Melesse, 2017; Melu, 2016). One of the clear results of this is that the interaction between the

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<sup>10</sup> This was a contentious issue at the time. The African Union and many African countries opposed the arrest warrant against Al Bashir issued by the International Criminal Court (Tladi, 2009). Ethiopia as a member state as neighbor and a strong strategic ally of the Sudan was strongly against the indictment of Al Bashir.

university leaders at different levels and the diaspora academics would be sensitive to issues like competence, ethnicity, politics and so on. One of my research participants, a professor of educational leadership recalls one of his interactions with a university president:

I tried to give some reflections on my observations during my stay there and what I thought could be helpful. But the president of the university did not show any interest to listen to what I was saying because he can only listen to the political leadership and I was speaking about the importance of meritocracy. I know how politics impacts his work, but until the leadership is merit based, anything can hardly change. When the president comes because of merit, the vice presidents will likely be meritorious, and it trickles down to the colleges, the departments, and to the recruitment of faculty... any way that was one awkward interaction.

The argument that a meritorious system can be created and sustained only if the top leadership is selected based on their merit resonates with the other research participants as well. One research participant observed that the current interference of politics in higher education is pushing away qualified and committed faculty members.

I have seen capable individuals and people who were committed to the cause of better education leave university and join other sectors, leave the country to take jobs in other African countries or to come here, because they feel pushed out. There might be other reasons, like their economic conditions, but mainly the frustration comes from the politics. It is common that people get passed for promotion, educational opportunities or miss out on benefits, like university housing, simply because they do not subscribe to a certain political view.

As discussed in section 6.3.3, this turnover directly ties to the lack of consistency in relationships built between the diaspora and Ethiopian universities. Besides the fact that engagement with capable faculty would be much more productive, the addition of ethnic politics into the mix creates another layer of challenge to the interaction. As one of the participants noted, in some universities, particularly in regional ones, it feels like all major positions are given to individuals from particular ethnic groups that are dominant in the respective region. “It creates some kind of feeling that you are not welcome unless you identify with that particular ethnic group, or unless you speak the local language”.

Others observed that the politics interferes even in the selection of students in graduate programs, particularly at doctoral level. In fact, if appointment of faculty is based on political affiliation, since most students in doctoral programs are university teachers, then it follows that the selection of doctoral students is influenced by politics. One of the participants had this experience to share.

Despite my extensive involvement in the program from the very beginning, I did not have any say in the selection of students. But I have heard there was a lot of politics playing into it. After I started teaching, I have noticed that some of the students were not as good as the others. Anyway, despite being advised not to give take home exam because students would copy from one another, I did. I chose to trust them, after all they are doctoral students. But to my dismay two of them turned basically the same paper. I knew these two were relatively behind with class engagement and I also know that they did not like my class because I asked students to write reflection papers every week. But I wanted to give them a chance. I called them and told them about the unethical nature of what they did and how big an offence plagiarism is at their level. And I gave them an

ultimatum that they do their own independent work and turn in, or I will report them to the concerned committee... Few days later I learned that they accused me of having a political agenda, and that I speak in class in disapproval of government policies, and so on. They accused me not at the department, or the college, not even at the university, but at the ministry of education. Imagine that... Luckily, several people, including the university president knew me well and that got me out of trouble.

Political interference and appointment of leaders by affiliation could also determine the institutional priority. The following story from one of the research participants who spent a semester in a second-generation university captures the essence of this challenge, which was also mentioned by others.

I noticed that the graduate program was weak and thought what I could do. So, I reached out to a colleague here in my institution and explained my idea and he agreed to go to Ethiopia for a week to give training for faculty and to have discussions with them on how they can strengthen the program. He even agreed to bring some GIS [Geographic Information System] software they can use. He has some license he could share only with faculty. This is all for free. The only thing the university had to do was to cover his expenses. I even offered to pay his hotel expenses from my own pocket, so they only had to cover ticket. But refused... Let me tell you, during the one semester I was there, there were at least four major festivities all for political causes... this was the time they said they won 99.6% of the parliament. In my very conservative estimation, the university might have spent at least 100,000 Birr on each event. That is about 400,000 Birr. But they could not buy one ticket... this is how priorities are set.

Others have also shared similar views on how politics takes precedence in universities to affect the way decisions are made. The common observation is that most decisions are made with political considerations, and once made the university leaders have little room to change them. At a broader level, this has been observed in some of the contentious decisions centrally made. For instance, one of the coordinators of the STEM Network noted that there was a strong reservation among members of the network about the government's plan to produce 500 doctoral graduates in engineering in five years. The reservation was that, as it is the case in many developing countries, Ethiopia needs to focus on strengthening the undergraduate programs and building strong masters programs, instead of shooting for such an ambitious plan built on such shoddy quality. Two of the research participants discussed this issue, in agreement. One of them said:

I don't think doctoral training in the field of engineering should be a priority for Ethiopia. There is a massive gap to address in the practice before moving to the theory and analysis oriented programs at doctoral level. Also, the country does not have the capacity to produce such large number of PhDs with the current state of the universities. Doctoral training in engineering requires labs, equipment, and infrastructure that we simply don't have. The government may say that they can build the facilities and infrastructure, but that is a very big investment and takes some time. Besides, the universities do not have the senior faculty who can teach courses and supervise research projects. Five hundred is a lot. Look how many graduates even the most established US institutions produce every year.

The other added:

Why would Ethiopia need doctoral programs? In engineering, even in the most advanced countries most of the work is done by graduates of first degree, and perhaps masters level specializations. I think it is wise to ensure the quality of those programs and gradually build capacity towards doctoral programs. But even if we agree to the idea, 500 in five years is too much. If the program takes five years that is 500 enrollees at once. Imagine what that takes.

The STEM Network coordinator said they could not succeed negotiating. The decision was made, and no one was open to even discuss it. He noted that in private conversations most faculty members see the challenges and recognize the decision being pushed down for political ends. But in the formal meetings they would join the leaders in saying that ‘it can be done’, ‘let us push forward together’ and so on. He adds “the faculty don’t want to say no to the university leadership, the same way the university leaders don’t want to say no to the political leaders”. It appears that the political interest of reporting this number of new programs or that number of PhDs has overshadowed the question of quality of education. Because of that some people dropped out because they did not want to be part of something they see doomed to fail, or to be part of the production of mediocre PhDs in engineering.

#### **6.4. Dynamics of Interaction**

Another set of factors within the broader environment that can affect engagement initiatives are those which directly relate to the interaction between the diaspora academic and their local counterparts. This could be a product of the other environmental factors discussed in this chapter and may come from both groups.

#### ***6.4.1. Expectations and Encounters***

Attitudes and expectation from both sides determine experiences both in setting up the relationships and the actual interactions. Some of the research participants admit that they had worse expectations than what they actually experienced, while it is true the other way around, too. Abera acknowledged how misled he has been by the rhetoric in the politically dominated public space.

Almost everything you hear here is too much trouble. Of course, I didn't have access to local media in Ethiopia, even if we did, they would tell the opposite, as if there was no problem at all. So, I went with low expectations. It is as in the business quality theory – if you have low expectations, you would be easily satisfied. It was really beyond my expectations. I am not saying there were no setbacks, or that I had a perfect time, but compared to my expectation.

Such low expectation, however, has kept many from even trying. Kasa, for instance, had interactions with members of the diaspora who were baffled that he even suggested it for their consideration, because all they know is that the situation in Ethiopia is so dire. Maseb rather attributes this to the lack of service mentality which is largely missing from the Ethiopian education system while he was a student, as well as now. Habte said that he has encountered many members of the diaspora who, after hearing his experience, reveal their surprise that it was even possible to do that. He remarked “many people seek to learn more about my journey and that tells me that we have a lot to do in sharing our stories, showing the possibilities, and of course how much demand there is”. This gap in communication is partly related to the absence of a comprehensive strategy towards diaspora engagement in higher education. If there was,

more effective communication could have been pursued by embassies, intermediary organizations and individuals designated to champion the cause.

On the other hand, there are those who have ‘too much expectation’. Reta underlined that one of the factors for his success, compared to some others he knows had a hard time, was his reasonable expectation. He noted that there are those who expect things to be like what they are used to here, in US institutions. He advises that it is better to expect that things might not get as smooth as expected. Bisrat shares the same observation and says that it is important to be considerate to the situations in Ethiopia. Both stress that taking account of how things are in Ethiopia, particularly acknowledging the circumstances of Ethiopian faculty who are overburdened with their work and challenged by other factors such as economic and political, is core to building a good relationship. Being sensitive to the experiences of the local faculty and as well as being respectful is what Lemlem said was missing among some diaspora academics. Referring to some interactions she had within a professional network in the diaspora, she recalls how she was offended by some suggestions that downgraded the education and intelligence of the Ethiopian colleagues. “It was outright disrespectful ... just because someone lives in a more resourced institution than others it does not make them better. You know I have worked with several Ethiopian professors from whom I have learned a lot.”

Moges, Sisay and Kasa also agree that attitude is one of the serious inhibitors in diaspora engagement. Moges noticed that the way some members of the diaspora behave taints the whole image about diaspora in general. “Some people go there and act in a way that is exclusively intended to show off how better their life is, they play like they don’t know anything about Ethiopia, let alone having grown up, educated and started their career there”. In everyday communication, this is indeed one of the meanings conveyed in the use of the word ‘diaspora’

[ጲያስፖራ] in its Amharic adaptation. Kasa said that in the past years the image of the diaspora has been damaged so much that even when someone goes with a genuine heart and a well thought out plan, it is likely that the reaction would be “‘here we go again’ with eye rolls. This is informed by the shoddy self-serving actions of many individuals and organizations in the diaspora”.

This has also come up in the conversations I had with some university leaders and Ethiopian faculty. One university leader who interacts with expats and diaspora on a regular basis said that

It is sometimes very difficult to deal with them. I don’t know what kind of expectation they come with. They make a complain on things over which I have no control, like why the internet at their hotel is slow. We often put them in five-star hotels, and that is all we can do. It is like as if the whole university has to pause and cater only for their interest. Some of them are interested only in taking some pictures and videos with students and some faculty, they don’t do much... But don’t get me wrong this are few. Many of them are very nice and genuine people. They come all the way on their own money and give it all they have got.

Meanwhile, it is important to acknowledge that there are some differences in institutional culture and practices that create differences. Most research participants have noticed that due to the lack of responsiveness and the level of motivation from Ethiopian faculty, they fear that they might come off as too pushy or demanding. There is a consensus on the difficult circumstances of Ethiopian faculty that keep them from robust academic engagement, and by extension from working with the diaspora. Sisay summarized it as follows:

Well, they can't afford to collaborate with us, mainly for economic reasons. Their salary is not that high. So, [to sustain themselves and their families] most of them take part time jobs, teaching more classes in private schools, working in projects, consulting and whatnot. And so, they cannot devote more than a certain amount of time for the university. Now, is it right? No, it's not. Can we do anything about it? No, we can't, apart from raising their salary, so that they can actually make a decent living without doing all these other things. You can't fire them! You can't fire them, unless you can hire at a better salary. So, the university management knows this; everybody knows this. Faculty are at the university just to teach classes, and they don't have the time to provide anything further such as any enrichment activities for students. Most of them do not do anything beyond the bare minimum required. They don't have the time to engage with us, either. And I wouldn't blame them.

Sisay's point here resonate with others too. The lack of motivation can be addressed by creating a system that rewards engagement. From the previous examples, it has been clear that engagement projects that have external funding have been much more effective as they financially reward the participation of local faculty instead of part time jobs elsewhere. However, it is important to note that economic situation is not the sole factor in how the interaction between local faculty and diaspora academics shapes up. Habte, for example said that he recognizes the challenges the Ethiopian faculty have to work through, and that there is little to no incentive for professional development or to doing research. But he is also cautious not to make this a blanket excuse. He gives an example from one of his encounters.

When I was in Addis this April, someone approached me and asked me to review his research manuscript. He is a young faculty. I said yes and he gave me a 32-page

document. My schedule was very busy, and I had only few days, but I wanted to give him my comments while I was there so that we can discuss them, instead of just sending him an email, you know. So, I told him that I would read it overnight and we made an appointment to meet at 7:30 am. I wanted to talk to him before I start the rest of the day. So, I read the paper, I wrote my comments and came to the university early in the morning. But he did not show up. He came around 11am, while I was in the middle of the conference coffee break. I said to him ‘I have read the paper and I was waiting for you in the morning...I want to give you some feedback, so meet me after the meeting at 5pm’. He said ok. But guess what, he did not show up.

Similar examples are shared by quite a few of the research participants. Such an experience could reasonably make people like Habte hesitant to take their time and extend their mentorship or to collaborate on projects. He stresses that in the entire system there is an inherent culture of not getting real with the necessary work, instead people are mostly motivated by immediate returns in material terms (money). Few others, like Maza, Maseb, and Moges have noted that they often receive questions from faculty that are vague and focused on the outcome, jumping all the work necessary. They said they often receive email from young faculty asking for ‘PhD scholarship’ or how to ‘get a job in the US’. In response they explain how the system works what tests the potential applicant needs to take, etc. after which often the communication drops.

Another aspect of the differences in culture and practice that were mentioned as obstacles to diaspora engagement relates to some of the requirements that the research participants find puzzling. Recognizing the lack of teachers for a newly established PhD program, Taye convinces someone he knows at a four-year public university to spare his summer to go and teach. He told

me that this person is a tenure track assistant professor who teaches doctoral classes, has published a lot and had served on dissertation committees. However, when he suggested for the department in Addis Ababa, they said that he cannot teach unless he was an Associate professor. Taye added “interestingly, a couple of months later he got his tenure and promoted to associate professorship”. Similarly, Bisrat and Sisay spent some time lobbying with practitioners they knew had terminal degrees to get involved in newly set-up graduate programs, hoping that they would help at least until sufficient internal capacity is developed. However, to their surprise, later they learned that practitioners were not allowed to teach in graduate programs. It is indeed puzzling to observe that someone with a terminal degree from a US university who has years and years of experience working in institutions like NIH or FDA, perhaps evaluating projects, giving trainings or even doing research, is not allowed to teach in a master’s program in an Ethiopian university, only because they don’t hold a teaching position.

Flexibility in course scheduling, options of co-teaching and co-supervising are other areas of difficulty for involvement of diaspora academics. From discussions with officials of Ethiopian universities, for instance, it was clear that there is more interest in long-term appointments i.e. for a semester or more. Besides, the absence of summer semesters reduces the possibility for diaspora academics to align their own schedules at their home institutions with that of their engagement in Ethiopia.

Overall, it is apparent that on both sides there are assumptions and expectations that are detrimental to effective engagement, as there are auspicious ones. Parallel with the literature in international higher education partnerships (e.g. Amey, 2010; Banks et al., 2016; Chan, 2004; DeWit, 2015; Mwangi, 2017) congruence in assumptions and expectations, and in culture and

practices, create the dynamics which largely shape the power relations between the diaspora and local academics.

#### **6.4.2. Power Relations**

Power relations are crucial elements of transnational higher education engagement. North-south higher education partnerships are generally characterized by power imbalance to the advantage of the northern partners (Obamba & Mwema, 2009; Mwangi, 2017). Such inequality is of major concern as it undermines the potential for knowledge generation (Maringe & Dewit, 2016). Such imbalance is also observed in diaspora engagement in African higher education (Teferra, 2010; Zeleza, 2004). Different factors contribute to the disparity in power relations.

Among the recurrently raised factors was, again, economic. Diaspora academics come from a far better economic position when they are compared to Ethiopian faculty. When they are hired as expatriates, they get a salary that is at least five times more than their local counterparts, plus benefits. Even when they are brought in for a short time, although they are often paid at the local rate or not paid at all, they are treated as a guest, given a lot of attention to their needs. As Desta pointed out in his comment, this could potentially leave the local faculty resenting their position.

I was put in five-star hotel, I had a driver to take me where I wanted to go, everybody was making sure that I had what I needed, and I was paid at a rate much higher than the locals because I was 'international'. Although it was a [World Bank] funded project, it was not fair. These people I worked with, some of them were my professors, and colleagues in the years I taught there. It is unfair. They have to be paid the same as long as they are qualified for the job, at least when it is funded from external sources.

To his point, this was a common reflection I received from Ethiopian faculty and university leaders. The perceived unfairness causes local faculty to resent their circumstances, and perhaps anything that reminds them of it. By creating such a system, in effect, though unknowingly, a negative message is being communicated as a subtext. Some of them were trained abroad and they chose to return to Ethiopia. Now, they are being shown that they would have been better rewarded had they stayed abroad. Through differential pay for the same job, they are being signaled that their contribution is much less worthwhile. Importantly, they are tempted to find a way to leave for somewhere abroad, perhaps to spend some years and to return with the glories of a diaspora or expat.

Regarding interaction with students, some of the research participants noted that there is a tendency to take their words uncritically. The fact that they are from an advanced higher education system, sets them to be ‘over glorified’ as all knowing. Most of them, however, regret this as it deprives them from having a more enriching conversations and the opportunity to learn about the local context. For some, this is also the characteristic of the interactions with faculty members. Taye shared his experience of co-supervising graduate students with local faculty.

My expectation was that we would both contribute. I would send my comments by email, copying the co-supervisors who reflect on my comments and add their own inputs, and guide the students through interaction on regular basis. I thought that there might even be some points of difference with the local co-supervisors as they know much more than I do about the local realities. But what happened is that they leave everything for me. They simply tell the students to proceed with whatever I suggested and at the end, they put their signature on the document approving it. I think that is my duty to cultivate the skills

and the knowledge they need to take over and to advise students independently in the future. Institutions should also create a mechanism to ensure this

Such a relationship that leaves the local faculty entirely dependent on the inputs of the diaspora, defies the essence of the engagement initiative. As Taye himself pointed out, for diaspora engagement to have lasting impact, it has to aim to build local capacity through collaboration and sharing of experiences, than making the local faculty rubberstamping the work of the diaspora. On the contrary, the diaspora academics are concerned that if they try to push towards more active engagement from the local faculty, it could hurt the relationship, and again, rendering the whole engagement enterprise unsustainable.

Conversely, few of the research participants have observed that there is a tendency to look at the diaspora academics as a competitor who come to take over. This sentiment generates resistance to the collaborative relations. A good example can be the experience of Bisrat, who led a project of revamping an undergraduate curriculum. Some faculty saw his efforts as a threat, knowing that the courses they had been teaching for years were to be cut out and replaced by others that are not of their specialty. They posed a strong resistance to the whole project, until they were provided a clear outline that preserves their interest. In this and other cases, local faculty, sometimes even students, leverage their power mainly social, ethnic and political connections to direct things in their own liking.

Meanwhile, diaspora academics may also build and leverage their own power base in a particular institutional setting where they undertake their engagement initiatives. A common practice is leveraging social and professional connections they build over time, with certain members of their host department or institution. As discussed elsewhere, because they initially

establish relations commonly based on personal relations, in times of need they deploy them to steer things. One of the research participants, for instance, referred to a long-time professional relation he/she had cultivated with a faculty member as an important resource used in managing relations with others. They met when the local one was a young aspiring faculty looking for opportunities to advance his career. The diaspora academic introduced him to a program which turned out to be helpful setting him up for his current position as a senior administrator. Now, eight years later, the diaspora academic reckons that there is a sense of [skeptically uses the word] ‘loyalty’ that has been a very helpful resource.

The deep rooted hierarchicalism in the higher education setting, as it is in society in general (Dagne, 2015), was another component of the power dynamics. Traditionally in Ethiopia there is a strictly vertical relationship between students and teachers. Having spent quite some time in a different culture, diaspora academics often tend to have a more relaxed and friendly relationship particularly with graduate students. Two of my research participants told me that they have noticed a ‘reaction’ from other faculty members about the way they interacted with students. Noticing that there was more positive response from his graduate students, than from the faculty, about his proposed conference, one of them started working with students. Soon enough, he received “strong reaction” from the faculty who felt bypassed, and he backed up to renegotiate the relationship.

Being a full professor or not, also made a difference in how much power one would garner. One of my research participants, who only did his first degree in Ethiopia a long time ago, learned this practically few years ago when he was in Addis with his American colleagues.

I did not know the difference. Everyone of the American colleagues with me was a professor. But we called each other doctor because in the US we call everybody who teaches in a university professor, and we call those with terminal degrees doctor. In Ethiopia there are very small number of professors and it made a difference. When they [local faculty] realized that I had been a full professor since 2012, it made a big impact. Some even apologized to me. I saw things opening up for me... I took the lesson and the next time I renewed my Ethiopian driving license, I added my title with my name as 'professor [such and so]'. That has become a ticket from heaven. It gets you anywhere... So, it is being a professor that is much respected among the public and in academia, than being from the US.

Name and reputation of one's institution is another factor. Some have mentioned that 'a never heard of' kind of institution, no matter how good it is, does not compare with the common names. One of my research participants is a tenured professor at a prominent four-year private institution that bears the name 'college'. He noticed that the name of his institution does not immediately ring positive and needed to explain further to assert himself. In Ethiopia colleges, as opposed to universities, are generally understood to be small, for-profit private institutions with much lower quality of education.

Some research participants have noticed the preferential disposition to expatriates, compared to academics from the diaspora. When Desta was in a project where he was part of a team that came from different countries, he remembers that himself and other colleagues preferred and asked for a flat rate of payment that includes accommodation and lodging. They were informed that the procedure was that the later would be provided in kind in addition to the daily rate for their services. However, when a colleague from the UK insisted that he wanted to

be paid a flat rate, they went out of their procedure to accommodate his request. He interprets this experience as a favor given to the white expat over the diaspora, as it was for the diaspora over the local faculty.

Another research participant made a similar observation. Once he ran into a deadlock with local faculty in a project. After repeated effort to negotiate a way out of it, he said he realized it was a case of *awekush nak'kush* [አወኩሽ ናቅኩሽ<sup>11</sup>] (an Amharic adage which can be equivalent in meaning with the bible verse 'a prophet is not without honor, but in his own country' Mark 6:4 KJV). Despite not really wanting to do it, he said he solved the problem by switching his approach from being a colleague with an international interlocutor position to an 'American professor'. Broadly speaking this entailed, among other things, disregarding the culturally loaded subtexts in the conversation and focus on the stated terms of the project. He invoked authority from his position and the agreement reached with the institution, and downplayed the culture and norms the Ethiopian colleagues alluded to in order to ensure their "personal benefits".

But he was not the only one who referred to this Amharic adage speaking about relationship with local faculty. Another research participant shared his experience with two Ethiopian universities where he was not very welcomed because the universities had expats from Ireland and South Korea respectively. He was eager to share his expertise in doing nanotechnology research in developing countries and specifically in small and less resourced universities. He gave me a tour of his small lab after the interview and proudly explained to me

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<sup>11</sup> Literal translation would be close to 'I don't respect you because I know you'

how he built equipment at a much lower cost than the market price. He said he would have loved to share this passion of his with Ethiopian universities. He added:

There is this mentality that they can get better from expats. Well, true that they may come with more as they are often financed by their governments as development aid. But it is short lived. They do what they do as long as they are paid, and they leave...They miss that development is not a sprint but a marathon. So, it requires a lasting engagement built on trust. Some of the diaspora might even consider returning and working in Ethiopia for extended period of time, if there was better reception.

This gets right into the essence of diaspora engagement in higher education. It is longer lasting and more impactful in the long term. As it is anchored on belongingness intertwined with one's history and identity, it has a potential to go beyond enumerated tasks and responsibilities and to last a lifetime, given the auspicious conditions. Part of this auspicious environment is a power dynamic that opens enough space for both parties to negotiate roles and relationships, and to empower one another.

In general power relations are not only underpinned by different factors – e.g. professional profile, place of residence, institutional reputation, political connections, etc. – but also materialize in different ways in different settings. Research participants are observed to assume different positions of power in different interactions with faculty, students and others. They also invoke their position as a means to push forward with their interaction.

In summary, this chapter has shown the various factors in play to determine the formation and effective execution of engagement initiatives. The influence from these various factors may be related to the personal circumstances of the individual or may emanate from broader

environmental situations. The chapter has shown that there is a considerable communality between the enabling and challenging factors. The availability, adequacy and form of existence of certain factors could decide whether or not those factors become of positive or negative influence in the engagement process. For example, the availability, amount and ease of accessibility of resources could be an opportunity or a challenge for engagement activities. Some of the factors discussed in this chapter – e.g. political environment – can be viewed from both the Ethiopian and the US sides, while others may be limited to either of the two domains of environment. Lastly, it is worth noting that the discussions in this chapter are based on categorizations of themes emerging from the data, focusing only on the major ones as they are perceived by the research participants. It is no claim to present an exhaustive list of enabling and challenging factors, even from one person's experience.

## **Chapter Seven**

### **Discussion and Implications**

The overarching objective of this research was to understand the experiences of the Ethiopian academic diaspora in the US engaging with higher education in Ethiopia. In an attempt to explore the phenomenon of diaspora engagement in higher education from the perspective and experiences of those who do it, the research had set out the following four research questions.

1. How do Ethiopian academic diaspora in the US engage with Ethiopian universities?
2. How do the research participants appreciate their experiences of engagement with Ethiopian universities?
3. How do research participants assess the enabling forces in their engagement?
4. What are the perceived challenges in the engagement of the Ethiopian academic diaspora?

The findings in the previous chapters have extensively addressed these questions, ultimately showing the intricacies of personal and environmental factors that play out in the process of diaspora engagement in higher education. These findings also elaborate on the nuances in transnational diaspora engagement which were never fully captured by such concepts as ‘reverse brain drain’ and ‘brain circulation’ as ways of rectifying the disadvantages due to the outflow of skilled citizens from developing countries.

In this chapter I will discuss the major findings through the lens of Bourdieu’s Theory of Practice and highlight the key areas this research contributes to existing literature. I will then

present the major implications of the findings to policy and to further research. But first, I present a brief summary of the findings pertinent to the above research questions.

## **7.1. Summary of Findings**

### *a) Formation of engagement*

Engagement takes different forms. The diversity of engagement starts with the timing that the engagement activities are carried out. Some commit their vacation times to travel to Ethiopia during the summer months. While this has been a challenge particularly for those who have additional administrative responsibilities, others make use of their sabbatical, although those who do so often continue their interaction with Ethiopian faculty and students after returning back to the US. A few have managed to develop projects and secure funding that would allow them to carry out their engagement woven into their regular responsibilities all around the year, for few years. Meanwhile quite a small number use virtual communication as a platform to ensure a continuous engagement using their personal time.

Diversity is also observed in terms of how diaspora academics choose the institution to work with and how they start the engagement relationship. Informal social and professional networks are often utilized towards these ends. Going back to one's alma mater is very common while knowing someone one has studied or worked with is another key entry point. Addis Ababa University appears to be more privileged not only because it has large number of alumni with higher academic and professional profile, but also because of its convenient location and its reputation as the oldest and biggest university in the country, which particularly puts it in advantage for institution to institution relations.

### *b) Forms of engagement*

The specific activities through which engagement is manifested cover a wide range across all the three major functions of higher education institutions: teaching, research and community services. In the teaching area instruction of courses, student exchange programs, curriculum development or review, public lectures, seminars and workshops emerged as a common forms of engagement while in research collaborative research projects, advanced institutes and summer schools, graduate student supervision and mentorship are identified. The limited activities in services areas include some form of community engagement, advisory and consulting services at different capacity, building networks and mobilizing resources.

These specific types of engagement are useful for analytical purposes, but it is rarely that diaspora academics are found engaged in one separate activity. Most are engaged in multiple activities that happen concurrently. Someone who travels to teach a course would also give a lecture or a seminar, help raise resources or build networks, advises graduate students, etc. It is common that participation in a one-off event such as conferences, seminars or public lecture gives a way to more sustained and integrated relationship and to other forms of engagement. Therefore, the identification of the different forms of engagement are meant for analytic purposes that can provide a general sense of direction for institutional and policy designs. They are not meant to make any clear boundaries and distinctions.

### *c) Motivation for engagement*

For diaspora academics, the desire and motivation to engage with Ethiopian universities is derived from different sources. Just like for anyone else, professional pursuit and the sense of responsibility to offer services where there is more need is one. This is focused to Ethiopia by the social and cultural connection the research participants have, fueled by such ideals as love of

country, the duty to ‘give back’ and sacred values learned from families. The realization of how Ethiopian students learn in a deprived environment, especially compared with those in the west, is another driving force. The feeling that one would have wanted to receive such support while they were a student encourages them to engage in ways that could be of help to others who are in a similar situation that they once were. With it also comes the outcomes of their engagement, be it in a practical or emotional form, that would reinforce and further sustain the engagement effort.

The sense of being indebted of having been educated in Ethiopia, for free, resonated with most diaspora academics as a motivation for their current engagement activities. At the face of it, this notion that one has to give back because one was educated in their home country and then left appears to be predicated on the concept of brain drain. However, the research has revealed varying perceptions about brain drain. Some find themselves being a typical embodiment of the idea of brain drain, and hence they feel obliged to engage with Ethiopian higher education as a way of ameliorating the negative impact their leaving has had on the country. Others do not consider themselves as part of the worldwide phenomenon of brain drain because the nature of the work they do, no matter where it takes place, is fundamental to the advancement of science that would ultimately benefit humanity. Further, being in a developed higher education system such as the US would rather create more opportunities for them to professionally develop and to contribute to advancement of their respective fields, compared to what they would have been able to do had they remained or returned to an Ethiopian institution. Essentially these findings challenge the common perception that sets diaspora engagement as a response to brain drain, since there are many who do not share the notion of brain drain but remain committed to engaging with their home country.

The experience of engaging with Ethiopian universities, which considerably varies in extent and intensity, is broadly characterized as having its highs and lows. It all ranges from the utmost pleasure derived from being able to create opportunities for others to realize their potential, to a series of frustrations encountered at different levels of the process. It is a source of professional satisfaction and pride among colleagues as it is of embarrassment. For some it has been a source of disappointment as they were shunned in favor of expatriates; for others it soured relations with former colleagues, classmates and social connections as they attempt to push for a serious outcome geared towards sustainable capacity development, instead of a quick fix sort of temporary support. The tainted image of the diaspora among the Ethiopian public has also been a source of difficulty navigating through the engagement process. Through all of it, however, for many there are strong reasons for keeping trying.

#### *d) Factors influencing engagement*

A number of factors, both in the US and in Ethiopia, contribute, positively and negatively, to the formation and successful execution of transnational diaspora engagement initiatives. Some are intuitive: availability of resources, for instance. Resources are key determinants of any engagement project as they enable better participation of stakeholders and facilitation of logistics. While there were examples of successful initiatives that secured third party funding, for the most part resource constraint has been identified as one of the major challenges of diaspora engagement. This includes not only the financial resources but also the facilities and infrastructures that are necessary for the effective implementation of specific initiatives, as well as for a continued virtual involvement. While Ethiopian universities are generally mandated to allocate resources for diaspora engagement, as they see fit, there is no clarity as to how the resource allocation works.

The broader policy environment on the Ethiopian side is another important factor. The level of emphasis attached to the issue of diaspora engagement in the field of higher education has consequences that relate to the creation of institutional coordination mechanisms, allocation of resources and the capacity to address relevant issues in related areas such as easing the bureaucratic structure. The lack of clarity in strategic focus both at national and institutional levels is the product of the fuzzy policy environment. The recent establishment of the Diaspora Agency at the national level and consequently the establishment of regional liaisons is an emerging development in the right direction.

What follows clarity at policy and strategic level is the creation of institutional mechanisms that coordinate activities and address issues in diaspora engagement. Universities do not have a designated unit nor clear guidelines to handle diaspora engagement. Even in the two universities of science and technology which were at the center of the government's plan to develop STEM education, despite the promise of adequate resources, the lack of clear responsibility of coordination remained a major impediment. Lack of responsiveness, ineffective communication, redundancy of formative processes every time the contact person is changed, inability to take clear and decisive measures on the part of university representatives, etc. are all the result of the absence of well-articulated institutional mechanism.

Intermediaries, such as professional associations and nonprofit organizations within the diaspora, are seen to have demonstrable positive impact facilitating engagement. Not only they coordinate fragmented efforts by individuals into a more cohesive effort for better impact, they also mediate between the diaspora academics and Ethiopian institutions. They help navigating the bureaucratic processes thereby allowing diaspora academics to focus on the substantive work they do in their respective areas of expertise, saving them time and shielding them from the

frustration of dealing with administrative and bureaucratic processes. However, it also emerged that many intermediary organizations are seriously constrained by politics.

The political environment influences diaspora engagement in at least two major ways. First, in the past years the diaspora has been known as the strong base of opposition to the political power in Ethiopia leading to a very precarious relationship between the government and diaspora in general. As a result, diaspora academics are seen with the same suspicious lens in their attempt to interact with government institutions. Many people in government institutions, including universities, hesitate in interacting with them, and importantly often refrain from making decisions in fear of consequences, in case the person happens to be linked to a political organization or opinion disfavored by the incumbent government. This makes the whole process agonizingly slow and ineffective. Second, the political divide is also strongly apparent among the diaspora. Due to the ‘with us or against us’ sort of political division, anyone who opts to work with government institutions in Ethiopia, including universities, is generally considered a supporter of the political power and is blamed for the hardships that the Ethiopian people suffer as a result of the political situation. This has negative consequences that come in the form of social sanctions among the diaspora community. Politics, therefore, has far reaching consequences that affect diaspora engagement in higher education.

Attitudinal issues on both sides play a crucial role. Overall, the tainted public image of the diaspora as bogus westernizers in the socio-cultural spaces, and as radicalizers or even advocates of violence in the political space is a serious deterrent, as is the hyperbolic negative perception among the diaspora of situations in Ethiopia. On the other hand, having too much expectations from Ethiopian universities has been a common source of dissatisfaction for both diaspora academics and the local faculty. Expectation that things be in Ethiopia as they are in the

US is simply a setup for a failed relationship and consequential frustration. Difference in work culture and prioritization on scholarship, quality of education and the like are identified to be central for frictions in relationships.

Meanwhile, power relation between diaspora and local academics is formed mainly as a result of the overall difference between the US and Ethiopian higher education systems. Often someone who studied and teaches in an advanced system as the US is considered to assume a position of power in the relationship. Local faculty, on their part, possess a power that emanates from their knowledge and better handle on local issues including the bureaucratic processes. Political and ethnic affiliation is leveraged, sometimes even by students, often in a counterproductive manner that harms a collaborative working relation.

Personal circumstances of diaspora academics, such as their family situation, tenure status, income, burden of supporting family and relatives back home, academic rank and profile, etc. determine the level of flexibility they can have with their time and other resources to engaging with Ethiopian institutions. Those that are further in their career with tenured professorship and grown up children who are off to college tended to have more flexibility for frequent and intense engagement. Having administrative responsibilities in their universities has proven to add a layer of challenge for academics to make the time for transnational engagement.

Engagement through online technology – as opposed to through a physical presence in Ethiopia – has proved successful as a way of reducing the logistical challenges of time and resources. However, this medium does not fit all forms of engagement. Student advising and mentorship are seen as two of the most convenient forms of engagement to carry out virtually. Attempts made to create online repositories of course materials and resources did not materialize

due to different reasons, mainly the absence of proper technology. Besides, such virtual engagement can be successful if US institutions can provide support for their faculty who are involved in virtual activities. Such support might extend from the simple act of allowing faculty to make use of university facilities and resources to offering credits for the work they do, and more. The accommodation of these needs and circumstances of foreign-born faculty in the broader university strategies could bolster transnational engagement.

Racial tension in US institutions has been a common experience among the research participants. Racism and lack of sense of belonging caused by language and cultural nonconformity were major challenges for the Ethiopian-born academics. This experience has for some created strong bond with their home country and hence has enhanced their motivation to engage with Ethiopian institutions. For others, dealing with these difficult circumstances in their career has absorbed more of their time and energy thereby keeping them focused on beating the biased system at the expense of more engagement with Ethiopian universities.

Overall, the findings of the research reveal that several factors are at play in shaping the planning and implementation of transnational engagement initiatives for the Ethiopian academic diaspora. The motivation for engagement is, on one hand, influenced by different personal factors, while the practical implementation is scaffolded by a number of enabling forces as it is challenged by even more.

## **7.2. Discussion of Findings**

This research has revealed that factors of diverse nature play distinct roles and interact in a complex web of relationships to shape transnational engagement with home country, for Ethiopian born academics in US institutions. One way to grasp the nature of these relations is to

look at the findings through the lens of Bourdieu's Theory of Practice. The central concept of the theory is that practice, which may constitute everyday actions or strategic decisions, is the product of complex interplay between one's internal dispositions (habitus) and the relative position he/she assumes in the social space (capital) as it plays out within and according to the preset rules and structures of the broader society (Bourdieu, 1972/1977, 1979/1984, 1989, 1999; Hays, 1994; Swartz, 1997). The interplay which Bourdieu (1979/1984, p. 101) summarized as follows can be a helpful framework to understand diaspora engagement:

$[(\text{habitus}) (\text{capital})] + \text{field} = \text{practice}$

Bourdieu's conception of habitus designates a system of dispositions that frame the social agent's tendency, inclination or way of being (Bourdieu, 1972/1977) essentially underlining the physical and cognitive basis of action both in the habituated and inventive forms (Swartz, 1997). Demographic characteristics of diaspora academics such as age, gender and family situations (e.g. number and age of children, responsibilities for families and relatives back home, etc.) influence not only the way they are positioned in their immediate environment but also the level and type of responsibilities they shoulder, and consequently how they see the world and behave towards everyday routines.

The research has demonstrated how the motivation of diaspora academics to engage with Ethiopian universities is influenced by different personal factors. Besides the professional reasons, which to some extent might be commonly shared by everyone who belongs to a particular disciplinary group, the aspiration and drive of the individual give them their own path and determination to engagement. Similarly, values such as love of country, one's feelings of linguistic and cultural connection with Ethiopia (or a particular part of Ethiopia), and the sense of burden emanating from the fact of having studied in Ethiopia at the expense of the public, all

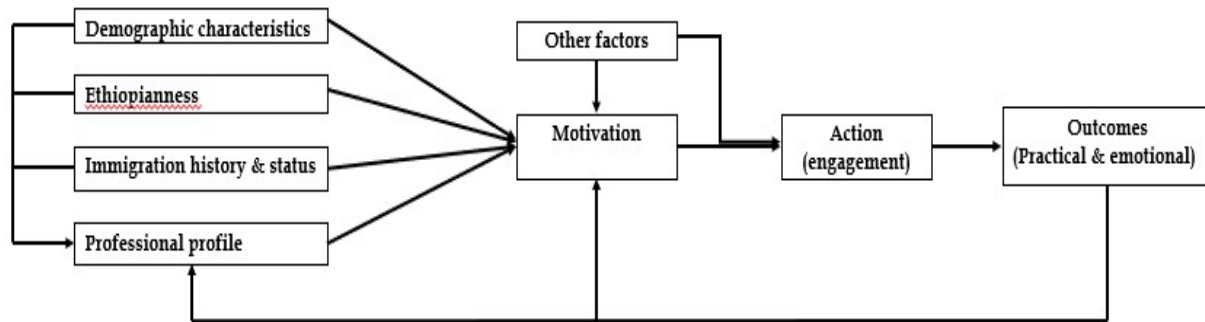
contribute to the aspiration and practice of engagement. Further, the emotional dividend obtained by the individual from their investment of time and effort into engagement, reinforces the desire to continue, and perhaps to strengthen engagement initiatives. All these vary from individual to individual and from time to time, even for the same individual.

The research has also shown how ‘Ethiopianness’ which denotes a range of attributes as race, color, language, cultural values, etc. play important role in shaping the way Ethiopian diaspora academics interact and integrate with their environment in their home institutions in the US. These, along with their demographic characteristics, influence their professional trajectories, among other things how they can navigate the US academic system to secure promotion and tenure. In return, their rank and tenure status (gain, along with other factors) determine their position in the environment and the way they behave in their daily life.

Class habitus (Bourdieu, 1979/1984), for example being an immigrant academic or more specifically being a tenured professor of physics in a four-year institution, establish expectation of common dispositions and behavior. However, considerable differences of habitus are exhibited by individuals who belong to the same group originating from the singularity of the social trajectories and series of experiences of each person (Bourdieu, 1999). The factors that form the habitus of the individual are in perpetuity of complex and interdependent relationships. A simplified visualization of some of the variables in the case of diaspora academics (fig. 1) can help capture this relationship.

**Figure 1**

*Habitus: Formation, Influence and Recreation*



As shown in the figure these different variables not only reinforce each other to shape what determines one's experience but they also continuously evolve to adjust to changing circumstances to influence further action and experience (Mayrhofer et al., 2007). As Bourdieu (1999 p. 109) puts it habitus is produced by history, which itself forms individual and collective practices – more history – according to the structures and rules generated by history. It is important to note that neither this illustration is a complete presentation of everything that is relevant nor do these factors necessarily produce practice (engagement). As Bouveresse (1999) and Strand (2001) point out practice is the product of habitus in the course of an agent actively involved in constructing social reality.

The second element of the theory of practice, capital, refers to the different forms of resources one needs to have in order to be able to accomplish tasks in a particular environment (Bourdieu, 1972/1977; Walther, 2014). The form and adequacy of the resource (capital) is an important aspect that varies by the specific area where it is to be deployed, according to the value assigned by the respective environment, or field. Capital mainly comes in three different forms: economic, cultural and social (Bourdieu, 1986).

The self-explanatory economic capital relates to the availability and amount of economic resources. In this research the difference in ease and coordination of management and logistics has been clearly articulated for those initiatives that had some form of funding. Inversely, it has emerged that the lack of commitment of resources by concerned bodies has caused the engagement initiatives to lag behind plan, and ultimately fail to sustain.

Scholarships, such as the Fulbright programs, were cited to have facilitated engagement with Ethiopian institutions. Even better, third party funded projects are reported to last multiple years undertaking enormous tasks that had largescale and lasting impacts. Funded projects were also more effective in rallying and coordinating stakeholders and attracting better participation of local faculty. In effect, having resources gives the diaspora academics better control over the engagement process by bolstering their negotiating power. However, it can also create power imbalance in the interaction between the engaged diaspora and local faculty where participation on equal footings as academics and co-creators of knowledge could potentially be jeopardized.

The research has also shown how the personal income and economic status of the diaspora academics influences their engagement activities. There is limited accessibility of resources for individually carried out engagement initiatives. Therefore, diaspora academics have had to rely on their own resources to cover different expenses. It therefore follows that those who have a better economic standing will have better flexibility in planning and executing their activities.

Professional profile of the diaspora academic considerably determines his/her potential to raise resources for their engagement activities. The successful implementation of funded projects (engagement initiatives) feeds back into enhancing the professional profile of the academic.

Therefore, there is a circular interdependence between one's professional status and their potential to mobilize resources for their transnational engagement.

Cultural capital pertains to one's disposition of the mind and their possession of culturally esteemed goods and qualifications that are key in the allocation of status in society (Bourdieu, 1986; Moret, 2018; Swartz, 1997). Meanwhile social capital refers to social relationships and networks one can rely on to mobilize resources, access information or influence actions of others (Bourdieu, 1979/1984, 1986; Swartz, 1997). In the research both types of capital have been shown to have a critical role in the smooth conduct of the engagement.

Social and cultural connections to Ethiopia have been identified as the predominant drivers of why diaspora academics choose to work with Ethiopian institutions, as opposed to other developing countries. Having been born and raised in Ethiopia, knowing the culture and being able to speak local languages, having extensive social connections and relatives who are based in Ethiopia, having professional connections with former classmates or colleagues in Ethiopia, etc. make it evident that Ethiopian diaspora academic would have much more resources (social and cultural capital) in Ethiopia than in other countries. In the previous chapters we have seen time and again how these various aspects of cultural and social capital were at play in shaping motivation, framing the engagement initiative, determining the host institution, and facilitating the actual execution of initiatives. At times we have also observed how these resources are deployed to address issues or resolve problems.

Professional status (e.g. being a full professor) and reputation of home institutions (recognizable institutional names as opposed to institutions which are rather called 'college') have been revealed as determinants of the status, and hence power, in the interaction with

Ethiopian faculty. The example of one of the research participants invoking his professorship to garner the power needed to get a stalled project going was a typical case of Bourdieu's cultural capital at work.

Similarly, one's discipline or specialization is also a factor. Given Ethiopia's strategic focus on improving STEM education, coupled with the short supply of academics with terminal degrees in those subjects, makes diaspora academics with specialization in those fields much more demanded by Ethiopian institutions. This demand can be leveraged to steer the power dynamics. The rarity and currency of one's specialization would also attach higher regard to him or her. For instance, a professor of linguistics would not have the same leverage as a professor of nano physics, despite the comparability of their accomplishments in their respective fields.

In the meantime, although its use by the research participants is not evidenced, political and ethnic affiliation has been realized as a potentially powerful resource pertinent to interactions with and within Ethiopian universities. Many of the research participants have acknowledged the power of political and ethnic allegiance in current Ethiopia, despite the unanimous rejection of the idea of deploying it towards any end.

In general, in their interaction with Ethiopian faculty, the research participants are seen struggling to work through the tension between their privileged position and their sympathetic view towards their Ethiopian partners, some of whom their former classmates or colleagues. While they acknowledge, keep stock of and at times deploy their power, they have also demonstrated a careful consideration of refraining from invoking their position of privilege in their interactions. They have emphatically acknowledged the difficult economic, political and social circumstances of Ethiopian university teachers in explaining high turnover, low research

productivity or undue disregard to quality of education. These sympathetic views stand in tension with the preferences of diaspora academics to hold themselves to higher standards of work ethic and commitment to rigor. It is seldom, however, that they invoke their power to see that things are done to the standard they deem appropriate.

The third element of Bourdieu's theory of practice, field, is the operating arena where practices take place and experiences are realized (Bourdieu, 1989; Chudzikowski & Mayrhofer, 2011). Field constitutes a set of circumstances and structures that ultimately determine rules of the game. Countless fields and subfields exist each with their own rules, structures, valuation of resources, power dynamics and so on (Bourdieu, 1989; Swartz, 1997; Winkel-Wagner, 2010).

At a glance the transnational engagement of diaspora academics seems to operate in two broad fields – the US and Ethiopia, in this case. This is true but inadequate. As Zeleza (2004) rightly pointed out, and also evidenced in this research, diaspora academics operate in multiplicity of fields and subfields spread in both geographic locations. In the US, as aliens they have to get by in unfamiliar cultural, political and economic environment; as academics they have to navigate the academic traditions and the higher education system in general; as parents they have to shoulder responsibilities expected of a parent in the US context; and so on. The same logic applies to their being in Ethiopia, although the degree of unfamiliarity differs.

Diaspora academics are, therefore, expected to understand the rules of the game for each of the fields they operate in. While there may be some fundamental rules common across fields (e.g. academia in the US and in Ethiopia) there are far more tacit and nuanced (Wacquant, 2011; Walther, 2014) ones one needs to master to effectively engage in both domains. Some formal rules are clearly different between the systems (e.g. in Ethiopia one needs to be associate

professor or above to be involved in supervision of dissertations), while others are informal and intrinsic to norms and traditions. Internalizing the rules of the game in the field (both formal and informal) is key to be able to read the environment, anticipate changes and develop appropriate strategies to succeed in the respective fields (Bourdieu,1999).

Having spent several years in the US and being socialized to the norms and rules in academia and other fields in the US, diaspora academics face challenges in navigating the intricacies of the fields and subfields in Ethiopia. Besides, the boundaries between fields, where the rules of one field end and those of the other begin (Iellatchitch et al., 2003) are never formally set and clearly delineated, nor are they static. In practice, fields are often overlapping not only in their rules of engagement but also in terms of how resources (capital) are defined and valued.

Overall, in the theory of practice field denotes the space where a set of rules and structures govern the continued struggle for control. In this struggle social agents are expected to understand and operate by the rules of the game in the specific field by deploying their resources and shaping pathways that suit their goals, given their respective habitus.

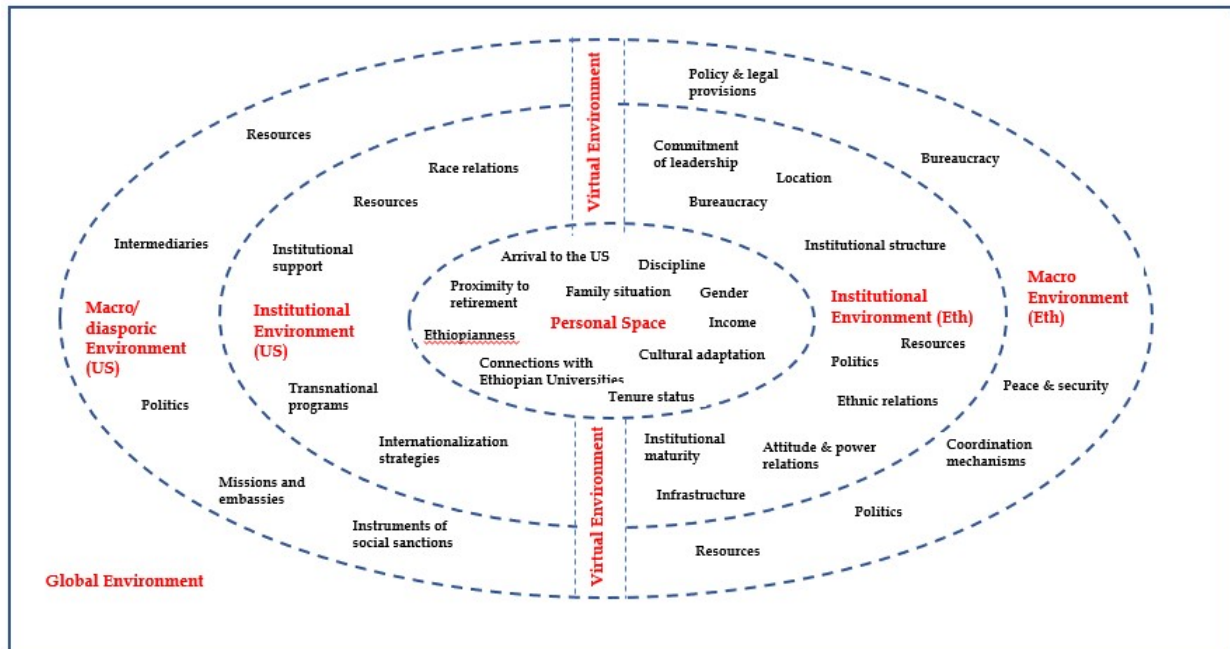
For diaspora academics, who operate in multiple fields, they need to understand and reconcile the rules of the various fields, which sometimes could even be contradictory. Operating in fields which they are not very familiar with, biased against them, and sometimes even hostile to them, they are engaged in constant negotiations and compromises. These acts of negotiations are suppressed by the fact that much of the cultural and social capital Ethiopian diaspora academics bring into the field of American academia (and others) are not highly regarded as those of their competition. Further, their attempt to engage with Ethiopian universities adds more

fields and subfields, more rules to master, and more strategies to craft. Similarly, diaspora academics continue to assume different positions of power, as they continue to operate in different fields. For instance, in their home institutions or in the broader field of the US academia, they may be operating on the edge of the local power dynamics. But in their interaction with the Ethiopian higher education they are likely to assume strong position of power that emanates from their place in a US higher education institution. Therefore, they benefit from understanding their position in the power dynamics, as they do by knowing the governing rules, in each of the fields they operate in.

A different way of interrogating these relationships is through a concentric visualization of the multi-layer environmental analysis. This takes a broader view to map the various factors at different levels in to layers of environmental settings with different components and rules of engagement. Each level of environment constitutes factors that have some form and level of contribution – positive, negative or both, enabling or challenging – to the formation and implementation of transnational engagement of the diaspora academic. Once again, it is very important to note that this visualization neither claims nor attempts to be exhaustive.

**Figure 2**

*Concentric Visualization of Environmental Factors*



At the center is the individual with his/her personal attributes which mostly resonate with the concept of habitus in Bourdieu's theory of practice. The personal environment, in addition to what is intrinsic to the individual, constitutes the immediate surroundings pertinent to their social and professional settings. The self-evident institutional environment constitutes the resources and structures within the institutions the diaspora academic is involved with, while the macro environment is the broader space in which those institutions are positioned. The institutional environment is geographically divided between the US and Ethiopia, as is the macro environment.

Between the geographic sub divisions of the institutional and macro environment there is the virtual space which is continuously narrowing the gap. While the virtual environment bridges

the physical divisions between fields and subfields in the US and in Ethiopia, it also adds its share complexity as it comes with its own resources, structures and rules of engagement. What is more, the virtual environment is far more fluid and ever evolving that requires faster adaptability, leaving some feeling uneasy in that environment.

The broken line designates the permeable nature of the boundary between the different environmental components. Some factors, such as resources, are common to all components of the ecosystem, although the type and amount of resources may differ in each one. Others, such as bureaucracy or politics, are common in multiple subsets of the ecosystem, although they may be different in nature and level of complexity. At last, it is important to note that all these are situated within the broad global environment with an overarching context of universal issues such as immigration, international relations, technological advancement, global advocacies for pertinent causes, etc.

In conclusion, this research has departed from existing literature to demonstrate that diaspora engagement in higher education is never a simple straight forward path. Previous studies, while very limited, focused on elaborating the potential and benefits of diaspora engagement in the African higher education (e.g. Amagoh & Rahman, 2016; Foulds & Zeleza, 2014; Ogachi, 2016; Teferra, 2003, 2010; Zeleza, 2004, 2013). Authors advocated for better involvement of African educated scholars based outside the continent in the development of African higher education institutions. Most of the studies, however, committed to explaining and examining broader policy issues and what are presumed to be challenges to the realization of the potential from engaging the academic diaspora. There has been little to no attention given to the actual experiences of the diaspora academics. We never knew what engagement looked like from the perspective of those who experienced it firsthand.

The current research, on the other hand, has elaborated how engagement for diaspora academics is a complex process influenced by several internal and external factors with unlimited number of possible combinations between them. It is not just that it is complex, it also produces different meaning for different people. First, even when different individuals are engaged in the same environment, due to the diversity in the personal attributes and resources (or habitus and capital, in Bourdieu's terms) they each bring in, they encounter different relationship with the environment (fields). In other words, they get different experiences from their engagement, which in turn feeds back into the set of factors in play that reshapes their motivation and persistence. Second, this process not only involves enormous amount of negotiation and compromise but it also calls for overcoming ripping dilemmas. The experience is also a source of professional and personal satisfaction and pride, as it is sometimes of frustration and embarrassment.

Presenting a holistic view of the complex nature of the transnational diaspora engagement, this research contributes to the literature suggesting approaches to address brain drain in higher education. Commonly cited approaches in literature 'reverse brain drain' (e.g. Chacko, 2007; Song, 1997; Tharenou & Seet, 2014; Wadhwa, 2009; Yoon, 1992) and 'brain circulation' (e.g. Daugėlienė & Marcinkevičienė, 2009; Robertson, 2006; Saxenian, 2002, 2005; Teferra, 2005; Zweig et al., 2008) are conceptually predicated on the notion of brain drain. While reverse brain drain is a self-explanatory concept that suggests returning emigrants back to their home countries, as Saxenian (2005, p. 36) puts it, brain circulation also emphasizes "the same individuals who left their home countries ...[to] return home ...while maintaining their social and professional ties to [their country of residence]".

These two approaches presume brain drain as the foundation of the measures they suggest. This is inadequate for at least three reasons. First, having been educated in one's home country (whether it is at cost or for free) and living in another (by choice or coercion), as encapsulated in the notion of brain drain, is far too simplistic to explain the rationale for interaction with one's home country. In other words, contributing to one's home country is not an automatic reaction to brain drain. Second, there is a slew of factors at play, both distinct to the individual (e.g. experiences of immigration, sense of belonging, identity, feeling of nationalism, etc.) and to their immediate environment (e.g. family, institution, etc.) as situated in the broader national and global context, and as pursued by the individual towards personal, familial or professional ends. By focusing on broader measures that help reattract emigrants, the two approaches downplay the role of personal factors, effectively undermining the agency of the individual. Third, laying down brain drain at the foundation, both reversing brain drain and brain circulation fail to accommodate for the contributions that can be made by anyone but first generation diaspora. By emphasizing on those who emigrated from their home countries, this conception excludes generations of the diaspora born in their country of residence.

Therefore, by embracing a broader view that takes account of all personal, familial, professional, and broader environmental factors of different scope, along with their dynamic interplay, transnational diasporic engagement offers a comprehensive approach to understanding the contribution of diaspora to their countries of origin. Similarly, as highlighted in this research, in higher education the acknowledgement of the diversity and the complexity of individual preferences and environmental factors, viewed from the vantage points of diaspora academics, offer better frame of conceptualizing the process of transnational diaspora engagement. It gives

better pathway for further inquiries into details, and reform agendas in institutional and policy settings.

### **7.3. Implications for Policy**

The findings of this research have demonstrated that diaspora engagement is a product of one's interaction with other social actors (institutions and individuals), structures and culture, against the backdrop of a web of complex relationships among numerous factors in the environment, which can be divided geographically – as US, Ethiopia and virtual. Similarly, a number of enabling and challenging forces have been identified some of which are intrinsic to the individual, others are inherent to the way higher education is organized in the two countries.

Based on the findings, the following implications for policy considerations can be drawn. The implications are selective only to those areas pertinent to higher education (while some of the findings locate issues in much broader context such as political circumstances in Ethiopia and the diaspora). The implications may pertain to institutions in Ethiopia or in the US, with major emphasis on the earlier.

At the system level the lack of ownership of the diaspora engagement in higher education has deprived the sector from a more purposeful and intentionally planned engagement strategy. Lack of coordination of individual efforts and absence of bureaucratic and financial support are serious impediments that can be addressed at a system level. The nascent developments of the creation of the Ethiopian Diaspora Agency and the formation of the Advisory Council of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, are plausible steps forward that need to be further strengthened. The Agency is federally mandated to plan and coordinate diaspora related issues in general while the advisory council is formed by including notable academics from the diaspora

where one of the nine working group is exclusively focused on diaspora engagement. These developments can be further strengthened by:

- a) Developing a national guideline. The national guideline can be instrumental in identifying national priority areas for diaspora engagement in such areas as higher education, research, technology transfer and adaptation, innovation and the like. It can also identify the major stakeholders and their share of responsibility to the realization of the diaspora engagement agenda which can be coordinated at the highest level by a body formed to represent these stakeholders. Besides the possibility of streamlining the bureaucratic process and accentuate resource allocation and utilization, the creation of guideline could also help develop common understanding and better communication both among the Ethiopian stakeholders as well as the diaspora. It can identify the pocket areas where promotion of diaspora engagement can be more productive with in the broader national diaspora engagement policies and strategies. Capitalizing on the key characteristics of engagement in the field of higher education – such as mechanisms of bolstering emotional dividends – the guideline can offer broad direction to balancing between different dimensions of higher education and between universities of different stature.
- b) Incorporating diaspora engagement in higher education reforms. Considering some of the pressing challenges in diaspora engagement in higher education, the concerned government organ needs to address some of the broader issues in its higher education reform agenda and in the long term plans for the sector – e.g. the Five-years Education Sector Development Plan. Lack of autonomy and meritocracy in the organization of higher education institutions is one of the major areas where such reform can be of immense benefit. This, however, requires the de-politicization of universities, specifically emancipation from ethnic politics.

With such reform institutions can have better freedom to decide on matters that are important to their specific circumstances and strategic priorities, including the allocation of resources and developing responsive procedures without the trepidation of political repercussions. This will also empower universities to develop flexible approaches that pertain to their circumstances so they can address different specific issues that hinder the diaspora engagement, without compromising quality of education, of course. For example, if high level professionals who do not have teaching positions offer their services to a given university, and that the university takes the due diligence to make sure that they are qualified, it needs to have the flexibility to allow them to teach, perhaps pairing them with a local faculty member. Further, this calls for reforms that will help maintain capable individuals in the system – curbing brain drain, including to other sectors locally. Better working conditions and performance based incentive schemes need to be in place.

- c) Encouraging the work of intermediaries. The research has shown that intermediaries play a crucial role connecting diaspora academics with Ethiopian institutions, and helping circumvent the bureaucratic process so that they can efficiently utilize their time doing substantive work. Intermediaries are also important in coordinating individual efforts and gearing them towards a better impact. They make it easier for coordinating activities and resources on the Ethiopian side as well, helping the Ethiopian universities and the concerned ministries better plan implement diaspora engagement initiatives. Therefore, recognizing this importance at the highest level, and providing support for their successful operation are crucial. Government, or the body designated to coordinate diaspora engagement may use different incentives, including but not limited to, granting recognition, easing the legal and bureaucratic processes, and promoting good practices.

At the institution level, much of the challenges related to diaspora engagement originate from its lack of formal recognition as part of the institutional processes. Despite the widespread acknowledgement of diaspora engagement as a means to supplement human capital gaps in critical areas, no institutionalized approach is in place to streamline the process into the regular operation of the universities. Diaspora engagement is mostly handled in informal manner that relies on personal connections, reputation of the university and driven by the extent of the commitment of the leaders. Without having the process institutionally recognized, it would be difficult to even identify the challenges let alone to address them to maximize benefits. Therefore, the following considerations can help institutions frame and utilize potential resources in the diaspora.

- i) Developing institutionalized approach. Setting diaspora engagement as an institutional strategic area of focus and developing the necessary institutional structure can help create a formal path for the processes as well as to establish mechanisms of resource allocation and accountability. Doing so can enable the institution to create a standard approach as to how diaspora engagement has to be handled at institutional level and to communicate and put into effect similar approaches across academic and administrative units. It can also help not only to bring the high level ideas to practical and specific means of implementation but also to establish feedback channels to continue improving the process. Institutions need to consider diaspora engagement in their major activities such as developing strategies, allocating resources and forming transnational partnerships.
- ii) Establishing system of need assessment. The research revealed that one of the major hurdles for institutions is that they do not have a clear assessment of their own needs. Due to the absence of formal structure and a designated institutional unit, the practice of collecting data

on the demands (internal human capital gap) and supplies (the number and disciplinary diversity of those who offer their services and those who potentially can). The needs assessment helps planning and setting priority areas. Meanwhile, a more targeted approach can be taken to encourage diaspora engagement in areas that are lacking, such as research and community services.

iii) Active recruitment of potential diaspora partners. Currently, the trend is that diaspora academics often offer their services to Ethiopian universities. The universities put little to no effort in trying and recruiting the diaspora. Even when they do, it is often through informal means by individuals at the lowest structure. Instead institutions need to focus on more active effort to attract members of the diaspora with a clear target, which includes working with intermediary organizations. In targeting it is important to note that diaspora is diverse on the count of several factors. Targeting by universities need to consider these diverse characteristics. For instance, a more continued engagement that targets on building centers of excellence, leading centers and the like benefits from targeting on retiring academics who would have both the time and the necessary experience as well as the desire to permanently resettle in Ethiopia. Supported by institutionalized approach, planned and purposeful recruitment can ensure more focus on sustainable capacity building goals, than just addressing immediate needs on a rolling basis.

On the other hand, the support from US institutions appears sporadic. US institutions can develop ways whereby the engagement of their foreign born faculty with their home countries can be embedded within their overall global engagement strategies. This approach creates a way for the faculty to plan and implement their transnational activities in institutionally supported and possibly resourced context. Meanwhile, according to a recent report from the Institute for

Immigration Research, 22% of faculty in US tertiary institutions are foreign born representing 154 countries (Furuya et al., 2019). This is a massive resource US institutions need to consider in planning their international engagement strategies. Foreign born faculty can be important interlocutors in supporting development of international institutional partnerships, research collaborations, student exchange and study abroad programs, etc. It is, therefore, a win-win game for US institutions to be conscious of the needs and preferences of their foreign born faculty in developing their international/global engagement.

#### **7.4. Limitations and Implications for Further Research**

As it took a phenomenological approach this research predominantly relied on data from selected Ethiopian diaspora academics in US universities and colleges. It is reasonable to consider that the findings of this research related to the interaction of the diaspora with Ethiopian legal and policy framework, institutions and faculty are likely to apply to the engagement efforts of diaspora academics in other parts of the world. However, the same cannot be said for the findings pertinent to the US side. The context of immigration, cultural integration, racial relations, institutional support and so on cannot necessarily be presumed to have similar effect in different higher education systems.

A reasonable extrapolation can be made regarding the potential applicability of the findings of this study to diaspora communities from other African countries. In the US immigrants from different African countries are faced with similar perception and challenges as they navigate through life in the US, and particularly their journey through the higher education system. While more and more African countries are pursuing diaspora engagement policies, it is presumable that these diaspora communities share similar ambitions and put forward similar efforts with those who participated in this research, and similar experiences are likely. Possible

exceptions can relate to the historical context of Ethiopia having no colonial history and hence its diaspora coming with a different mindset and cultural expectation – regarding racism, for instance. While the political divide between incumbent governments and diaspora communities are observed in many African countries, the details of the tension could possibly present different context that can impact the experiences of diaspora academics in specific ways. All in all, it is reasonable to take the findings of this study to have applicability to other African diaspora communities in the US. On the other hand, despite efforts to incorporate some reflections from current and former university leaders and high level officials in the ministry of science and higher education, the research did not make extensive investigation of the Ethiopian side of the engagement process, except through the experiences of the diaspora academics who participated in the research. Therefore, more research is desirable to have a closer look at the institutional arrangements, bureaucratic and financial paths, attitudinal and cultural forces, and power and political relations through interactions. Studies from the perspectives of Ethiopian institutions, faculty and staff need to compliment the current findings.

The important contribution of intermediaries has been established in earlier sections. However, although few exemplary, intermediaries – non-profits and professional networks – are featured in this research their models, funding mechanisms, forms of membership, their effectiveness and the like are not extensively explored. Given their important contributions, more research is needed to highlight what is working better and how the maximum potential can be tapped into.

As discussed in chapter two, the study of diaspora has a broad multidisciplinary background. The term traditionally carried specific historical and social implications that were pertinent to specific population. Despite its narrow origin, today the term is used to represent

communities of broad range of historical and sociological contexts. As the number of Ethiopians living abroad steadily increased in the 1980s and 90s the term diaspora began to come to use in both policy and academic arenas, without much interrogation of its applicability to the Ethiopian case given its historical connotation.

In recent years, however, the use of the word diaspora to the Ethiopian context has been questioned. This has emerged both in broader public discourse and in this research. For the research participants the discontent with the use of the word is explained in two ways. First, in the past years the word diaspora has become negatively framed in the public imagination for what is considered as a reckless approach in political engagement. While the diaspora has a considerably potent impact on Ethiopian politics, often it has been a target of criticism for the aggressive approach it pursues that endangers the lives of the youth who are at the forefront of the political tension. This has been towards both sides of the political spectrum – in support and opposition of the government in power. Similarly, the social and cultural interaction between the diaspora and the local population has been tainted by the display of some in the diaspora who go extra miles to show off their allegedly superiorly modernized and luxurious lives. Although it is impossible to say this is a common behavior of all the diaspora, it has been so pervasively portrayed that it has distorted the public image of the diaspora in general. Second, and more importantly, many see the word diaspora as a distancing terminology, one that sets them far from being Ethiopian, as if they were a different group than the rest of their countrymen. It is, they say, a foreign word that makes them sound and feel foreign, leaving them to feel foreign both in the US and in Ethiopia.

It is presumable that diaspora engagement could be deterred by these sore perceptions. Building on the limited existing work (e.g. Getahun, 2005; Kebede, 2012), there is a need for

more in-depth study on the historical and sociological aspects of the formation and socialization of the Ethiopian diaspora. This helps not only answer the academic question of whether or not the term diaspora could be adequate to capture the Ethiopian experience, but also to understand how historical and social factors play in promoting or deterring the engagement of the diaspora with their home country, including in the area of higher education and knowledge creation.

## **7.5. Conclusion**

It is long established that the free flow of skill across borders has created a global competition for talent, and with it produced gains and losses for countries of different economic strength. Higher education is among the sectors where the impact of this global phenomenon has been severely felt. Countries that have suffered from losing their talent, including Ethiopia, have embarked on different initiatives to try and rectify this challenge. With further developed communication technologies and increasing mobility and cross border partnerships, diaspora academics have an irreplaceable role in bridging the knowledge gap – and subsequently the economic gap. Failure in this regard – such as the growing embargo on mobility – threatens the very essence of the global knowledge economy.

Making use of the talent in the diaspora needs a careful consideration of the environmental factors at play that may encourage or challenge transnational engagement. Acknowledging the complexity of the environment and diversity of personal circumstances and preferences of the diaspora should be our cue not to make blanket policy assumptions. Research based programs with in a broader open and flexible policy environment would produce desired results for specific segments of the diaspora. Appreciating the experiences of those who have been engaged and building on what is working and pointing out what can be improved has been my aspiration in this research.

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## **Appendix A: A Case in Point Revamping Pharmacy Education in Ethiopia**

The following example of an Ethiopian diaspora academic bridging between his home institution in the US and his alma mater in Ethiopia, demonstrates the contribution of diaspora in supporting higher education in country of origin, through promoting transnational institutional partnerships. The case is exemplary not only because it shows the critical role of funding enabling large scale reforms, but also because it highlights some of the potential challenges that require innovative responses. The case is also noteworthy for its participatory approach that began with consultation with local faculty and needs assessment survey, while it also invited the participation of a wide range of stakeholders throughout the process. In other words, this abbreviated story is an attempt to portray some of the major components of the two chapters – i.e. forms of engagement (research, teaching, curriculum/program review or development, professional development, and resources mobilization), and enablers and challenges (i.e. funding, institutional support, resistance, and lack of qualified faculty as a threat to sustainability).

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In 2006, Bisrat, an Ethiopian born professor of pharmacy at a four-year private university, was in Addis Ababa working on a project for his American institution. During his short stay, while he was chatting with graduate students, faculty and officials of the School of Pharmacy at Addis Ababa University he realized that he may be able to help improve pharmacy education in Ethiopia. In his words, he said,

“I realized not much had changed in the school in terms of the content of the curriculum from what I knew back in the 80s when I was a student there. Students are still spending much of

their program studying courses that focus on the fundamental science about plants, extraction, chemistry, and the traditional drug function, and not much, if any, on clinical communication and interaction, patient counseling, disease diagnosis, etc. This is a model the rest of us have moved away from a while ago. Pharmacy graduates need to be equipped with the skills necessary to interact and understand patients so that they can effectively counsel them, as much as they need to understand the science of it.”

But he did not just impose his realization and suggest to change things. Instead, he set up a meeting with the dean and vice deans of the school and asked them how he may be of help. They discussed several challenges they faced, including those Bisrat had identified. They talked about some possible remedies they thought would address the issues. After some deliberations they agreed to survey pharmacy professionals across the country to get their perspectives on the challenges and issues faced in their practice.

The survey identified important priority areas. One was the absence of a properly organized drug information system that students, faculty and practitioners could refer to. Many practitioners must work in rural areas and small urban centers with limited access to libraries, reference books, or the internet. Further, even when they did have the access to this information it was not well organized, and so it was of little use to them. The survey also confirmed Bisrat’s initial assessment that the curriculum was outdated and did not equip graduates with the skills they needed as practicing pharmacists. Given the shortage of doctors and nurses, particularly in areas outside the major cities, increasing pharmacists’ role in patient-oriented services was crucial.

Based on these results, professor Bisrat, together with colleagues at his home institution and at Addis Ababa University, successfully applied for a grant. Through the grant, which was initially for five years but was later extended to eight years, major initiatives were implemented.

Among others:

1. A Drug Information Center (DIC) was established, first at Addis Ababa University, and later replicated in eight universities in different regions across the country. DIC staff offer evidence-based information and resources on drugs to hospital staff to enhance patient care.
2. The undergraduate degree program in pharmacy was overhauled to include more courses in clinical and interactive patient communication. Several subject-specific experts from the US and elsewhere collaborated with the Ethiopian faculty in redesigning the curriculum where some courses were removed from the curriculum while some new ones were introduced. The revised curriculum, which extended the program from four years to five and incorporated a considerable amount of practical exposure for students, was adopted nationally (approved by the ministries of education and health).
3. Clinical rotation guidelines were developed and training offered for representatives of different institutions who would serve as preceptors to hospitals and other rotation sites.
4. In collaboration with Ethiopian Pharmaceutical Association, national accreditation guidelines and training modules for continuous professional development were developed, and trainings of trainers offered.

These successful outcomes can be partly attributed to the availability of funding which made it possible to not only establish proper management and facilitate logistics, but also to

secure a more structured and sustained commitment from local faculty who received a top-up on their salary for their contributions in the various initiatives. However, there were several challenges along the way which required negotiations, compromises and some innovative solutions.

For instance, while many stakeholders in Ethiopia, such as pharmacy school staff, officials from the universities and the ministry of education, the association of pharmacy professionals etc., were involved, and collaborated towards positive outcomes, there were also frictions and conflicts, as the implications of the proposed changes emerged. The strongest push back came from faculty members who felt marginalized by the process, especially those who taught the courses that were to be axed. Addressing these issues required continuous negotiations with the concerned individuals. This included bringing some of them to the US partner institution so that they could see for themselves how the proposed changes would play out in practice, and what the benefits were.

On the other hand, a serious shortage of qualified faculty to teach the newly introduced courses threatened the sustainability of the whole effort. This was resolved by establishing a graduate program in clinical pharmacy which, for a short while, was run through the support of American professors and Indian expats, while Bisrat continued teaching courses – even after the funding ended – and coordinating the support from the US side. An international student exchange program between Bisrat's institution and Addis Ababa University also created the opportunity for him and his volunteering colleagues to go to Ethiopia with students during the summer, where during their few weeks stay, they teach courses or train junior faculty.

## **Appendix B: Informed Consent Form**

Engaging with higher education back home: Experiences of Ethiopian academic diaspora in the  
United States

**Introduction:** I, Ayenachew Aseffa Woldegiyorgis, a doctoral student at the Center for International Higher Education at Boston College, invite you to participate in this research study titled above. You have been selected as a potential participant because of your professional position in relation to the engagement of Ethiopian academic diaspora with Ethiopian higher education institutions.

**Purpose:** The purpose of this research is to highlight the nature and extent of engagement of Ethiopian academics in the US have with institutions of higher learning in Ethiopia. It attempts to show the motivations, forms and outcomes of engagement, and its challenges and opportunities.

**Procedures:** Your participation in this research will consist of completing a one-time maximum 3 hours interview with me, the researcher. It is highly desirable that the interview shall be conducted in person at a place of your choice. Conducting the interview via online platform such as Skype or Zoom shall be considered if the alternative is not possible. The interview constitutes questions related to your own experience in the area of participating or facilitating engagement initiatives.

For the purposes of convenience, the interview will be recorded and transcribed to make it suitable for analysis. Once it is transcribed, the transcribed copy will be kept for analysis while the audio file will be permanently deleted.

**Risks:** to the best of my knowledge, your participation in this study does not have any risk of harm to you, or others. However, there may be other unforeseen risks.

**Benefits:** as a participant in this research you will not receive any direct benefit that comes as a result of your participation. Your contribution, however, will make this research possible which intends to address issues related to the engagement of Ethiopian academic diaspora with institutions in their home country.

**Cost:** there is not going to be any cost you will incur because of your participation in this study, besides your time.

**Confidentiality:** your identifying information such as names email addresses institutions, etc. will not be stored with the data. Once the interview is transcribed, it will be coded and the codes will be kept separate from the data itself. The audio files will be permanently deleted after transcription. In the reporting, participants will be anonymized by using general terms of discipline and type of institution (e.g. a chemistry professor in a four-year public university) to identify specific characteristics relevant to the analysis. Only electronic copy of the transcribed and coded data as well as the informed consent form will be maintained, which will be stored in a designated folder on the University server.

Mainly just the researchers will have access to information; however, please note that a few other key people may also have access. These might include government agencies. Also, the Institutional Review Board at Boston College and internal Boston College auditors may review the research records. Otherwise, the researchers will not release to others any information that identifies you unless you give your permission, or unless we are legally required to do so.

**Voluntary participation:** It is entirely yours to decide to participate in this research.

Participating in this study is voluntary. Even if you decide to be part of the study now, you may change your mind and stop at any time, or opt not to answer any question(s). Your withdrawal from the research will not have any implication.

**Questions:** You are encouraged to ask questions now, or at any time during the study.

You can reach me (the researcher) at (617) 552-1061 or the supervisor of this study, Prof. Hans de Wit at (617) 552-4236. If you have any questions about your rights as a participant in a research study, please contact the Boston College Office for Human Research Participant Protection, (617) 552-4778.

**Certification:** I have read and I believe I understand this Informed Consent document. I believe I understand the purpose of the research project and what I will be asked to do. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and they have been answered satisfactorily. I understand that my participation in this research is voluntary and I may stop my participation at any time and/or that I can refuse to answer any question(s). I understand that the interview I will have with the researcher will be recorded and transcribed, after which the audio file will be deleted. I understand that my personal information will be kept separate from the main data, and that I will not be identified in reports on this research. I have received a signed copy of this Informed Consent Form for my personal reference. In acknowledging all of these conditions, I hereby give my informed and free consent to be a participant in this study by checking the box below.

☐ I give my consent to participate in the research

Name of Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Consent \_\_\_\_\_ Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Person providing information and witness to consent \_\_\_\_\_

## **Appendix C: Interview Guideline**

The purpose of this interview is to collect information for my doctoral dissertation research. Overall, the research attempts to understand how Ethiopia, a country that has severely suffered from brain drain, can improve brain circulation through diaspora engagement. The research specifically examines existing fragmented engagement initiatives of Ethiopian and Ethiopian born academics in the US, with Ethiopian universities, in order to identify areas of improvement.

Engagement is understood here as any form of intentional relationship/interaction/working relations between the research participant (you) and any higher education institution in Ethiopia, relating to your professional activity (as an academic). Engagement could therefore be in any form, modality or scope, and might have any motive.

Your participation is very much appreciated.

### **Questions:**

1. Can you tell me a little bit about yourself?
  - Your institution
  - Your current position (tenure status?)
2. When and how did you come to the United States?
3. What does your academic and career trajectory look like?
  - How did you become an academic?
  - How did you end up at your current institution?
4. Can you briefly tell me about your engagement with Ethiopian higher education institutions (if there are more than one focus on the most significant one and highlight the others)

- What was the nature of it? (what does it involve)
  - How long did it take?
  - Who did the initiative come from?
  - How much did it cost and who financed it?
  - Did it involve multiple institutions? And stakeholders?
  -
5. What was your motivation to engage with Ethiopian higher education institutions?
- (rationale)
- What are the benefits you expect from your engagement? (promotion, tenure, economic return, etc.)
  - Why did you choose Ethiopia - you could do your services to other countries (poor countries, African countries, developing countries)?
6. How do you choose the institutions to work with?
- Did you have any prior contact with the institution (such as being an alumnus, knowing someone in the leadership, it being in your home town or region, etc.)
7. How do you start your connection?
- Did you go to the ministry (of education or other), the institution itself (where exactly, president, VP, school/college, department) or through intermediaries (facilitating organizations)
  - What was the response like? (walk me through the process at its early stages)
8. Which aspect of the university mission does the engagement focus on?
- Why that particular dimension? (teaching, research, community services)?

9. What was your relationship/interaction like with the university you worked with?  
particularly
- University leadership
  - Administration
  - Faculty
  - Students
  - The academic culture in general
  - What is the impact of you being from a US institution in the interaction with others?
10. What was the outcome of the engagement project?
- Were there measurable outcomes?
  - Did you have any publication as a product of your engagement?
11. How was it like to navigate through the bureaucracy?
- Was the ethnic politics in universities an issue at all?
12. How is technology facilitating (or hindering) your engagement?
- If there was better technological facility, would that increase your chances of engagement? How and in what areas/what sort of technology?
13. Have you at any point been in contact with diaspora networks or organizations such as ABIDE to help you connect with Ethiopian universities?
- If yes, how do you evaluate your experiences?
  - Has any of your engagement been mediated through such organizations?
14. How did you align your engagement with Ethiopian institution(s) with your responsibility here in your home institution?
- Was there enough support from your institution?

15. How does the pressure to publish (and attract grant) inhibit you from engaging with Ethiopian higher education?
16. How do you evaluate your experience: what were the positive aspects and the challenges?
- To what extent did you have control over the process?
  - Was it easy to communicate and create a common understanding with colleagues in Ethiopia?
  - Are universities and/or other government institutions well prepared to handle collaborative work with you, the diaspora in general?
  - What is the most rewarding aspect of your engagement?
  - What are the most challenging factors?
  - What have you done well? What could you have done differently?
17. If you are asked to summarize your experience in three words/phrases, what would be those words/phrases that best describe your overall enduring impression/memory?
18. Do you intend to continue to engage with Ethiopian higher education institutions?
- Why or why not?
19. When you hear/read discussions about brain drain, does it have any impact on you?
- Do you associate it with yourself individually?
  - Do you consider it to be your moral obligation/responsibility (in word obligation or responsibility) to give back?
  - Do you relate it to your up-brining, the way you were educated and socialized? E.g. If education was not free in Ethiopia, or if the country was better off, would you have felt differently about it?

20. Immigrant, black (of color), African or African American, etc. which word/phrase do you identify with most comfortably (as used by others)?
- Is there another word/phrase you commonly use to describe/introduce yourself when needed?
  - Why do you choose that one over the others?
  - Has your position of belonging to multiple domains (immigrant, of color, Ethiopian, etc.) positively or negatively impacted your engagement with Ethiopian universities?
21. Because of the not so smooth relations between the diaspora and the Ethiopian government, for a long time working with Ethiopian government (or its institutions) was not seen positively. How did that affect you?
- The mass firing of university professors (although long time ago) and subsequent measures of politicizing universities, have caused a lot of people to lose trust in academic institutions in Ethiopia. How does that resonate with you?
  - How do these factors affect the perception, motivation, safety, etc. issues for academics to engage? (in general)
  - The famous cases of diaspora members who went home and run into trouble with government (e.g. Dr Fikru Maru, Ermias Amelga, ...) and how that influences decision?
22. How do you think the recent changes in politics and in the diaspora-government relations affect diaspora engagement in higher education?
- Do you think universities will keep up with commensurate reforms?
  - Is there fear, with you or others, that it could slide back to where it was?

23. Have you ever participated in an event where issues of diaspora engagement were discussed?
- If yes, who organized it? (embassy, diaspora community organizations, US universities and higher education related organizations, etc.)
  - Was higher education part of the discussion?
24. Have you ever been contacted by anyone from Ethiopia about your work?
- Was it by aspiring scholars (students) universities, government agency, professional associations?
  - What was the nature of the communication?
  - What was your reaction - was there anything that attracted your attention and forced you to respond or anything in the opposite?
25. Are you a member of, or in contact with, any networks professional or otherwise in the diaspora?
- How do you see their role in facilitating the connection and engagement of the diaspora with Ethiopia?
26. Do you respond to general calls- like when some government officials say come work with us, we need your expertise etc., or do you prefer to be contacted individually?
27. How much do you know about the laws on diasporas and the institutions concerned with it - e.g. embassy units, MoFA, MoST, investment agency, etc. and the diaspora policy?
- How much do you know about the law and the policy regarding the various benefits and incentives available for diaspora in general and for academic diaspora in particular?

- Which incentives, which aspects of the law/policy are appealing to you and which are not?
28. What should be done so that the potential of the diaspora in the US universities can better be utilized towards the development of higher education in Ethiopia?
- What kind of legal and institutional frameworks are needed?
  - What should the Ministry(ies) do?
  - What should universities do?
  - What should Ethiopian scholars/university teachers do?
  - What should intermediary organizations and networks do?
29. If you have to choose one thing (assuming the interview happens in their offices) that you think would represent you as an academic, as a scholar, as a migrant and in the spectacle of your engagement with Ethiopian higher education, what would it be?