

**“The Sufferings and Persecution of my People
Back Home is the one that Really Burns and
Boils in me Every Single Day”:
Exploring Expressions of Cultural Well-being
in the Oromo Diaspora**

**by
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Ethics Statement

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Abstract

Oromos are an Indigenous people living in the horn of Africa and in diaspora. Their long history of struggle against (internal) colonization creates a challenging context in which to strive for well-being. For the last 30-40 years, Canada has been a common destination and safe haven for many persecuted Oromos. The current project sought to explore Oromo conceptions of well-being through a qualitative study involving participant-observations and 14 interviews in three Canadian cities. The findings reveal that Oromo people's origins in Oromia remain an important and continuing determinant of their health and well-being, despite migration to Canada. The findings suggest that our current understandings of determinants of immigrant health in Canada are too narrowly focused on post-migration conditions. These findings contribute to a growing body of literature that prioritize understandings of collective over individual well-being, as well as the important exploration of social determinants of immigrant health.

Key Words: Collective Identity; Determinants of Well-being; Histories of Colonization and Injustice; Oromo Migrants; Transnational Connections; Well-being

Dedication

To all Oromo children, women, and men who have perished in the struggle for peace and independence.

To all Oromo people who survived the struggle for freedom and justice.

To my son, Adi, 'the just one.'

In solidarity,

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List of Acronyms

| | |
|--------|--------------------------------------------------------------------|
| CIA | Central Intelligence Agency |
| EPRDF | Ethiopian People’s Revolutionary Democratic Front |
| GPI | Global Peace Index |
| HRW | Human Rights Watch |
| IEP | Institute of Economics and Peace |
| OCHA | United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs |
| OWB | Objective Well-being |
| RWB | Relational Well-being |
| SDOH | Social determinants of Health |
| SDofW | Social Determinants of Well-being |
| SES | Socioeconomic Status |
| SFU | Simon Fraser University |
| SWB | Subjective Well-being |
| TCPS | Tri-Council Policy Statement |
| TGE | Transitional Government of Ethiopia |
| TPLF | Tigrayan People’s Liberation Front |
| UNESCO | United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization |
| UNGA | United Nations General Assembly |
| UNHCR | United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees |
| WGIP | Working Group on Indigenous Populations |
| WHO | World Health Organization |

Chapter 1.

Introduction and Literature Review

The story of colonization in Africa is one that can be divided into ancient and modern periods. The earliest period of colonization in Africa began in 300BC, when Greeks and Phoenicians conquered North Africa (Khapoya, 2015). In the early modern era, from the 7th century onwards, Arab and European states gradually colonized more of Africa (Khapoya, 2015). The most extensive colonization endeavour was the Scramble for Africa during the late 19th century and early 20th century. This colonization spanned a period during which Britain, Portugal, France, and other European countries established colonial empires over a vast proportion of Africa (Khapoya, 2015). In Africa, as in the Americas, millions of Indigenous peoples perished at the hands of the colonists. Africa's colonizers were also similar to those of the Americas in that they strategically sought to 'enlighten' and Christianize Indigenous peoples and to exploit their lands and resources for economic and political gains (Battiste, 2004; Jordon, 2000). Eventually, powerful European forces claimed almost all African soil. One of the exceptions to this was Ethiopia, which successfully resisted Italy's attempt to colonize it (Gudina, 2007). Although Ethiopia was not colonized, scholars argue that it was a geopolitical entity shaped by the influences of the European colonization of Africa (Jalata, 2009; M. K. Kumsa, 2005).

Unlike Indigenous peoples in Canada, African peoples who were colonized successfully repossessed their lands from external powers. In Canada, Indigenous peoples' lives were subjugated to the colonizers' governance and for many years, assimilation was the only alternative to exclusion from mainstream society. Indigenous people were unable to reclaim their identities and lands for many years and it was not probable, nor realistic, for them to leave the country and forge a new home for themselves elsewhere. In contrast, the Indigenous peoples of Africa sought to reclaim their autonomy and sovereignty after World War II ended (Khapoya, 2015). The ideology they espoused came to be known as the decolonization of Africa, which does not apply to Ethiopia as it was never formally colonized by an external European power.

According to Barsh (1999), the Indigenous populations of Africa differed from those of the Americas in that a small proportion of them had had not been “absorbed by the growth of nation-states” (p. 1). This scenario was likely the reality for the Indigenous peoples in Ethiopia who were better able to retain their traditional ways of life because they did not experience the same external forces of colonization. However, lesser known stories about internal colonialism that permeated African nations exist. For example, through the establishment of economic, political, and cultural lines of stratification, Indigenous populations have been subjugated by the ruling elite through a process of internal colonialism. One key element that distinguishes internal from external colonialism is the intensity in which cultural hegemony is asserted to transform populations into internal colonial subjects. The Oromo, an Indigenous people whose lands are located in Ethiopia, are one of the peoples whose histories and experiences reflect the ramifications of these phenomena. Previous research has documented that a contentious history of internal colonization perpetrated by successive Ethiopian regimes, has induced the forcible displacement of countless Oromos (Hassan, 2000; Holcomb, 1999; A. Kumsa, 2014).

The research for this thesis was generated by my concurrent master’s degree in criminology and health sciences. I chose an interdisciplinary approach to explore what well-being means to Oromo people. As I will describe below, the Oromo have been impacted by a legacy of ‘crimes against humanity.’ Given that all human suffering is health-related, a combined health and human rights approach allowed the project to gather information that interlinks the past, present, and future aspirations of the Oromo people. This method facilitates an understanding of the challenges, strengths, and solutions they face when their homeland is subject to governance by others who have used their position to oppress.

With respect to criminology, I embraced a critical perspective that focuses on challenging macrostructures. Specifically, how histories of actions and inactions involving state harm exacerbate human suffering. Given the early marriage between criminology and criminal justice, mainstream criminology has been inundated with studies ostensibly against the state (e.g., street crime) instead of crime by the state (e.g., state crime). Hall and Winlow (2012) argue that mainstream criminology focuses on a few general recurring theories that fail to capture the conditions of crime “in today’s globalising neoliberal world” (p. 16). I argue that these traditional theories work to

propagate the criminological status quo, rather than directly challenging “that orthodoxy at its deepest intellectual and political roots” (Hall & Winlow, 2012, p. 7). By emphasizing conventional concepts and theories, mainstream criminology has overlooked some of the most serious atrocities that have impacted humanity. For example, criminological discourses largely ignore the study of violence enacted by states, such as ‘crimes against humanity.’ Maier-Katkin, Mears, and Bernard (2009) suggest three reasons for advancing knowledge that focus on crimes against humanity: *i*) more people have died because of mass violence than as a result of all other crimes; *ii*) these crimes are a threat to individual and social stability; and, *iii*) they invoke the question of the state’s responsibility as arbiter of justice. The failure to challenge power and authority suggests that mainstream criminology is dominated by attempts to establish the grounds for state-defined crime. Conversely, a critical approach aims to present perspectives and narratives that challenge state-defined concepts of crime and question the supremacy of mainstream analyses of criminality.

This research was inspired by a desire to explore the Indigenous narrative as a counterpoint to the state narrative (practiced by states and many academics). The utility and application of the Indigenous narrative is a feasible point of departure for addressing the empirical and theoretical neglect of state power and crime in the discipline of criminology. Not only is this narrative important because of Indigenous rights, I contend that a resolution to Indigenous people/s fraught relations with states necessitate an understanding of how multiple perspectives cross paths in any given social nexus.

Within health sciences, I draw upon perspectives that consider larger social forces that underpin health inequities, such as the literature concerning social determinants of health. Specifically, I use this frame to examine the larger context of power and inequality at play as a way to investigate the interplay between injustice and well-being. Like criminology, the discipline of health sciences has traditionally centered on practice-based learning and research. Although public health scholars have engaged with human rights frameworks – such as the work done by Paul Farmer (Farmer, 1999) – this discourse needs further advancement within relation to Indigenous rights. Within the context of state power and crime, it is important to explore if a health perspective can work to advance Indigenous rights. In other words, what contributions does health research bring to the struggle for Indigenous rights? The motivations for the current research was also inspired by seeking answers to this type of question. By drawing from

literatures in both disciplines, I aimed to engender a multifaceted understanding of the research topic concerning how bonds to the past impact well-being in the present.

This thesis shows that the well-being of forcibly displaced Oromos living in the diaspora has been influenced by the socio-political, historical, and cultural conditions connected to migration. To gain an in-depth understanding of the impacts these conditions have on the well-being of Oromos over the life course, I begin by considering the historical contributions of colonization and injustices and their implications for how Oromo people in the diaspora negotiate well-being. This review serves to set up an exploratory case study among Oromos in the diaspora who have become migrants due to histories of internal colonization and crimes against humanity in their country of origin. Although my research does not explicitly examine crimes against humanity, an analysis of this phenomenon provides a conceptual backdrop for understanding why social justice issues remain at the forefront of Oromo people's lives as they live in diasporic communities. This analysis serves to contextualize the current study, which aims to elucidate ethnocultural expressions of well-being through perceptions of social justice issues related to Oromo relations with Ethiopia's state government.

Historicizing Racial and Ethnic Relations: Ethiopians and Oromos

For several centuries, people in Ethiopia have endured racial and ethnic tensions that have often erupted into deadly violence. One source of contention that has contributed to these conflicts over millennia is the distinction between who is 'African' and who is 'Arab.' The privileging of some groups while other groups are oppressed (e.g., based on skin colour or race), has been a master narrative that has overshadowed humanity, such as the oppression and disempowerment of Indigenous peoples in the Americas due to racist ideologies of Western colonizers (Battiste, 2004). Likewise, in Ethiopia, those who view themselves as Arab descendants are regarded as racially and culturally superior, whereas Indigenous Africans have been considered as their inferiors (Jalata, 2009).

Nevertheless, ethnicity in Ethiopia is complex. Language creates one of the most important distinctions between the groups that comprise this ethnic mosaic, with over 100 languages spoken in the country by 77 different ethnic groups ("Ethiopia,"

2007). It is estimated that the Oromo represent the single largest ethnolinguistic group in Ethiopia, comprising an estimated 34.4% (Central Intelligence Agency [CIA], 2016) to 40% ("Ethiopia," 2007) of its total population. The other three major groups are the Amhara (27%), the Somali (6.2%), and the Tigray (6.1%) (CIA, 2016). According to *The World Factbook*, the population in Ethiopia was an estimated 105,350,020 as of February 2018 (CIA, 2018), which suggests that there are up to 42 million Oromo people in Ethiopia. It should be noted that although the majority of the Oromo population resides primarily in Ethiopia, Oromos also live in neighbouring countries such as Kenya, Somalia, and in the diaspora.

In examining how people classify themselves within Ethiopia, Jalata (2009) argues that the modern Ethiopian state was gradually established through various "discourses of civilization, race, culture, and religion to justify and rationalize the colonization and dehumanization of the Indigenous Africans" (p. 190). Jalata (2009) elucidates this point, stating the following about Ethiopia's ethnic makeup:

The Amhara ethnonational group and another group known as Tigray are collectively called Habashas or Abyssinians. The Habashas developed a common religion, tradition, and set of customs, but each group, the Amhara and Tigray, maintained different languages. Although phenotypically and culturally Africanized, the Habashas have suppressed their Africanness or Blackness by linking themselves to the Middle East and by considering themselves a Semitic people, claiming to be racially and culturally superior to indigenous Africans. (p. 191)

In other words, Jalata suggest that the Amhara and the Tigray people are distinct in comparison to other nationalities in Ethiopia such as the Oromo. The distinction Jalata (2000, 2009) makes is that the former two groups are not Indigenous Africans, and do not consider themselves to be. Some of the discourses that he examines will be outlined in the following sections. For now, it is important to highlight his point that treating Ethiopians as one homogenous population would be erroneous.

Nevertheless, it is common for people outside of Ethiopia to consider all the citizens of Ethiopia as 'Ethiopian,' perhaps because they are all 'black' and/or because there is a lack of understanding about the various nationalities within the country. Such racial homogenization is a form of oppression and cultural imperialism. Similarly, Lawrence (2003) states that the colonial term 'Indian' reduces Indigenous people to one single race, when they are in fact multiple nations of people. Some people residing in

Ethiopia also see themselves as culturally and historically diverse. For example, the Oromo in Ethiopia and in the diaspora do not typically identify as Habasha, Abyssinian, or 'Ethiopian,' but rather as Indigenous Oromo people. Henceforth, the term 'Ethiopian' in this paper is not used to describe the Oromo people.

Despite having a single common mother tongue (known as Afaan Oromo), a shared culture and collective socio-historical experiences, the Oromo people are quite heterogeneous. Alemu (2007) observes that the Oromo are divided into more than 200 tribes in "six major regional groupings: Southern (Borana, Guji), Northern (Wallo, Raayyaa), Central (Showa, Tulamaa), Eastern (Harar, Ittu), Western (Wallagga, Leqaa), and South-western (Mecha, Macca)" (p. 57). This information was drawn from an ethnographic survey that was published more than 45 years ago and there is no current, valid ethnographic survey or census population data that would provide better insight into the demographics of the Oromo at present. Thus, the distinction between how Oromo territories formerly divided themselves in comparison to how they currently organize themselves locally remains unclear, foreshadowing a lack of scholarship as well as government disinterest to the collection and diffusion of this sort of information.

Nevertheless, the Ethiopian government has established official boundaries to define Oromo and other nationalities in Ethiopia. For example, a 2013 map from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) indicates that the Oromo are subdivided into 17 ethnic administrative zones (for an illustration of this refer to Appendix A). However, I believe that the official lines of geographical and political demarcation are not always consistent with the actual distribution of people because the first colonizers of Africa imposed geographical maps without strategically considering the heterogenic demographics of its people. Others have contended that the implementation of ethnic federalism - "which equates ethnic groups with administrative units" (Adugna, 2011, p. 776) – in Ethiopia was a crafty political strategy that gave the illusion of the right to Oromo self-determination (Gudina, 2007) while exacerbating territorial claims and counter claims among various ethnic groups (Adugna, 2011; Bassi, 2010; Kefale, 2010). These views suggest that the ethnic federal restructuring is contested among Oromos and other ethnolinguistic groups.

The Oromo in Ethiopia recognize their nation as Oromia. Oromia covers 600,000 square kilometers and is bound by the Nile River in the north, the border of South Sudan

in the west, and the Hararghe Plateau in the southeast (Klemm, 2009; see Appendix B). Finfinnee (otherwise known as Addis Ababa, a name coined by the Habasha people) is the capital of Oromia, although neither the capital nor the Oromo nation were formally recognized by the Ethiopian government until the 1990s (Gudina, 2007). What a nation's borders *are* and what descriptors characterize different groups as continues to be a main point of contention between peoples and governments in Ethiopia and many other African nations (Gudina, 2007). The following review of several socio-political and historical factors adduced from available literature sheds further light on how ethnically-based administrative regions were delineated in Ethiopia, shaping the contemporary Ethiopian state. Understanding the implications of this history is significant for my study because it is the most contentious factor that has spurred the modern Ethiopian-Oromo conflict that has led to the forcible displacement of many Oromos, including the participants in this study. To fully comprehend and appreciate the present-day implications of these tensions on the well-being of Oromo people living in diasporas, it is necessary to first understand the country's socio-political and historical climate.

A Narrative: How the Literature Situates the Ethiopian-Oromo Conflict

Members of the Oromo intelligentsia have viewed the socio-political history of Ethiopia's Oromo peoples through several lenses. Many of these scholars begin by situating their arguments within the context of historical processes they believe led to the creation of the highly contentious multi-ethnic polity that characterizes modern Ethiopia. Gudina's (2007) perspective is that the "wars of the 19th century were for the 'making' of modern Ethiopia" (p. 81). He makes two assertions to support this position. The first is that pre-1850s Ethiopia had been under feudal anarchy. Tewodros II, an Amharic emperor of Ethiopia from 1855-1868 ("Tewodros II," 2015), wanted to abolish that system as a part of his modernization plan, which also included challenging *de facto* Oromo supremacy of the time (Gudina, 2007, p. 86). Accordingly, his vision was to increase the authority of the central government by decimating the feudal power of the local nobility. Gudina's (2007) claims that "Tewodros was the first modern Ethiopian ruler who explicitly recognized the ethnic factor in his project of empire building" (p. 86). The 19th century was clearly a century for sealing the deal on empires, particularly of the colonial kind. Gudina (2007) adds that although Tewodros' plan failed to materialize, his

dream set the stage for how successive Ethiopian regimes would operate thereafter. Based on the literature, Tewodros' vision marked the beginning of the Ethiopian-Oromo conflict.

Gudina's (2007) second assertion is that during the governance of Menelik II, emperor of Ethiopia from 1889 to 1913 (Hussein, 2008), profound changes occurred in Ethiopia that exacerbated tensions between Ethiopians and Oromos. According to Gudina (2007), the Shewan expansion was at the center of Menelik's crusade. This expansion sought to incorporate and assimilate the Oromo of Shewa from northern Ethiopia, a region that Menelik had ruled as King from 1865 to 1889 ("Menilek II," 2015). It is believed that once the conquest of the north had been achieved, Menelik proceeded to carry out Tewodros' modernization plan and successfully conquered all Oromo lands throughout Ethiopia (Gudina, 2007; Hussein, 2008). The process involved invasions that aimed to achieve expansions, and many battles were fought as Oromos resisted the nation-building plan that was being imposed on them (Gudina, 2007; Hussein, 2008). A non-Oromo, non-Ethiopian scholar supports this narrative and further contends that:

Following Menelik II's conquest of the Oromoland, the Oromo were forced to relinquish their land and to pay tribute to the conquerors. They were also made to relinquish their religious, cultural, linguistic and political identities. The conquerors created hegemonic structures through which they would perpetuate their cultural, economic and political domination. (Hussein, 2008, p. 34)

Hussein (2008) refers to this narrative as "the politico-historical narrative of the Amharic cultural hegemony" (p. 34), which continued to unfold for another century. Although the Tigray people also have been implicated in the conquest of Oromo lands at various points throughout history, the Amhara were considered to spearhead the conflict between Ethiopians and Oromos, perhaps because they were larger in number than their Tigray allies. Toward this end, the above-mentioned scholars believe that these are the some of the key events through which one should understand the birth of the Ethiopian-Oromo conflict, also known as the Amhara-Oromo struggle. However, some scholars have offered alternative viewpoints.

Others attribute the real onset of the conquest of Oromia to the Amharization policies of emperor Halie Selassie I, who eventually emerged as the successor to Menelik II, becoming the emperor of Ethiopia from 1930-1974 ("Halie Selassie I," 2015).

Deepening ethnic conflicts plagued Ethiopia during his reign, and it is widely believed that this was the result of several policies that he enforced in the name of Ethiopian unity. According to the perspectives of Bulcha (1997), Gudina (2007), Hussein (2008), and Jalata (2000, 2009), Haile Selassie embarked upon a relentless journey to centralize and homogenize non-Amhara nations and nationalities (excluding Tigray), which was seen to entail a continuation of objectives pursued by successive Ethiopian/Amhara-dominated regimes. Through what Hussein (2008) terms “the Amharization campaign” (p. 37), Haile Selassie imposed the superiority of Amharic language, ethnicity, and culture on non-Amhara nations (Bulcha, 1997; Hussein, 2008). Consequently, Oromo people were forbidden to speak Afaan Oromo, assert their ethnicity, or practice their culture. Although Haile Selassie outlawed Afaan Oromo during his rule, Bulcha (1997) suggests that it was formally recognized and taught in schools during Ethiopia’s brief Italian Occupation, which lasted from 1936-41. The Oromo experienced relative freedom during this time, but it was short-lived. In other words, external occupation by Europeans provided Oromo people relative freedom, which creates an interesting paradox as European powers by this era had a history of being colonizers rather than liberators. According to Bulcha (1997), after the Italian Occupation ended and Haile Selassie returned from exile in England, the Amharization campaign was reinstated in 1941 and lasted until the emperor was overthrown in 1974.

Parallels can be drawn between the histories of Indigenous peoples from the Americas and the histories of the Oromo people of Ethiopia. Bulcha (1997), Hussein (2008), and Jalata (2000, 2009) contend that Ethiopian/Amhara-dominated regimes perceived Oromos and other non-Habasha nationalities as inferior, second-class citizens. Jalata (2009) states that because Oromos were considered a primitive race, “their colonization and enslavement by the alliance of Ethiopians and Europeans were seen as a civilizing mission” (p. 203). This would not be the first time in history that colonial ideologies have been viewed as the root of race-based discrimination. For example, colonial administrators undertook initiatives targeted at ‘civilizing’ Indigenous peoples in the Americas early on in their reign. Pope Alexander VI's *Papal Bull*, the *Inter Caetera* of 1493, is one of the earliest examples of the dogma that was exercised to control First Nations people and occupy their lands. The Pope’s proclamation asserted that only Christians had rights of dominion (i.e., governance, sovereignty), which left Christian nations free to “discover” foreign lands and establish colonies in the absence

of other rightsholders (Borrows, 1999). These principles would later be codified as the *Doctrine of Discovery* (Venne, 1997). Justified as "natural law," it enabled the colonizers to exercise control over Indigenous people and provide legal grounds to relocate, displace, and dispossess Indigenous peoples of their native lands and resources (Venne, 1997). The ramifications of this are evident in the issues that Indigenous peoples have experienced subsequent to colonization and in many Aboriginal communities' ongoing struggle to maintain their cultures and their functionality.

According to scholars like Jalata (2009) and Dugassa (2017), European colonialism is a thread that weaves through Ethiopian history in a manner that resembles the way in which colonization shaped the making of the Americas. To elucidate this point, Jalata (2009) states:

Because of their Christian ideology and willingness to collaborate with European imperialist powers, such as Great Britain, France, and Italy, successive Habasha [*i.e.*, Amhara/ Tigray] rulers received access to European technology, weapons, administrative and military expertise, and other skills needed for the construction of a modern [Ethiopian] state. (p. 192).

Jalata (2009) adds that "The [construction of a] modern Ethiopian state was the continuation of the previous Abyssinian racialized state, which committed genocide on indigenous peoples" (p. 192). In other words, the development of modern Ethiopia was predicated on successive Ethiopian powers aligning themselves with neocolonial ideologies that coincided with Western interests (*e.g.*, Christianizing) because it earned support from the West. Furthermore, Jalata (2009) proclaims that:

Contemporary Ethiopia emerged as an empire by claiming the name of ancient and historic Ethiopia with the help of the West during the partition of Africa by European powers, and justified its genocide, enslavement, colonization, and the continued subjugation of Oromos and others through the discourse of race and religion. (p. 193)

The parallels that exist between the Indigenous peoples of the Americas and the Oromo experience demonstrates how colonization has directly shaped the livelihood of Indigenous peoples and influenced how the rest of the world perceives them and responds to them. However, the Oromo people are distinguished from the Indigenous people of the Americas in one primary way. That is, the Oromo people have not been colonized by external European powers – except the brief Italian occupation that

reportedly (and ironically) gave them respite. Scholars have therefore argued that the challenge faced by the Oromo people is the legacy of internal colonization, as opposed to external colonization or imperialism (Gudina, 2007; Hiwet, 1975).

Two more historical factors have been noted in discourses pertaining to the Ethiopian-Amhara/Oromo conflict. First, it has been well-documented that:

From 1974 to 1991, Ethiopia was ruled by the Dergue, a military junta that came to power in Ethiopia after abolishing the Imperial rule of Haile Sellassie I and in which Mengistu Haile Mariam brutally controlled the Ethiopian peoples' [including non-Amharic/Tigray nationalities] political and economic freedom. (Hussein, 2008, p. 40)

Bulcha (1997) states that "Mengistu's socialist ideology converged with the imperialist ideology of his predecessors, and he continued with their politics of centralization and homogenization of the multi-national and multi-cultural empire" (p. 346). The brutality of Mengistu's dictatorship towards real or perceived political opponents garnered enough international attention that when Mengistu lost material and ideological support from the Soviets, he fled to Zimbabwe and was among the first of his Ethiopian/Amhara-dominated regimes to be tried and found guilty of his crimes.

The second factor is Gudina's (2007) suggestion as to what marks the beginning of "the struggles of the 20th century [,which] were for the reversal of the same historical process that created the multi-ethnic polity of Ethiopia" (p. 81). According to Gudina (2007), the 'remaking' of Ethiopia began in the post-Dergue era, which was ruled by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). The EPRDF consisted of a coalition of four ethnic armies but was primarily dominated by members of the Tigrayan People's Liberation Front (TPLF) (Amnesty International [Amnesty], 2014; Bassi, 2010; Human Rights Watch [HRW], 2014). The EPRDF and Ethiopia were eventually led by Meles Zenawi from 1995 until his death in 2012 (Gow, 2004; "Meles Zenawi," 2015). It has been argued that Zenawi's reign was significant for the Oromo people because the EPRDF

...divided the country into ethnically based regions. The issue of language, history and culture became important immediately after the EPRDF took power in May 1991. This forced the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) to formulate social and political policies that would embed the ethnic groups' right to self-determination and the right to speak their own

languages, [re-]develop their own cultures and reconstruct their own histories. (Hussein, 2008, p. 40)

In other words, Ethiopia's state government kept an Ethiopian federalism but within ethnic autonomy. This ethnic federalism process did not occur only in Ethiopia and some academics have argued that "ethnic-based political restructuring as a panacea for the present political quagmire [was] found in much of Africa" (Gudina, 2007, p. 83). Others (Adugna, 2011; Bassi, 2010; Kefale, 2010) have contended that Ethiopia's ethnic regionalization has led to more polarization, given rise to resources-based competitions, and has created a myriad of new conflicts. Divergence and rivalry among groups has also occurred in Canada, where a geographic area like Quebec that is identified as a primary home of the French in Canada, and whose unique culture has been acknowledged and promoted, but with the cost (to Canada) being the rise of ethnic/linguistic nationalism. According to Adugna (2011), Bassi (2010), and Kefale (2010) there are ongoing contentions between the official divisions of peoples and the way they organize themselves unofficially. Appendix B provides an example of the Oromo restructuring, while Appendix C illustrates the country's federal divisions. Although ethnolinguistic differences were used as the basis for restructuring Ethiopia's administrative divisions, Amharic continues to be the national working language despite the Oromo being the largest people in the country.

In sum, scholars have suggested that i) Tewodros II designed the monolithic plan to integrate disparate nationalities and specifically Oromos within one nation – Ethiopia; ii) Menelik II put this plan into action by physically taking over Oromo territories; iii) Haile Selassie I continued the quest to strip Oromo peoples of their identities; iv) Mengistu used brute violence to do the same with his modernization plan; and v) the policies established by the Meles-led EPRDF have created new kinds of conflicts. Although Jalata (2009) draws a conclusion that aligns with most of the narratives I have read regarding the Ethiopian-Oromo conflict, it is important to note that these discourses summarize a narrative, one that could perhaps explain why Oromos are the largest single people but a political minority without any representation.

‘Crimes Against Humanity’: A Case Study of Consecutive Ethiopian Regimes v. The Oromo

The Ethiopian-Oromo conflict provides a perfect example of successive regimes that are culpable of crimes against humanity. The longstanding *intrastate* conflicts (*i.e.*, state crime) in Ethiopia only gained some recognition by the international human rights community in the last four years. In March 2014, HRW released a report titled “*They know everything we do”: Telecom and internet surveillance in Ethiopia*,¹ which detailed the rampant patterns of oppression in Ethiopia and the Ethiopian government’s totalitarian practices and policies (HRW, 2014). Soon after, Amnesty issued its own report titled ‘*Because I am Oromo’: Sweeping repression in the Oromia region of Ethiopia*,² which exposed the contemporary Ethiopian regime’s ceaseless campaign to quash real or imagined dissent. The measures taken by Ethiopia’s state government include systematic, widespread, and arbitrary arrests of Oromo citizens; the prolonged detention of citizens who have not been charged; enforced disappearance; and torture, brutality, and murder (Amnesty, 2014). More recently in 2016, HRW published a report titled “*Such a brutal crackdown”: Killings and arrests in response to Ethiopia’s Oromo protests*,³ which documents how state security forces in Ethiopia have used excessive lethal force against peaceful Oromo protesters (HRW, 2016). It has been estimated that between 400 (HRW, 2016) and 3000 (Dugassa, 2017) protestors have been killed, thousands have been injured, tens of thousands have been imprisoned, and countless others have disappeared. Some argue that these human rights violations occurred simply because Oromo people attempted to assert their natural and legal rights (Dugassa, 2017; HRW, 2016). In essence, Ethiopia’s state government has targeted and criminalized Oromo people for exercising these rights, causing many Oromos to become displaced and dispossessed.

¹ Methodology: research was conducted between September 2012-February 2014 and included 100+ interviews in Ethiopia and 10 other countries; content analysis of secondary data, and internet filter testing were conducted.

² Methodology: 176 face-to-face interviews with 176 Oromo refugees living outside of Ethiopia were conducted between June 2013 and July 2014; 40 telephone interviews between 2012-2014, and 30 face-to-face interviews with Oromos in Ethiopia, Egypt, and Kenya between 2011-2012.

³ Methodology: 125 interviews with witnesses, victims, and government officials. Data were collected during the Oromo protests from late 2015 until May 2016. All interviews were conducted individual in-person, by phone, or another secured method of communication.

Crimes against Humanity and Migration: Broad Implications for Well-being

The literature describes how the Oromo people were subjugated through ongoing systematic violence perpetrated by successive Ethiopian dictatorships and tyrannical rule. Widespread human rights violations have been launched against Oromo people, which have created a history of conflict and instability in the country. The Global Peace Index (GPI)⁴ uses 23 qualitative and quantitative indicators that gauge the absence of violence or citizen's fear of violence to determine a measure of peace in 163 independent states and territories (Institute of Economics and Peace [IEP], 2017, p. 2). According to the 2017 GPI, Ethiopia has suffered major deteriorations in peace since its last report in 2016 dropping 16 places in the rankings to 134/163. The report states that "Ethiopia suffered the biggest decline, both in the region and globally, as violent demonstrations, partly driven by rising ethnic tensions, led the government to introduce a six-month state of emergency in October 2016" (IEP, 2017, p. 18). Furthermore, the state of emergency gave "the government significant powers to crack down on dissidents" (IEP, 2017, p. 21), which coincides with Dugassa's (2017) position that the emergency decree exacerbated the conflict. According to the 2016 *Global Trends* report, Ethiopia continues to produce asylum seekers and by the end of 2016 there were 78,100 United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees pending claims (UNHCR, 2017, p. 45). It has been argued that since the contemporary remaking of Ethiopia, *i.e.*, post-1991, "half a million Oromos were forced to flee [Ethiopia] as refugees, over a million people were imprisoned and over 10,000 civilians and about half a million activists killed" (Dugassa, 2017, p. 114). Despite the historical accounts of systematic and widespread collective violence (Dugassa, 2017) and modern-day state crimes that have been reported (Amnesty, 2014; HRW, 2014, 2017), to date no Ethiopian regime has been held accountable by an international judicial body for their participation in these crimes against humanity. However, on January 11, 2007, the Ethiopian Federal High Court found Mengistu and 25 of his co-accused guilty of genocide and crimes against humanity for the atrocities committed while they were in power (Tiba, 2007). Although this was the first trial in Africa where an entire regime was brought to justice in front of a

⁴ More on GPI methodology <http://economicsandpeace.org/>

national court for crimes committed while in power (Tiba, 2007), justice was not served since they were all tried *in absentia*.

Tracing the socio-political history of the Oromo people provides a step forward in understanding and addressing the current day social determinants of well-being for resettled Oromo populations. It has been suggested that “health is political because the social determinants of health *i.e.*, the social, economic, political, and cultural status of people, are all determined by political actions or inactions” (Dugassa, 2017, p. 118). Alternatively, it can be argued that health is social and historical. Both of these positions have been adopted in this research, which considers health to be socio-political and historical. I argue that both these views are related to the profound implications that determinants have on collective health and well-being of resettled individuals. Pedersen (2002) stressed “the need for a clearer understanding of the ways in which macro-social dimensions interact with the micro-social (the community, the family and the person) in attempting to explain both the construction of suffering and its opposite, the production of health” (p. 187). Within the context of this research, I use this frame to understand the implications that arise for individuals resulting from unresolved intergenerational effects of colonization and crimes against humanity. More specifically, this frame unpacks the individual and collective conceptions of suffering and well-being vis-à-vis state crime embedded in legacies of internal colonization and crimes against humanity.

Undoubtedly, the interrelationship between legacies of colonization, crimes against humanity, and well-being are complex. In spite of the growing body of literature regarding the interplay of conflict, violence, and displacement, a few central questions remain largely unanswered: How are legacies of colonization linked to the well-being of forcibly resettled populations? What is the social production of individual and collective suffering and well-being? What is the role of resiliency, social cohesion, and social support networks in a given resettled population? My Master’s research was motivated by the desire to explore the answers to these sorts of questions about peoples’ lives concerning the interconnection of well-being and socio-political histories.

My Study

The literature review demonstrates how conflict today is characterized by tensions between citizens and the state rather than state vs. state and shows how struggles against state crime create a challenging context in which to strive for well-

being. One illustration is how the Oromo in Ethiopia have taken activist paths to establish an Oromo homeland, which has resulted in considerable conflict with successive Ethiopian regimes. Forcibly displaced Oromos living in diasporas in various countries around the world frequently share the same aspirations as their activist counterparts in Ethiopia because they did not leave their homelands voluntarily. In other words, they are not 'economic migrants' who wanted to leave Oromia/Ethiopia to look for a better life, but rather are people who wish they could have stayed but were not able to because of intolerable conditions in their homelands.

My objective for this thesis was to undertake a qualitative study of Oromo people living in diasporic communities to understand how they conceptualize and strive to achieve and maintain well-being in their lives. As discussed below, what emerged from this undertaking was Oromo conceptions and aspirations of well-being in connection with perceptions of social justice issues as they play out regarding Oromo relations with Ethiopia's state government, which provides a nuanced understanding of Oromo well-being.

Given the lack of available literature on well-being pertinent to Oromo people in general, let alone Oromo well-being vis-à-vis relationships with Ethiopia's state government, my research explores: how Oromo people in the diaspora conceptualize cultural well-being⁵; the obstacles that impede the good life for Oromos in the diaspora; and the factors that contribute to the Oromo people's realization of the 'good life.'

⁵ In this research, cultural well-being is loosely defined as the well-being of a culture as well as how culture influences definitions of well-being. As discussed below, I did not enter the study with these definitions, rather, they emerged from participants conceptualization of the term.

Chapter 2.

Research Methodology and Methods

Methods of Research Used

The primary method for this study was one-on-one, face-to-face, semi-structured in-depth interviews, which are commonly used data collection methods in health and social research. By engaging in one-on-one interviews, I was able to uncover the perspectives of individual participants. The face-to-face technique allowed me to communicate directly with participants in accordance with the prepared interview questions. This method also afforded the capture of non-verbal cues, such as face expression and body language body, which indicated enthusiasm or hesitancy with the topics being discussed. I used a semi-structured interview guide to initiate conversations with my participants regarding the different themes I was interested in exploring. I carried this out by asking each participant some questions pertinent to the research topic, while also allowing them to discuss other related topics that were of interest/importance to them. All together, these techniques granted me the freedom to explore additional points and change direction when necessary; allowed for an in-depth exploration of the research topic; and provided a platform to capture rich descriptive data about the participant's perceptions, attitudes, and behaviours.

The second method for this study involved being a participant-observer at select Oromo community-wide social events in Ottawa. During these events, participants were aware of my research identity. As a participant, I had the option to fully engage in the prescribed activities of the specific events alongside the participants (*i.e.*, members of the Oromo diaspora in Canada), and the observer role allowed me to observe practices of well-being among these community members (see Palys & Atchison, 2014). I placed myself at the center of the action where I could see as well as hear what was going on within the setting. Doing this served to provide a way to check for nonverbal expressions of well-being, witness how well-being was performed in group settings, determine what topics participants discussed in community settings, and check definitions of terms that participants used during their interviews. It also facilitated firsthand corroboration/refutation of findings accumulated through interviews (and

literature). Employing this method afforded me a few advantages: *i*) it was largely nonintrusive as participants were able to behave as they normally would during these events without my interference; and *ii*) the observation component alleviated ethical difficulties, such as establishing trust among participants whose lived experiences have left them skeptical about power and authority, as it involved heightened transparency and cooperative relationships between myself and participants/gatekeepers.

The third method for this study entailed observations. During the observation events I attended in Calgary, the participants were not aware of my research identity. Although my primary role was that of an observer, some might argue that I was also a participant. For example, Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2011) posit that being a “complete observer” requires a researcher’s role to remain completely undisclosed and the researcher to avoid any interaction with the research participants (p. 204). They also suggest that the “complete participant” observational role allows researchers to actively interact with participants, but the researcher role again remains hidden (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 207). As my identity as a researcher was completely concealed during these observational events, one requirement of both observational roles was met. My role was less clear with respect to Hesse-Biber & Leavy’s (2011) second requirement concerning interaction. Although I was actively engaging in some of the prescribed activities and interacting with some of the participants, there were many instances where I positioned myself on the periphery of the setting where I had a broad view to make my observations. It might therefore be argued that I was actively engaged in the data collection process as “complete participant” some of the time and as “a complete observer” at other times (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, pp. 204-207). One advantage afforded by utilizing an observational method is the potential reduction in reactive bias that could occur had participants been aware of my research identity.

Triangulation is a technique, which Golafshani (2003) describes as “a strategy (test) for improving the validity and reliability of research or evaluation of findings” (p. 603). That is, combining two or more methods of data collection, using two or more sources of data from within the same method, having multiple researchers investigate the data, or employing different theoretical perspectives (Denzin, 1978). Given that I utilized interviews, participant-observations, and observations as a triangulation strategy, the overall credibility of the study was enhanced.

Ethical and Legal Considerations

Heading into this project, I was aware that there were specific ethical considerations to address concerning the different methods and settings where I had planned on obtaining data. Guillemin and Gillam (2004) identify two dimensions of ethics in research studies: *i*) “procedural ethics” – which include the processes involved in gaining the approval of bodies that govern ethics, and *ii*) “ethics in practice” – which entail the day-to-day ethical considerations that researchers address throughout the course of their research (pp. 263-265). With respect to the former, formal approval for this project (see Appendix D for a copy of the ethics approval letter) has been granted in accordance with Simon Fraser University’s policies and procedures as detailed in the *Ethics Review of Research Involving Human Participants* (SFU, 1992). Although procedural ethics are of paramount importance to the fundamental guiding principles that govern research integrity, the concept of ethics in practice helps researchers to better understand and negotiate important ethical tensions that may arise throughout the research process. As I discuss below, the consideration of both dimensions enabled me to conduct ethical research.

Although I am acutely aware of the historical and present-day socio-political and economic conditions for the Oromo in Ethiopia, the focus of this project was on how well-being is pursued by Oromo immigrants living in diasporic communities across Canada. While I assumed that well-being was in fact being pursued, this assumption is supported by the experiences and history that I share in common with the participants. Given the nature of my research, I did not anticipate that sensitive information (*i.e.*, political dissent) would be shared with me. This expectation was supported by some empirical evidence that I had obtained and the six weeks I spent in Ethiopia during the summer of 2015 engaging in preliminary research for this study. During that time, I observed that no one privately or publicly partook in any form of political dissent, which was the most fundamental legal consideration relevant to this project.⁶ However, participants naturally

⁶ For example, it has been well documented by the international human rights community (Amnesty, 2014, 2016; HRW, 2014, 2015, 2016, 2017) that Ethiopia’s state government routinely and systematically quashes real, or imagined, political dissent. Given that participants were likely displaced because of these circumstances and presumably had extensive family networks in their Ethiopia, I considered the potential implications that could arise in response to political dissent.

discussed sensitive issues, perhaps because they felt able to speak more freely given that they were not in Ethiopia.

I understand that it is my responsibility to ensure that the participants are not harmed because of what I saw and/or heard. In other words, if I anticipate any legal ramifications due to my involvement, I will invoke our researcher-participant confidentiality privilege (see Palys & Atchison, 2014; Palys & Lowman, 2014). As such, participants were guaranteed strict confidentiality and anonymity. This approach reflects my obligation to honour the research guidelines set by the institution I am attending, Simon Fraser University. Further, and of equal importance, I have a duty to my participants. I feel doubly responsible to uphold ethical standards for my participants because they entrusted me with intimate details of their lives, and I am mindful that I am representing a population with whom I identify: my own people.

Informed consent requires participants to be informed of the purpose, scope, and specific details of the research, as well as what will be requested of them prior to and during participation (TCPS, 2014). I provided each interview participant a brief introduction about the study and had them read the information sheet prior to obtaining oral consent and beginning the interview. Reading the study information sheet and details about confidentiality to each participant ensured that consent was informed and that a mutual expectation of confidentiality existed (see Palys, 2003; Palys & Lowman, 2014). Obtaining that consent orally ensured that no identifying paper trail was created. In an effort to safeguard my participants' identities, I assigned them pseudonyms that reflected perceived personal characteristics emblematic of the Oromo culture.

Although the methods (*i.e.*, interviews, participant-observation, and observations) that I utilized were fairly unobtrusive and posed minimal risk, the fact that I engaged in participant-observation initially raised numerous issues with respect to consent. Would it be feasible or necessary to receive formal informed consent from each participant? Is collective consent valid, or did I need to obtain individual consent? Given that I planned to adopt various statuses and roles throughout the research process, such as an insider-outsider and participant-observer, during what stage would consent be required? As an Oromo person and member of the Oromo community, I was personally invited to participate in the settings where participants were being observed. In lieu of obtaining individual consent, I decided to take these personal invitations from the gatekeeper as

collective informed consent. For example, before the event, the gatekeeper emailed members of the Oromo organization to make them aware of my research project. During the event, the gatekeeper and I announced my research status by providing a group introduction regarding the project. Thus, participants were fully aware of my research identity and the research endeavour.

Informed consent did not have to be obtained for the observational events as my identity as a researcher remained completely concealed. The confidentiality and anonymity of the research participants were upheld nevertheless, and pseudonyms were not required. My observation of individual behaviours and the group dynamics did not pose any ethical risk to my participants. I valued participants' autonomy by respecting their personal space and the collection of data did not disrupt their participation in the events. I ensured that I did not make participants suspicious and uncomfortable by staring at them or focusing on them intently. The data collected were as accurate and representational as possible in light of my acknowledged epistemological position.

After having transcribed my detailed field notes and interviews, the data were safely stored on a USB drive with 256-bit AES hardware encryption. In addition, in the transcribing stage of my research all information that could potentially reveal participants' identities was removed. These measures helped me to create a trusting environment in which participants engaged in their activities and shared their stories, thoughts, and feelings openly and honestly without any fear of negative repercussions. Such a cooperative and collaborative approach is also important because it requires me to be accountable to academic institutions, the research community, readers, and the public.

The Data Collection Process

Recruitment Strategies, Research Context, and Sampling Procedures

Since the exact population of Oromo people in Canada is unknown, my plan was to target the five cities known to have the densest Oromo populations in Canada. It is common for larger Canadian cities to have at least one officially registered Oromo association and some have an affiliated youth sector. I began by sending recruitment emails to three of the five target associations (Vancouver, Ottawa, and Toronto) to

introduce myself and my research intentions as well as to ask about upcoming community-wide Oromo events that I would be welcome to attend (see Appendix E for a blank copy of the recruitment email). During the research design stage, I had intended to send an email to the Calgary association, but when the time came to send email, their website was no longer active. I also was aware that the Victoria Oromo community does not have a formal website. For both these cases, I sent recruitment emails directly to the organizers. Within 24 hours I received several responses from members of the Oromo association in Vancouver and heard from Ottawa within 48 hours of sending the first email. The email I sent to Toronto bounced back, and despite locating and sending emails directly to the organizers, I never heard back from members of this community. Accordingly, I collected data from the remaining four cities: Vancouver, Victoria, Ottawa, and Calgary.

Data collection took place over a period of six months. I was invited to one participant-observation event in Vancouver, which I was not able to attend, two participant-observation events in Ottawa, and was informed about two (observation) events in Calgary. I attended all four of the latter events and was hosted by members of the community in each location. Upon establishing a list of events where I could engage in participant-observation and observations, the next step was to recruit participants for interviews. As is often the case with association structures, permission flows from top to bottom. Thus, I started by talking with people at the top (*i.e.*, administrators who would eventually become my gatekeepers) to facilitate conversations about inviting people to participate in the interviews. One prospective interview participant was identified during one of the participant-observation events (*i.e.* theoretical sample as I discuss below) and I was also contacted by individuals who had heard about my study 'through the grape vine' (*i.e.*, gatekeepers and other community members) and were interested in participating.

A non-probabilistic sampling technique known as criterion sampling guided participant selection for interviews. The objective of this technique is to draw a sample from a population to achieve specific analytical, theoretical, and methodological purposes (Palys & Atchison, 2014). My sample had three subsets. The first comprised the elders who mostly came to Canada as refugees, except for two participants who were sponsored by their Oromo refugee husbands to immigrate to Canada. I have identified this subset as 'first-generation' (*i.e.*, elder generation) since they were all born

in Oromia. The second subset of the sample entailed immigrants who were 18 and over, self-identified as Oromo, and were born outside of Oromia but came to Canada as young children. Third, I successfully connected with three Oromo youths in Victoria, Calgary, Ottawa who were 18 and over, self-identified as Oromo, and were born in the Oromo diaspora in Canada. In this project, the second and third subsets are identified as the 'younger generation.' Including the voices of the younger generation served to enrich the study because they were bound to have different conceptualizations and pursuits of well-being compared to their first-generation counterparts. These criteria allowed me to explore a generational analysis of well-being.

As an Oromo-Canadian woman with extensive contacts in the Oromo diaspora, I did not anticipate any difficulties with recruitment or access to participants for this study. Except for Ottawa, I have previously visited these cities to connect with the local Oromo people. My familiarity helped people to respond positively to me. Even in situations where I was unknown in the community, people responded warmly. It also was not uncommon for people to tell me that they knew my parents, usually because they had been refugees together or knew them from 'back home.' Many times, people would also tell me that they had met me when I was small child, although I did not recall who they were. Whether in diasporic communities or back in Ethiopia, the Oromo tend to live interconnected. It thus did not surprise me when people knew me or knew of me. Given the strained socio-political climate in Ethiopia, and the suspicion that it has bred among people, being known by members of the community most likely facilitated access to the field and to prospective participants.

I dealt with three gatekeepers, one in Vancouver, a second in Ottawa, and a third in Calgary. All three individuals were instrumental in *i)* inviting me to their local community events to engage in participant-observation or informing me about other events where I conducted observations; and *ii)* helping gain access to interview participants in their respective locations. As mentioned previously, I do have extensive contacts in the Oromo diaspora. However, I sought not to limit my recruitment to people directly from within these networks because I did not want my personal and deep connection to the research topic to guide who I recruited. Doing so may have resulted in enlisting participants who primarily shared my worldview. In a sense, by talking to people outside of my circles, *i.e.*, creating and maintaining distance between myself and my participants, I was able to avoid limiting my sample by only focussing on these

contacts. The objective was to create a more diverse sample and this, in part, is why I ended up collecting data in four cities from people I did not know. Thus, I relied on the gatekeepers to facilitate access to prospective participants external to my first-degree Oromo network.

The Interviews

A semi-structured interview guide was used to introduce certain topics and to facilitate the development of narratives. The guide explored three overarching issues: (1) participants' conceptualization of well-being; (2) their experiences in achieving or striving to achieve well-being; and (3) any obstacles that impede it. Although each interviewee was asked the same set of questions, they were framed as 'open' questions to encourage them to talk at length about their specific areas of interest. Because open-ended questions elicit responses that are relevant and meaningful to individual interviewees, the questions were not always worded the exact same way or asked in the same order. The open-ended questions also prompted more in-depth disclosures, including perceptions, attitudes, and understanding of the issues. Every effort was made to create an environment that encouraged the participants to share stories and experiences and to honour their voices.

The first interview I conducted served as a pilot to test for my interview guide. Following this interview, several adjustments were made to omit/refine questions that proved to be superfluous. As I discuss in Chapter Three, the pilot interview was also instrumental in clarifying the nuance of terminology concerning what encompasses well-being as it pertains to this study. For example, until this point of the research process, I was using well-being as a general stand-alone term. Upon testing the terminology, it appeared to be too vague to elicit focused responses. Consequently, I made the decision to establish particular terminology (*i.e.*, 'cultural well-being' in place of 'well-being') for subsequent interviews that was better aligned with the research questions and literature on the subject of well-being. The interview guide was further revised after the second and third interviews upon realizing that there was a topic that I was not getting to. For example, I had initially planned to explore the topic of how participants' renewed well-being as a separate issue; however, as the interviews progressed, I realized that participants instinctively talked about renewed well-being and therefore did not need to be prompted to discuss this topic.

Of the 14 interviews, 13 were conducted in person between July 28, 2016 and October 23, 2016, at a mutually convenient time in a location chosen by each participant. In one case, two participants were interviewed together at their request, while the 14th interview was conducted via Skype on January 20, 2017. This interview was conducted over Skype because it was an outcome of theoretical sampling. In keeping with Corbin and Strauss (2015), theoretical sampling is “a method of data collection based on concepts derived from data” (p. 134). By the time I left the field and completed coding and analysis, I realized that interviewing an individual who I met in Ottawa could help to inform my developing understanding of the conceptual theory. First, I thought it would be valuable to include the perspective of another youth who was born in the Oromo diaspora in Canada. Second, based on my interactions with this individual during one of the participant-observation events, it occurred to me that in many ways she was the antithesis of how the elder participants who I interviewed characterized Oromo youth in the diaspora. In some ways, she also appeared to stand apart from some of the other younger generation participants that I interviewed. As it was not feasible for me to return to Ottawa to conduct the interview, we settled for Skype.

Upon receiving consent, all interviews were recorded on my iPhone 5 (smartphone) using a free app called *AudioMemos*. Interviews lasted between 45 minutes and two hours, with an average of 90 minutes. All participants were given a choice for the interviews to be conducted in Oromo or English. In the end, all the interviews were conducted in English. Although this transpired naturally, in many instances participants would insert Oromo words, phrase, or short narratives. At various points throughout the interviews, I repeated what the participants had said back to them to ensure that I was understanding and capturing what they were saying accurately. Participants seemed genuinely interested in participating in the study.

Given my past experience conducting recorded interviews, I took “on-the-fly-notes,” which entailed recording key words and phrases, while other notes were made with rich “thick description” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2011, p. 216). Participants were alerted to my note-taking and did not appear to be distracted by it. The first notes taken were the time of the consent and the person’s answers to the two questions regarding consent and being recorded. Within 24 hours of conducting each interview I went over my notes, reflected on the interviews and identified any missing information. I also

ensured that the recordings were audible. Both these practices enhanced the accuracy of my observations and strengthened my analysis and interpretation of the data. After each interview was completed the audio recordings were uploaded and safely stored on a USB with 256-bit AES hardware encryption and the interviews were deleted from the smartphone used to record them.

Sample Attributes

The participants in the study were self-identified Oromo women and men who either came to Canada as refugees, who were sponsored by resettled refugees, or who were second-generation descendants of refugee parents. A total of seven women and seven men between the ages of 20 and 65 were interviewed. The participants shared similar socio-political and historical backgrounds but were diverse in other respects. Some had fled an active war, while others sought refuge from the ongoing and residual effects of the century-long war launched against Oromo people by Ethiopian officials. Even those participants who did not experience direct conflict or its direct aftermath, *i.e.*, descendants of refugees, expressed similar concerns about the impacts of colonial legacies to those who had firsthand experience.

The participants' self-identification ended up forming the categorizations of first-generation and second-generation as used in this study. According to Statistics Canada (2016), 'first-generation' immigrants are individuals born outside of Canada while 'second-generation' includes people born in Canada to at least one first-generation immigrant parent. By this definition, 12 of the 14 participants are 'first-generation' immigrants while two of the participants are considered 'second-generation' citizens. Although I initially intended to use this frame to classify generational status, the way that participants self-identified was not so clear-cut. The younger first-generation immigrants who came to Canada as refugee children perceived themselves to be more like second-generation immigrants rather than their older first-generation counterparts. It makes sense that these participants would self-identify as second-generation participants because all of them came to Canada between four months and seven years of age. Therefore, they identified more with those born in Canada rather than with those who came to Canada as refugee adults like their parents. Based on how these participants self-identified there were a total of five second-generation participants (*i.e.*, younger

generation) and nine first generation participants (*i.e.*, elder generation), as observed in Table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1: Sample Characteristics

| | Participant Pseudonym | Sex | Age | Formal Education | Generational Status | Recruitment City |
|----|-----------------------|--------|-----|---------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| 1 | Gammadu (happy) | Female | 31 | Completing B. Comm | Second-generation | Vancouver |
| 2 | Gargaaraa (helper) | Male | 52 | Associate's Degree | First-generation | Vancouver |
| 3 | Bontu (proud) | Female | 29 | BSN | Second-generation | Victoria |
| 4 | Laafaa (sensitive) | Male | 47 | BCS | First-generation | Ottawa |
| 5 | Ogeessa (enlightened) | Male | 65 | PhD | First-generation | Ottawa |
| 6 | Jiraatuu (lively) | Female | 46 | Associate's Degree | First-generation | Ottawa |
| 7 | Jebduh (strong) | Female | 48 | Some High School | First-generation | Ottawa |
| 8 | Obsituu (patient) | Female | 26 | Some High School | Second-generation | Calgary |
| 9 | Barsiisaa (teacher) | Male | 51 | Diploma Certificate | First-generation | Calgary |
| 10 | Amantaa (spiritual) | Male | 56 | BSN | First-generation | Ottawa |
| 11 | Dursaa (first) | Male | 34 | Some High School | Second-generation | Calgary |
| 12 | Jeynittii (heroic) | Female | 54 | Some Elementary | First-generation | Calgary |
| 13 | Bilchina (wise) | Male | 56 | BA | First-generation | Vancouver |
| 14 | Abdatuu (faith) | Female | 20 | Completing BSN | Second-generation | Ottawa |

Another characteristic in the sample that stood out was that over 70% of participants had obtained some sort of certificate or degree at the post-secondary level or were in the process of completing a degree program. The highest level of formal education achieved was a PhD and the lowest was elementary school. Given the history of internal colonization that kept Oromo people educationally subjugated, it appears that the sample is better educated than the general Oromo population. The number of females and males was even, but there were more 'older' participants (*i.e.*, > age 40 = 9) than 'younger' ones (*i.e.*, < age 40 = 5). Both education and sex were important

demographics to consider because I anticipated that they would yield different results, and they did.

Several strategies were employed to strengthen the analytical rigor of this study. I ensured I selected a meaningful sample of participants and employed theoretical sampling techniques where applicable as detailed below. The sample comprised a diverse range of the population (see Palys, 2008). For example, older and younger participants as well as men and women were included, and the sample was drawn from four geographical areas. By employing these techniques, I sought plausible rival explanations to enhance credibility of the research findings and to keep personal and conceptual biases in check.

The Participant-Observations and Observations

For the participant-observation and observation components of the study, data were collected in an ongoing and systematic fashion that included note taking of the observations made and memoing regularly. These were primary tools used to record activities, behaviours, interactions, or other features that were observed, which included what participants did as well as what they said. Field notes were written directly following each of the activities. Additionally, I took pictures and videos with my iPhone 5 camera of things that would jog my memory, or of things that I wanted to analyze and write about after disengaging from each event. When preparing the field notes I followed these guidelines:

- carried a phone to allow me the flexibility to take notes as soon as observations were made when it was feasible to do so;
- included the day, time, location and other non-identifying information about the participants; and
- I spent as many hours as needed after disengaging from each participant-observation and observation to elaborate on it while the information was still fresh in my mind.

Memoing complements field notes because the process involves reflecting upon the observations and insights that occur in the data collection process (Palys & Atchison, 2014). Using memoing and fieldnotes enhanced the accuracy of my observations and provided me with a good foundation for analyzing and interpreting the data.

During the participant-observation events, I attempted to balance my roles as observer and participant. As my research identity was known to participants, I was more mindful about participating in the activities. Overall, I did my best to actively intermingle with participants and engaged in the prescribed activities whilst keeping my observational lens central to all interactions. I immersed myself into each setting by being mindful about how I dressed and how I behaved as to blend in as much as possible and to demonstrate respect for cultural and social norms. Next, I offer a description of the four settings where I conducted my participant-observations and observations.

Engagement with the Setting: Community Events

Event 1 – Preparing for the Annual “Summer Picnic”

I attended my first participant-observation event in Ottawa. I was invited by members of the Oromo community association to participate in pre-picnic activities. In accepting the invitation, I was asked to accompany two men from the local Oromo communication association to do some shopping for the annual summer picnic scheduled for the following day. A total of three hours were spent engaging in this event.

Event 2 – The Annual “Summer Picnic”

Ottawa was also the location of my second participant-observation event. The Oromo community association in Ottawa held their annual summer picnic, which took place at one of the local public parks that was reserved by the association ahead of time. The picnic was set to take place from 11am to 8pm, but members from the Oromo community did not start trickling in until 1pm and some arrived as late as 5pm.

Overall, I was told that the event had a quarter to a third of the attendance of past events. Although there were too many people to count, if I had to guess, I estimate that several dozen people attended throughout the day. There appeared to be roughly equal numbers of men and women, and a fair number of children between the ages of 2-17. I ended up spending most of my time with a small group of individuals who looked like young adults. According to some conversations I was privy to, there were very few people between the ages of 25-39. Most who attended were families with children or elders, but no young families in which the parents were under the age of 40. This

observation was striking observation because it appeared that an entire generational group was missing, those who have been identified in my study as the second subset. A total of 10 hours was spent engaging in this event.

Event 3 – Preparing for an Oromo Wedding

The third event took place in Calgary and was the first of two observations that I engaged in. My Calgarian gatekeeper invited me to partake in pre-wedding activities. In accepting the invitation, I accompanied her to one event where Oromo women got together to prepare food and cook for an upcoming Oromo wedding. The event took place at a community member's house. My presence at this event would not have been unexpected because Oromo people who assist with community events tend to have an open-door policy for other Oromos. When I first arrived, only eight women were in the house. Women continued to trickle in and eventually there were 15 of us along with several of their young children. Some of the women were older, between 40s and 50s, some were in their 30s, and one was in her teens (I could tell by her body and mannerisms). Women continued to arrive and by the time we left, there were about 20 women and a few more children. A total of four hours was spent at this event.

Event 4 – An Oromo Wedding (Turned Protest)

Calgary was also the location for my second observation event, an Oromo wedding set to take place at one of the local community halls. Unlike mainstream Western weddings, it is not standard practice for formal invitations to be sent out for Oromo weddings. The preferred mode is to invite people through word of mouth. Given this informal approach, it is expected and totally acceptable for any Oromo person to attend an Oromo wedding. Thus, when my Calgarian gatekeeper invited me to join her at a wedding, my presence was guaranteed to be completely appropriate.

As the wedding guests believe that there was a Tigray government fundraising event taking place in one of the two rooms at the community hall, the planned wedding turned into a protest that also included local Amhara people. It appeared there were hundreds of Oromo people engaging in the protest and roughly 100 Amhara protestors standing on the sidewalk which bounded the parking lot of the community hall. A total of 10 hours was spent engaging in this event.

Approaches to Transcribing, Coding, and Data Analysis

All interviews were transcribed verbatim. Following advice outlined in Palys and Atchison (2012), an audio software program called *Express Scribe* was employed to reduce the actual recorded speed of the participant's speech. *Dragon Naturally Speak 15* is a voice recognition package that allows users to transcribe voice communication into textual data. *Dragon* was also used to facilitate the transcription process. Upon creating a user profile and training *Dragon* to recognize my voice, by trial and error, I explored three methods before determining the most efficient. My preferred technique was to use *Express Scribe* to listen to slowed down audio files whilst dictating the conversation directly into *Dragon*. Each 60 minutes of audio took me between 2 and 3 hours to transcribe and it took approximately three weeks to transcribe the 16 hours of data I had in total. The process of transcription revealed multiple levels of meaning because it allowed me to re-experience the interviews and deepen my understanding of the phenomenon. According to Morse, Barrett, Mayan, Olson, and Spiers (2002), "verification is the process of checking, confirming, making sure, and being certain" (p. 9), and attending to this practice has important ramifications for methodological rigour. The mechanism used to ensure the accuracy of the recorded data was to review each transcript while listening to its corresponding audio file. By this point, I had engaged with the data a total of three times: when the interviews were originally conducted; during the transcription stage; and while verifying each transcript. Implementing this verification process facilitated coding and analysis.

I also asked key informants to help validate my interpretations. For example, in the few instances when I was unfamiliar with an Oromo word or phrase and missed the opportunity to ask participants what it meant, I checked the meaning with my mother or other community members who speak Oromo as their native language and are also fluent in English. I did this to mitigate potential loss in meanings and to represent the participants' voices accurately. The use of key informants as a form of inter-rater agreement also sought to enhance trustworthiness of the research findings.

Coding and analysis were performed using a qualitative research software program called *NVivo 11*. This program aided in the compilation, management, and examination of the data as well as in identifying the associations between the various datum/data, which were mapped out diagrammatically. More specifically, *NVivo*

facilitated in-depth “constant comparisons” between each datum, and these comparisons became the basis for synthesizing and interpreting the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, pp. 7-8) as well as developing a narrative.

Using NVivo, data were coded and analyzed both inductively and deductively. First, I employed top down or ‘a priori’ technique whereby I sorted the data based on specific thematic issues, which essentially corresponded to the way that topics/questions were organized in the interview guide (*i.e.*, conceptualizing well-being, achieving well-being, and barriers to well-being). It could be said that this round of coding was specific to the central questions in the study. When doing this level of coding I did not concentrate on comparing datum with datum, but rather moved quickly through the data to reduce it from the transcripts and organize it to form the top-level categories (*i.e.*, nodes at the top level of the hierarchy or ‘parent nodes’). Following this round of coding, all the data were coded and analyzed within and across each of the respective thematic issues. In other words, I moved from general topics at the top to more specific topics (*i.e.*, ‘child nodes’).

The second round of coding was guided by an open coding approach. Here I was concerned with identifying, naming, and categorizing emergent patterns and relationships across the data by further reducing the data from within the thematic categories. I achieved this by conducting a detailed line-by-line analysis to identify the similarities and dissimilarities, which were then grouped together to establish lower-level nodes pertinent to these patterns. Third, I applied an axial coding strategy, which entailed a process of relating nodes to each other. Selective coding was the fourth stage. This round included a process of establishing core categories and relating other categories/subcategories to these. Core concepts were then identified to integrate, refine, and validate the emerging narrative. The fifth and final phase involved identifying, naming, and defining themes. Decisions had to be made about which themes made the most meaningful contributions to understanding what was going on with the data. As an outcome of this process, seven overarching themes, 13 sub-themes, and 3 sub-sub-themes emerged from the data.

In completing these five cycles of coding, I was able to develop a cohesive narrative that aligned with my research question(s) and that formed the basis of this thesis. The process was holistic, within a dialectic and iterative process. This approach

necessitates the use of emergent coding techniques, which differ from the pre-set coding technique in that it allows concepts, ideas, and meanings to evolve naturally from the data. Although data were first organized deductively, this was simply done to make the coding process more efficient, but it did not devalue the inductive nature. To be clear, pre-determined codes were not used to guide the coding process.

Chapter 3.

Conceptualizing Cultural Well-being

“The big thing is Oromo believes in “Waaqa” and God, and the God created the Earth and everything in it, including human beings. So as a human being, when we think as Oromo, and when we think about well-being, we think togetherness. There is nothing that I benefit specifically for myself. We think, I think if I make a crime, that affects the whole my clan, the whole my family if I commit a crime. If I make also fortune and success, it also compensates my family, my clan. That is the source of Oromo well-being. That is how Oromo was living together...“Ilmii ha gosa.” “Ilmii yoo dhaloota, ha gosa.” “Intaltii ha gosa.” (Translation: If someone is born with a gift of wisdom and intelligence, these gifts do not belong to just the individual, they belong to the family, the tribe and the community, the lands and nature, and the higher power. All things are one; all things are interconnected). That is how Oromo believes. Well it is completely different from what's happening in the West or North America.” – Barsiisaa (Interview Participant)

As a first step toward gaining a deeper understanding of the ways in which Oromo people in the diaspora conceptualization cultural well-being, it is important to delineate what is meant by well-being within the context of how it was evaluated in this study relative to more mainstream conceptualizations. Analyzing well-being as an exploratory concept was a challenging undertaking as there is no consensus in the literature on how to operationalize and measure it. As stated by Axford, Jodrell, and Hobbs (2014), “the way in which well-being is defined and measured is shaped by different ways of conceptualizing ‘the good life’” (p. 2728). Accordingly, conceptions of well-being are likely to vary among and between people in particular social groups (e.g., see Izquierdo, 2005; Mathews & Izquierdo, 2009). Although there is general agreement that well-being includes the presence of positive emotions concerning one’s life, less has been written about the *collective* and *cultural* dimensions of well-being and their intersections as discussed in the current study.

In this research, I use the phrases “collective well-being” to distinguish it from “individual well-being.” This distinction is imperative because although various disciplines are inundated with research on the individual aspects of well-being, the aspects of well-being that the individuals I interviewed reflected on were often grounded in a broader, shared understanding of what it means to fare well. For example, when

participants were asked about their self-conceptions of cultural well-being and how they personally felt and experienced it in their own lives, many gravitated towards explanations like the one starting this chapter, which include Oromo people as a unified community. A predominant outlook of Oromo people as inherently social beings who rely on relationships and interactions to thrive was commonly embedded in their accounts of what cultural well-being meant. Conversely, some participants also conceptualized cultural well-being on a more individual level, establishing a case for this disjuncture to be explored.

Broadly speaking, collective well-being could refer to contentment derived from or related to conceptions that are based on one's membership in particular social groups (*e.g.*, collectivist cultures), whereas individual well-being could refer to personal success or happiness, which are primarily characterized by individualism (*e.g.*, belonging to an individualist culture). However, this dichotomy does not negate the role of individuality in group-oriented cultures and contrariwise. This observation was striking in the current study because despite asking participants about cultural well-being with the knowledge that they originally come from a collectivist culture (*i.e.*, Oromo), some still expressed well-being on an individualistic level. The importance of the distinction between collective and individual cultural well-being emerged from the research rather than something that was informed by pre-existing literature. Since so much has been written about individual well-being and its elements, one of the main goals of this research is to emphasize the need for more scholarship on the collective and cultural dimensions of well-being and how they intersect.

Figure 3.1 offers a visual representation of a hierarchal structure of well-being as characterized in contemporary literatures on well-being. This figure provides a useful guide for understanding how the subsequent literature review was structured. The scope of the literature review began with the overarching concept of 'well-being,' a term that appears regularly in academic literature and has been studied extensively as a concept. Upon reducing the concept of well-being to analyses that distinguish between 'individual' and 'collective' conceptualizations, the next level down arranges well-being based on prominent constructs observed in mainstream discourse. These concepts have been categorized as dimensions of analysis.

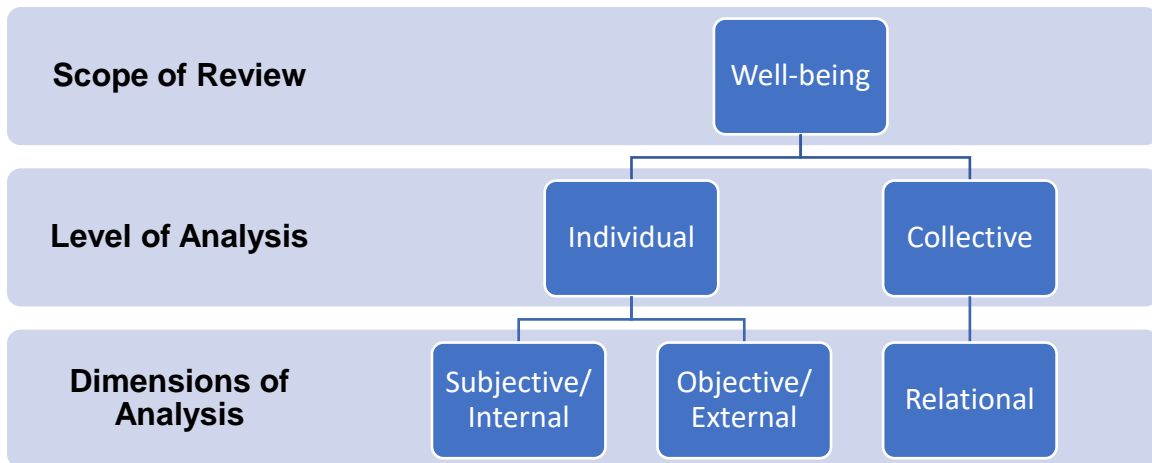


Figure 3.1: Hierarchical structure of well-being as characterized in reviewed literatures

A dimensional analysis enables researchers to dichotomize well-being in relation to its subjective (*or internal*) and objective (*or external*) aspects, which is a persistent division in the psychological literature on well-being. ‘Subjective well-being’ (SWB) is an umbrella term that includes various types of quantitative valuations that one has about their own life (Diener, Oishi, & Lucas, 2003). One view is that SWB falls within the ‘hedonic’ perspective that defines well-being as being fundamentally about “maximizing happiness and satisfying [individual] preferences” (Axford et al., 2014, p. 2278). As such, well-being is comprised of an affective component (high positive affect or low negative affect) and a cognitive component (the sets of beliefs that justify affective evaluations) concerning one’s life.

Carruthers and Hood (2004) propose that individuals experience well-being when positive affect and satisfaction with life are both high. This approach measures how people experience life on an individual level but does not elucidate a societal perspective of well-being. Conversely, objective well-being (OWB) is characterized by the relationship between material well-being and quality of life. According to Alartartseva and Barysheva (2015), the factors that influence OWB are “the level and stability of income, the conditions of residence, the opportunity of having education, the quality of the social and natural environment, safety and security, and the opportunity to realize social and civil rights and needs” (p. 38). Unlike SWB, this approach captures a societal perspective of well-being that is based on material, tangible, and quantitative indicators. Both approaches have theoretical and practical value in terms of understanding well-

being, but they do not offer a framework that can be used for how well-being was conceptualized by the participants in this current study.

Although there are various sub-dimensions that researchers consider to fit within the domain of SWB (such as psychological, social, and emotional) and common OWB indicators (such as income, nutrition, and life expectancy), it is beyond the scope of this study to present an exhaustive list of these dimensions and indicators. However, it is worth acknowledging the growing view that neither approach to capturing well-being is appropriate in isolation, which has led researchers to attempt to combine subjective and objective aspects in order to gain a more holistic understanding of well-being (see *e.g.*, Alartartseva & Barysheva, 2015; Axford et al., 2014; White, 2015). Axford et al. (2014) suggest that the distinction between subjective and objective well-being has been a key fault-line in the debates concerning the conceptualization of well-being. While SWB and OWB differ from one another, White (2017) suggests that they both assume an individualist ontology: positive associations with external elements contribute to the individual's (internal) well-being. In other words, subjective perceptions of well-being are anchored in external/material contexts. It has been argued that evidence of this is reflected in empirical research in which people commonly responded to questions about their subjective experiences by referring to objective/external circumstances (White, 2015). Thus, subjective and objective dimensions are intimately connected. Rather than disaggregating the two concepts/approaches, combining subjective appraisals and objective circumstances can yield new insights. One way this can be approached is by viewing well-being holistically – that it arises through the complex interplay of personal, societal, and environmental processes.

My concern is that scholarship on SWB and OWB tends to focus predominantly on micro-level considerations (*i.e.*, individual or subjective happiness/material elements), whereas the findings in this chapter encompassed micro- meso- and macro-level interactions (*i.e.*, community or collective well-being/societal structures). The latter factors account for the interactional and relational dimensions of well-being that are integral to the current study. These factors were better represented in the scope of analysis on the right side of the diagram (see Figure 3.1), which reflect an emerging concept of well-being that moves beyond common conceptualizations that inhere to the individual. In critiquing the dominant, individualistic usage of the term well-being, Atkinson (2013) demonstrates that well-being comprises complex assemblages of

relationships between people, and between people and place. Moreover, Panelli and Tipa (2009) consider relations between material substances and the less material elements of places, such as atmosphere, histories, and values. What is important with these examples is that the authors explicitly recognize that well-being is situational, relational, and multifaceted.

White (2015) advocates for the emergent construct of relational well-being (RWB) to address how people are shaped within specific social and cultural contexts. RWB takes us beyond thoughts and emotions that are grounded in individual preferences, as is the case for SWB, and emphasizes externality as captured by the common indicators of OWB. RWB aims to position individuals as relationally-oriented subjects in seeking to understand the ways in which they experience the world. For example, this approach could aid understanding of how well-being is conceptualized by 'new' immigrants compared to 'old' immigrants, vis-à-vis their connections or disconnections to the homeland and the diaspora. RWB "directs attention to the effects of social structure and of place" for conceptualizing well-being (White, 2015, p. 2). It is argued that subjectivity arises through contextualized relationality (Atkinson, 2013; White, 2015), so one approach is to conceive of well-being as social or collective rather than individualistic.

White (2015) offers a set of approaches informed by several specific disciplines (e.g., human geography, social anthropology, and development studies). These approaches seek to challenge the dominance of other disciplines (e.g., psychology and economics) in framing contemporary conceptions of well-being. Some key elements that emerge from the RWB approach proposed by White (2015) are: *i*) well-being could be conceptualized in social and collective terms as evidenced by studies about non-Western cultures, such as Aboriginal cultures, in which individuals tend to place greater emphasis on collective identities and relationships (see e.g., Adelson, 2009; Heil, 2009); *ii*) well-being considers the importance of the influence that social structures and politics has on it (see e.g., Beyer, 2013; Højlund, Meinert, Frederiksen, & Dalsgaard, 2011); *iii*) to avoid treating SWB and OWB as two distinct dimensions of well-being, they could be alternatively viewed as complementary for elucidating well-being, and; *iv*) to be aware of interconnections between materiality and place as they pertain to contextualizing well-being (see e.g., Atkinson & Joyce, 2011; Ereaut & Whiting, 2008; Mathews & Izquierdo, 2009; White, 2015). In general, White's (2015) approach suggests that interactions and

relationality are the central focus of RWB as both are the means through which affective and material goods are distributed and needs are met, and both are fundamental to the composition and experience of overall well-being (White, 2015).

An additional characteristic of RWB is that it is viewed as a dynamic social *process* through which interactions between individual circumstances, activities, and 'mental capital' contribute to overall well-being (Atkinson, 2013; White, 2010, 2015). White (2015) suggests that the first step towards conceiving well-being as a process is by looking at it in terms of activity – well-being is something that happens rather than a state to be achieved. Conceiving of it in this way also lends itself to exploration through qualitative methods that I used such as participant-observation and observations, where well-being can be explored dynamically, compared to surveys regarding a person's state within a fixed time frame. This proposition recognizes well-being as characterized by domains of action, which include people's ability to *experience* capability and a positive self-image, to *access* important resources, to *build* social connections, to *experience* participation, and to *enhance* physical and psychological wellness (White, 2015).

Several examples in the literature portray well-being as situated in the realm of collective activities that transpire through interactions and relationality. Heil (2009) presents well-being amongst the Aboriginal people of Murrin Bridge in relation to their capacity to construct and participate in the demands that constitute relationships. In exploring what it means for the Aboriginal people of Murrin Bridge to experience well-being, Heil (2009) attempts to challenge mainstream attitudes that depict well-being as individualistic (*i.e.*, embodied selves). She explains how the Aborigines situate well-being relationally in terms of kin and immersion in social obligations and responsibilities (*i.e.*, social selves). In examining practices in six Latin American kitchens, Yates-Doerr and Carney (2016) illuminate the caring practices that unfolded in the kitchen, such as cooking and sharing meals, which are vital sources of collective well-being. This research offers some evidence for the processual nature of well-being consistent with RWB.

As proposed by White (2015), the second step for characterizing RWB as a *process* is to situate it across the life-course. This understanding incorporates individual and/or community reflections of the past and present, and expectations of the future. For example, Adelson (2009) emphasizes the dynamic and fluid nature of well-being by

highlighting its multiple dimensions (temporal, generational, territorial, landscape, and symbolic). This author argues that well-being among the Cree in Canada is grounded in the past (traditional practices) and the present (the dramatic changes that are occurring to impact younger generations). Adelson (2009) outlines the ways in which the Cree have reinvented their sense of well-being as their traditional societies have transformed through growing connections to the outside world and the changing of generations. This insight suggests that isolating well-being as a static concept with immovable parts does not describe how the Cree experience well-being. Rather, well-being for the Cree is best articulated as interrelated practices between the people and the land, and the way in which these interrelationships play out across time and space – which are ever-changing. The value of networked relationships and interactions over the life-cycle also underpinned a study conducted by de Jong (2011), which explores the establishment of kin relationships via constructed age and gender roles. This author offers a rich multigenerational perspective on the norms and responsibilities of an impoverished Muslim community in Kerala, India. Her findings reveal that securing intergenerational kinship is an important source of well-being for aging people and for the community as a whole. Montgomery (2013) offers an ethnographic reflection on how relationships with family and friends, optimism about future possibilities, subjective happiness, and contentedness interact to create meaningful lives. Beyer (2013) articulates that well-being is not something that is attained, but rather constantly in-the-making based on the social, economic, and political factors and caring practices that characterize a community. On the whole, this scholarship on well-being suggests that ‘a good life’ emerges through the interplay of personal, collective, socio-political, historical, cultural, and environmental processes that engender RWB.

Though White (2015) proposes RWB as a distinct sub-field, its elements can be detected from the confluence of literature from scholarship that originates mostly from or about the global South. White’s (2015) approach to RWB is particularly critical to the current study because it provides a flexible structure that can be used to contextualize how well-being emerged in this study. Although White’s (2015, 2017) scholarship is progressive, her RWB approach is operationalized within a context that focuses mainly on methodologies, policies, and politics. However, it does offer a budding framework for examining well-being through a relational ontology that challenges dominant

contemporary conceptualizations predicated upon an individualist ontology, which can be used to expand on the existing literature on RWB.

Overall, scholars who explore relational well-being are championing the argument that there is a need for more analysis that integrates holistic cross-cultural accounts of well-being (Izquierdo, 2005; Mathews & Izquierdo, 2009). In spite of this growing body of literature, a few central questions remain largely unanswered: What are the ways in which culture influences well-being? What intangible qualities shape and define cultural well-being? How are these qualities mobilized in time and space across ethnic groups, youth, and elders? The emphasis herein is to explore the answers to such questions by grounding the representations of well-being in the contextual determinations of how Oromo participants in this study conceptualized cultural well-being.

Cultural Meanings of Well-being: Toward a Cross-Cultural Perspective

One goal of this research was to examine the ways in which the participants expressed well-being as grounded in their particular ethnocultural conceptions, aspirations, and activities. According to Adelson (2009), “to understand the cultural meanings of well-being is to understand a society’s social, cultural, and political values: values which are, in turn, reflected in the language and practices of well-being” (p. 109). Culture is dynamic, as are the concepts of well-being. Commonly, culture is considered to be comprised of shared values, norms, and practices. In sociological terms, ethnocultural groups denote a collection of people or a community who share a common culture and ethnicity. I believed that exploring their well-being in this way would provide comprehensive and contextual insights into how their particular modes of life are featured through their well-being. However, gaining insight into the ethnocultural meanings of well-being is not a straightforward endeavour.

Mainstream definitions of well-being as an indicator of health are likely to emphasize clinical data, whereas a more holistic understanding of well-being as a concept “involves total life experience, happiness, and prosperity” (Patwardhan, Mutalik, & Tillu, 2015, p. 66). According to Atkinson (2013), a common feature of contemporary engagements with well-being is to conflate it with physical health. Alternatively,

Izquierdo (2005) presents the results of a study conducted with the Matsigenka people of the Peruvian Amazon, who perceive their health and well-being to have severely declined within a span of 20-30 years, despite having experienced significant improvements to their overall physical health during this same time period. The author attributes this discrepancy to the contrast between how health has been defined and measured in a biomedical manner and local perceptions that situate health in relation to socio-cultural factors. In other words, dominant Western conceptions of well-being that conflated clinical health and positive outcomes were insufficient for understanding the well-being of the Matsigenka people. Similarly, I wondered if participants in my study would be constrained by mainstream definitions of well-being.

The very first questions I asked interview participants were: “Are you of Oromo heritage?” “Do you self-identify as Oromo?” “To you, what does it mean to be Oromo?” All of them responded affirmatively to the first question. Although all the participants identified as being Oromo, some participants identified as being Canadian as well. For example, when asked if he self-identified as Oromo Laafaa said, “Yes I do, Oromo-Canadian.” Likewise, four of the younger generation participants (Abdatuu, Bontu, Dursaa, and Obsituu) explicitly expressed Oromo-Canadian hyphenated identities during their interviews. Kumsa (2005) examined the dynamics of identity and belonging among young Oromos in the diaspora and argued that Canadian belonging is a contested territory that participants had to negotiate in unique ways. As young Oromos experienced tensions between citizenship and nationality, further advancing boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, they sought comfort in the hybridity of identifying as Oromo-Canadian (Kumsa, 2005). Although these factors could help us to understand why some participants in the current study identified in these ways, all interview participants went on to explain that being Oromo meant more than being just born into a particular ethnic group/more than blood quantum. As Bontu stated, “To be Oromo. Well first of all, obviously like being born an Oromo. Like having Oromo parents. Secondly, I would say not just blood, but I mean also like practicing my culture...” In other words, for one to self-identify as an Oromo one has to a) be born into the ethnocultural heritage and b) engage in/with the ethnocultural group’s practices. Espousing their nationalistic identity in this way does not necessarily preclude them from also identifying as Canadian citizens and engaging in the Canadian cultural practices, which signals important spatial

and contextual dimensions of how identity is located. In other words, people can have multiple identities whereby they identify and belong to many places at once.

The questions that followed the preliminary demographic questions entailed the phrases “from the position of an Oromo person...” or “as an Oromo person...” These phrases were meant to position the impending dialogue within Oromo cultural representations of well-being. However, despite asking the preliminary questions and framing the subsequent questions in this way, it became obvious during the pilot interview that the interviewee was not conveying her responses through the lens of her Oromo self-identity.

For example, upon reflecting on the pilot interviewee’s responses to these questions, I realized that the term ‘well-being’ was being equated with a more general/material understanding of health. An excerpt of an exchange with Gammadu elucidates this point:

Biftu: So now we’ve moved on to the first core topic and this really has to do with how Oromo people understand well-being and how you specifically as an Oromo person understand well-being. So first of all, I’d like to ask you: what is your understanding of well-being?

Gammadu: Yeah, so my idea of well-being on a very basic level is food, water, shelter, but then there's also emotional, spiritual, and cultural as well. You know that ties into my culture, certain traditions, family, and yeah, so that’s how I would think of well-being.

Biftu: So this is your understanding of well-being, what does...

Gammadu: And just support too.

Biftu: Support?

Gammadu: Yeah, having good support, whether it's family or community or in your religious beliefs. It's good to have a support system.

Biftu: Okay, and so just as a follow-up to that question what does well-being mean to you?

Gammadu: Ummm, well-being to me... humm good question... ahhh I would say well-being to me is... not having to worry about you know the basic necessities of life so that you can focus more on other things for your well-

being, such as you know being able to focus more on spirituality or family... helping people. So my well-being I guess I would sum it up as not necessarily having to worry about the necessities of life and also being happy and having support, like family support and community support, would be my idea of well-being.

Biftu: That's what well-being means to you personally, right?

Gammadu: Yeah.

Biftu: And how, if you were asked to give a definition of well-being, how would you define it? You've provided a list of different ways that well-being could be understood and what it means to you personally. But if I asked you to give me a definition of well-being could you try to....

Gammadu: Yeah, I think well-being... I would describe well-being, a description of well-being, would cover a bunch of different elements as I mentioned already like financial well-being, financial stability, spiritual and mental health, physical well-being, health...healthcare, and then obviously having family moral support and whatever it is that people believe in whether it's spiritual or whatever it is. I think encompassing all those things I mentioned together would be well-being. So it's not just money, food, air, shelter, it would be a lot more intangible things that I would include in that.

As the interviewee's reply to the first question was ambiguous, probing techniques were implemented to obtain in-depth information about how she conceived well-being as a self-identified Oromo person. The subsequent questions and responses reveal what, in the moment, felt like a failed attempt at prompting her to reflect about well-being from an ethnocultural vantage point. Although she articulates that well-being entails broader social connections, her viewpoint epitomizes a classic Western 'basic needs' perspective that may not have emphasized her self-identity as an Oromo person, which she had described in her earlier responses. As a result of this exchange, the language in the preliminary interview guide was adapted to encourage a more grounded conversation that specifically addressed the well-being of Oromos. For example, as I wanted to ensure that participants in my study talked about well-being as a culturally relevant concept (which could also entail Western definitions of health), the modifier 'culture' was used to orientate them towards an ethnocultural rumination of well-being. Thus, rather than asking subsequent participants about Oromo well-being, (as was done during the

pilot interview), they were asked about Oromo *cultural* well-being. By doing so, I wanted to get a better understanding of the cultural conceptions of well-being and how these played out among the generational groups.

Some might argue that the modifier of culture guided participants to discuss collective well-being. However, cultural well-being is not inherently collective in nature. When participants were asked about *Oromo cultural well-being*, they had the option of discussing it from an individualist position or another position. Oromo cultural well-being could have meant the vitality that the Oromo community shared or could have been enjoyed through both *individual* practices and belonging to the Oromo cultural group. Some participants' expressed individuality, primarily the younger generation, others referred to the Oromo as a collective. In asking participants about their personal understandings of Oromo cultural well-being, how it was achieved and maintained, the elder generation often spoke using plural pronouns such as "we," "us," and "ours" in place of the singular "I," "me," and "mine" as evidenced in many of the quotes below. In fact, even when the pilot interviewee was asked about *Oromo well-being*, the general health-related responses that she offered at times included the collective as well as to her individual self. Adding the word cultural as a modifier could have increased the likelihood that participants would ground their responses in ethnocultural representations of well-being, but it did not guarantee that they would talk about the collective dimensions of well-being. Given that the focal community was the Oromo people, this modifier was necessary to draw people towards an ethnocultural framework. It is also important to consider that whereas these interviews were conducted in a Western society, the notion of well-being focusing on health/finances could have been a subject of permeation of Western ideals. Had the interviews been conducted on Oromo people within their original setting, that modifier likely would not have been necessary. In addition, foregrounding cultural well-being also supports cross-cultural meanings of well-being, which was important given that all the participants were Canadian citizens and often talked about well-being in relation to their experiences with Canadian culture.

In the following section, I present a discussion of two key themes that highlight the ethnocultural conceptualizations of well-being expressed by individuals who self-identified as Oromo. The first theme reveals that cultural well-being for some Oromo participants involves a personal and collective understanding while for others it holds a more detached meaning. This theme also shows that experiences of Oromo cultural

well-being are shaped through social connections and relations with other members of the ethnocultural group and can relate to transcendental forces. Theme two demonstrates that participants expressed their beliefs about cultural well-being within the context of their Oromo identity, which functioned as both a cause and effect of cultural well-being.

Ideologies of Collectivism and Individualism

“Oromo people in diaspora are like animal cubs or babies who lost their parents. You know that they stick together.” – Laafaa (Interview Participant)

The elder generation participants easily conceptualized cultural well-being on a collective level rather than an individual level. Subsequent to the pilot interview and upon collecting demographic data, one of the first interview questions participants were asked was: “What is your understanding of Oromo cultural well-being?” The elder generation participants predominately drew upon collectivist ideologies to elucidate their insights. The following excerpt illustrates this point:

Well, Oromo cultural well-being, you know it can be taken as the personal and psychological feelings of the Oromos when they get together, when they celebrate together, when they mourn together. By being together means they are going to practice all sorts of activities that they are used to when they have been back home. So, in a sense, by being together they can transplant whatever practice they had in Oromia to where they are, although not perfectly so. So, also what cultural well-being means that when we come together, we not only celebrate in the way we used to celebrate as Oromo, also what we used to eat when we were in Oromia, and we eat the way we eat when we were in Oromia. So at least there are some elements we crave for that we enjoy by being together, by creating community... That's what I consider well-being. So at least your psychological craving or psychological demand for certain values, culture, aspects of religion, is somehow answered by being together, forming a community. Reminiscing or whatever we want. So that creates some closeness for many of us. (Ogeessa)

This participant's articulation of cultural well-being suggests that Oromo people in diasporic communities' fare well when they are able to come together to engage in social customs and practice cultural traditions. Ogeessa is not signifying that he believes this to be indicative of what is good for only his well-being, but instead puts forth a narrative that refers to the collective well-being of Oromo people living in the diaspora. Evidence

of this can be found in the way he uses the plural pronouns “we,” “they,” and “us” when articulating aspects of his response. This position not only denotes a collectivist mentality, but also emphasizes the importance of the Oromo collective for experiencing individual cultural well-being. It is through the act of coming together that individuals can engage in and enjoy traditional activities, and cultural well-being is enhanced by participation in these activities. Thus, participation not only contributes to individual well-being, but also serves to improve well-being of others, and therefore the well-being of the Oromo ethnocultural group as a whole –which would indicate that reciprocal relationships, as delineated by the RWB approach (White, 2015), positively impact cultural well-being.

This discovery among the elder generation participants was not surprising because back home, Oromo people traditionally sustained a collectivist way of life that emphasized close-knit relationships within particular social groups. According to a comprehensive study that compared the key drivers of culture in various societies, Ethiopia scored low on individualism (Hofstede, n.d.) and was characterized more as a collectivist society, consistent with some of the observations from this study. In these cultures, people tend to work together to create harmony, and group cohesion is highly valued (see *e.g.*, Ma & Schoeneman, 1997). The collective dimension of well-being is not always evident in North American societies because social relations are patterned in a way that locate the individual at the fore of one’s life (Mathews & Izquierdo, 2009). For example, Ethiopia scored 20 on individualism, while Canada scored 80 on this same dimension (Hofstede, n.d.). This high score suggests that Canada can be characterized as an individualist culture and a loosely-knit society in which people are expected to look out for themselves and their kin. In contrast, for Oromo people in Oromia and some of the elder generation in the diaspora, interactions and relationships are threads that interconnect people beyond kinship ties and serve to build and maintain collective communities. Here is one participant's thoughts that reflect this point:

... basically Oromo by nature is an integrated community. And there is no singularly, as isolated life, it can't be in our tradition. We are interrelated, we are interconnected. And not only in positive aspects, even if there is something difficult. If there is something that hurts an individual, it is not only his burden, it is the [burden of the] community. We share things a lot, we have a network. And actually, I can say that by now, we have [an] Oromo community by North American. Basically, established as a North American Oromo community on the idea [that it] is also going to be global. (Barsiisaa)

He expresses an interesting perspective of Oromo people collectively experiencing both the positive and negative dimensions of well-being. Others also shared this perspective. In the words of one participant: “the support we have is, for example if like any grievance or sadness or happiness within the community, [we] participate...we are there for one another” (Laafaa). Another participant also acknowledged that this was true when “the times of death and bad news come from back home...we come together and share” (Amantaa). This viewpoint denotes that the Oromo collectivity strives to be holistic in its aim to embrace both needs and aspirations of its people due to local struggles and realities linked to the homeland (Oromia).

Conversely, in many instances, the younger generation participants responded in ways that suggested they conceptualized Oromo cultural well-being from more of an individualist mindset. For example, when asked about her understanding of Oromo cultural well-being, Abdatuu stated:

I guess being involved with the community is a big thing because they teach you. Like just communicating with the people around you, the Oromo people around you. They can teach you so much about the culture, what Oromo needs are. What it means to be Oromo too. So I feel like communicating with your community, whether it just be like the community that's established or anyone who you know that is Oromo. Especially like your parents or like family friends, communicating with them and being involved with them. And having some type of relationship with them I feel like is really important. Yeah. (Abdatuu)

What is striking about Abdatuu’s articulation of cultural well-being compared to how the elder generation participants responded as demonstrated in the quotes above, is the way she utilized subject pronouns. Unlike the elder generation respondents, Abdatuu neither explicitly positions herself as the subject of her statement nor does she make use of plural pronouns. Instead, she uses the generic/impersonal pronoun “you” rather than a plural pronoun such as “us.” Likewise, other younger generation participants created distance between themselves and the topic being discussed by using language that created a detached tone in their narrative. Here is another example that helps to justify this position:

Well-being for me is basically the [Oromo] people having their freedom. Being able to live their lives how other Ethiopians are living their life, and actually having the freedom to keep their land, and also to not be oppressed, you know, to keep them silent. They need to be able to have the freedom to speak their mind, and basically, we shouldn't be, not just silenced, we shouldn't be jailed, we shouldn't be murdered. And just a

continuation, basically of our people, and repopulating, and continuing that through generations. (Dursaa)

Dursaa begins by explaining that cultural well-being is when the Oromo people are freed from repressive and oppressive social forces. Although this seems to signal that he is both aware and concerned about the well-being of the Oromo collective, there is a stark contrast between the first part of his narrative and the last two sentences where he uses the term “we” indicating that he also identifies with the greater Oromo collective.

Although both Abdatuu’s and Dursaa’s conceptions of cultural well-being implicate the Oromo collective, their positions do not denote a collectivist mentality in quite the same way as the elder generation participants. Their responses suggest a difference between how the elder and younger generation participants construct Oromo identity, which in turn shapes how they conceptualize cultural well-being. As evidence has shown, socialization beliefs and practices (Aycan & Kanungo, 1998) and locality (Vathi, 2015) tend to impact how immigrants and their descendants create and experience cultural identity differently. This disjuncture was also identified by some of the participants in the study. For example, one of the younger generation participants stated:

I think for this question, for me and you were to ask me and you were to ask our parents, or a generation that has been elsewhere, it would be answered differently. Because for me, like I said I feel like a second-generation here. So it's almost like I haven't had the different life experiences that our parents have had, or that other, like Oromo refugees have had. I've had everything handed to me, so basically of that I, for me I think it's more cultural well-being as in just trying to maintain my culture. And not, I mean because I am a Canadian and I do believe I'm a Canadian as well, and I do identify within both cultures. But I also really strongly try to withhold my culture in even just raising my son and my daily practices. So I don't lose my self-identity, you know what I mean? I feel like it's very important and I think that for me, it's just basically incorporating that in my life. I think that that's what it means to me. Like it's just incorporating my culture, my Oromo culture in my life and in my son's life. It's not just about, like it's not just, for me, because I've had everything handed to me it's not about trying to make the Canadian dream, should I say? (Bontu)

In this excerpt, Bontu epitomizes the cross-cultural conceptualizations of well-being as constituted by the elder and younger generation Oromos in the diaspora. Based on these findings, I argue that the younger generations’ conceptualization of cultural well-being differs from the elder generation and that this is based on the varying

proximities/attachments to homelands. In other words, given the socialization process of young immigrants in the diaspora, it is not surprising that the younger generation participants appeared to be more detached when expressing what Oromo cultural well-being meant to them personally, whereas the elder generation participants responded from a more united ideology. However, despite the younger generation participants' inclination to reflect on cultural well-being from an individualist vantage point, subsequent themes reveal that many other aspects of what they shared also assume some commitment to the collective and relational aspects of cultural well-being, perhaps indicative of how they are socialized within their homes and ethnocultural communities.

Interconnectedness and Oromo Togetherness

One way that collectivism manifests for some Oromo people is through close long-term commitments to primary groups such as family, extended family, or friends and neighbours. These groups tend to foster strong relationships in which individuals take responsibility for the fellow members of their group. As Jebduh shared:

Yeah, back home you know, you don't raise [kids] by yourself you know? You don't even close your door when you leave [home]. You just leave and the kids are outside. You don't care about whether they eat or not because neighbours, they feed their kids, they feed yours too. So, you don't have to worry about anything. Here everything is just on you, everything. Yeah, so back home you don't, you don't have to even discipline your kids. Neighbours can beat up [*i.e.*, discipline] your kids, you don't say anything [to them].

This is just one example that not only exemplifies the traditional African proverb: "it takes a village to raise a child," but also validates the significance of a community's efforts to maintain the well-being of its members. However, it is important to note – as indicated by Jebduh – that it is not always possible to partake in collectivist activities while living in the diaspora due to the patterned social arrangements of North American societies:

...that is what I'm also telling to Oromo families, to bring closer their kids. Although the work, the lifestyle, the life condition is very expensive. But bringing each other together is the thing we have to do. Because if we are separated, that our wellness, togetherness will be getting looser and looser and looser, and finally our Oromo-ness will be distorted. So the source of the well-being of Oromo is their togetherness, their common ideology, common idea... [with this] we have our well-being. That is what I think. (Barsiisaa).

Barsiisaa stresses the importance of retaining interconnectedness for well-being even though life is demanding. He also expresses concern that if Oromo people in the diaspora become disintegrated, it will impact the Oromo cultural values and shared identity. With this example, it becomes easy to understand why some of the younger generation participants had an impersonal conceptualizing of cultural well-being compared to their elder generation counterparts.

Despite the structural challenges of living in a foreign society, Oromo individuals do aspire and attempt to engage and build a community while living in the diaspora. In an article published by Kemp (2017) involving Oromo refugees who resettled in Sussex, Brighton in 2006, one of the community members stated:

In our culture, neighbours eat together and share meals every day. We grow up, eating together, speaking together and playing together. When we come to this country, we split up and lived far from each other. Having time to spend together, socializing [sic], sharing food and supporting one another, is extremely important for us. (Abdo as cited in Kemp, 2017)

The elder generation participants in this study shared similar sentiments regarding the significance of Oromo togetherness. They expressed the common belief that Oromos are social, interconnected beings by nature: “So as a human being, when we think as Oromo, and when we think about well-being, we think togetherness” (Barsiisaa). Amantaa said “Oromos... [are a] very tightly knitted network.” One elder generation participant went as so far as to say, “...we are collective people, we are [a] group, like animals” (Laafaa). This same participant proposed that a collectivist way of life is encoded “in [the Oromo] DNA,” and is manifest in “the way [Oromo people are] nurtured and [the way they have] grown up (Laafaa). Similarly, Bilchina stated:

I think it's because we have a common denominator which is being people coming from the same root. And also going more or less through some stages of change in life. Like you know, wherever you go, whatever you do, you always have that immigrant thing, which is a common denominator for all of us. Where one has to really rely on the others' support, come together, share, particularly the deep-rooting of the cultures. I think that's got to do with cultural dependencies on each other, I think.

Bilchina's explanation speaks to a common narrative of elder generation Oromos who live in diasporic communities, which is reinforced by participants' general view that togetherness is an ingrained characteristic of Oromo culture and civilization. As one can

envisage, for a people who rely on togetherness as the core element for faring well, distance and structural barriers can put significant strain on all dimensions of well-being (e.g., individual, collective, and cultural). This characterization is especially true in circumstances, discussed below, when old ways of life are founded on collective values and collective societal arrangements, and new ways of life are starkly different – as is the case for Oromo people living in the Americas, specifically with respect to younger generation immigrants.

People are the Source of Well-being

Given the elder generation participants' orientation towards their collective culture, interconnectedness, and Oromo togetherness, it is no surprise that when asked about their sources of cultural well-being, they collectively agreed that cultural well-being was primarily dependent on or determined by people. Similarly, the younger generation participants also stressed that people were important sources of cultural well-being. Several elder generation participants were surprised when asked about their sources of cultural well-being. For example, Gargaaraa said “sources of [cultural well-being is] of course people.... Listen, listen like sources, it's me and you and other people.” Not only his words, but the tone of his response was emphatic, as was the case with other participants from this group. It was as if they were suggesting: if not for people, what would be the genesis of cultural well-being? I wondered whether the elder generation participants felt like the answer to my question was a bit too obvious – as if I should have known better than to ask a question concerning the source of cultural well-being, given my own self-identity as an Oromo person.

Some common examples emerged across the participants with regard to their collective perception that people were the primary source of cultural well-being. Participants talked about people in relation to two social categories. First, some of the younger generation participants noted that family and elders were the most significant social source of cultural well-being. As said by Bontu: “I think the biggest sources would be our families and elders. Like you know what I mean, to really understand the culture that would be source number one. You learn the most from elders, right?” Similarly, Abdatuu said: “...obviously elders and family...They always come up in different aspects of life.” Both participants are alluding to the guidance they receive from elders within these social groups, who are often family members. In essence, families and elders are

essential links to both the past and the future because they provide continuity of culture. Elders are the holders of sacred knowledge who are often understood as pivotal for the maintenance of well-being and identity among community members, as is the case for Indigenous people in the Americas (King, Smith, & Gracey, 2009).

Oromo communities in the diaspora were the second most important social source of cultural well-being according to both the elder and the younger generation participants. With regard to these communities, Laafaa stated that “the community itself [is a source of cultural well-being], okay? Having a community. Within [a] community, having members, okay? Within those members, helping one another.” This idea of having, engaging, and leaning on the community for support “shows how important it is to help one another...united we stand, divided we fall” (Dursaa). In combination, two social categories are characterized by individual people who are a part of a whole community. The “vitality of [the] Oromo” (Barsiisaa) collective culture functions vis-à-vis people “coming together just in general as a people, to keep our culture strong and supporting people to strengthen our relationships” (Dursaa). These values are some of the fundamental elements that shape the cultural well-being of Oromo society.

When the participants in this study suggested that people are sources of cultural well-being, it could be argued that *people* as sources of well-being are a synergy of material and non-material culture. The material aspects of culture are made up of physical objects and artifacts that belong to a group of people, whereas the non-material aspects of culture are the ideas, beliefs, customs, practices, values, and norms that shape a particular society. Every culture is a product of the interaction between its material and non-material aspects. As put forth by Bourdieu’s (1985) concept of “habitus,” people are the physical embodiments of their social and cultural capital. Cultural habits become deeply ingrained in the forms of dispositions that people possess throughout their life experiences. Behaviour is acquired and transmitted through interactions with cultural symbols, which serve to produce and reproduce cultural systems. Thus, when participants explained that specific material manifestations of culture such as books, food, and music were sources of cultural well-being, the emphasis was on the non-material elements of these cultural objects. For example, it was not so much that the books, music, and food held particular meanings and attachments for them per se, but rather that these items served to teach and reinforce nuances within their culture. As Bontu explained:

I think a lot of us learn a lot through music. You know what I mean? Like Oromo music, I think for me, I've always spoken Oromo very fluently. But I would say that a lot of bigger vocabulary that I've learned is through Oromo music. Because they use metaphors and all this different stuff, and different vocabulary, and it's listening and just trying to make an understanding out of that. I feel like Oromo music has really grounded me, I don't know like it's really grounded how I see the culture. Or not just the culture, but just like even the language. Like the beauty of the language. So that's one for me, is just the beauty of the language.

Although songs can in a sense be seen as musical artifacts from the past that people use to define their culture, they also denote non-physical ideas with respect to how people (e.g., musicians and their audience) engage with the implicit and explicit messages that they convey. Similarly, when participants talked about food as an important component of their cultural well-being, it was not the physical food items that they necessarily valued, but rather the process of coming together to cook and enjoy feasting on traditional Oromo food. Hence, for some Oromos, people are sources of cultural well-being.

Elder generation participants articulated from a collective mindset and drew upon references that spoke to the significance of collective practices for shaping their cultural well-being. Conversely, the younger generation participants were distant when they talked about their conceptualizations of well-being. While the elder generation explicitly identified themselves as a part of the larger Oromo collective, both generational groups identified people as their fundamental source of cultural well-being. This finding demonstrates that the dimensions of subjectivity/individuality and relationality/collectivity are fundamentally intertwined, as denoted by the RWB approach (White, 2015). Specifically, cultural well-being is socially created through an interplay of personal and societal processes that emerge through interactions and relationships with social 'others.'

Oneness: Natural and Spiritual Worlds

Some elder generation participants also recognized cultural well-being as existing in relation to an interconnected system that moved beyond individuals and societal structures to encompass the natural and spiritual worlds.

Oromo well-being refers to the, not only the health of the person, but the environment also. The Oromos consider themselves as, they have

things that define that health in terms of relationship. Not only the person but the relationship you are. So I'm trying to refer to things like the buffer for you to be healthy, like "safuu" (Translation: ethics, moral, value)⁷ and "lubbuu" (Translation: soul, spirit)⁸ in Oromo tradition that you have to observe. If you don't keep those things you'll be missing the balance, then you'll be unhealthy. So health is the... psycho-social condition of a person in terms of well-being. (Amantaa)

In other words, Amantaa's vision of cultural well-being moves beyond the material world to include doctrines regarding ethics, morality, and virtues. Similarly, Barsiisaa stated:

So "safuu" is the nature, the norm of keeping balance in our relation. "Safuu, abbaa fi ilmoo jidduu jira" (Translation: these are values and respect that must be upheld between parent and child). "Safuu, abbaa mana fi haadhaa mana jidduu jira" (Translation: these are values and respect that must be upheld between husband and wife). "Safuu, obboleessa fi obboleetiti jidduu jira" (Translation: these are values and respect that must be upheld among brothers and sisters). "Safuu, ollaa jidduu jira" (Translation: these are values and respect that must be upheld among neighbours). "Safuu gosaa jidduu jira" (Translation: these are values and respect that must be upheld among clan members). "Safuu Oromo guutuu keessa jira" (Translation: these are values and respect inside every Oromo person). That is the balance, the keeping [of] the togetherness. The concept of togetherness and how we are able to live on Earth is by that "safuu." Without "safuu" we can't live because things will be disorderly. That is what, which is highly threatened now in many ways, and it is against Oromo in many ways. That is why the Oromo has to work together and restore...

These are principles of deep moral honour and accountability fostered by Waaqayyo (*i.e.*, God) fearing Oromos, which encourage a desire to live by traditional values. These philosophies also inspired the Gada system developed in the 16th century (Jalata, 2009), which oversees and regulates the economic, social, and political activities of the Oromo community. As described by Bassi (2010)

The main political element of the gadaa system is a mobile center (yaa'a gadaa or caffee), whose responsibility is entrusted to a new generational class every eight years (a gadaa period). The generational class is represented by elected and titled leaders, representing the main segments of a political unit organised under a single gadaa center. During this eight-year-period the generational class is known as gadaa or luba, referring to the central stage of the gadaa life-cycle, with overall responsibility for the political community at large. (p. 222)

⁷ The definition for the term "safuu" was retrieved from www.Oromodictionary.com

⁸ The definition for the term "lubbuu" was retrieved from www.Oromodictionary.com

It has been suggested that the Gada system is democratic: because a Gada period enforces principles of checks and balances; because power is divided among executive, legislative, and judicial branches; because the inclusion of five parties balances the opposition; and, because power is distributed between higher and lower administrative organs (Jalata, 2009). The Gada system's function is to strengthen social relations and facilitate harmony and mutual respect among its citizens. It has guided the life of the Oromo in relation to other peoples and the environment for centuries. Some scholars have argued that the culture of Oromo people is deeply rooted in the Gada system (Baissa, 1994; Jalata, 1998, 2000). According to a petition by the Oromo people in Ethiopia to have the Gada system inscribed as an intangible world heritage,⁹ this system is described as an Indigenous and democratic socio-political system of governance (Geras, 2015). As Barsiisaa alludes in his passage, the principles that underpin the system have been endangered, which has prompted its urgent safeguarding by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). It is critical to point out that the Gada system exists among some Oromo nations today, but not all. However, it is an age-old system that is widely recognized as the cradle of Oromo culture (Baissa, 1994; Jalata, 1998, 2000). As an Indigenous social institution, it has helped Oromo people retain collective values that continue to manifest in how they conceptualize cultural well-being, whether in their native lands or while living in the diaspora. It thus reflects the undeniably critical bonds between Oromo people and their lands, nature, spiritual and traditional institutions, and each other.

As stated by Laafaa, “collectively caring for people around you” is a thread that weaves together and enhances the social fabric of Oromo societies in Oromia and in diasporic communities. Coming together to engage in traditionally prescribed ethnocultural activities is a way for Oromo people to engage in cultural well-being and preserve it. One can infer that the collective well-being of Oromo people is deeply entrenched in the traditional Oromo way of life, wherein people aim to rise above self-interests and strive to live in ways that take the Oromo collective into consideration. It was therefore important to seek ethnocultural conceptualizations of well-being for this study, rather than relying on general or mainstream considerations of what it means to fare well. Although the Oromo culture is one vehicle that unites people, the Oromos’

⁹ On November 30, 2016 UNESCO announced that it registered the Gada system to the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

strong commitment to their collective identity allows them to be resolute in their philosophy about togetherness.

Upholding Cultural Identity

*“If you don’t know who you are, it’s hard to know where you’re going.” –
Abdatuu (Interview Participant)*

In collectivist cultures, interactions and relationships between members of the group play central roles in shaping and reinforcing group identity. As stated by Polletta and Jasper (2001), a group’s collective identity is constructed and expressed through the group’s culture, social customs, and traditions. Shared social characteristics such as the language, values, and worldviews that evolve from membership in an ethnocultural group create strong ties, bonds, and a sense of interconnectedness, which manifest in shared practices and customs that are, in turn, reflected in a group’s identity. The theory of collective identity was put forth by Melucci (1995), who argued that it was a process comprised of three components. The first part involves cognitive definitions, which appertain to the construction of shared meanings concerning goals, means, and collective actions. These meanings are incorporated into rituals, practices, and cultural artifacts and collective actions that enable group members to connect their individual beliefs to those of the larger group, thereby strengthening their collective identity. The second part of Melucci’s (1995) theory is concerned with networks of active relationships among group members, which signifies that individuals are interconnected through shared experiences. The third part of the theory requires group members to have a certain degree of emotional investment in the group, which enables individuals to feel like they share a common unity.

Melucci’s (1995) theory of collective identity was developed to explain how social movements are cognitively and emotionally framed by active relationships. However, his theory also sheds light on people’s sense of belonging in relation to other phenomena, such as having membership in a particular migrant group. In relation to this study, Melucci’s (1995) theory helps to inform how the cultural well-being of Oromo migrants is framed and reinforced through their collective identity.

A common view held by the elder generation was that maintaining their Oromo identity was of primary importance to cultural well-being while living in foreign

communities. As stated by Gilkinson and Sauv  (2010), “collective identities are statements about categorical memberships, which can be understood to be, on the one hand, socially constructed, yet on the other, not unreal or without meaning” (p. 1). Collective identities based on group membership can provide powerful insights into resettlement experiences. In this study, the interplay between identity and well-being was critical for understanding how some Oromo people in the diaspora conceptualized and envisioned cultural well-being. These participants expressed that Oromo cultural well-being for them included recognizing their belonging to the Oromo ethnic group. Specifically, the health of Oromo society depends on upholding the Oromo collective identity. As said by Gargaaraa:

... Oromo is a big ethnic group. It’s a nation. It’s over 40 million people. And so, being an Oromo, wherever they live, whether in Canada or anywhere in the world, they are Oromo. They identify as an Oromo. Well-being is how Oromos are able to keep their value, their identity, their language and their lifestyle. Are they able to do this? To maintain all this? Their lifestyle?...

This interviewee is suggesting that no matter where Oromo people reside throughout the world, they will always *be* Oromo and identify as such. As can be perceived in the tone of this excerpt, the participant’s voice proposes a collective consciousness. In sociological terms, collective consciousness refers to a set of shared beliefs, ideas, attitudes, and knowledge that operate as a unifying force within a social group or society. Founding sociologist Emile Durkheim established the concept of collective consciousness to explain how people are bound together into collective units such as social groups and societies (Durkheim, 1893/2014). He concluded that collective units exist because individuals feel a sense of solidarity with one other. In this context, Gargaaraa’s remarks are reminiscent of Durkheim’s ideas of collective consciousness as it pertains to Oromo peoples’ sense of belonging, identity, as well as their collective actions.

Oromo First! Oromo Forever

Several participants expressed the notion that “we are Oromos first” (Bilchina, Dursaa, and Gargaaraa,). This way of thinking suggests that it is not enough to simply acknowledge and uphold the Oromo identity – it is also essential for individuals to emphasize that being Oromo is their primary identity. Elder generation participants stressed the significance of actually safeguarding the Oromo way of life. Laafaa said

that it was necessary “to preserve the [Oromo] culture, identity, and who they are.” Doing so allows individuals to “continue to live as an Oromo, having their [own] community... just like other ethnic groups who live in Canada. So, the well-being of Oromos... in Canada is to have that root. Not to disappear you know, just keep it there” (Laafaa). In the view of Jiraatuu:

... cultural well-being. If I have to define that, when the culture, the language, the tradition, the cultural way of living when it exists in the Oromo people... it doesn't have to die just because they live here, or we live here. If that doesn't die we can carry it on, we can still be proud of being Oromo, proud of our culture, proud of that. That would be the well-being of the Oromo culture. That's how I define it.

Some elder generation Oromos thus indicate that they are committed to remembering who they are and where they have come from and are unlikely to adopt a foreign culture at the core of their lives. Being who they are is foundational to their cultural well-being because it allows them to retain meaningful connections to their ‘old’ traditional ways of life. Baumeister and Leary’s (1995) belongingness theory states that individuals are driven to create lasting interpersonal relationships and ultimately are motivated to be a part of a social group environment. Consistent with this theory, the connections that participants talked about seem to offer a sense of belonging, which is a human need that has positive effects on well-being and provides a sense of purpose in overall life (Baumeister & Leary, 1995). Some scholars have argued that a collective identity matters mainly because it relates to social cohesion (Jenson, 1998, 2002; Muir, 2007). According to Muir (2007), when individuals share values, actions, and an identity, it engenders social cohesion/ group unity/ common unity. In this context, identity fosters deep meaningful connections that manifest as a desire to belong to something that is greater than oneself and to engage actively in the life of the collective identity.

Preserving Identity for Posterity

When elder generation Oromos come together, speak their language, and engage in their traditional and customary practices, they can cultivate affective ties within their Oromo community. Their inclination to work as a part of a collective not only provides pathways for them to survive and prosper whilst living in diaspora but has also impelled many of them to want the same for future generations. As a case in point, all but one of the elder generation participants stated that retaining their ethnocultural identity was vital for posterity.

Oromo Cultural well-being for me is if Oromo people, especially the young, the people that are born here, know the culture, the language, and the tradition. That is, if we can pass that to the new generation... that would be well-being for me. And it means a lot for me because I need to pass it on too. It's a good culture. It's very loving. Oromo has a very good culture where we respect, we love, and it's all about peace and love and I want to pass that to my kids. And that means a great deal for me, that every Oromo child that's born here gets to learn this culture and the heritage, yeah. (Jiraatuu)

As culture is learned and passed down through generations, it is understandable that Oromo elders generally aspire to transmit their beliefs and values to younger generations. The elder generation participants expressed a shared sense of obligation and a willingness to cooperate with each other in order to keep the Oromo culture alive while living in foreign communities. In this sense, collective identity was seen as a necessary prerequisite for the endurance of the Oromo people. How can one know where they are going if they do not know who they are and where they have come from? If the elder generation commonly ascribes to such strong beliefs about retaining the Oromo identity, it would follow that the younger generation in their existing networks would have a degree of emotional investment in that identity. Consequently, they would share the wider Oromo collective's desire to express and preserve the Oromo ethnocultural identity.

However, there is evidence to suggest that not all elder generation Oromos in the diaspora feel committed to preserving the Oromo identity for posterity. For example, Ogeessa stated:

...we raised our kids, our three kids, the North American style. So we didn't impose our culture on them, we didn't see any point in it, although this is a multi-cultural society that has got some things that are positive and some that are not. What we found was we never thought that we'd make our kids not conforming to the Oromo-ness kind of things. Like they don't feel that, we felt very bad about that, so... they are more in the North American, so.

This elder generation participant clearly states that he and his partner raised their children to be more Westernized because they did not see utility in forcing the Oromo identity on to them. He went on to say:

We feel bad that they don't, they don't have the feeling of their Oromo-ness as we do feel. And we see many of our friends, you know the, it's also. It's also the level of the parent's education that is affecting this one. Those ones who brought them up like Oromos, speaking in just

only Oromo to them, to their kids, it's really not they want it that way, but it is because they don't speak the [English] language instead. So, but our kids took the advantage that both me and my wife are speaking English, so they never cared to learn Oromo. The eldest one fully understands, she can even converse. The twins they don't. They do understand a few things, but they don't. So yeah, we have a cultural society or a cultural association here, but our kids are really not fully integrated. So, for them what the cultural well-being, I don't know. (Ogeessa)

Ogeessa offers some insight into why he believes that other Oromo children in the diaspora are raised speaking Afaan Oromo. Specifically, he believes this emerges out of necessity rather than desire. I suspect that the other elder generation participants in this study would contest this assertion, given their position on significance of upholding the Oromo identity for their own children as well as future generations. Another aspect of his narrative that stood out in both of his responses above was the sentiment of regret. Ogeessa and his wife did not anticipate that their decision to adapt the North American culture would distance their children from espousing the feeling of Oromoness.

Although the elder generation participants generally envisioned ethnocultural continuity as fundamental to the cultural well-being of the Oromo collective, some were less optimistic about the actualization of this vision. Immigrants, as a group, often have difficulty maintaining their cultural identities (Bhugra, 2004; Bhugra & Becker, 2005). A great deal of research has examined the challenges that immigrants face as they struggle to balance their desires to celebrate their individual cultural backgrounds while acculturating to the dominant culture in their new homelands. Studies have found that first-generation immigrants (*i.e.*, foreign-born individuals or immigrant parents) generally have stronger and more meaningful connections to their old cultures/countries of origin than one-and-a-half generation (*i.e.*, those who straddle two cultural identities) and second-generation immigrants (*i.e.*, those who are born in the diaspora) (Zhou, 1997). Other research has pointed out that an intergenerational discrepancy can exist between former and latter groups of immigrants in terms of cultural values and expectations (Kwak, 2003; Phinney, Ong, & Madden, 2000). As immigrant parents are primarily concerned with retaining traditional values, immigrant children and children of immigrants often struggle with adjusting/fitting into their new foreign environments (Sung, 1985; Zhou, 1997). This phenomenon is known as the “acculturation gap hypothesis,” which stipulates that acculturation discrepancies between immigrant

parents and children create family dissonance (Phinney & Devich-Navarro, 1997; Szapocznik, Scopetta, Kurtines, & Aranalde, 1978). The cause of the discrepancy is that parents are more acculturated to their ethnocultural heritage, while their children are more acculturated to their host country. Some evidence of this was found in the existing study, discussed below.

In Oromia, where Oromo people are numerous, and the Oromo culture is widespread, fears about preserving and passing down Oromo ethnocultural identity do not parallel the anxieties of those who are living in diasporic communities. On the one hand, although most of the elder generation participants discussed their desires for future generations to uphold their ethnic identity, many realized that this notion was likely idealistic. For instance, it was acknowledged that while “language is the pillar of identity” (Gargaaraa), among “the second-generation, 95% or 90% may not speak the language” (Jiraatuu). The loss of language among the younger generation is not desired by the elders, as many of them see language as essential to retaining the Oromo ways of life. One participant went as far as to say that the “Oromo culture and the Oromo people is highly, highly on risk. The Oromo culture is at risk, the Oromo philosophy is at risk. The Oromo identity is at risk, the Oromo, the wholeness of Oromo-ness is at risk” (Barsiisaa). These comments imply that elders can be concerned about the continuation of the Oromo heritage in the diaspora.

On the other hand – perhaps a surprising finding to many of the elder generation participants – the younger generation participants also ascribed to the Oromo collective consciousness, in that they, too, shared similar viewpoints about wanting to belong to and uphold the Oromo collective identity. Here are some quotes that demonstrate how participants from this demographic group spoke passionately about *wanting to be* Oromo.

For me, a good life is to be first of all healthy, and happy within yourself. Happy that you are being yourself, because I think it's too easy here when you're in the Western life, to get lost as in losing yourself culture-wise. And, as a lot of people like to use, being 'Westernized.' So, I think that for me, myself, happiness is being within Canada and being proud to be Canadian, but not losing yourself as in your culture, being proud to be Oromo, and spreading that on to your future offsprings. And having them understand how important it is to be Oromo, and to be proud to be Oromo. In general, I would say yeah, to be proud of who you are and also not losing your culture and being happy within

those parameters that you don't feel like, you know, you have to please somebody and be something that you're not. (Dursaa)

Similarly, another participant from this demographic group expressed the following view:

Oh, for me, being in tune with my culture really helps with my wellness too. Just like the small traditions that we have in our house, whether it be like food or just like, for example how you treat a guest in your house. There's these things and little stuff you do, I feel that definitely helps too especially with the Oromo aspect of my well-being. I think that helps. (Abdatuu)

As observed above, the younger generation participants share some of the sentiments of elder generation participants, in that neither group was prepared to let go of their ethnocultural identity. The nuanced language of these younger generation participants indicates a turn toward individualist cultural well-being, which presumably is a consequence of acculturation. However, the predominant tone that comes across from the younger participants speaks to an underlying fear of losing oneself through the process of acculturation and emphasizes that knowing who you are and where you have come from is invaluable for preserving one's cultural well-being. It is important to point out that Bontu and Dursaa not only came to Canada as immigrant children, but also had children of their own and sought to teach the Oromo ethnocultural ways of life to these children. This practice provides some evidence to suggest that aspirations for posterity exist even among the younger generation Oromos.

However, discrepancies between the desires were expressed by both younger and elder generation participants and their reality with regard to being able to practice and maintain their Oromo identities. Although all the participants, young and old, expressed a strong affinity for the Oromo culture, some of the younger generation really struggled to uphold their cultural aspirations. As expressed by Obsituu, a younger generation participant:

... I grew up in household of two Oromo parents that were very into the [Oromo] culture and very proud of being Oromo. But going to school and just seeing the society that I grew up in, it was just very very different from what my mom told me. So she would try to instill these things in us from back home, and the culture, and their ways, but it was really hard to relate to that because I'm not seeing that every day. I'm seeing something completely different, so basically my whole life has been like that.

In sum, the way of life taught to Obsituu inside her home was remarkably different from her observations and experiences outside of the home. Similarly, Gammadu, said “I spent a lot of time in this Western culture, so although I have half of me that's a part of [the Oromo identity] there's another half that also engages in certain Western practices. And so sometimes, it's difficult to find the medium.” These feelings indicate an incongruity between traditional cultural norms and values in the ethnocultural and host societies, which creates conflict between two cultural identities (*i.e.*, bi-cultural identities). The term “one-and-a-half generation” was coined by Rumbaut (1991) to characterize children who straddle two ethnocultural identities, such as the younger generation participants in this study. Bi-cultural conflicts are common among immigrant children and children of immigrants as they struggle to adjust to foreign environments and balance multiple cultural identities (Sung, 1985; Zhou, 1997). Similarly, the First Nations in Canada generally affirm a collective identity, and they, too, struggle with how to balance their collective perspective with the omnipresence of a more individualistic and capitalist dominant culture (Frideres, 2008).

Investigating how first- and second-generation immigrants perceive resettlement is particularly significant because they elucidate the impact that a bi-cultural identity can have on well-being. Researchers have shown that culturally-based conflicts can create challenges for interpersonal relationships (Giguere, Lalonde, & Lou, 2010); that bi-cultural stress can negatively impact the mental well-being of certain individuals or groups of individuals (Romero, Carvajal, Valle, & Orduña, 2007); and that bi-culturalism may contribute to personal conflict across several domains, such as acceptable levels of aggression and sexual openness, and the essentialness of sports and education (Sung, 1985). Conversely, researchers have also pointed out that interactions with ethnic community members can help individuals to develop and strengthen their ethnic identity, and ease bi-cultural identity conflicts (Zhou, 1997; Zhou & Bankston, 1998). Thus, the community could play a critical role in helping to reinforce the cultural identity of its members, which in turn enhances cultural well-being.

Similarities in how the elders and the young conceptualize and envision cultural well-being speaks to the notion of well-being over the life-course, as put forth by RWB scholars (Adelson, 2009; Beyer, 2013; de Jong, 2011; Montgomery, 2013; White, 2015, 2017). This notion construes cultural well-being to be a dynamic process that plays out across time through an interplay of relational processes. The Oromo collective identity

has shaped participants' understanding and construction of their individual identities. In trying to embrace both their native culture and new culture, some Oromo elders and youth in diasporic communities share deep desires to uphold their ethnocultural identities, despite the challenges of doing so. The commitment to Oromo ethnocultural heritage that these individuals show implies a shared bond that offers them a sense of belonging to Oromo collective identity. The Oromo collective identity represents Oromo history, including Oromos' bonds to the past, present, and future. It is important for them to know who they are so that they can pass on their ethnocultural identity. As put forth in Melucci's (1995) theory, interactions and relationships are means for achieving their visions of cultural well-being, which would not be possible if not for their networks of active relationships.

Conclusion

The findings in this chapter show that identity plays a significant role in how Oromo people in the diaspora conceptualize cultural well-being. As Oromo people have migrated from one nation and one culture to another, they have carried their knowledge and expressions of culture with them. Upon settling down in their new communities, participants' sense of belonging to their ancestral group has remained strong. By engaging in and with material and non-material aspects of the Oromo culture as best they could while living in the diaspora, individuals have sought to uphold their collective identity among themselves and for posterity. All the participants expressed that they attempted to acculturate or engage in biculturalism, rather than assimilating into the larger Canadian society. By doing so, they have strived to integrate their traditional ways of life into their resettled lives as best they could which helped to preserve their ethnocultural well-being.

The generational analysis offered in this chapter generated insights that reveal similarities and differences among the different group of migrants. The elders have retained their ethnocultural identities despite having been transplanted, while the younger generation has struggled to hang on to this identity although they are committed to it. However, as a whole, the participants were transparent about who they are as individuals and as members of a collective group. It is important to emphasize that it could have been the case that the younger generation participants lost their desires for the Oromo culture while in the diaspora, but they did not express this position. This

speaks to the strength of the Oromo collective and to the power of ethnocultural socialization. As a result of their deep affiliation to the Oromo society and to each other, their desires and aspirations to be Oromo are very concrete. Cultural well-being for participants emerges from reciprocal relationships with others, and with something larger than one-self. The emphasis on the cultural well-being of Oromo collective is valued above individual needs and desires. Participants generally demonstrated that they are determined to stick together and to uphold the Oromo collective, as it is perceived to be the genesis of their cultural well-being.

Chapter 4.

The 'Bad Life' – Determinants of Well-being

"Yeah, it, you know honestly, to be honest, the Oromo well-being can be seen from two perspectives. One is from those, the first-generations like myself who immigrated here at the later age of life, and whose life has never been the same again, and who still feel for the lives, the cultural things, all the connections that were lost. And most importantly because I lost my country, and the sufferings and the persecution of my people back home is the one that really burns and boils in me every single day. That has taken lots on me personally, and that has [and] definitely will affect my well-being as well. I mean in terms of Oromo general life quality. But on the other, in the other continuum, we find my children and my grandchildren who are flourishing here, who are having good exposure to [a] new life system, new quality, new education, new living style. Where they are taken care of, where they can determine their destiny, when they can pursue whatever they become, where they have the opportunity to be whatever they like, which we never had back home. And so in terms of overall life quality, the Oromo well-being, I mean well-being if you take it in terms of economy, we are by far better here rather than home because in terms of general livelihood we are free, at least we are free. We know that when we wake up in the morning we are free. We know for sure that we can come home back freely without being detained, questioned, asked [anything] by anyone. So living in a very democratic, egalitarian and socially affluent society here is something really really good for us. And of course there is a change in our lifestyle, a change in our head style, a change in our physicality, a change in our economies. How we are able to, rather than being dependent on others, we are even able to help back home people who are there. We are able to sponsor people over here. So I think, in terms of, there is a change in terms of life quality which is generally positive in Canada, I think... So once Canadian we enjoy every aspect of livelihood that any Canadian enjoys, all the security, job securities, life securities and other things. But there are struggles also to get along with things. Like there is a language barrier, there is a cultural shock which you'll never overcome. There is also yeah, there is also other things, little discrimination which you have to fight." – Bilchina (Interview Participant)

This vignette advances a central issue concerning the complexities and challenges that underpin the well-being of Oromo migrants: what constitutes the 'bad life' for Oromo migrants may not be the same for first-generation immigrants when compared to their second-generation counterparts. It has been well-documented that myriad experiences influence migrants' health during the various stages of the migration process: pre-departure from country of origin (e.g., Gushulak & MacPherson, 2011;

Khawaja, White, Schweitzer, & Greenslade, 2008); the transit phase (*e.g.*, Adams, Gardiner, & Assefi, 2004; Bhugra & Jones 2011); and resettlement in destination countries (*e.g.*, Keyes & Kane, 2004; Miller, Worthington, Muzurovic, Tipping, & Goldman, 2002). Societal conditions invariably impact displaced peoples' overall health and well-being, exacerbating challenges and suffering throughout the migration process. The act of migration profoundly disrupts socio-cultural support systems and can cause social isolation and an ethnic identity crisis, as discussed in Chapter Three, which can potentially have an intergenerational effect. Although the displacement experience is often considered to have concluded when migrants resettle in their destination country, Hyndman and Giles (2017) argue that "being uprooted again, even for resettlement, is another form of displacement" (p. 97). Additionally, resettled individuals can continue to feel displaced even after resettlement as they struggle to find equilibrium while navigating the new terrain in countries of destination.

The aggregation of circumstances affecting migrant health and well-being is often examined within the purview of socio-economic environments in countries of transit and 'final' destinations. However, my research aims to demonstrate that resettled migrants' overall well-being is also influenced by the maintenance of social, political, and economic ties to their country of origin, a sentiment often expressed by the participants in a similar fashion to Bilchina's narrative above. Although some studies have explored the health effects of pre-migration conditions from which individuals migrate (Halcón et al., 2004; Jaranson et al., 2004), fewer studies have recognized the lasting and intergenerational effects associated with transnational ties to a migrant's place of origin. Particularly, the goal of this chapter is to show that migrant well-being is shaped by complex and inter-related circumstances in countries of destination that are juxtaposed by historical and emerging events in their homelands.

There is growing recognition that macro-level social forces (*e.g.*, social and structural inequalities) are central to migrants' health (Castañeda et al., 2015; Davies, Basten, & Frattini, 2009), but researchers and practitioners have not sufficiently explored this phenomenon within the context of transnational migration. Existing research primarily contextualizes migrant health against the backdrop of existing social forces in countries of destination, whereas a transnational approach would situate their well-being in relation to cross-border connections. Utilizing a transnational lens thus engenders a new critical perspective for understanding migrant health.

In this chapter, I expand upon the finding that both local and transnational macrostructures affect migrant well-being, which I will accomplish by unpacking select contemporary literature as explained below. This review begins with a brief overview of the ‘social determinants of health.’ Following this review, I critique and build upon three available approaches related to social forces and migrant health: Castañeda et al.’s (2015) framework that advances social determinants of health to understand migrant well-being; and Davies et al. (2009), which commits to the same agenda in addition to including a human rights angle.¹⁰ Third, I examine the utility of the ‘determinants of health’ model, as put forth by Dahlgren and Whitehead (1991), for exploring the same phenomenon. I offer a novel approach that defines *transnational social determinants of well-being* in a way which addresses the limitations of the three existing approaches that I critique. I use this new approach to examine the relationship between *local societal structures* such as social, economic and political factors and *transnational ties* to elucidate the elements that engender the ‘bad life’ from the perspectives of Oromo people in the diaspora and as seen in their ways of life during the participant-observation and observation events that I attended.

Social Determinants of Health (SDOH): A Brief Overview

Social determinants of health (SDOH) provide critical insights into the multiplex, intersected, and coinciding social structures that are responsible for most health inequities, in contrast to biological and lifestyle determinants, which tend to emphasize the individual characteristics and behavioural factors that contribute to health. Traditionally, public health research has put more focus on biological and lifestyle factors that underpin the health outcomes of individuals and communities. However, during the past two decades a large and compelling body of evidence has revealed that social (including economic) inequalities play a powerful role in shaping health across a wide range of settings, measures, and populations (Marmot, 2005; World Health Organization [WHO] 2008; Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003), and that SDOH demonstrate these inequalities. According to the WHO (2012):

¹⁰ This component of my review centers on the approaches put forward in these two scholarships because they were the only two that I could find concerning the interconnection between social forces and migrant well-being.

The social determinants of health are the conditions in which people are born, grow, live, work and age. These circumstances are shaped by the distribution of money, power and resources at global, national and local levels. The social determinants of health are mostly responsible for health inequities - the unfair and avoidable differences in health status seen within and between countries. (para. 1)

As such, SDOH encompass the social, economic, and political disparities that prevent individuals from attaining their full health potential. As stated by Raphael (2009), SDOH “also determine the extent to which a person possesses the physical, social, and personal resources to identify and achieve personal aspirations, satisfy needs, and cope with the environment” (p. 2). The latter definition adds a contextual layer to the former by emphasizing that SDOH are not merely about the social conditions that determine if individuals stay healthy or become ill. It also denotes that SDOH are about the quality, quantity, and distribution of resources that shape an individual’s overall well-being. Altogether, these factors are critical for gaining an understanding of how macro-level social structures influence individual and community health and well-being. As discussed below, researchers have argued that it is necessary to identify how they impact migrants’ health and well-being (Castañeda et al., 2015; Davies et al., 2009).

SDOH and the Migration Process: A Structural Framework

Contemporary developments and applications of SDOH signify an important paradigm shift that moves beyond the medical model and lifestyle approaches to understanding health and well-being in more critical and diverse ways. However, while public health researchers and practitioners increasingly recognize that health and well-being are shaped by macro-level social structures, the interconnection between these structures and migrant health has *i)* seldom been explored and *ii)* lacked empirical backing when it has been investigated perhaps due to limited or unavailable cross-cultural data. Castañeda et al. (2015) state that public health research on immigration health has been influenced by three primary frameworks: *i) individual* health behaviours – too narrow, *ii) cultural factors pertinent to immigrants* – moves beyond the individual but still neglects macro-level social factors, and *iii) structural* factors – addresses macrostructures, but mostly as they pertain to access to healthcare. The most prevalent framework focuses on individual health behaviours, whereas the second most dominant framework focuses on the cultural context of immigrants (Castañeda et al., 2015; Viruell-Fuentes, Miranda, & Abdulrahim, 2012). Given that both these approaches neglect

many of the large-scale forces affecting migrant health as advanced by a structural framework, Castañeda et al. (2015) suggest that the resulting knowledge gap can be addressed by utilizing a macro SDOH approach to engage in research and practices related to the broader factors impacting immigrant health. For example, Castañeda et al. (2015) argue that this approach would necessitate a consideration of the broader historical context that surrounds migration, including political and economic circumstances that underpin the motives for migration, and greater attention to policies that shape the larger health landscapes (e.g., living and work conditions) in which immigrants live. Accordingly, a macro SDOH approach fits more directly with a structural framework as defined above. Apart from highlighting knowledge gaps and encouraging the use of a macro SDOH approach to explore migrant health, Castañeda et al. (2015) do not utilize empirical data to assess the contributions of such an approach. Instead, their conclusions stem from a review of contemporary public health literature on the health of immigrant populations.

A SDOH structural framework, as utilized in the current study, concentrates on macrostructural factors that are determined by the socio-political and economic policies and inequalities that have important implications for migrant health. Seeing the migration process through a “macrostructural social determinants of health lens” implies that immigration itself ought to be regarded as a health determinant (Castañeda et al., 2015, p. 381; Davies et al., 2009). Given that immigration in today’s global landscape is fundamentally driven by socio-political and economic inequalities, conceptualizing migrant health as both a SDOH in its own right and as socially determined allows for a more holistic and bi-directional understanding of the complex interplay of SDOH. An excerpt from Davies et al. (2009) elucidates this point:

Social determinants of migrants’ health relate to factors that influence the migration process, reasons for migrating, and the mode of travel, length of stay and the migrants’ language skills, race, legal status. These determinants of migrants’ health are complex and inter-related. Migrants can come from different backgrounds and situations, and once they migrate their status often changes dramatically. Different categories of migrants may have very different experiences. Determinants of migrants’ health are shaped by their experiences and situations in the countries of origin, transit and destination. Migration itself adds a particular dimension to social determinants of health, given that being a migrant can make persons more vulnerable to negative influences to their health. Many of the factors that drive migration also contribute towards the health inequalities between countries and within countries. Being a migrant puts the individual in further

social disadvantage when compared with individuals in the host community in the same social strata. In addition to being particularly vulnerable to certain health risks as a migrant, migrants often experience certain challenges and barriers to accessing health and social services, especially if they are undocumented. This in itself is a social determinant to the health of migrants. (p. 4)

Put simply, migrants' health outcomes are shaped by the circumstances that cause them to become displaced (*e.g.*, conflict-induced vs. natural disaster), the type of migrant that they become (*e.g.*, refugee vs. internally displaced person), and their experiences upon resettlement in their country of destination. The convergence of these social forces is both a consequence of SDOH as well as the conditions of SDOH.

Although a macrostructural SDOH framework as advanced by Castañeda et al. (2015) is more compelling than an individual or cultural framework, it was not designed to account for ties that migrants maintain to their homelands and how these attachments impact well-being. Instead, its purpose is to address macro-level social forces within a local context. As indicated in the vignette, which is an overall theme that emerged in the findings for this chapter, the connections that migrants maintain to their countries of origin can affect their well-being. For the participants in this study, these realities are marked by experiences of loss, grief, and a long history of oppression. Thus, a more critical approach would also integrate connections to original country as a determinant of health and well-being. This framework is the focus of the following chapter.

Contributions of Injustices to (Migrant) Health: SDOH and A Human-Rights Based Perspective

All human beings are entitled to basic human rights because these rights support a life of dignity and well-being. Within the scope of global health (*i.e.*, state of health in the global population) and global health practices (*i.e.*, actions aimed at fighting threats to the global population), innumerable initiatives have been implemented to tackle global health disparities. Despite the practice and study of global health that has aimed to challenge systems and ideologies that remain a threat to health, inequities in global health continue to be an unresolved phenomenon. For example, significant progress has been made in the establishment of legal instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNGA, 1948) to address the human rights injustices that give rise to social and economic inequalities – which are the driving force behind most

global health disparities. However, the long-standing legal campaign for health and human rights has not seen remarkable progress in the press for social and economic equity. I contend that a new approach is needed to deal with the injustices that produce global health disparities.

The *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* is one of several international attempts to right the wrongs that have been committed against the world's Indigenous peoples. It has tremendous potential, but this potential has yet to be realized. A bottom-up approach was taken to the development of the declaration. The grass roots level was comprised of Indigenous diplomats and advocates who spoke on behalf of themselves or their communities. These voices were able to be heard because of an open-door policy stating "that no [I]ndigenous community, organization, nation or even individual person from any region was to be denied the right to take the floor in the annual sessions of the Working Group on Indigenous Populations (WGIP) to peacefully express an opinion or viewpoint" (Daes, 2008, p. 8). The second level was comprised of unique working commissions and sub-commissions such as the WGIP. The top level was comprised of the General Assembly and its various committees and entities that were politically appointed to speak for the nation states they represented. The draft Declaration was passed at the WGIP in 1994 after 12 years of development by the WGIP on the advice of Indigenous delegates but stayed in effective limbo at the UN Human Rights Council until finally coming to a vote at the General Assembly in 2007. It was particularly disappointing that Canada was one of 4 states to vote "no" while 144 others voted "yes." Even though Canada was governed by conservative ideologies at the time (Ljunggren, 2007), the world community considered it to be the Western democratic nation most likely to support the declaration. Consequently, there was a justified backlash against Canada for its rejection of the declaration. Canada did eventually come to affirm and support the declaration; however, Ethiopia was absent for the vote. Articles 21, 23, 24, and 29 of the declaration cover Indigenous people's rights to improve, maintain, access, and restore health, but it is unclear what rights an Indigenous people might have in a place they are not Indigenous, such as the Oromo in Canada.

Farmer (1999), a staunch advocate for promoting health and human rights, stresses the significance of taking a "health angle" to advance human rights (p. 1491). His philosophies center on the contribution that health brings to the struggle for human

rights, rather than how the human rights framework can be used to address health inequities. The reason for this is that human rights standards and laws are not sufficient mechanisms to address health inequities, given that they are largely ignored by those who wield power (e.g., states). Thus, despite advocating for health as a human right, Farmer (1999) recognizes the pragmatic limitations of focusing on laws alone to rectify human rights injustices. Instead, mitigating the human suffering that diminishes health requires “pragmatic solidarity”: the deployment of tools and resources to improve the health of those who have been victimized by the neglect of those in power (Farmer, 1999, p. 1488). This notion is linked to the task of bringing people together to help those in need overcome obstacles in a practical manner. It is not enough to merely acknowledge that human suffering exists, as it is necessary to explore what we can do collectively to lessen it.

As global trends indicate that civil unrest spurred by violent oppressive regimes are the predominant causes of recent conflict and displacement (Edwards, 2016, para. 1; Pedersen, 2002), it is imperative to consider the synergy between health and human rights. Like Castañeda et al. (2015), Davies et al. (2009) offer a pragmatic framework for exploring the interconnection between macro-level social forces and migrant health. However, Davies et al. (2009) explore the relationship between migrants’ health and SDOH “from a human rights and social equity based perspective” (p. 4). By doing so, they first acknowledge the social origins of many threats to health that migrants face during the migration journey and after resettlement, such as poverty, discrimination, stigma, gender bias, housing, education, and occupational health factors. Second, they consider three approaches for achieving migrants’ right to health: *i*) situating migrant health and well-being in a human rights framework, *ii*) viewing migrant health as a matter of empowerment, and *iii*) improving the cultural appropriateness of health systems. Finally, they offer a set of recommendations aimed at strengthening partnerships across multi-disciplines and stakeholders.

Davies et al.’s (2009) approach offers a different set of insights compared to Castañeda et al.’s (2015) framework because, along with focusing on macro-level SDOH, it recognizes the implicit human rights implications of migrant health and is compatible with Farmer’s (1999) “pragmatic solidarity” concept (p. 1488). This perspective adds important layers to exploring the interplay between migrant health and

human rights because it is about working with communities themselves on empowerment, rather than depending on laws and policies to rectify the issues.

While Davies et al (2009) integrate a human rights perspective, one limitation to their approach is that they ground migrant health issues and rights within the context of the availability, accessibility, acceptability, and quality of health services in the host environment. These propositions pertain to making 'health care a right,' which aligns with rhetoric that has been used by specialized international organizations such as WHO. As stated by The Honourable Roy Romanow (2003)¹¹, "a health care system – even the best health care system in the world – will be only one of the ingredients that determine whether your life will be long or short, healthy or sick, full of fulfillment, or empty with despair" (para. 24). It follows that the crucial factors that shape well-being are not only determined by the health and social services that individuals receive or should receive because it is their right. Rather, the aggregation of living conditions that individuals experience throughout their lives help to determine if they will live the 'good life' or the 'bad life.' For many present-day resettled individuals, these living conditions are largely shaped by experiences that are overlaid by the backdrop of injustices that dispossessed them from their homelands. Employing a human rights-based perspective that focuses only on access to health services as envisioned by Davies et al. (2009), cannot account for past exposures that migrants carry forward with them in their new resettled lives.

A framework that would better account for the nuances of today's migration experiences would not only focus on 'the human right to health' (*i.e.*, the effect of health policies and programs on human rights) that pertains to host environments, but it would also address health and human rights within the context of historical and ongoing injustices that are linked to migrants' homelands. For example, as characterized in the opening quote, the human right to health in Ethiopia can be as central to Oromo migrant's well-being in Canada as human right to health of Oromo migrants in Canada. In other words, human rights exposures are not a thing of the past they are also contemporary.

¹¹ During his time as premiere of Saskatchewan (1991-2001), the Honourable Roy Romanow was responsible for restoring the province's fiscal health. As a staunch advocate for publicly-funded Medicare, he led the 2001-2002 Royal Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada.

This critique brings us to the second limitation of Davies et al.'s (2009) approach, which, like Castañeda et al. (2015), does not consider how the connections that migrants maintain to their countries of origins impact their well-being while living in resettled communities. Rather, the SDOH framework and the human rights perspective were constructed to realize migrant health and well-being within the context of destination countries.

As migrants are shaped by the socio-political and economic structures in both their countries of origin and destination countries, it is imperative to consider the contributions of injustices to migrant health and well-being over the life course. Like the opening vignette in this chapter, participant responses necessitated both a life course and geographical focus for understanding what constitutes the 'bad life.' The question I pose is: what implications do historical and ongoing human rights violations in migrants' countries of origins, have on migrant well-being throughout the life course after resettlement? I believe that exploring this question will provide a better account of the lasting and intergenerational effects of human rights violations that migrants experience and how these injustices infringe on well-being even after resettlement. Examining migrant health within the context of transnationalism would serve to ground a cross-border perspective concerning the implications of SDOH and human rights for migrant well-being.

Transnational Social Determinants of Well-being: A Comprehensive Approach

Although working on SDOH is central to challenging health inequities linked to migration, health and well-being are impacted by many factors operating at different levels. Figure 4.1 illustrates a prominent model of the relationship between the micro-, meso- and macro-level determinants that influence health and well-being (Dahlgren & Whitehead, 1991). At the center of the model are individuals who have a set of fixed genetic elements (e.g., hereditary factors such as sex and ethnicity). The first layer represents the individual behaviours and lifestyle choices that can either enhance or hinder a person's health and well-being (e.g., those who decide to smoke cigarettes compared to those who decide to refrain). The second layer includes social and community influences, which can provide support for health and well-being in adverse conditions. Conversely, unfavourable conditions may exacerbate health and well-being

in the absence of these supports. The third layer is comprised of the interacting structural factors (e.g., social, economic, political, policy, and organizational) that directly impact health either positively or negatively. Rather than isolating each factor (e.g., lifestyle or social), Dahlgren & Whitehead's (1991) model posits causal relationships between the different layers and factors, which altogether can have a protective influence on health and well-being or undermine them. The model is useful for exploring and understanding the relative influences of a wide range of determinants on different health outcomes, rather than focusing strictly on a silo approach. It embeds micro- and meso-level factors within broader aspects of society, making it more comprehensive than a SDOH framework.

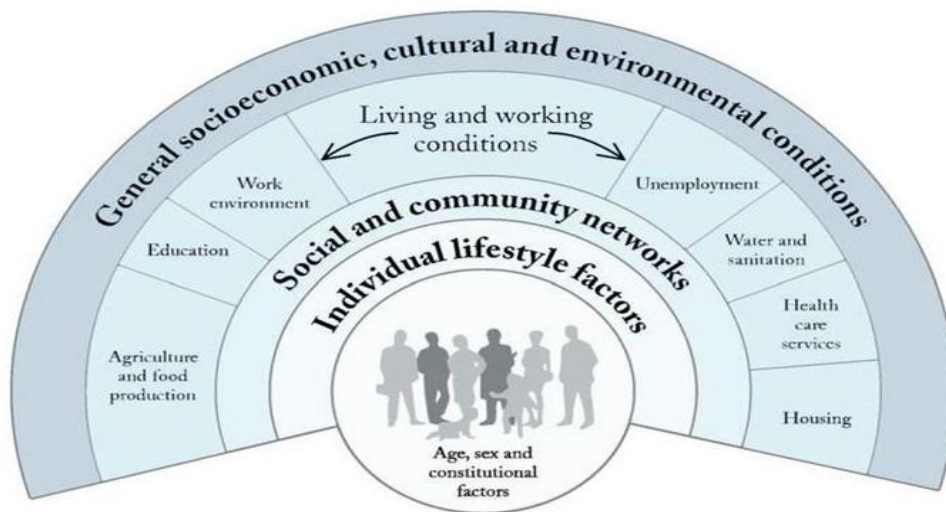


Figure 4.1: One influential model of the determinants of health and well-being (Source - Dahlgren & Whitehead, 1991, p. 13).

While Dahlgren & Whitehead's (1991) model is useful for understanding the various determinants of health that may exist in a given society, elements of well-being that were important to the participants in this study remain obscured by this model. Transnational migration is defined as “a process of movement and settlement across international borders in which individuals maintain or build multiple networks of connection to their country of origin while at the same time settling in a new country” (Fouon & Schiller, 2001, p. 60). Transnational migrants are individuals who belong to multiple societies and maintain strong relationships with their homelands despite having resettled in new countries. Studies have shown that transnational migrants express their interests politically, spiritually, and socially in multiple contexts, rather than in ideas that

are related to a single nation state (Levitt, 2004), but studies have not examined how traversing the globe might impact one's own notion of 'good life' or 'bad life.'

In the current chapter, as well as the next, the terms 'good' and 'bad' were used as anchoring points of the spectrum. Participants were asked to define both values and then were asked to position themselves on the spectrum based on their own perceptions. All the participants placed themselves somewhere in the middle of their self-anchoring scales, which means that they neither saw themselves as having a 'good life' or a 'bad life.' In varying ways, some participants in the current study expressed a 'bad' life in ways that were deeply rooted in transnational identifies (*i.e.*, socio-political and economic ties to their homelands). For these participants, well-being was not only determined by social factors in their destination countries, but also influenced by historical and ongoing socio-political and economic conditions in their country of origin (*e.g.*, state crime and structural violence). Dahlgren & Whitehead's (1991) model encourage researchers to construct a range of hypotheses about the determinants of health but the *de facto* application of the model is to local settings; it does not encourage analysis across international boundaries.

Within the context of migration pertinent to the findings in this chapter, a more suitable model (as illustrated in Figure 4.2) would include a layer to capture the transnational social determinants of health which pertain to the transnational macrostructures that affect the well-being of resettled migrants. As noted by Farmer (1999), human suffering and injustice is largely a product of state power, which is the key ingredient that has bred and perpetuated forced global displacement. Farmer, Nizeye, Stulac, and Keshavjee (2006) state that "the arrangements are structural because they are embedded in the political and economic organization of our social world; they are violent because they cause injury to people (typically, not those responsible for perpetuating such inequalities)" (p. 1686).

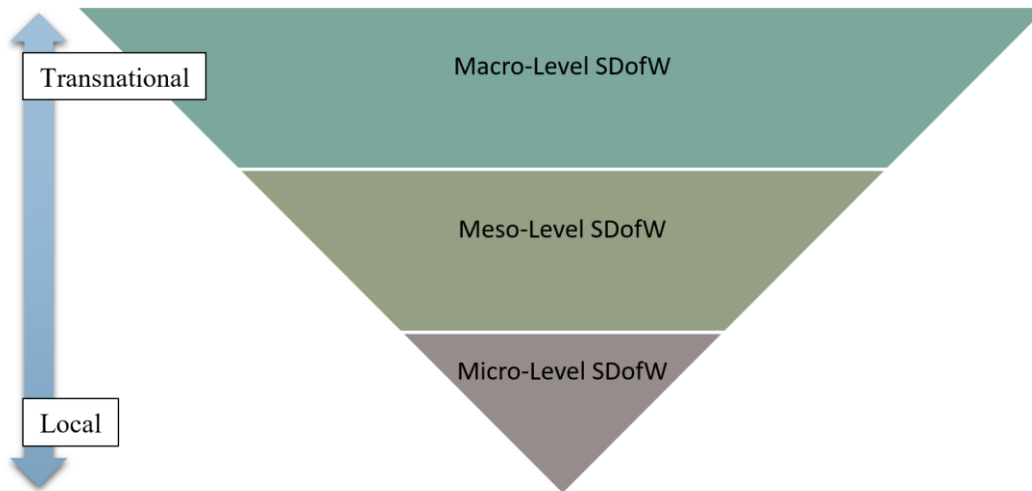


Figure 4.2: Local and transnational social determinants of well-being (SDofW)

Accordingly, the analysis of suffering must consider deep historical and broad geographical factors, as well as the interrelated social factors such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status (SES), and religious creed that are entrenched in social and structural inequalities. Such an approach is better able to engage with the implications of human rights violations beyond a local context, and in so doing, centers on the contributions that well-being angle can bring to the struggle for improving migrant health and well-being throughout the life course after resettlement. Figure 4.2 considers the micro-, meso- and macro-level social determinants of migrants' well-being as they relate to local and transnational structures. Three distinct themes emerged from the data that indicate that participants embodied the 'bad life' in terms of *i*) micro (individual/material), *ii*) meso (social identity/ community), and *iii*) macro transnational (historical and current socio-political climate) social determinants of well-being (SDofW). I consider each of these themes in greater detail below.

Micro-Level SDofW: Individual-Material Well-being

The data from this study indicate that, in most cases, participants perceived specific requirements as fundamental for well-being. In response to questions about what constitutes the basis of a 'bad life,' the inability to fulfil basic needs was an overarching theme that emerged for Oromo migrants. For example, Gammadu stated:

The first thing that comes to mind is not having the basic necessities of life. If you're not able to feed yourself or your family, you don't have

access to water, or a roof over your head, or no means of income. Just that's the foundation of fundamental aspects of your well-being. If you don't have shelter then you're exposed to basically anything, so those would be the main things.

Gammadu acknowledges that when the basic human needs required for survival (*e.g.*, food, water, shelter) are not met, individuals are not able to live the 'good life.' This outlook lines up with the most basic (physiological) level of Maslow (1943) "hierarchy of needs," which are deemed to be the most fundamental and pressing human needs.

In addition to fulfilling these basic life needs, many participants stressed that a lack of education was a significant impediment to obtaining the 'good life.' The following excerpt illustrates this point of view:

I think education is a big thing because it opens up so many doors, so being restricted from that and not having an opportunity to go to school, or do everything you want to and life. So yeah, I think that's how I would describe a bad life. (Abdatuu)

Similarly, Gargaaraa said "No education? You don't get a good job... You go nowhere. Telling you, you go nowhere," and Obsituu said that "not being able to have education" would result in a life that would be less than ideal. This notion of education creates an interesting paradox. For example, as delineated in Chapter Three, cultural well-being for participants entails the Oromo ethos and connectedness that exists back home in Oromia. The current chapter reveals that the 'good life' would include education, but back home, access to education is limited for Oromos – particularly for girls. As such, in Oromia, one can simultaneously have both a good (culture) and bad (education) life, whereas in Canada, one can simultaneously have both a good (education) and bad (culture) quality of life as well. In other words, if participants were to return or remain back home, they would experience cultural enrichment, but their educational prosperity would suffer, while in Canada the opposite is true mainly as is it concerns younger generation Oromos.

In stressing the value of education, these participants also demonstrate that meeting foundational needs is only one layer of the local determinants that lead to the 'good life' or the 'bad life.' Thus, even if physiological needs have been gratified, additional requirements need to be met for one to live the 'good life.' Education's position as another layer aligns with Maslow (1943) second level of "hierarchy of needs," which is the desire for safety and security. These needs are 1) personal security, such

as physical security, *ii*) preserving self and personhood, and *iii*) financial security, such as job security. Education affords certain privileges, such as wealth, that can allow individuals to satisfy these needs. Conversely, a lack of education could limit economic prosperity, or as Gargaaraa stated: “You working with minimum wage? Even [if] you've grown up here, you and someone who came yesterday from refugee camp is the same.” Gargaaraa is suggesting that first- or second-generation immigrants who are not educated and are employed at minimum wage jobs have the same SES as newcomers from refugee camps. Likewise, it is conventional wisdom that level of educational attainment is an important SDOH and well-being because it can play a significant role in shaping employment opportunities (Mikkonen & Raphael, 2010), and therefore serves to increase peoples’ capacity to autonomously make life decisions that impact other, interrelated, SDOH and SDofW.

On the other hand, at least two participants recognized that in some cases being formally educated is not enough to predict if an individual will lead the ‘good life.’ In other words, one can still live the ‘bad life’ despite attaining a higher level of education.

In many ways, unfortunately, not every foreign educated people come here and get the opportunity to get a reliable job or make a decent life. That depends not only on the people themselves, but mostly on luck and opportunity. So yes, that is, that cannot be generalized for everybody. It's not because of lack of education, not because of lack of experience or anything else. But just simply, it's hard to get the opportunity to show what you are capable of doing. So I know many people who are hurting, many Oromos who didn't make it. They did at school, did very well at school, in getting the right education at the right time, but never had the chance to get a good job, to make a good life. (Ogeessa)

... some people are really educated back home, but when they come here to Canada or anywhere in North America, I guess a lot of the education they have back home doesn't really meet the standards here. So they're forced to just have jobs that really nobody wants to do and therefore lower income. And it's just a lot more of a struggle. (Obsituu)

What Ogeesa and Obsituu are describing here is a phenomenon that is not unique to Oromo people. Local macrostructural factors impede many foreign-born and foreign-educated individuals from applying their education in North American settings. Previous research has demonstrated the existence of a few key structural and institutional barriers to employment for skilled migrant populations. These impediments include a lack of recognition of foreign credentials and experiences, communication and language

barriers, and discrimination that privileges native-born populations because foreigners lack local employment experiences (Krahn, Derwing, Mulder, & Wilkinson, 2000). These barriers are embedded in hierarchies established during histories of colonization, which have allowed some nationalities (e.g., British) to use their credentials, while preventing others. Thus, although educational qualifications can be viewed as an asset, migrants do not always have opportunities to capitalize on them due to their status as immigrants. I argue that in addition to the local macrostructures that have the potential to be barriers for all people, migrants face more challenges because of their past exposures.

Notwithstanding the local macrostructures that have created challenges for Oromo migrants, participants for the most part acknowledged that they were materially satisfied. Laafaa said “like I’m well off here. I have a big house, a car, and family and work.” Similarly, Ogeessa commented “I have a decent home, that’s even good enough for me. I drive a car that is safe. And decent enough in terms of mechanical efficiency.” Living in Canada has afforded some Oromo migrants opportunities for economic advancement. They have had access to education, employment, healthcare, and assets such as owning a vehicle and a home. Given the conflict situation that has led them into exile, it is unlikely that these micro-level needs would have been attainable had they remained in Ethiopia. However, participants also recognized that the individual and collective well-being of the Oromos entailed much more than simply being able to fulfill basic necessities. A quote by Bilchina exemplifies this point: “I would never say that I’m having a good life just eating or having a good sleep, having a good car, having a good house, is not good life for me. I can’t define that really as a life” (Bilchina). In other words, although being somewhat content on an essential, material level, participants were inclined to look beyond that level when expressing what well-being meant to them and how they could achieve it. In particular, they focused on meso- and macro-level impediments to the achievement of a ‘good life.’

Meso-Level SDofW: Social Identity-Community Well-being

Participants also drew upon social identity and community indicators of factors that constitute the ‘bad-life.’ I have categorized these as meso-level social determinants because the participants talked about experiences that pertained to both the local and transnational macrostructures. Participants were more varied in their comments on meso-level social determinants as compared to their comments on micro-level social

determinants. However, two distinct sub-themes that emerged from this component of the interviews indicate that, at this level, participants conceived a 'bad-life' in relation to i) loss of self/identity and ii) social and community disintegration.

Loss of Self/Identity

Generally speaking, the younger generation participants voiced that balancing their bi-cultural identities was the primary obstacle that has prevented them from completely achieving the 'good life.' These participants spoke extensively about loss of self as a fundamental form of discontent. Abdatuu suggested that "...being disconnected from your background or your cultural background and not really knowing who you are" are two of the key elements that fuel the bi-cultural conflict. Similarly, one of the elder generation participants stated: "A bad life, if you are like... lost. Like you don't learn about your culture, and then you don't be with your people. And I think just like, to forget about your cultures and about everything..." (Jeynittii). An interesting aspect of Jeynittii's perspective is that it implies that loss of self is not necessarily something that just happens to people, and that individuals can be active agents who contribute to that outcome. Another elder generation participant made a similar comment, but was more specific and explicit about the subject of concern:

Another example also is the children, they probably think it's better to learn or to act like Western here than their own heritage. That makes it very hard to, even to speak to them. When you speak to them in Oromo they reply to you in English, and all they don't like hearing it. So that's one of the challenges, the kids themselves. They don't appreciate, yeah. (Jiraatuu)

The following excerpt reaffirms the point that Oromo youth have made cognizant decisions to relegate their Oromo ethnicity to the periphery of their lives:

Bad life, I would say, if you lose yourself. If you lose your sense of culture, I think if you try to be somebody you're not. Which I can speak from experience, I've been in my old life, I can say that I tried to be more Western, and yeah, I found myself losing myself and going down the wrong path, as in not being happy... I find that there's a huge differences within Oromo culture and Canadian culture, and I think there's more stabilization and...what's the other word I'm looking for... I think there's more of a sense of morals in the Oromo culture. From my perspective, anyways, in my upbringing. So, I think a bad life would be not being myself and trying to appease people, and trying to live a life that doesn't even really identify me as a person. (Dursaa)

In saying “I tried to be more Western,” Dursaa is basically admitting to a period of time in his life where he suppressed his Oromo identity whilst privileging a more Western way of life. He felt that he had lost himself during this stage of his life. Ultimately, Dursaa left this “old life” behind because he was no longer able to identify with the Western identity that led to feelings of discontent.

On the other hand, individual accountability does not negate other factors at play that also contribute to one’s loss of self. Take for example what Abdatuu describes in terms her own perspectives and experiences, which describes how adults can shape the bi-cultural challenges experienced by younger generation Oromos, sometimes with unintended consequences:

Being ashamed I think is a big thing. A lot of the youth don’t know the language. And because they don’t know it, sometimes they get looked down upon by the adults, like “you don’t know Oromo” and kind of brush you off. You know how some adults will insult you here and there. Sometimes it’s a motivation like “no, I’m good. I need to learn a bit more,” or “I’m not as bad as some other people,” but being ashamed that there’s always some way that they can make you feel ashamed. For example, when I went back home, yes, I got praised for knowing my language, but when I would say something wrong or pronounce it wrong, they will basically poop on you. Ouch. Now I’m embarrassed and I don’t want to talk, I don’t want to engage at all. Embarrassing us and having that feeling of being ashamed I think is a big thing because it makes you want to be secluded, and left alone, and like you don’t want to talk to anyone anymore, and don’t want to participate any more. It’s the same thing with the youth here that don’t know Oromo, they feel like they’re not important or they feel like they cannot relate. Being insulted I want to say it comes from the elderly people, the adults. It’s kind of disappointing. I think that’s a barrier too.

Abdatuu’s narrative does not suggest she decided to forego speaking Afaan Oromo without reason. Rather, she experienced external situations that led her to feel insulted, embarrassed, and ashamed. In these instances, she did not feel encouraged to embrace the Oromo language and cultural identity and as a consequence, felt isolated from the Oromo people. Surely, this cannot be a positive indicator of social inclusion for Oromo youth in the diaspora who struggle to balance their bi-cultural identities, including those youth who have a deep yearning to be a part of the larger Oromo collective. However, shaming to embarrass or dissuade is not a traditional practice among the Oromos. Instead, it is done in-jest to remind people of their responsibilities.

Research related to the struggles of bi-culturalism has shown that social circumstances can have a profound impact on an individual's health and well-being. Wilkinson and Marmot (2003) identified social exclusion as a SDOH, whereas social support, good social relations, and social cohesion have been recognized as powerful factors that protect health and well-being because they make "people feel cared for, esteemed, and valued" (p. 22). The particular challenge for younger generation immigrants is that they are already vulnerable to certain societal conditions due to their intergenerational lived experiences as immigrants, such as social inequities, poverty, stigmatization, and discrimination (Castañeda et al., 2015; Davies et al., 2009). Consequently, they are bound to be twice as vulnerable if they feel like they do not have access to their local ethnocultural groups –both within the Oromo cultural group they are struggling to identify with and in society at large. The more elderly participants did not voice the same concerns about loss of self as younger participants. One can therefore infer that the elder generation participants feel most comfortable with other Oromos because of shared values and shared language, but they are most likely isolated from the broader community because they are less likely to speak English. In contrast, the youth are more likely to be connected to the broader society, and the second generation are often translators for the first, and less likely to be connected to Oromo. First, they may be fluent in Afaan Oromo, then they may understand but not speak, and then they can may get to a point where they can do neither.

An interesting observation about these reflections is that they demonstrate patterns of an individualist ideology, in contrast to the more collective ideology that emerged from discussions about the conceptualization of well-being discussed in Chapter Three. For instance, with regard to identifying loss of self as one social determinant of the 'bad life,' most of the narratives centered on individual accountability rather than collective responsibility. Here are a few quotes to elucidate this finding:

...there is a barrier that I noticed within myself, or my lack thereof the knowledge of certain things, I should... I've been thinking that I should really educate myself more on the history of my country. Things that happened you know on a global scale, politically, internally, locally, and even just demographically. I can't sit here and pinpoint all the cities and stuff so there's still a lot that I need to learn and that's something that I have to kind of do on my own as well. (Gammadu)

Yeah, because definitely, because I was very I guess shy, and I don't know if shy is the right word -- I basically lacked confidence in speaking

it, and I came to a realization it was mostly myself holding me back. And once, when I went back home, and got to meet my grandma and relatives, I came to realize that how it was still a part of me, and also that it's a lot easier when you get back into, and start being around people that speak it on a daily basis, so that became more natural to me. (Dursaa)

What these excerpts demonstrate is a turn inward in describing barriers perceived to impede the 'good life' or exacerbate the 'bad life.' This finding could mean that despite conceptualizing well-being on a collective level, the actual manifestation of well-being at this level in participants' lives may not have conformed to their conceptualization. Ethnographic research by Fischer (2014) examined the behaviours and rationales of urban Hanover shoppers and rural Mayan farmers in relation to how each group engages the market to pursue visions of well-being. He found that sometimes the way well-being is conceived (*i.e.*, stated aspirations) does not align with what actually transpires (*i.e.*, revealed actions). This finding explains that the pursuit of a 'good life' can be affected by certain constraints, such as opportunity structures (*e.g.*, social norms in a given society). Some of this may reflect what I have been noting regarding the impact of living in a more individualistic society, but also raises a point about tensions that are created when collectivist Oromos seek to retain their collectivist ideologies, leading to challenges in adapting to their lives in Canada.

Understandably, the further away that migrants stray from being immersed in their traditional lands and ways of life, the more likely they are to become disconnected from their traditional customs and beliefs. My study shows that this is more common for younger generation Oromos, such as those who were born in the diaspora or those who arrived at a very young age, than for those who were born and raised in Oromia. It will impact future generations of the Oromo diaspora to an even greater extent. That said, both generational groups reported disintegration as a key social determinant of 'bad life.' Concerns also were raised about the implications that this could have for future generations. The notion of disintegration is also linked to loss of self in that the latter can be both a cause and effect of the former. In other words, loss of self can be a source of social and community disintegration as well as an outcome of it, so it is important to unpack its implications.

Social and Community Disintegration

“The other thing that could be, yes it is already we said, being detached itself is isolation. You know, if we look at that perspective I tend to take Maslow’s Hierarchy, the basic need and the safety issue and that love and relation and self-perfection, actualization. Here we might be, you know we have been working and feed ourselves. Yes we have security, but people here are isolated because of the nature of the environment and work habits. That is very important to productivity of person to go to next level. So that affects well-being, of course, I think. That’s why you see people relations are broken down or people don’t have good relationship... And yeah, it is, that connection as a society. And the stronger the communities, that is little bit helpful or the strength of community helps. Because the more you come together as a society, as a community. Like for example, the Italian population... They came about 90, 80 years ago with large amount or large population and they have huge resources today. We are new to this and we are just trying to survive at this time. Probably we might achieve their level of today’s after how many years. However, you don’t, you start something with little. The more we come together, and things like this research is done and out in public, and people read and understand it, and be aware of how that important is how that connection is supported. Well good, then things will get better. So those are things I think as.” – Amantaa (Interview Participant)

Amantaa highlights that as social isolation is enhanced and connections to the society weaken, it could lead to the breakdown of traditional support systems and negatively impacting well-being. Other elder generation participants recognized that living in the diaspora has created significant physical distance between Oromos, making them more isolated than they had ever been. These participants said that separation was particularly difficult for their well-being because they had grown up accustomed to a more integrated way of living.

Yeah, but for once you don't live close to most Oromos. People don't live in this, we are in the same city but we don't, you live and drive like half an hour, an hour away. Like 35-45 minutes away, so you don't see each other every day. Back home people drink coffee from the morning together, and their rituals together. They do these things. But that is one, distance is one of the problems. You don't see people. People are busy, they don't even get together even once every week or two, every two weeks. We try to make it once a month to do that, so busy lives people. We don't have a lot of time too, we raise families here. And so yeah, we're scattered all over the city so we don't get to see each other. And that is one of the things that prevents us from achieving a good life. (Jiraatuu)

Jiraatuu is describing physical distance between people as one of the structural challenges that has caused social disintegration. In her view, physical barriers have prevented the Oromo people from maintaining meaningful bonds. Another elder generation participant cited “work” and “competition” as contributing factors to social disintegration:

One of the problem is people, you know some of them quarter century passed, some of them half century passed in their life. They came here, you tried to compete with everything around you and that will create, you know, you don't have time for people. So that will create, you know if you don't have social life it's no good. Yeah, it's not good, it's work, eat and sleep and get up and go, and it's... that's not a good life, you know? I've seen people who doesn't have social life, Oromos, they suffer a lot. I see them, they are on a lot of medication, stuff like that, you know. (Jebduh)

Similarly, Jeynittii describes the challenges of creating work-life balance:

There's a lot of challenge, because first of all people just don't have time, and people are busy, right? We don't have enough time to come together to be practicing more what we supposed to do. And everybody's just like struggling for, you know, working to live, and for a living, right? And challenges, just like we are not doing what we are supposed to do. And we just like, everybody's just like making their... to live life. (Jeynittii)

Networks of active relationships can enable Oromo people in the diaspora to fulfill their cultural obligations, whereas the absence of such relationships causes them to feel like they are not living the best possible life.

A common theme in the above narratives is that participants primarily emphasized external factors that have impacted their ability to be together, rather than internal ones. Conversely, at least one younger generation participant also spoke of specific forces that centered on circumstances internal to the Oromo community. For example, Abdatuu said:

And our community being separated too [is a barrier]. I feel like that doesn't help at all with the youth because you're just breaking down a support system or a network that they could possibly have. If my family wasn't involved in the community then I probably wouldn't have these Oromo friends, and I wouldn't be able to connect with them and my identity would be completely different from what it is now. So that separation and that division in the community, that to me is a big barrier because it just segregates everybody and seclude us and doesn't really

help. Because communication and networking is huge and essential. So if that can't happen, then your identity, it hinders your identity.

Abdatuu identifies that both separation and division among community members are barriers that impact all Oromos in the diaspora. When other participants who also talked about community division were probed to provide further explanations regarding their perceptions on what has caused division in the community, they cited “politics” and “religion” as being the two main inextricable forces of community disintegration. However, when explaining the roles of politics and religion, participants talked about them in relation to transnational factors – which is a theme that will be discussed subsequently. It is also important to highlight that Abdatuu also establishes a connection between self loss, disintegration, and separation, indicating that it becomes more difficult to identify with Oromo culture if bonds of solidarity collapse. In expressing their perceptions of identity and integration, participants describe psychological desires that fit with level three of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy: to give and receive belongingness and love. As some Oromo people in the diaspora have recounted, the combination of bi-culturalism, structural barriers, political ideologies, and religious creed have hampered upward mobility in their quality of life. The most significant reasons that they cited for not having completely achieved the ‘good life’ were socio-political factors related to current day events that are situated in a historical context. As discussed below, these realities also came to light during some of the participant-observation and observation events that I had attended.

Macro-Level (Transnational) SDofW: Historical and Current Socio-political Well-being

Many participants revealed that the deep history of structural violence in their countries of origin continues to impact their individual and collective well-being negatively. This sentiment permeated despite their having resettled in a country that has provided layers of safety, security, and access to quality health and social resources that remain inaccessible in their country of origin. Whereas only a few of the younger generation participants expressly articulated their well-being vis-à-vis the historical and ongoing socio-political climate in Ethiopia, all the older generation participants talked at length about their well-being in relation to transnational factors. Even though all the younger generation participants did not strictly emphasize that a component of their well-

being was contingent on socio-political conditions in Ethiopia, the sub-themes that emerged from the data (*i.e.*, 'feeling demoralized' and 'no freedom, no, happiness, no life') demonstrate that they can still be impacted by the intergenerational effects of these conditions as prolonged impacts are passed down by the elder generation. This finding suggests that human rights violations that cause displacement in the short term also act as social determinants of well-being throughout the life course, including life after resettlement.

Feeling Demoralized

"...Oromo people have been told that they are less people always. You can ask your parent[s], they will tell you the same thing. We've been told we are... we are dehumanized you know...By oppressive Amhara regimes, you know? We always been. We are told that we are not good enough. For that we never had something called self-esteem. That's, I feel, the barrier for a lot of Oromo people here in Canada, or [the] West. Because even if they are educated, even they have a PhD, that is still there, OK. Because when you've been told for over a hundred years that you're less human, that you're not capable of this, that, that always you have to pretend to be someone else, OK, not yourself. That's the way we go on back home, OK. Even though I left [when I was] younger, but I still remember, I still know. And this problem came with us to North America. I hope we don't pass this on to our children, honestly. Honestly. That's what I'm telling my oldest daughter, say 'no'. Try to say 'no' if you don't like it, if you don't agree with it, say 'no'. Out loud, say 'NO'. Let me with disagree with you, it's fine. You know, because she doesn't say 'no'. We don't have that, you see. We tend to accept what we've been told, but more than my half of [my] age I'm outside of the country. I'm trying to be a little bit off of that kind of problem. But it's still there, I can still see myself sometimes, you know self-esteem barrier..." – Laafaa (Interview Participant)

Some of the elder generation participants were concerned that Oromo people in the diaspora suffer from low self-esteem due to the Ethiopian colonization of Oromos. It is believed that this is one barrier that has made it challenging for Oromo people in the diaspora to strive for and achieve individual and collective well-being. The following excerpt exemplifies this point:

The Oromo people, I think we are in general because we were oppressed by the government, like Ethiopia, we never maybe found our voice, or maybe we never felt that we deserved things maybe? And we don't thrive I think, we accepted maybe mentally that we don't deserve it or something like that. That is one reason I believe it is, because every government for 100 and some years that led Ethiopia told Oromo people, "you're not worth it, you're not good enough." So maybe that

mental slavery, maybe we were mentally enslaved you know? One thing is that, that is I think what happened to Oromo people back home. Here the situation also like, I think it came from back home. Because education wasn't allowed for the Oromo people, and a lot of Oromos here they came, a lot of my generation that came here didn't have any education because just from what happened back home. We didn't have an education, when we came here we came with less education. So all we have a chance to do is raise our kids and send them to school because it was too late for us kind of. The barriers at our age, we came here older, and we didn't have, we have to get a family. So most of us think about getting married and having family so you don't have time to go to school. That also, because that's one of the barriers for me personally, and for other Oromos too I think... And I think mostly, I truly believe it's because of the way we grew up in Ethiopia. We just lose self-esteem. We were told we don't deserve it. We were treated basically, in our own countries, as a second-class. And once you come here and live in a different country, why do you feel any better? You don't feel any, we were treated that way in our own country. (Jiraatuu)

Jiraatuu, like Laafaa, raises a number of points in relation to the transnational social structures that have helped construct the 'bad-life' for Oromos in the diaspora. For one, she identifies that it could very well be that elder generation Oromos in the diaspora continue to feel like second-class citizens because of the long history of oppression they have had to endure as a people. The notion of second-class citizens refers to individuals who are systematically disenfranchised and treated as inferior to other people in a society. In stating "We were treated basically, in our own countries, as a second-class," she alludes to the question: why would we feel any different in another society? Second, she mentions that Ethiopian colonial rule could have colonized Oromo people's minds, not just their lands. Given that the subjugation of Oromo people in Ethiopia has not been eradicated (Amnesty, 2014; HRW, 2014, 2016, 2017), it is understandable that simply living in the diaspora is not enough to enable Oromos to decolonize their minds.

A third point that Jiraatuu raises concerns the challenges put forth by barriers erected in Ethiopia that have prevented upward mobility for Oromos in the diaspora. For example, many first-generation Oromos have come to the diaspora with little to no education because they were not permitted to be formally educated in Ethiopia. Although educational opportunities exist in the diaspora, Oromos can feel like they are too old, too incapable due to language barriers or lack of previous educational training, and too overburdened by competing obligations. Participants stressed how these perceptions have combined to perpetuate feelings of demoralization among first-generation Oromos and suppressed the voices of Oromos in the diaspora. These

accounts denote that influences from past exposures can have ongoing influences into the present and need to be taken seriously, which is not really emphasized in current approaches concerning migrant health and well-being such as those outlined by Castañeda et al. (2015) or Davies et al. (2009).

Another elder generation participant spoke specifically about the ways of life that were adopted as result of the colonization of Oromia, which were previously not common to the native Oromo philosophy and lifestyle.

The way they believe, the way we believed, the way we communicate, the way we see world out there was totally changed. And instead of thinking in wholeness and togetherness, the idea of thinking individually was also even coming in the community. Because the government was picking individuals and giving them privilege on the course of the people. And it was affecting the life of the people, the culture of the people, the philosophy of the people, the religion of the people. Those things, when Oromo was living back home for more than a century, has damaged, has made stagnant the socio-economic formation of the Oromo people and the whole Ethiopian people at large. And for Oromo or for any other people from Ethiopia to go and survive in Kenya was not easy, because Kenya is open capital-oriented country, and that is locked in-land country, and it was not easy. That has a big impact on the, even on the people's psyche, on the people's mind, on the people's way of thinking. And people will believe in that, they are not able to do things. People will believe in thinking that, they may get solution from people, from somebody else, from government, from donors, or from educated people. The philosophy, when the philosophy of Oromo that they believe in themselves, was changed into believing in other people to do things for them. (Barsiisaa)

In this passage, Barsiisaa draws connections between factors pertinent to both Ethiopia's colonial rule and living in the diaspora (*i.e.*, Kenya) that have contributed to an undesirable shift in Oromo peoples' modes of life. One can interpret the passage to indicate that the government privileged some individuals by offering various temptations and which caused them to effectively sell out perhaps thinking it was an ominous indication. This tactic denotes the oldest colonial trick in the book – divide and conquer – whereby states maintain power by breaking up larger concentrations of power into smaller clusters that wield less power. This approach serves to disrupt or even collapse traditional governance as was the case for many Indigenous peoples in the Americas.

Before the Americas were subjected to invasion, their native inhabitants had rich, distinctive cultures and ways of life. In Canada, *The Indian Act* and other federal legislation have shaped the way non-Indigenous Canadians view Indigenous peoples

and how Indigenous peoples view themselves. For example, in 1869, the newly passed *Gradual Enfranchisement Act*, required for the first time that Indigenous peoples have a certain blood quantum in order to be considered Indian (Lawrence, 2003). The goal of the act was to segregate those who were considered 'pure Indian' from those who were 'mixed Indian.' This is just one example of many laws that functioned to divide and rule Aboriginal people in Canada since contact. Judge Sinclair (1994) explains how some of the earliest Canadian legal provisions intended to limit Indigenous peoples' rights and opportunities. Canada's native inhabitants were not only excluded from the policy-and law-making processes that governed them, but also prohibited from practicing their own traditions and customs (Sinclair, 1994). These exclusionary practices resulted in a loss of identity and cultural breakdown for many Indigenous communities. Legislation was eventually enacted to address this issue, an example being Bill C-31, which was enacted in 1985 and struck down previous provisions for Indigenous peoples that were overtly discriminatory, racist, and sexist (Lawrence, 2003). This strategy was part of a legal paradigm shift that has enabled many Indigenous peoples to rightfully reclaim their identity as First Nations and pursue land claims. Despite advancements in legal provisions, King et al. (2009) assert the one of the major challenges that diminishes the health and well-being of Indigenous people are the structural factors that prevent them from maintain social cohesion through collectivist activities while living in urban centers that do not cater to these modes of life. This example betokens the challenges that Indigenous people face when their basic (collectivist) beliefs come into clash with dominant (individualist) ways of life. The privileging of some cultures while marginalizing others has effectively collapsed traditional, sustainable livelihoods.

As Oromo people struggle to cope with the impact that the colonial system has had on their ways of life, they have looked to others (*i.e.*, donors or governments) to resolve their socio-economic challenges. This pursuit inhibits self-esteem and self-efficacy, both of which play major roles in individuals' belief that they can succeed in particular situations. According to Maslow (1943), esteem needs include people's sense of confidence and worth. If feelings of confidence and worth are lacking, people are not able to self-actualize – that is, they are not able to fulfill their true potential in life and achieve their goals and aspirations.

The younger generation Oromos in the diaspora also can be affected by the elder generation's transnational identities. For example, if the younger generation

witness the elder generation being acquiescent or experiencing self-doubt, who is to say that they will not reproduce these same qualities in their lives (*i.e.*, not pursue education or settle for menial jobs)? Both Laafaa and Jiraatuu raised this concern explicitly, as is summarized by the following passage:

And some of them don't end up finishing school. There's some that drop out of school, and they have opportunities. But, and also maybe because their parents didn't have the opportunity to learn, they looked at their parents and they're maybe following the same pattern. "If my mom didn't go she's fine, so why should I go?" (Jiraatuu)

What this suggests is that even if Oromo youth grow up in the diaspora and have access to opportunities that could improve their individual and collective capacity to achieve upward mobility, they also face many challenges that are ingrained in transnational SDofW that can inhibit their progress. Jiraatuu's comment also gives insight into a common cited statistic among some Oromos in the diaspora in which they perceive that 90% of Oromo youth drop out of high school. When the afore-mentioned realities are coupled with local societal forces that lead to structural or systemic inequalities in immigrant populations (*e.g.*, stigmatization and discrimination), the barriers to achieving success are exacerbated.

No Freedom, No Happiness, No Life

"Oromo never had a good life. Sorry to say this, Oromo...like I'm well off here. I have a big house, a car, and family and work. But at the back of my mind I've never been happy. The reason is, it's obvious and I'm for, we have to call it anyway probably, but when your people die, killed, tortured, disappeared, and you can't do anything about it, it's... I don't see happiness. I don't see happiness. But yes, we can forget sometimes ourselves. We have a better life here, but I don't think so until our people are free, have a democracy in that country, and live without fear, without imprisonment, without torture, you know? My heart, you know when I see mom cry for her son or her daughter, shot or killed, then I become helpless and I can't be happy. I think for the last nine months I am kind of in depression myself because I watch too much graphic images. I don't know if that answers your question, but this is connected for all of us, and we still live. You know, our soul is back home. Physically we're here, our soul is back home. So happiness? I don't know happiness. Is not only about having money and having a good job. Happiness is when you're happy fully. But one part of us is not happy." – Laafaa (Interview Participant)

This excerpt exemplifies how Oromos' visions of the 'bad-life' are grounded in cross-border connections. On the one hand, Laafaa acknowledges that there are a lot of

things going well for him on an individual level in terms of material well-being. Being in Canada has provided him with certain affordances that have made him better off in some ways. On the other hand, there are deeper aspects of well-being have not been satisfied because of the ongoing colonial practices that continue to oppress and repress the Oromo peoples.

How could Laafaa be expected to be holistically well when he self-identifies with his people, who are suffering in his place of origin? Two other older generation participants shared the same perspective:

Bad life is what they're living especially back home. Alright, bad life is, if they don't have their freedom, we never had any, they never had any freedom. They live under, always threat from the government. They always lose their lands, they are not free, they don't have anything. Like they cannot even live in their own land, like for peace. So it is a bad life if they don't have that. And they never had that back home, I think only the people, Oromo live outside have a little bit of a good life. And not 100%, because like I say, part of Oromos is not having a good life. Maybe in the future we will have... (Jiraatuu).

Yeah because I come from an extended family. My sisters, brothers, uncles and cousins, they are all over there. Some are toiling in prison, some are... and I have to pitch in money over there every month, every time from my salaries I have to send them some money back home to support those. Because they are no more with their parents, most of, some are jailed in jail, some are killed. And you know, we live in a very extended family, in a clan-ish type society. So I, you can't just segregate yourself, put yourself aside and say, "yeah, I'm now living a good life." That a good life will never, it will be whole. It's yeah, that's basically was speaking to. (Bilchina)

The elder generation Oromos were explicit about the impacts that the Ethiopian-Oromo conflict has had on their individual and collective well-being, so it is likely that these perspectives have been transferred both directly and indirectly to younger Oromos. When I asked the younger generation participants what they thought their parents wanted for them and how this aligned with what they wanted for themselves, compelling narratives emerged that demonstrated transnational ties. For example, as demonstrated in the former chapter, Oromo youth in the diaspora have such strong beliefs about upholding Oromo cultural identity although they have struggled to do so. These participants acknowledged that they inherited these values from their parents and other elders in the Oromo community. The younger generation also expressed feeling obligated to engage in "meetings or protests or just anything that contributes to Oromo

culture” (Obsituu). Not only did they believe that this was expected of them, it also reflected what they wanted for themselves.

Finally, they also talked about being committed to applying their expertise to areas that may help to advance Oromo people in their local community as well as back home. Gammadu said “Just participating, like not just being in the background but also offering my education or certain skills that I have to improve the community or lend my expertise in an area that might help.” Similarly, Abdatuu stated:

My parents want me to know my language, be able to go back home and make a living there. So giving back, basically like open up a clinic, for example... And being active in the community. I know my parents want me to keep coming to all of the events, so I’m still forced to go. So being involved in the community for sure... And giving back to the Oromo community and to back home as well. Because eventually my parents, especially my dad, want me to go back home and open up some kind of business that allows me to give back to my town. By helping them, by giving to them. For example, by building a school or clinic or whatever that I may do, by helping and giving back and helping our economy back home to grow. So that we can flourish and stuff like that. I guess he doesn’t want me to stay here for the rest of my life, he wants me to go back home. And honestly, I can see myself doing that. I definitely would like to go back home and start some sort of business and help my family. Not just my family, yeah, I would give them a job because a lot of them are in the countryside and don’t have the opportunity to go to school because you have to pay for it and stuff. And a lot of them are farmers still. So just being able to go back home. My parents have said that to me so many times that right now, and since I’m in nursing, I’m thinking about what it is that I really want to do with this career. So now I want too, my big goal is go back home and build a clinic tailored to women and children. That creates jobs for my family members, especially, but also for other people in our town. And it just helps, it’s just a way to give back and it will help women flourish and have good health and have access to health care that they may not have because of money or stigma or whatever. So my parents have influenced me in that sense, to the point where that’s my goal, a long-term goal that I have. And they want me to learn my language and I really want to learn, and I feel like there’s so much stuff that I need to learn in all aspects of the culture.

Abdatuu offers a detailed account of how her parents regularly encouraged her to be engaged in the local Oromo community as well as the Oromo community back home. Her visions to return to her native country to establish business, were motivated by these influences. This passage exemplifies the intergenerational, transnational realities found in the younger generation Oromos as they pertain to external expectations and internal aspirations to improve the status of Oromo people.

The wider Oromo community engaged in certain actions that corroborate respondents' viewpoints of the impact of transnational factors. For example, I attended an Oromo wedding for one of my observation events that turned into a full-fledge protest. When I arrived at the parking lot of the wedding venue, I encountered a group of protestors standing on the sidewalk which bounded the parking lot. It was hard to tell at first what was going on and I even wondered whether I had mistaken the location. It turned out, a meeting of Tigray government officials was occurring in the room next to where the wedding reception was to be held. The wedding guest believed that there was a Tigray government fundraising event taking place in one of the two rooms at the community hall. What initially perplexed me was that the group of protestors I encountered while entering the parking lot were Amharas. At that time, there was a movement in Ethiopia that saw Amhara people join Oromos in their struggle for freedom. Somehow, they had received word about the Tigray event and decided to show up and protest in solidarity with members of the Oromo community. As you can imagine, I left home expecting to attend a wedding ceremony much like the ones I had attended previously, but instead was greeted by loud protestors who were not members of my ethnocultural group.

When I finally made it into the venue I observed that it was beautifully decorated (see Image 4.1 below). I located a table towards the center front where I decided to sit with the other two women who accompanied me. One of the women who came with us took it upon herself to go into the second room in the hall to voice her anger with the Tigray people. Another woman had arrived at our table angry and insisted that we all go and express our concerns to them as well. Both women were older, one in her early 40s and the other in her early 50s. I know this because I know them personally. Shortly after this encounter, all people in the hall were addressed by a man who said, "All of us let's get up and make a stance, let's join the Amhara protesters outside." I stood up with the group and walked towards the door. Then several women intervened and said, "Let's wait until the bride and groom arrive because the staff are threatening to close down the venue if things get out of hand." A few heated words were exchanged between those who were determined and ready to go outside and those who were looking out for the best interests of the bride and groom. Ultimately, we returned to our tables instead of going outside to protest.

As we sat, I observed people wearing Oromo flags as necklace tags (boys) and head bands that said “Oromo” (young girls). Many people were in Oromo colours, which are either black, red, and white, or red, green, and yellow. The variation in colour palettes represent specific political/cultural allegiance. For example, black/red/white signify the Gada system (black = past, red = current, white = future). Red/green/yellow are emblematic of the various modern Oromo political organizations such as the Oromo Liberation Front. Altogether, to me these markers symbolized *Oromummaa*, which is defined as Oromo pride, culture, and nationalism (Jalata, 2007). Many women were dressed in traditional outfits and many others who wore more mainstream Western clothes such as dresses, rompers, and skirts.

Then another announcement was made about 10 minutes after the first one: "Everyone ... let's go outside and protest." Both times the announcements were made by males and both times women intervened and tried to tell everyone to stay settled. However, this time the women were not successful as most people got up and went outside. Rather than joining the Amhara protesters, Oromo community members formed their own group. We were told not to touch anyone: "Please, do not touch anyone." This announcement was repeated several times as a physical confrontation had already occurred. Specifically, things got forceful when a guest from the Tigray event uttered some derogatory words at an Oromo woman who retaliated by hitting the Tigray woman in the head with a vase resulting in the police being called. The woman suffered an abrasion and bump on her forehead.

The protesting was initially peaceful. Mostly just chants, loud enough that people in the other room could hear the messages that were being conveyed. Initially women were at the front line and the most vocal while men initiated/mobilized the groups to come outside from the hall. The dynamics changed when the bride and groom arrived in their limousine. The chants described above were replaced by cultural/traditional wedding songs that announced the couple's arrival. At that point we were escorted back inside to our tables to anticipate the entrance of the wedding party. After this took place dinner was served. Then the bride and groom signalled – by crossing their forearms into an ‘x,’ a widely used symbol expressing Oromo solidarity during contemporary protests (for an example of this see Image 4.3 below) – that the guests should go back outside. Without a second of hesitation, everyone was outside once again. By this time, other people from the Oromo community who were not planning on attending the wedding had

come to join the escalating protest. There was a lot of yelling at the police as well, as Oromo people wanted to get them to understand the motivation for all the anger that was being communicated towards the Tigray.

There were six police cars in the parking lot and police at the main doors of the hall. Police officers also were guarding the front and back door of the room where the Tigray officials were meeting, while others were dispersed throughout the parking lot and surrounding area. Their goal was to try to keep the peace between the ethnic groups (Oromos + Amharas vs. Tigray), which for the most part they did accomplish. I was surprised that no news personnel attended, given that police continued to arrive in numbers and eventually a helicopter was summoned. But I was there until 2:30am and no further violence erupted on the part of Oromos. However, members of the Oromo community refused to leave until the police had escorted every single Tigray person to their vehicles. It took 6-7 police officers to escort these individuals, and when doing so a massive crowd of Oromo people circled them chanting loudly in their faces. This process continued until the hall was cleared of all Tigray people.

Here are some visualizations of the wedding-protest event:



Image 4.1: This image captures the interior of the wedding reception. I was not among the first guests to arrive; the rest of the guests were outside of the reception area actively engaging in the protest.



Image 4.2: In this image, the bride and groom had just entered the hall. Moments later, they offered sentiments that backed the protests.



Image 4.3: Oromo women with raised arms, crossed at the wrist above their heads. The gesture symbolizes the arrest of Oromo people by Ethiopian authorities. This is a famous protest gesture for Oromo people all over the globe and it has been banned by the Ethiopian state government (see Duggan, 2016, for a list of banned activities proposed under Ethiopia's state of emergency).



Image 4.4: Here we see a police barricade, police officers, and Oromo people chanting towards perceived oppressors.

Overall, hundreds of wedding guests spent hours collectively chanting: "PLEASE PLEASE, STOP STOP, KILLING KILLING, OROMO PEOPLE." "THIEVES THIEVES" "LIARS LIARS." I observed expressions of anger as people chanted into the night, pain and sadness as tears streamed down their cheeks, and frustration. These behaviours and emotions suggest that some Oromo people in the diaspora share similar aspirations to be freed from colonial rule, and that this desire for them trumps the traditional meaning of monumental events such as a wedding.

In sum, participants demonstrate that conflict trends in Ethiopia encompass immense human suffering that has had lasting effects on displaced and dispossessed

Oromo people. For those Oromos who are living in a host country, achieving and maintaining complete well-being has been a continuous process that is only fully understood vis-à-vis their socio-political and historical connections their place of origin. Many participants in the current study recounted stories of being effectively uprooted as the result of human rights violations that were embedded in “structural violence,” or systematic social arrangements that deliberately place individuals and populations in harm’s way (Galtung, 1969). Participants stressed that they had not wanted to leave their homes, lands, and country, and that they would not hesitate to return home if the socio-political and economic climate were resolved. Consequently, they continue to live with unease and ambiguity in the diaspora, as human rights violations continue to plague their people and their homelands.

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs can help us understand why the participants place themselves far away from “a good life” on my anchored scale. The fifth level in Maslow’s (1943) hierarchy concerns one’s ability to transcend physiological and psychological needs in order to obtain realisation in terms of life’s meaning. Like Maslow, Fischer (2014) asserts that the core and necessary elements of well-being are 1) “adequate material resources, physical health and safety, and family social relations”; 2) “aspiration and opportunity,” 3) “dignity and fairness,” and 4) “commitment to a larger purpose” (pp. 5-8). These values not only constitute a subjective dimension of well-being, but also highlight that it has an objective component vis-à-vis institutional structures. For many Oromo, life’s meaning remains tied to the freedom of all Oromo people; therefore, it was critical to examine the ‘bad-life’ against the backdrop of transnational structures and not only local structures that have created impediments to acquiring a ‘good-life.’ A transnational outlook provides a more comprehensive account of the societal forces at play that have interfered with Oromo people’s achievement of a ‘good-life’ while living in the diaspora.

Conclusion

Well-being for participants in this study hinges on three key social determinants, which play out in relation to local and transnational contexts. First, basic material well-being has allowed people to take care of themselves, their immediate families, and extended families back in their countries of origin. A second determining factor relates to social identity and community well-being: people are able to fare well when they

establish and maintain their identity, bonds and social ties with other members of their ethnocultural group. Third, well-being is predicated on socio-political connections to one's country of origin.

The findings in this chapter suggest that although participants discussed three distinct themes with respect to their understandings of the 'good life'-'bad life' continuum, for these Oromos to completely achieve a 'good-life' requires their people to be liberated. The actualization of well-being for some Oromo individuals living in the diaspora has been confounded by the historical and ongoing socio-political and economic injustices that continue to plague Oromo people back in Ethiopia. In other words, the historical and ongoing human rights issues in Ethiopia that have forcibly displaced many Oromo people continue to influence the well-being of some Oromo people in the diaspora. Given that conflict-induced displacement is *i)* neither unique to the Oromos in Ethiopia, nor *ii)* a trend that promises to decrease in the near future, it is vital that researchers continue to explore the connection between the local and transnational factors that influence resettled individuals' health and well-being throughout the life course. Although this chapter has demonstrated that local and transnational macrostructures create challenges that fuel the 'bad life,' the same contexts can be used to understand the elements that are also central to the 'good life.' I explicate this argument in the next chapter.

Chapter 5.

The 'Good Life' – In Pursuit of Well-Being

SDOH and SDofW, as described in the previous chapter, not only reflect the social factors at the root of much human suffering and injustice, but also elucidate the social factors that are central to health equity and actualizing well-being. Whitehead (1991) indicates that health equity is created when individuals can achieve their full health potential and that health equity is undermined when systemic conditions constrain life choices. Customarily, SDOH have been utilized to advance knowledge regarding the material and social inequalities that shape health inequity, rather than being used to understand how healthy equity is or can be formed. Similarly, highlighting the determinants responsible for the 'bad life,' as presented in Chapter Four, reveals how socially determined circumstances create and perpetuate health inequities.

Another approach to well-being would be to employ SDOH/SDofW frameworks to understand characterizations of the 'good life.' Doing so would focus on good material conditions and other positive social factors that contribute to health equity and well-being. For example, education and wealth, cultural and spiritual activities, civic life, and interpersonal relationships are commonly recognized as SDOH (Marmot, 2005; Raphael, 2009; WHO, 2008; Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003). Although these social factors can be positive or negative, from a SDOH perspective, proponents who use the model primarily view them in terms of the negative effects they can have on health in situations that may be marked by their absence rather than their presence. As Halfon, Larson, and Russ (2010) state, "not all social determinants are negative, and a greater understanding of positive determinants could inform the design of effective health promotion interventions (p. 17). In other words, they are proponents of positive SDOH for mobilizing health-affirming lifestyles rather than focussing on the negative health impacts of social determinants. I utilize the SDofW approach as a pivot for understanding what constitutes the 'good life' for some Oromos living in the diaspora. In using this approach, I explore how the 'good life' relates to local and transnational SDofW, some of which overlap with the social factors identified as underpinning the 'bad life' in the previous chapter. For example, whereas social and community disintegration were found to be one of the determinants of the 'bad life,' participants also talked about social networks as

being an important determinant for pursuing the 'good life.' Although the former is the antithesis of the latter, they are two aspects of the same situation. Thus, unpacking the determinants that underpin the other side – the 'good life' – is one of the goals of this chapter.

There are many advantages to examining the 'bad life' and the 'good life.' A greater understanding of positive and negative social determinants could inform more effective health promotions and interventions. For instance, when researchers frame work on the 'good life' as opposite to work on the 'bad life,' it has the potential to ignore the larger contexts of power and inequality at play in determining well-being. Everyday experiences of happiness and the 'good life' are limited by different systems of oppression. Thus, both angles are not only necessary for obtaining a holistic understanding of well-being but are also inextricably interlinked. Philosophically speaking, we need to understand what establishes the 'good life' in order to understand what constitutes the 'bad life' and vice versa, because they are two parts of a whole. To date, we have learned much about human suffering and violence, but a lot less about human good and peace. Therefore, understanding well-being comprehensively requires assessing social determinants as they relate to both points on the continuum (*e.g.*, 'the good' and 'the bad'), which was one goal of this research. Some academic disciplines that have already laid the groundwork for such multi-topic/multi-focal inquiries are discussed in the literature review below.

In this chapter I make the case that traditional binary opposites such as bad/good or negative/positive have been the focus of valuations of well-being. The analysis to support this argument is contextualized in literature pertinent to contemporary considerations of the 'good life.' This scholarship provides critical insights into frameworks for assessing well-being and offers examples demonstrating that well-being is a diverse and multi-faceted concept. A review of this literature also suggests that social determinants are as central to the 'good life' as they are to the 'bad life.' I then move on to examine the elements that engender the 'good life' from the perspectives of some Oromo people in the diaspora and my observations of their ways of life. I accomplish this by utilizing the local and transnational SDofW approach, as delineated in the preceding chapter. This framework allows me to examine the relationship between local and transnational links to elucidate the social factors that contribute to the 'good

life.’ In doing so, the ‘bad life’ narrative is enriched and the inherent interconnection between characterizations of the ‘good life’ and the ‘bad life’ are revealed.

Politics and the ‘Good Life’

My vision of the ‘good life’ developed as a result of my critique of contemporary scholarship on Oromo people, which has focused almost exclusively on political processes within Ethiopia. As I concluded in Chapter One, the Oromo intelligentsia are comprised primarily of educated males who focus exclusively on male-centered paradigms in documenting the atrocities that have been perpetrated against the Oromo. For example, public decision making *i.e.*, Gada, was normally a male-dominated sphere with much focus on critiquing injustice in this domain. Although this scholarship excels at detailing accounts of injustice, it has failed to consider the everyday experiences of ‘ordinary’ Oromo people in Ethiopia and in the diaspora. In other words, existing research centers on practices that are emblematic of the politics of injustice but does not emblemize modes of well-being that contribute to the Oromo people’s realization of the ‘good life.’

This critique is characteristic of a larger trend in academia regarding the inclination to focus on research that centers on problems, rather than valuing the importance of topics pertinent to ‘the good.’ As a case in point, Robbins (2013) proposes a new theoretical framework for the discipline of anthropology that looks beyond “the suffering subject,” which he argues has become an important focal point in anthropology (p. 448). Robbins (2013) states that the “anthropology of suffering” needs to be complemented by an “anthropology of the good” (p. 457). Whereas the former refers to cross-cultural research that inquires about people who are in some sense victims – *e.g.*, the poor, the oppressed, refugees and migrants, and disenfranchised communities – the latter concerns research that centers on cross-cultural diversity and what constitutes the good – *e.g.*, “topics [on] value, morality, well-being, imagination, empathy, the gift, hope, time, and change” (p. 448).

At least three benefits arise from following Robbins (2013) theoretical framework. First, utilizing this approach may actually enable the creation of situations that promote health/good rather than trying to avoid the bad, since merely avoiding the bad does not necessarily make things good. Second is his advocacy for both theoretical paradigms,

instead of displacing one in favour of the other (*i.e.*, suffering and good are not in opposition to one another). Third is that one of his special interests – well-being – has been a major focus of research across many disciplines (p. 457). Although the term is notoriously elusive, it has been closely related to other concepts such as ‘happiness’ and ‘the good life’ in its more contemporary forms. Embracing Robbins (2013) philosophy offsets the inclination to reach an exclusive/singular understanding of such concepts. Alternatively, it provides room for diversity as it pertains to grounding and integrating concepts across different contexts. One of the challenges for researchers concerns expanding notions of ‘the good’ in ways that encompass understandings of the diverse ways in which people strive for well-being or the ‘good life.’

What Constitutes the ‘Good Life’?

What is the ‘good life’? This philosophical question has been extensively studied within the milieu of well-being. Philosophers have conceptualized it from the perspective of morality (*e.g.*, Socrates and Plato). The philosopher Epicurus emphasized that obtaining pleasure was central to the ‘good life’; Aristotle equated the ‘good life’ with happiness, also known as eudemonia, which has been among the most predominant approaches utilized in contemporary research on well-being (see Ryan & Deci, 2001). Mathews (2012) is among those who characterize well-being as synonymous with happiness. He uses both terms interchangeably in his work concerning the implications of culture and context for well-being. Other scholars view happiness and well-being as independent constructs that have separate analytical functions. For example, Montgomery (2013) argues that happiness is an aspect of well-being rather than its equivalent, adding that, “well-being is a state that contributes to contentedness” (p. 424). Although people may experience high levels of contentedness in their lives, it does not necessarily mean that they are happy. As discovered in this current research through explorations of the ‘bad life’ and the ‘good life,’ one can be both content and unhappy. In light of this, both constructs (*i.e.*, contentedness and happiness) ought to be distinguished.

A third contemporary approach considers the ‘good life’ as a ‘meaningful life’ that is reflected in experiences of value, worth, or significance rather than happiness. In a national online study that surveyed 397 participants (“68% female; ages 18–78; M = 35.5 years old; 48.1% were parents”), behavioural psychologists found key differences

between happiness and meaningfulness in life (Baumeister, Vohs, Aaker, & Garbinsky, 2013, p. 507). One of the first findings was that getting what one wants, having needs satisfied, and feeling bad less often than feeling good were positively associated with happiness, but not with meaningfulness. As discussed in the previous chapter, participants in the current study also indicated that material goods lead to contentedness rather than happiness. Second, while meaningfulness encompassed past, present, and future, happiness was only about the present. Reporting spending more time contemplating the past and/or future than the present was associated with having a meaningful life but not necessarily a happy life (Baumeister et al., 2013). In other words, happiness was fleeting, while meaning was more permanent. Third, with respect to social engagement, happiness was related to doing things for oneself, while meaningfulness was related to doing things for others. Likewise, the participants in my study primarily derived meaning from their interconnections with others, rather than their subjective experiences. Fourth, the stress and worries that individuals reported dealing with tended to make life more meaningful for them, but also created unhappiness (Baumeister et al., 2013). In other words, people who reported experiencing more negative events had more meaningful but less happy lives than those who had fewer unpleasant events. Fifth, a meaningful life was characterized by deep ties to an esteemed sense of self and one's purpose within the greater context of life and community. As evidenced throughout the findings in this study, this was likewise a common theme for the participants in my research.

In sum, although a meaningful life does not always yield happiness, it can connect people to a larger sense of purpose and value, which can in turn allow people to make positive contributions to society. As one can live a meaningful or content life and be unhappy at the same time, it is imperative to view happiness and well-being as distinct concepts when exploring what constitutes a 'good life.' Baumeister et al.'s (2013) findings support the position that the concept of 'well-being' as a phenomenon is elusive, and context is required to bring about a critical understanding of it. What constitutes the 'good life' varies across time and space, which is a particularly useful framework for understanding the ways in which the participants in this study strived for the 'good life.'

Viewing the 'good life' as synonymous with the 'meaningful life' provides a more comprehensive understanding of well-being than reducing the 'good life' to single key

principles such as morality, pleasure, or happiness. This position is supported by findings in the book *Pursuits of Happiness: Well-being in Anthropological Perspectives* edited by Mathews and Izquierdo (2009), in which scholars demonstrate that well-being is a diverse and multifaceted concept. Therein, Mathews and Izquierdo (2009) and colleagues explored well-being ethnographically in an array of different contexts (e.g., culture, place, society) that best inform humanity about its different perspectives and enlightens our own positionality regarding the concept. One of the most important lessons from the concluding chapters is an emphasis that well-being is a comprehensive term which is best explored at the following levels: micro (subjective-biological: Hollan (2009), meso (person-centered in relation to the social/cultural norms: Clark (2009), and macro (person-in-context based on larger institutional and structural arrangements: Weisner (2009). Although my research did not aim to examine well-being on a subjective, biological level, the 'good life' was explored from person-centered and person-in-context perspectives. Next, I consider how these concepts play out in contemporary anthropological literature.

Contemporary Studies: 'What is a Meaningful Life'?

Contemporary scholarship on well-being/the 'good life' offers a pragmatic understanding of the ways in which it is conceptualized, established, and constructed in everyday life among people in disparate communities. In a quest to answer the question 'what is a meaningful life?' scholars have examined various cases that cast light on its different sources. Mostowlansky (2013) conducted ethnographic fieldwork among Tajikistan's eastern Pamirs to observe how social milieus related to well-being. This research reveals that peace and harmony are central to well-being and strengthen social relations/social spaces within families, among kin, and in neighbourhoods, villages, and towns. However, for peace and harmony to be actualized, good male leadership was required. Similarly, in an ethnomethodological study directed by Beyer (2013), male elders in northern Kyrgyzstan played a prominent role in shaping the communal well-being of all the villagers. Beyer (2013) articulates that well-being is not something that is attained, but rather constantly in-the-making based on the social, economic, and political factors and caring practices that characterize a community. For example, despite a highly charged post-conflict situation in Kyrgyzstan, people were able to come together and create new initiatives for taking care of each other by ordering (*i.e.*, creating or

establishing) ideals (such as the one the elders set up with the chart), which led to the establishment of a cooperative of elders called Yiman Nuru (Light of Faith). In uniting the villagers, the cooperative served as a vehicle that not only repositioned elders' role in public, but also rehabilitated morality within the community.

For Louw's (2013) participants, religion and faith were important sources of well-being both individually and for society at large. Like Beyer's (2013) research, this ethnographic study was situated in Kyrgyzstan and conducted during a post-conflict period characterized by chaos, disorder, heightened attention on religious extremism, and social change. As people struggled to attain a balanced existence, many Muslims found comfort in realigning themselves with Islam. Doing so enabled them to maintain "a balance between well-being in this world and in the afterlife; a balance between the acceptance of one's fate and the attempt to improve one's situation; or balance between adherence to abstract dogmas and respect for local moralities" (Louw, 2013, p. 514). Montgomery (2013) offers an ethnographic reflection on how relationships with family and friends, optimism about future possibilities, subjective happiness, and contentedness interact to create meaningful lives. Evidence showed that the communal sharing of stories about struggles enabled community members to experience a cathartic process that mitigated the strains of everyday life. Thus, supportive relationships were an invaluable source of well-being for these Kyrgyz mountain people. Their "deep connections [were] forged over time in stories retold and re-enacted over years of sharing tea and bread" (Montgomery, 2013, p. 478). A final source of well-being that emerged from my review of contemporary literature is "the kitchen as a site of care" (Yates-Doerr & Carney, 2016). In using a mixed-method approach (participant-observations, surveys, ethnography, and interviews) to examine practices in six Latin American kitchens, Yates-Doerr and Carney (2016) outline the "forms of care that unfold...and related notions of health encompassed by these practices" (p. 14). These case studies demonstrate that the care that happens in the kitchen is directed at the group rather than at individuals. The researchers also make a point to characterize care as 'health' rather than the 'pursuit of the good' or 'the good life,' and argue that this is because the former is a more balanced concept.

In sum, a review of contemporary anthropological scholarship reveals the following sources of well-being that underpin meaningful lives: establishing peace and harmony; strong male leadership; elder cooperatives; establishing ideals; strengthening

communal relationships; sharing stories; securing intergenerational kinships; religion and faith, and; caring practices such as cooking and sharing meals. These notions of well-being offer rich and contextual insights about the sociocultural elements of the 'good life,' which aligns with what Baumeister et al. (2013) discovered in their study. That is, they all inquire closely into what gives people a sense of purpose or direction and how people strive for the best way to live even in unfavourable circumstances and provide evidence that 'meaning' is a powerful entrée to the question about what constitutes the 'good life.' These bodies of work also place well-being or the pursuit of the 'good life' within the context of sociocentric and macro-level worldviews. By utilizing these frameworks, which are analogous to the SDOH/SDofW frameworks, researchers can delve deeper into the more meaningful dimensions that constitute well-being. These conceptual structures are particularly suitable for understanding how participants in the current study both envisioned and achieved the 'good life' because, as shown below, they expressed sentiments of the 'good life' that distinguished it from happiness. The experiences that participants reflected on also demonstrate that life can be meaningful even in the face of despondency and suffering.

As shown in my review of contemporary studies, examining meaning in life in relation to the 'good life' enables us to more critically understand how the 'bad life' and the 'good life' are interconnected. Hardship is bound to be experienced by all individuals and everyone wants to live a 'good life' – no one wants the 'bad life.' Oromo migrants in the current study identified the root causes that contributed to them anchoring themselves far away from the 'good life,' but this does not suggest that they have been complacent or that they have completely evaded good in their lives. Despite the current day and historical realities that continue to plague their people back home and wrench their hearts and souls, they have also engaged actively in creating and recreating well-being while living in the diaspora. As their visions of the 'good life' entail the liberation of Oromo people throughout the globe, they are individually and collectively making positive contributions to the betterment of their people.

Three distinct themes emerged from the data concerning how participants envisioned a 'good life' and two themes emerged in relation to how they have gone about pursuing it while living in the diaspora. The distinction between how they envisioned the good life and how they have pursued it emerged organically. I attribute this to the fact that they do not see themselves as having completely achieved the 'good

life,' and therefore recounted visions of what it could look like and what they are actively doing to achieve it. Next, I offer an interpretation of these five overarching themes as they pertain to their respective foci.

The 'Good-Life' Envisioned

Stability: More than Education, Career, and Money

When participants talked about how they envisioned the 'good life,' a pattern emerged indicating that having stability was the bedrock of the 'good life.' Though the state of being stable was thought to be fundamental and participants provided examples of its core components, they differed in their accounts of why they thought it was necessary. Ogeessa directly states: "well good life means that you have basically a job that provides for your family, and that you have got decent shelter, and that you feed yourself and your family adequately. That's a good life." The basis of the 'good life' for Ogeessa is being able to procure employment, which allows individuals to secure sufficient food and housing to care for themselves and their families. Conversely, as described in Chapter Four, not having stability could hinder the attainment of the 'good life' as it has been identified as one of the elements that contribute to the 'bad life.' Ogeessa was not the only participant to talk about the relative importance of stability to the 'good life' in such a matter-of-fact kind of way, although other participants' provided more context for this claim. An excerpt of an exchange with Obsituu illuminates this point:

- Obsituu: Um, a good life is being... OK. Having my family close to me and being financially stable and... that's basically really it, actually.
- Biftu: So having stability and...
- Obsituu: Stability.
- Biftu: And do you think that's true of all Oromo people?
- Obsituu: Not all, no. But I think as a majority yes.
- Biftu: A family's really important, and having stability.
- Obsituu: Yep. So you can provide for your family and for yourself, I think that was like, those two things are the

most important. And actually, education as well. That's a really important thing I think.

Both Ogeessa and Obsituu highlight the importance of material elements such as money to satisfy their obligations to their families and communities. Apart from highlighting ideas that pertain to what have previously been characterised as basic/physiological and safety/security needs, their responses are not characteristic of the prevailing viewpoints that emerged as the predominant findings in this chapter. That is, conversations about the 'good life' were typically embedded in more robust descriptions and meaningful narratives. It is worth mentioning, however, that this was not the only way that Ogeessa and Obsituu talked about the 'good life,' as they also expressed sentiments that were representative of the more common narrative.

Other participants who talked about the significance of stability did so in ways that were detail-rich and grounded in particular contexts. For example, Bontu states:

...for me, I feel like living up to my parent's dreams, the dreams that they had for us, because they worked so hard for us to have the good life. I feel like showing that we are living the life that they've built for us, and the life that they've dreamed for us, I think is really my definition [of the 'good life']. So, for example, having an education is number one because that's the dream for every Oromo parent is for their kids to be educated because they may or may not have had the opportunities themselves, or have had to cut their education short, because of circumstances. So, having an education, being stable and having a career. I mean if you talk to a lot of Oromo parents, they all want their kids to be doctors. But we are not all doctors, but I think they're still proud of us just for having an education. And being stable, like [in] life. I think just the stability and making them proud, like education would be the biggest one for me. I think would be education, having a career, like that's the good life... Like you have your education, and your career, and you have your family.

When I compare Bontu's response to how Ogeessa and Obsituu discuss stability as it pertains to the 'good life,' I recognize that they all identify the same material values: education, career, and family. However, Bontu's description of these core values differs starkly from the other's descriptions in that she contextualizes them in a deep and meaningful narrative framed by a socio-historical context. Specifically, Bontu states the driving force behind her pursuit of the 'good life' is the sacrifices her parents made for her to have a better life than they did. Consequently, she wishes to fulfill her parents' dream of obtaining stability in life, which includes gaining an education and a career. Similarly, Abdatuu states:

Definitely being able to take advantage of all the opportunities that I have, and that my parents never really had. So, school, going to university, getting jobs, learning different languages (English, or even French), or being able to do all the things that they couldn't. Even travelling the world. That's something that I want to do eventually. They never had an opportunity to do that. I guess they only really travelled to leave their country and stuff, but that was kind of by force. So, stuff like that. So, taking the opportunities are like a big thing, so taking advantage of that.

Both Abdatuu and Bontu explicitly and deeply connect their motivations to strive for stability with their parents' history. For them, stability emerges not only from the material not only because having it allows them to fulfill important obligations, but also because having it is predicated on the impetus of relational expectations. This position suggests that the 'good life' for some Oromo migrants involves an interaction between subjective/individual perceptions of what that life entails, material well-being (Højlund et al., 2011), and experiences that are larger than one's own. As some scholars have identified, individual experiences of well-being can be shaped by communities (Montgomery, 2013), by cultures (Mathews, 2012), and by various societal structures (Højlund et al., 2011). These notions invite a conversation about the social, cultural, and historical contexts of well-being.

Peace, Balance, and Harmony

Another theme that emerged in terms of how participants envisioned the 'good life' concerned their heartfelt desires for balance, peace, and harmony. These notions materialised in relation to local and transnational social structures. One participant emphasizes that balance and peace are essential components of 'the good life':

OK, a good life is balanced life. Balance, as I said is "nagaya," may I say, or that well-being. And the Oromo people, when they can, you are walking and you meet somebody, they say, "here," they say, "hi how are you?" There, the first question is about "nagaya," about peace. When there is peace, peace is the whole core cover of the well-being. So I think when you are in peace, you have health, and you have wealth. When you don't have peace, you are in quarrel, contradiction, and all that, you are insecure, so many other things are not kept together. So that being, when you have that peace that entails having all other resources that will you make you a successful person, then you will be successful in terms of resources. Then you'll be seen as successful person in the community too. And that might also entail the role in a community as a leader or elder, or something like that. So yeah, that's what I think about... Here, yeah. Whether when people have babies we

will go visit and we will talk about how the Oromos celebrated babies. And that's how [the 'good life'] can be achieved; that's how we achieving. (Amantaa)

Amantaa starts by stating that balance requires peace and well-being, insinuating that the three terms are synonyms. He goes on to state the differences in how people “here,” (the West) and “there” (back home) greet people. For example, the first question that an Oromo person would ask another Oromo back home is if they are at peace – as opposed to simply asking how he/she is are doing – given that peace is inherently about well-being within that context. This articulation pinpoints some key elements the good life that hinge on local and national meanings pertinent to historical and current day experiences. For example, Amantaa suggests that peace is the foundation for all things related to the ‘good life,’ which aligns with a customary perspective that he would have developed during his ethnocultural upbringing. Similarly, Mostowlansky (2013) found that local concepts of peace and harmony are of paramount importance to keeping balance in and between social spaces. Amantaa goes on to say that having peace on an internal and subjective level creates external success, which helps to create the harmony that fortifies the ‘good life’ within a local context. Essentially, he draws upon ethnocultural values that connect to his place of origin to illustrate how one can achieve the ‘good life’ while living in the diaspora.

Not all participants who talked about peace related it to internal factors pertinent to the ‘good life.’ In fact, one participant said the complete opposite:

Gammadu: A ‘good life’ to me would... there would be a lot more peace.

Biftu: So what kind of peace are we talking about?

Gammadu: Just like world peace, every country is struggling in their own way. So yeah I'm drawn to looking at my, I guess I'm a little biased that way, but I would look to see or I would want to see my people not being gunned down on the streets and offered more infrastructure and education and all that stuff, right. So a good life to me would make sure that that would be happening, and then obviously the well-being of my family my immediate friends and family, being able to be balanced...

In her depiction of what constitutes a ‘good life,’ Gammadu starts in a reverse direction than Amantaa. She begins by saying that the ‘good life’ would exist when world peace

can be achieved, and more specifically, when Oromo people have obtained peace and harmony. She then moves on to state what she refers to as “obvious,” which is the well-being of people in her immediate networks as it relates to obtaining a balanced life. Whereas Amantaa starts internally and proceeds externally, Gammadu starts externally and works her way within. Although these perceptions are inverse, Gammadu also touches upon local and transnational elements. For example, whereas Amantaa defines peace and well-being in relation to traditional values, Gammadu explains in a broader way that the ‘good life’ is about peace around the globe and the implications of this for people in particular circumstances, such as the Oromo people in her country of origin. These beliefs indicate that envisioning peace, harmony, and balance for the ‘good life’ materializes transnationally.

Wanting Good and Doing Good

The third and final theme that emerged in relation to how the ‘good life’ was envisioned concerned the participants’ desires to ‘want good’ for all. These desires were closely linked to aspirations of ‘doing good’ by serving others. The following passage demonstrates these points:

A good life for an Oromo person, like for me, is when I see good, and I get something good, I want to have my friends, my community, my people to have it good. If I have good information, passing it on to other people, if it’s a good information. Whatever like, Oromo people if we have something that works for us, something nice, something we like, something good, we want other persons to have it too, and to experience it, and to enjoy it. (Jiraatuu)

Jiraatuu recognizes that ‘good’ pertains to sharing knowledge and expertise about ‘the good life’ with other Oromo people in one’s networks, which relates to Baumeister et al.’s (2013) finding that social engagement, in the way of doing things for others, engenders a more meaningful life when compared to just doing things for oneself. Another participant also talks about the significance of social engagement:

Yeah, and then being able to help your people basically I think. Because I feel like the most important thing, especially for us youth, our parents have worked so hard because they left under tough circumstances and there's lot going on back home with our people, that I feel like not, just because we're here, we're raised here, and we didn't experience the things that they experienced, people our age are experiencing worse right now back home. And I feel like being able to recognize that and

not forgetting yourself in your own luxuries is very important. So, if I feel like just being able to help your people, even just through raising awareness or whatever it is. Just being involved in the communities, getting a voice out for them I think is important to incorporate in your life. Yeah. (Bontu)

Bontu explains that it is crucial for the younger generation Oromos to extend themselves in any way feasible to be of service to their own people. She states that younger generation Oromos who have not directly experienced the harsh circumstances their elders have experienced are still obligated to do what they can to help. From her perspective, doing good for others could be as simple as being a voice that raises awareness about the present-day realities of Oromo people in Ethiopia. Bontu believes that value of doing good for other Oromos should be integrated into one's life.

Jiraatuu's and Bontu's accounts reveal that wanting good is derived from doing good for other Oromo people and that doing good is a responsibility as well as an action that brings about more good on an individual level and within the communities that are being served. The following exchange with Jiraatuu that further elucidates the latter:

Jiraatuu: ...a good life is when you're feeling good, when your neighbours feel good, when your community feels good, that's a good life. You can't just be having a good life just by yourself. Everybody around you that you care about has to have a good life. That's when an Oromo says a good life is good. Just person by itself, good life is not a good life.

Biftu: Why not?

Jiraatuu: Well, you can see when people around you are not happy. You can't be Oromo, me I can't personally as an Oromo person. I think it's the same for every Oromo. Even back home, even we are happy here, we still when we hear back, like people, our families not living as happy as free as we are, we're not 100% free, [or] happy too. Like we're not 100% well. We don't feel, we're OK, we don't feel 100% well, because part of us is not well...

This dialogue suggests that for Jiraatuu, the 'good life' would emerge from seeing and knowing that other Oromo people, such as family, neighbours, and people in local/back home communities are happy and well. She believes that an Oromo person cannot be completely well in the absence of this good. Bilchina expresses similar sentiments:

Yeah for me, a good life is where I see people living in... a good life for me is when I walk on to the streets when I go wake up in the morning or listen to something, or hear or see something and that thing really doesn't take its toll on my life. For instance, when I, because I'm still, I'm very much connected to my roots back home really. This is the thing... I can't really say I'm having a good life because for me to go back home, work with my people, and at least share their sufferings there, and bring something of change, it would have been a good life for me before I really die, before my life, I get much older than this. I would never say that I'm having a good life just eating or having a good sleep, having a good car, having a good house is not good life for me. I can't define that really as a life. My life would be more of aesthetic, more of mental, more of mental satisfaction, more of reality, more of fact where people can live peacefully and where have got their rights. Particularly I'm talking of people of the Oromo because our focus is about the Oromo people.

Bilchina explains how the 'good life' revolves around being able to do good for those who are suffering in his place of origin. He would have had a 'good life' if he was able to bring about some sort of change back home, and still hopes to do so before he passes away. Like Jiraatuu and Bontu, his motives for wanting to do good stem from his aspirations to bring about good for all other Oromos. As such, the 'good life' is not always about individual satisfaction, which is consistent with how the participants in this study conceptualized well-being as delineated in Chapter Three. Specifically, collective well-being characterizes the 'good life.' These findings are also consistent with literature that identifies the importance of materiality in relation to place (Atkinson & Joyce, 2011; Ereaut & Whiting, 2008; Mathews & Izquierdo, 2009; White, 2015) as a way to understand how sociocultural contexts (Clark, 2009) and meso- and macro-level social arrangements (Weisner, 2009) influence how the 'good life' is envisioned and can be achieved. Within the context of this study, the negative events occurring back home that participants have been aware of have not rendered them disconnected or destitute. One perspective is that these events could have served to increase meaning in life and attachment to current and past places while living in the diaspora (Baumeister et al., 2013). Unfavourable events could have led to a high degree of participation in local and back home Oromo communities, which would have served to strengthen ties and enhance one's purpose within the greater contexts of community and life. Many aspects of the participants' narratives as well as the community events that I attended support this position. Next, I elucidate these aspects of the narratives.

Striving to Achieve the ‘Good-Life’ While Living in the Diaspora

Building and Maintaining Community

In many ways, practices of well-being have united some Oromo people in the diaspora and helped them to establish and maintain local communities that serve as proxies for the ways in which they have organized socioculturally and historically. Although these communities are not identical to those back home, they are the quintessence of deep Oromo values that include, reciprocity, respect, and support. These communities have served as lifelines for social support networks to thrive and the networks of which they are comprised are known to be protective factors that buffer against ill-being (Wilkinson & Marmot, 2003). As described by the WHO, “Social support networks – greater support from families, friends and communities is linked to better health. Culture - customs and traditions, and the beliefs of the family and community all affect health” (para. 4). Similarly, participants espoused the importance of developing and participating in Oromo communities to advance the ‘good life’ for Oromo people. Practices of well-being that have contributed to the building and maintenance of community relations and networks have taken many shapes and forms. For example, one participant notes:

Well we, as Oromo, we [are] involved with a lot of stuff. Like we have meetings and we help each other through weddings and through when people have kids. Like when they have children and stuff, and then when they have babies, we have those kinds of stuff. We help each other with everything. (Jeynittii)

Jeynittii emphasizes that Oromo people regularly support one another in different ways. Although she states that Oromo people help one another with everything, she highlights a few key examples that are consistent with the examples given by other participants: meetings (*i.e.*, civic engagements) and ritual observances (*e.g.*, weddings or births). Another common practice that participants talked about at lengths pertained to specialized communities, such as women’s groups. Next, I describe these three examples of community practices in greater detail.

Civic Awareness and Civic Engagement

Civic awareness and engagement are widespread among Oromos in the diaspora. A few of the goals that influence this type of involvement is a shared desire to stay interconnected, to congregate around mutual interests, and to work for and towards their collective good. For participants, this has included political awareness and participation, keeping up-to-date on Oromo politics and news, holding regular meetings to discuss the current-day atrocities that plague Oromo people back home, and staging protests. The following exchange with one of the participants emphasizes some of these involvements:

Ogeessa: I'm very much interested in what is going on in Oromia.

Biftu: OK good, I was hoping you would talk about that.

Ogeessa: Very interested in what's Oromo, right? I can't say I'm not doing anything. I do read a lot, what is happening in Oromia.

Biftu: You keep up-to-date, would you say daily or...?

Ogeessa: If not a couple of hours.

Biftu: Every couple of hours, OK.

Ogeessa: Yeah, yeah.

Biftu: So, do you see that as contributing to Oromo cultural well-being at all?

Ogeessa: Oh of course, of course.

Biftu: OK, can you talk about that a little bit?

Ogeessa: Of course, that means I'm, that's how I keep...

Biftu: You're being engaged, right?

Ogeessa: Being engaged. So, I'm also one of the people who are trying to do, to hear about Oromia. So, in certain ways, so in this climate, in the current climate, so yeah. That's, you can say it's cultural well-being.

Biftu: Cultural well-being as well?

Ogeessa: Yeah, you feel their pain when they feel the pain, you are happy when they are happy, so yeah. You are there.

Biftu: Being connected in various forms.

One of the things that stands out in this dialogue is Ogeessa's level of commitment to staying current on topics pertinent to the Oromo in Oromia. Similarly, Laafaa also talks about his practices with the "day-to-day things [like]...reading online and engaging other people, calling, discussing about the politics and all that kind of stuff." In contrast to Ogeessa, Laafaa emphasizes that he also engages with information about the Oromo by discussing it with other people, which is emblematic of how other participants have cooperated in various forms of civic awareness and engagement. Staying aware and attuned to Oromo politics also resonates with the younger generation participants. As one younger participation elaborates:

Number one, staying aware with what's going on constantly. Like staying in tune and aware. And then secondly doing what you can to help. Through word of mouth, through friends. Like there's a lot of less fortunate people, or there's people who have been, families displaced from one another because of the current regime or persecution that's going on with our people, right? So, I feel like helping, sending money and helping people. I mean we're not all rich, but I feel like every dollar counts, you know what I mean? Like for them, it's a big thing right. 50 bucks is a big thing, you know what I mean? So, and just getting word out. Word out as in like, for example with what's going on right now, with all the students being killed and all the protests and what the regime is doing right now is just basically. Getting like, protesting here, many people may say what's the point, but the point is you're letting your government know that whatever funding that they're sending is not being used as funds. It's being used as killing our people, you know what I mean? So, it's just, basically being voices. (Bontu)

As Bontu articulates, being aware and engaged is *i)* to care about the community that one belongs to, and *ii)* to work with other Oromos to bring about a positive change for their people. She acknowledges her own positionality relative to those who are suffering in her country of origin and alludes to the view that Oromo people in the diaspora are more fortunate than those back home. Consequently, all Oromos in the diaspora have a certain burden of responsibility to do their part to raise awareness and to be engaged.

All the events that I attended to conduct participant-observations and observations (as described in Chapter Two) suggest that coming together provides people with a common space not only to celebrate their identity, culture, and well-being, but also to vocalize and demonstrate their grievances. As previously mentioned, I observed this happen at a wedding-turned-protest. During the participant-observations and observations it appeared that people were more willing to showcase and discuss

their grievances than to celebrate their happiness. I arrived at this conclusion because Oromo politics were the focal point of all the conversations that I was privy to, rather than topics that centred on day-to-day activities. For example, during events one (preparing for the annual summer picnic) and two (the annual summer picnic), participants were engrossed in conversations about the recent wave of protest crackdowns in Ethiopia that had left hundreds of Oromo students dead (HRW, 2015). This topic also emerged during all the other events that I attended. Participants thus shared a desire and commitment to participate in civic awareness and civic engagement across multiple platforms and networks. Some of the narratives that emerged through the interviews explicitly confirm this. For example,

Well say there's like, I would say that in the Oromo community, for example Victoria, the Victoria community's so small. So, we do everything together, right? But then sometimes it will be extended to, say like if something comes up. For example, looking at more politics. We work towards, with the Oromo community, I mean not the Oromo community, the Vancouver community should I say to bring awareness about persecution that goes on with Oromo people. For example, there's the Oromo protests going on right now, so we'll work together in trying to give awareness on that. Like organizing protests and going over to Vancouver and protesting to raise awareness on that, and that kind of stuff. And just working with things, like there's the Oromo Media Network. And we'll work with them, I'll work with the Vancouver chapter and in trying to fundraise for that, or help out, or gave awareness and get the word out. So basically, I feel like in the smaller aspects it can be social, and then in a bigger aspect it's doing something for your people that are back home basically. (Bontu)

Similarly, another participant states:

Yeah, we have a network where we can connect all over Canada and we have the community organizations I think, two of them here in Vancouver metropolitan area. Two community organizations and also there is one in every other province [where] there are Oromo communities. And we have also a network of Oromo-Canadian Community Associations, which is just being in the formation right now. But always we try to connect, we try to support each other in rallies, in getting our voices heard across the world, and demonstrations, and staging demonstrations, and just trying to promote the cause of the Oromo and to stop the persecutions and political issues going back home. So yeah, we have networks in terms of social support as well. Particularly in Vancouver area, when we have the burials, weddings, and other cultural events. Celebration of new year's, celebration of other religious festivities. We come together, yeah. We have some sort of support and consolations with the network. But it's not really very well developed to the extent we want to, yeah. (Bilchina)

What both passages exemplify is the deep level of networks that have been forged within one community and how these networks have extended across communities in the diaspora and back home. Bontu and Bilchina identify that although coming together has a social component, such as celebrating life and death, it fundamentally centers on utilizing support networks to engage politics as a forum for cultivating the common good. Thus, civic awareness and engagement relates to the basic question of what constitutes the 'good life' for some Oromo people while living in the diaspora. Maintaining and engaging in social support networks has allowed individuals and communities to express their voice and to contribute to the functioning of their society. Research provides evidence suggesting that people who have more extensive and closer social support networks and people who report feeling connected to their local community tend to have better health (Berkman, Glass, Brissette, & Seeman, 2000; Cohen & Wills, 1985; Furnham & Shiekh, 1993). In light of this evidence, social support networks are an important positive SDofW and the absence of these networks would probably have a negative influence on health and well-being. Thus, Oromo people who are supported are likely better off than those who are not, which is why civic involvement is one factor identified as fundamental to the 'good life.'

Birth and Death: "Teessoo"

There were a few activities that participants repeatedly mentioned when discussing the various pursuits that commonly brought Oromo people together in the diaspora. One of these activities is characterized as "teessoo,"¹² which directly translates to mean 'meeting'. A teessoo does not have to be specific, as there are many reasons for people to come together (e.g., political gatherings or fundraising events). However, the findings suggest that Oromo people tend to congregate when there is a birth or death in the community. Participants in this study talked about both forms of congregation as common events that bring people together for teessoos. The exchange below helps to provide some context for what a teessoo is and also offers an example of how it can be created in the community:

Jebduh: We have a women's group, a "teessoo" group, yeah.

Biftu: What is it called?

¹² The definition for the term "teessoo" was retrieved from www.Oromodictionary.com

- Jebduh: "Teessoo." We have a "teessoo."
- Biftu: And what does that include?
- Jebduh: Usually we help each other during death in the family, childbirth, just you know, the whole social life thing. Yeah. Just for social life, you know? And then it helps us to get together at least once in a month or two, that's [the] only way. If you don't do that, there's no way you can see each other, you know?
- Biftu: So, it's a good way to, it sounds like what you're saying it's a good way to keep, even though you haven't seen each other all the time, it's a good way to keep connected with people.
- Jebduh: Connected with people, yeah.
- Biftu: How many people attend the group?
- Jebduh: We are about 20, yeah, it's not bad for a small city, yeah.

Jebduh explains that she is involved in a women's teessoo in her local community. The teessoo involves about 20 Oromo women who meet at least monthly to support one another through various life events such as childbirth and death. Jeynittii offers a more explicit narrative about what transpires when women come together during times of childbirth:

When people have babies, we usually go and visit them in the hospital when they have a baby. If we are allowed to go in the hospital, and after they come from the hospital and they go home, we go and help them. And sometimes we cooked together for them. If they have children, we take the kids from them and then we keep the kids until she comes out from the hospital. And we cook food and sometimes we buy a drink, juices like milk or something like that. And then for the baby, the clothing something like that, and then yeah. (Jeynittii)

Jeynittii's account regarding the level of support that Oromo women in her community offer to one another is an important point in this passage. The women not only visit new mothers in the hospital, but also go to great efforts to mitigate some of the post-childbirth demands. These practices include getting together with other Oromo women to cook meals for the mother and other household members, providing childcare for other children that a new mother may have, and buying material goods for the household and the newborn. Gammadu shares similar sentiments in saying: "if there's you know a birth...then yeah we usually come together, we'll cook, we'll visit the mother and visit the

family and offer support, community support.” These actions demonstrate that despite the work-life demands that have created a great deal of constraint and separation among Oromo people in the diaspora (as discussed in Chapter Four) some Oromo women have nonetheless gone to great lengths to retain the value of reciprocal support. As Jiraatuu says, “when people have babies we will go visit and we will talk about how the Oromos celebrated babies. And that's how a ‘good life’ can be achieved. That's how we [are] achieving [it].” In other words, various mechanisms of cooperation and solidarity that pertain to certain milestones constitute another fundamental way that the ‘good life’ is being experienced.

Although only the female participants talked about teessoos in relation to childbirth, both men and women stated that teessoos are important for grieving death. In the words of one participant: “...if there's a death [in the community] people pool together and help with you know being there physically, or offering resources, or money, or moral support...” (Gammadu). Similarly, Laafaa states:

For example, in many occasions in [my local community] we collect money for people who died or the refugees in Kenya, Somalia and Sudan and somewhere else. And the victims in back home, there's a little bit politics. But they, we have to be. That even gives you the well-being of community by helping people across the ocean, you know? So, you feel good about it, like when we collect. We come together and discuss and that, that's well-being. (Laafaa)

Laafaa explains that the community fundraises money to support the families of people who have died “across the ocean” in other places where many Oromos have been displaced. Another example of how death is acknowledged pertained to getting news that someone had died back home. According to Barsiisaa, “in terms of when the times of death and bad news come from back home or somebody dies here, yes, we come together and share, yes.” The participants acknowledged that they congregate to grieve deaths that happen locally, in other parts of the diaspora (e.g., common hubs for Oromo refugees like refugee camps), as well as back home. These findings further corroborate a previously stated conclusion that individual and community commitments transcend local efforts to include transnational connections that are deeply valued and maintained. It is also important to note that these practices reflect traditions that Oromo migrants have carried with them into the diaspora and were not developed in the diaspora. The following passage supports this point:

And the values that, like helping people and all that stuff, we can, I practice it too by helping. You can do mostly the culture, the Oromo well-being, we practice it every day. We get together, we help each other, if somebody died back home, we keep the back-home tradition. We bring it here, we go to that person's house, we bring food, we stay with them for three days, we make them, you know, feel like, forget about it for at least three days. Things like that, we bring what we know back there, and we bring it here. (Jiraatuu)

Jiraatuu's statement illustrates that preserving certain cultural traditions has enabled some Oromos in the diaspora to experience cultural well-being. Honouring and upholding as many aspects of tradition as feasible has contributed to their achieving the 'good life.' To the contrary, participants' see the breakdown of traditional support systems as a determinant that exacerbates the 'bad-life.'

Specialized Communities: "Afooshaa"

Another common practice that was discussed primarily by women is known as "afooshaa,"¹³ which means 'community.' Like teessoos, afooshaas include men as well as women as men have them too. However, women talked about them extensively in terms of the various women's groups that they have formed. A dialogue with one of the participants further explains afooshaas:

Biftu: What does "afooshaa" mean?

Jebduh: "Afooshaa" is like, it's just people come together. The one we do is for female is almost the same thing. Yeah, just came together every month, and then you contribute something, and you eat you drink and then you help each other during death, and birth, and wedding, and stuff like that. You know? They call it "afooshaa," yeah.

Biftu: "Afooshaa."

Jebduh: Mhm, yeah.

During this exchange, Jebduh helped me to understand her definition and perception of afooshaa. She points out that afooshaas involve Oromo people coming together, and that she is involved in one specific to women. She states that afooshaas are similar to teessoos in that they provide Oromo people in the diaspora with a community space for important events such as births, deaths, and weddings. Afooshaas differ from teessoos

¹³ The definition for the term "afooshaa" was retrieved from www.Oromodictionary.com

because they tend have gendered, ancestral, religious, and geographical orientations, whereas teessoos primarily pertain to the general Oromo community. An exchange with one of the participants helps to tease out some of these nuances:

Jiraatuu: Yeah, we have a woman's group separately and also, we have men and women, all the community together. We support each other, yes.

Biftu: And so, the next question is what, like who does it include and what does it include?

Jiraatuu: A woman's separately, and then the other, the general big community is everybody - kids, adults, all, everybody.

Biftu: Everybody.

Jiraatuu: Singles, everybody that's Oromo is welcome to, in the community.

Jiraatuu indicates that there are exclusive women's groups and mixed groups that include women, men, and children. Another participant talks about how groups form in relation to how their members identify ancestrally. As Jebduh states:

... Oromo come to Oromo, I can count them. From whom to whom. The ones [that] participate all the time, you know when we have something. And then there's other Oromos, they are, you know this "afooshaa" thing, you know?... the Dire Dawa they have their own, that [other group] have their own.

Jebduh indicates that there are Oromo people who participate regularly when there are community-wide teessoos and some of these people also participate in their own specialized afooshaa groups, such as the Dire Dawa group. Dire Dawa is a city in Ethiopia, so its eponymous afooshaa is for people who originate from this city or have family in this city. Although these findings suggest that some Oromo people congregate along specific lines of identity while in the diaspora, at least one participant emphasizes that Oromo people traditionally support one another despite their demographic characteristics. The following passage helps to elucidate this point:

In our country, they call it "afooshaa." "Afooshaa" is a group of people that, in our country they do it, and men and woman it doesn't matter. From any kind, it could be Christian, it could be Muslim, it could be anybody. They come together, like neighbours and all in the area. They come together and then they do it "afooshaa." "Afooshaa" means like for death and happiness, which is for married and a death, right? And

to be for happy to do it for people getting married or whatever. And then the other way is just when people die. When these two things, they take it as the two big things, right? When people die and when people get married. It's a big huge thing to us. So when people die, the same thing like I said. Back home, the men and women and everybody do it together. And so, if somebody dies, even from the Christian people, like who's like in your neighbours and then they have it in your group that's "afooshaa," you go to them. And then they do "sharra," what they call it, the tent. They put the big tents outside and then people come together there, and then there is a big thing they put it on the floor. And then people collect money in there, whatever anybody can. It's necessary, you have to pay, they tell you have to pay this much money. Anybody, like what they can, what they can help with, they put that money together for the person who lost a family member. Like if somebody died from that family's members. Or people have a wedding, or whatever, for those people. Whatever they spend over this certain time, they put money together and help them. We do have like that here too, but it's not strong as that back that everybody comes together. But we have, like everybody has that little group in that areas, mostly. And they just come together and just we do the same thing. Like similar, mostly similar to that. Yeah. (Jeynittii)

Towards the end of the passage, Jeynittii mentions that in the diaspora, smaller groups form throughout various areas, which is different from the way that all people have historically come together back home. She also acknowledges that local groups that have been established, although they are not as interconnected as they could be.

Having discussed the sociocultural and historical character of afooshaas, three detailed narratives describe some of the key aspects that underpin them.

We have yeah, meetings we have. Once in a while we'll come together as a woman's group. I can say we have a woman groups, right? And as a woman's group, sometimes we come together like once a month and we sit. Everybody comes together and then we eat, we drink, and then we talk about everything, like about our children, about the cultures, about back home, about our families, and about everything. And then put money together, like there is a money... we save like for sickness, for happiness like weddings, like if anything comes to be, to take that money, and to just put it towards what one would want to do with it. And those kinds of stuff, yeah. (Jeynittii)

Well, we talk about issues. Like if anybody has a problem we will talk about it, how can we help. If somebody is having a baby, we maybe have to hold a baby shower. If somebody's having maybe having their son or daughter getting married, we plan and how to do this wedding. We do events, like a wedding for. Like when we do, when people have weddings we cook and all that. We plan those things. But they, every month we basically just come have fun, forget everything that happens at home, and mostly just come and relax, enjoy some laughter, eat

some good food. And like I said, if there is an issue we will talk about it, and we share and that's what we do. (Jiraatuu)

It was basically, support networks? I would say that, for one I think it would be the social aspects right. Just like, being involved in socializing with people that come from the same background as you. And next to that, there's also in the communities based on where you're living. For example, here in Victoria the women have gotten together where they come together monthly, and just will have a little potluck or just meals. And we go from house to house and it's basically, we also have kind of a member, not a member fee, but just kind of where we save money just in case something happens... It's just five or ten bucks a month. And the money will go towards if there's an emergency for someone. Like say somebody within that network has a death in the family and you need to have burial costs, or there's a big wedding or event or something. Just to help each other out for that cause. You know what I mean? Like a little bit goes a long way. You know, over the month when you save that money at least there's something to help each other out. You know what I mean? So, it's a good basis just to have that sisterhood, you know what I mean? And then I think the men kind of started a similar thing, you know? (Bontu)

Several commonalities in the passages delineate how afooshaas are conducted by some Oromo women in the diaspora. Specifically, these women have been able to *i*) meet regularly, *ii*) pool money together, *iii*) share meals, *iv*) discuss prevalent issues that pertain to challenges they may be facing, *v*) offer advice and mutual support, and *vi*) enjoy one another's company. It is important to note that it was primarily the elder generation participants who talked about their involvement in afooshaas as well as teessoos – only one younger generation participant mentioned this. This observation could imply that traditional, sociocultural, and historical pursuits are ubiquitous among the elder generation, but rare among the younger generation.

I was fortunate enough to attend one observation event (as described in Chapter Two) which involved several women's afooshaa groups collaborating to cook for an upcoming wedding. As mentioned by Jiraatuu, it is common for the women's afooshaa groups to prepare food for Oromo weddings that are being held in the community. Here are a few images from this event:



Image 5.1: In this image we see several Oromo women from local afooshaa groups who are dressed in their traditional attire. They had just finished chopping onions and were preparing to cut the meat.



Image 5.2: Like image one, this image shows the fruit of a collaboration between women. They were hard at work cutting meat in preparation for several traditional meals that they went on to cook inside large pots.

My gatekeeper explained to me that there were representatives from several afooshaa groups who attended this event. She also informed me that women also got together at other Oromo households to do their share of delegated activities for the wedding. This insight suggests that although the various women afooshaa groups exist within a community, some activities draw the groups together to cooperate in solidarity.

As the findings from these three sub-themes indicate, building and maintaining community networks are prevalent features among Oromo migrants in the diaspora.

Oromo migrants have strived to pursue meaningful lives by extending their support to one another both locally and transnationally. These pursuits are emblematic of transnational social structures that maintain sociocultural and historical traditions, rather than just local ones. The findings are also consistent with contemporary anthropological scholarship, which has established that important sources of well-being include coming together to engage and strengthen communal relationships (Beyer, 2013; de Jong, 2011; Montgomery, 2013) and caring practices (Yates-Doerr & Carney, 2016). These are some of the factors that have worked to make life more meaningful for Oromos in the diaspora.

Non-Material Culture: Music, Food, Language, Song and Dance

The final theme that emerged in relation to how participants strived to pursue the 'good life' revolved around non-material culture described in Chapter Three. Specifically, certain cultural activities have extended across generations, such as the inclusion of Oromo music, food, language, song, and dance as important practices that serve to inspire well-being and the 'good life.' As indicated, this was evident among the elder generation participants as well as the younger generation. In the following passage, one of the younger generation participants describes how she learned certain traditional practices:

Basically, like I said it really is the way that I was raised. My family, they came, they've been to so many places. They left really young back home, like they were really young. But with everywhere that they've been they've picked up the good cultures and they've incorporated it in to raising us. But Oromo culture was the major part of that. So, number one, my parents really enforced the language, really enforced it. And like I said, we were very fluent in speaking it. And then like I said through music I learned even more. Because I listen to a lot of Oromo music, including different dialects, right? So that really really helped me out... and then Oromo cooking. Say now if my parents are not home, and we have ten guests, I can go in the kitchen and throw it down exactly like Oromo food. I can make "bedennaa" (which is an Oromo national dish) and I can make everything. And that's something that my mom, since I was ten years old, literally made me come in the kitchen and learn how to do. Because she's like practice makes perfect, let's get on this. So, it's like since age ten she's been training me. So, I can cook good Oromo cuisine, just throw it down. And also just really really understanding the cultural norms, like we've said before. It's a huge thing in Oromo culture, you know what I mean? You really need to understand those norms, and it's basically like that's how I was raised. So that was normal for me. So that's why I feel like when I am with

Oromo people that are pretty new, it's just like they don't know. Like they think that they don't know, they don't believe me when I say that I was actually raised here and I've only been there once. Like back home once, because I identify so much like them and I act so much like them. But then at the same time, there's my, I still have my other side to me. Like the way that every second-generation was raised because my parents still incorporated that too. But it's just, I guess it's me being self-aware I guess basically, depending on where I am and who I'm around. But it's not a struggle, it really comes really naturally to me. (Bontu)

Bontu starts off by asserting that her parents brought their Oromo cultural traditions to Canada and enforced certain aspects of them throughout her upbringing, such as speaking Afaan Oromo and cooking Oromo traditional food. Because she was exposed to these traditions, she has been able to retain them so well as an adult that Oromo newcomers have a hard time believing she was raised in the diaspora. Other younger generation participants also highlight certain cultural practices that they have retained over the life course, which is exemplified in the following two passages:

Sometimes listening to Oromo music or cooking with a family member and making our food and really enjoying actually fully having that experience as far as evening wearing my traditional clothing and listening to music while cooking and speaking my language. Yeah, it's an activity but it's also a way to keep it alive in a way, in the household. (Gammadu)

...of course, the food, eating "bedennaa" and stuff. I guess for food, everything is about eating together in one plate instead of separate. I can't eat separately unless it's something like pasta or something that I need a knife and fork for, then yeah, I'll eat by myself. But if it's anything else, I like sitting down with my parents and eating from one plate. I think that's a big thing. So yeah, the food... (Abdatuu)

Both Gammadu and Abdatuu emphasize that engaging in certain cultural practices involves doing things together as a family unit. Whereas Gammadu draws on the example of cooking traditional food together with family members, Abdatuu refers to eating traditional food off one plate as a family. These findings imply that although all the younger generation participants did not discuss their involvement in civic engagement, teessoos, and afooshaas, they have reproduced certain aspects of non-material culture.

In a like manner, the elder generation participants explored elements of non-material culture as mechanisms that create a sense of continuity between past and current lives. An excerpt of an exchange with Jeynittii elucidates this point:

- Jeynittii: I do. I love singing. Actually, when I cook. I love singing when I cook, and it just reminds me back when I was in childhood and makes me very happy to sing. And it makes faster for me, the job.
- Biftu: And so that's a cultural thing too, is not cooking and singing?
- Jeynittii: Yes, that's what I get always from my mom, OK? Sometimes I think back, and then I'm like, "oh my god, I sound like my mom," you know? And yeah, she always... when she does things and then in the house she always sings. And I became like her, and I'm just like. I like to sing about my country, songs and stuff and to listen sometime. And, yeah.
- Biftu: Yeah. So what kind of songs are you singing?
- Jeynittii: What kind of songs?
- Biftu: Yeah.
- Jeynittii: There's a lot of different songs that reminds you about, you know, about your family, and about your country, and about love and about everything.
- Biftu: Can you think of anything else?
- Jeynittii: That's only song I actually practice in the house. I can tell you, really, I listen like in Canadian too, but mostly that's what I practice actually in my own home.
- Biftu: In your house, is Oromo.
- Jeynittii: Yeah, yeah.

Jeynittii, an elder generation participant, reminisces on her past in describing how she continues to sing meaningful Oromo songs as she cooks traditional foods. She learned this practice from her own mother back in Oromia, which reminds her of her family, her country, and loved ones that she had left behind. The inference to be drawn from this is that engaging in cultural practices extends across time, space, and generations. For example, Jiraatuu and Jeynittii speak about deliberately exposing their children to certain cultural practices.

I practice... Oromo cultural well-being. Like I try, for example, language. For the language, I tried to speak to [my kids] in my own language... And also to have our kids, we had a school, like Oromo school, we hold cultural events, we put on some cultural music, dance, Oromo dance

shows. That's the way we can practice and achieve [the good life].
(Jiraatuu)

To keep my cultural... food and to teach my children, and to dress my
cultural way, and practice my cultural way always in the house.
(Jeynittii)

A younger generation participant commented that her son, who was four years old at the time, had grown so accustomed to listening to Oromo music that he did not want to listen to non-Oromo songs.

Bontu: Like even my son will only listen to Oromo music.

Biftu: Oromo music, is that.

Bontu: If I turn on English music he's like, no mommy I want
Oromo music. But that's just what he likes.

In sum, some Oromo migrants in the diaspora have maintained certain ritual practices that are intimately tied to *i*) their past experiences and *ii*) conceptions of collective well-being. Although migration has removed Oromo people from their traditional homes, lands, and sociocultural practices, the inherent bond between cultural identity and cultural practices has not been entirely interrupted. As stated by Horstmann and Jung (2015), "In ritual performance, people can re-enact their social relations and create a place similar to home, thereby allowing them to retain connections to their place of origin (p. 7). In other words, by engaging in the non-material elements of Oromo culture well-being, participants have held onto their aspirations for the 'good life' locally and transnationally.

Conclusion

In making the argument that SDOH/SDoFW are neither just 'bad'/'negative' nor just 'good'/'positive,' the findings in this chapter highlight some of the positive determinants of well-being that contribute to the 'good life' as defined by the participants in the study. This finding transpired in light of the positive effects that social determinants have on well-being due to their existence. Moreover, if contemporary measures were used to assess the participants' happiness, health, or well-being, they may have scored okay on measures that relate to material satisfaction (e.g., stability and peace). However, this would not have been an accurate representation since these measures do not account for the other more meaningful aspects of well-being

discovered in this research. For the participants, there is more to well-being and the 'good life' than happiness or material satisfaction. They identified socio-cultural and historical determinants that have made their lives meaningful while living as migrants in the diaspora. The struggles and suffering that participants have and continue to experience did not serve to drive them apart or render them assimilated. In fact, in some cases these experiences have provided opportunities for them to come together and organize to fight for a common cause. This reality does not negate the hardships that they have experienced, but rather to point out that they have not been complacent and that they are engaging meaningfully although they may not have fully achieved their visions, aspirations, or values with regard to the 'good life.'

Participants' accounts of well-being show that macrostructural factors such as citizen relations with a nation-state play significant roles in determining quality of life. On the one hand, when societal conditions are positive (e.g., stable democratic governance such as what the participants have experienced in Canada), citizens tend fare better. On the other hand, if social and political systems are unstable (e.g., what has been described in Chapter One concerning crimes against humanity perpetrated by Ethiopia's state government), citizens tend to fare worse. Because the conditions of people's lives are influenced by the conditions that characterize nations, understanding well-being on the 'bad life'-'good life' continuum and across societal contexts has produced some nascent insights as explored in this study.

Chapter 6.

Conclusion and Implications

Like all the Indigenous peoples of the world, the first peoples of Africa and Canada have been challenged by colonization, industrialization, and capitalism. Both have also experienced discrimination, dispossession, and the loss of their resources and identity. Despite these parallels, there are profound differences between the two populations in that the Indigenous peoples in the Americas normally remain within or close to their lands, whereas many Indigenous Africans have been displaced from their lands. This is the reality of many Indigenous Oromos who have fled to diasporas around the world in search of peace and security, including their resettlement in colonized lands such as Canada. Although this creates an interesting paradox, my research draws some attention to how histories of colonization and injustice impact the well-being of externally displaced (e.g., Indigenous peoples who have become refugees) in similar ways to those who have been internally displaced (e.g., Indigenous peoples in the Americas). These findings thus suggest that it is imperative to trace the socio-political histories of displaced groups to better understand how bonds to the past impact the present.

The first findings chapter demonstrates that some Oromo people in the diaspora conceptualize cultural well-being collectively, rather than individually. Well-being for them emerges through ties that they have maintained with other members of the Oromo ethnocultural group. Expressions of Oromo identity were key to their collective well-being. As they have migrated from a collectivist culture, they continue to express collectivist sentiments, despite having resettled in an individualistically oriented society. This critical discovery denotes that some Oromos in the diaspora are not particularly inclined to assimilate. However, this does not negate the barriers that have impeded their desires to be more integrated with one another than they currently are.

Findings Chapters Four and Five explore the determinants of well-being from two angles. On the one hand, Chapter Four reveals that the socio-political, historical, and current-day conflicts that have shaped the Ethiopian-Oromo narrative are the most significant determinants of the well-being for some Oromos in the diaspora. Despite

living in diasporic communities that have afforded them luxuries, all participants reported that they had not achieved a 'good life.' A 'good life' for them happens when their country is well, their lands are well, their communities are well, and their neighbours are well – when all Oromo people are well. Adhering to this understanding aligns with how they conceptualize well-being. It also denotes that transnational ties are fundamental, as the participants did not migrate to the 'golden' diaspora and forget about who they are and where they have come from. As discussed in Chapter Five, it makes sense that participants did not anchor themselves as having the 'bad life,' because they have actively engaged in various customary practices as a way keep the spirit of their culture and traditions alive and at the forefront of their lives. Chapter Five also reveals that many Oromos in the diaspora have become activists to promote the welfare of all Oromo people throughout the globe. They are engaged in social justice practices that serve a larger social and political purpose, rather than being focussed on their individual lives. These practices have been fundamental to their well-being overall.

Without negating the hardships that refugees face, my research on Oromo migrants – many who were refugees at one point in time – demonstrates that they are not mere victims. Specifically, Oromo people in diasporic communities have adapted to different world systems using their social and cultural resources. Many have retained and even redeveloped their traditional modalities of well-being, reciprocity, and mutual support, which are largely grounded in their local and transnational ties. The internal networks that they have forged and maintained have proven to be more crucial to survival than the support of the various outside organizations encountered throughout their migration and resettlement journeys. They are a proactive people who have taken risks for the faith they have in Oromo people's capacity to valorize their communications. The findings reveal that they are agents of their own lives, despite all the hardships they continue to endure, and that they have passed down their social and cultural resources intergenerationally.

Study Limitations

In this study, I did not account for Oromos who are happy to be out of Ethiopia and are enjoying their access to health care and education as never before. It is possible that the Oromos who I met at the community events are individuals who identify most strongly with being Oromo; hence their participation at the Oromo cultural events.

Given the circumstances of their departure from their homelands – to survive rather than by choice – it is no wonder that those who I talked to expressed that they still care deeply about their Oromo identity; wished that they could return ‘home’; and are concerned as time passes and their collectivity identity erodes.

I also question how much of a response set was created by asking interview participants about their conceptualizations of ‘cultural well-being’ instead of asking them about ‘well-being.’ In retrospect, I wonder if asking them about ‘cultural well-being’ triggered a particular mental framework (*i.e.*, collective identity) through which they responded. Alternatively, I could have asked more general questions about ‘well-being’ to see if participants would come back and refer to their collective selves instead of offering more individualistic perspectives.

Another observation to highlight is the highly educated interviewee sample or, more specifically, the lack of participants with less education. On the one hand, this could be limiting because it is not representative of the educational levels among the general Oromo population. On the other hand, as educational attainments correspond with socioeconomic status, despite the participants being better off compared to their less educated counterparts, they still saw themselves as being hindered by the socio-political struggles in their native lands. In other words, achieving prosperity could have made them loosen their ties to their homelands as they reap the benefits of being more affluent while in Canada. Overall, these limitations provide some opportunities for future studies which aim to explore similar phenomena.

Strengths

Researchers’ lived and learned realities invariably shape their cultural, political, social, and academic orientations, which may be reflected in their research. One of my goals in this study was to situate knowledge through a reflexive consideration of my role as a researcher in this research. I remained cognizant of the personal, political, and philosophical vantage points I brought to the study firstly by acknowledging my positionality. This approach allowed me to consider the influence of my positionality on the research process. I entered this study with a multitude of prior insights into the research context that may have inhibited or enabled certain observations.

I had an insider-outsider position to the participants that I met, which opened doors and curtailed possibilities. Given that I have grown up in contemporary Western societies and have had a contemporary Western education, I accept that my own experiences and lived realities inform my conceptualization and operationalization of the topic investigated. This acceptance includes my awareness that I cannot easily separate myself as a person from myself as a researcher. My positionality also influenced my relationships and interactions with the research participants and the researching settings, my analysis and interpretations of findings, the conclusions I drew, and the forthcoming publication and dissemination of my project. I also have a position of being a child from a forcibly resettled family. These positionalities created both advantages and challenges for me. For example, my identity as a privileged Oromo-Canadian holds particular meaning not only that I have constructed for myself, but that participants formed of me. On the one hand, as a member of the Oromo population who is fluent in the native language Afaan Oromo, understands Oromo cultural practices, and is passionate about the Oromo people and causes, it was easy for me to develop a rapport with the participants. My membership identity automatically provided a level of trust with and openness in my participants that would likely not have been present otherwise. Our shared identity also made it easier for me to understand and relate to participants' stories because they often paralleled my lived experiences as well as the narratives that I grew up listening to. On the other hand, participants accorded me particular social responsibilities, such as advancing the interests of Oromo people, in a way that may not have been expected of a non-Oromo researcher. I had many reflective moments when I wondered if participants' accounts would have been more descriptive if had I not been a member of their ethnocultural group. At times this was obvious in the way that participants responded to some questions indicating that they thought I should have known the answers, which was not always the case.

Secondly, identifying my positionality in relation to the research allowed me to recognize my conceptual assumptions as a researcher and keeping biases in check was imperative to the fidelity of the research process. To facilitate reflexivity, I kept a journal, whereby I examined my personal and analytical assumptions and goals. This practice included making regular entries about methodological decisions and the reasons for them, the logistics of the study, and reflecting about the study progress in terms of my

interests and values. Engaging in this reflexive practice helped to clarify my belief systems and subjectivities that I brought to the research.

Another goal in this study was cultural relativism, which is a doctrine implying that *i)* knowledge and meaning are relative to particular frameworks (*e.g.*, an individual subject, a culture, a language), and *ii)* no one culture is superior to another. For my project, cultural relativism was used as a critical tool to challenge ethnocentric Western views and practices, and to promote an appreciation of cultural diversity. Toward this end, I continued to challenge my own ways of thinking, which are firmly rooted in formal Eurocentric educational conventions and discursive constructions. But I also grew up in an Oromo household, speak the mother tongue, and have visited Oromia/Ethiopia, and have been exposed to the Oromo culture my whole life. Leveraging these bi-cultural identities helped to facilitate the research process. Generating knowledge inductively through this endeavour allowed me to fulfill the objective of cultural relativism. This approach involved my commitment to starting with observations, searching for patterns in the observations, and developing explanations/theories for the observed patterns. The advantage of adhering to such a framework is that it encouraged the collection of collaborative, participant-centered data. Given my methodology, the methods chosen were thought to best celebrate the richness, depth, and nuances of the social phenomenon being studied. The data evolved naturally and organically, which is the essence of qualitative research.

The nature of this project was exploratory, grounded, and open-ended. An exploratory research design was necessary as the research sought to investigate a specific social phenomenon that is under researched. The purpose of using this approach was to gain insight and understanding about the topic of well-being from the position of Oromo people in the diaspora. Given the exploratory nature of the project, few guidelines were followed. The primary focus was on clarifying the research questions that guided the project and remaining open to change direction if new insights emerged throughout the process. The project provides some interesting interim conclusions to the research questions, which explored the topic through varying levels of depth and analysis. By grounding the research in this way, it has the potential to lay groundwork that will lead future studies.

Future Research

The current state of conflict throughout the world, and the social disorganization that it causes will ensure that displaced peoples will continue to migrate globally in search of health, safety, and security. For the health and well-being of displaced people to be advanced, it is imperative to develop tools and policies that recognize past exposures that displaced people carry forward with them throughout their life course, and the implications this has on advancing their well-being as advanced by my study. As Indigenous peoples in most regions of the world are not fairly represented in their countries' decision-making process; are discriminated against; have been dispossessed of their status; fall victim to violent conflict; and lack access to the rewards and opportunities of society, it is most crucial for mandates to emphasize the features of their proactive contributions. By identifying how the Oromo pursue well-being, my research offers nascent insights into strategies that can be implemented to further strengthen the well-being of individuals and collective groups living in conditions of strife and discontent, as well as living in the diaspora. The latter can be achieved by bringing forward strengths and challenges that illustrate how even persecuted, forcibly displaced peoples like the Oromo attempt to renew their well-being in the best modes they can while living in the diaspora.

In light of the insights gained in this study, additional research is required to further explore the different modalities of solidarity and cooperation mobilized by different generational groups. The current research supports a belief commonly held by the elder generation migrants: that traditional ways of life are eroding for younger generation migrants in the diaspora. Although this may be true, it does not imply that the younger generation migrants have not forged their own ethnocultural ways of coming together. The two generational groups in my study showed that they had opted for different modalities of solidarity and cooperation. Whereas the elder generation has sought to reproduce traditional mechanisms of group solidarity, the younger generation has engendered alternative forms of solidarity. Thus, a multigenerational analysis that is grounded in a society-centered perspective necessitates further analysis to elucidate the nuances of group solidarity and cooperation mobilized by migrants in diasporic communities. I hope to explore such an analysis in future studies, as it would serve to support the argument that refugees are not helpless victims and could encourage more

comprehensive policies that center on: *i*) aspects of refugee agency and autonomy; *ii*) distal determinants of health and well-being, and *iii*) transnational non-state networks that are forged and maintained over the life course.

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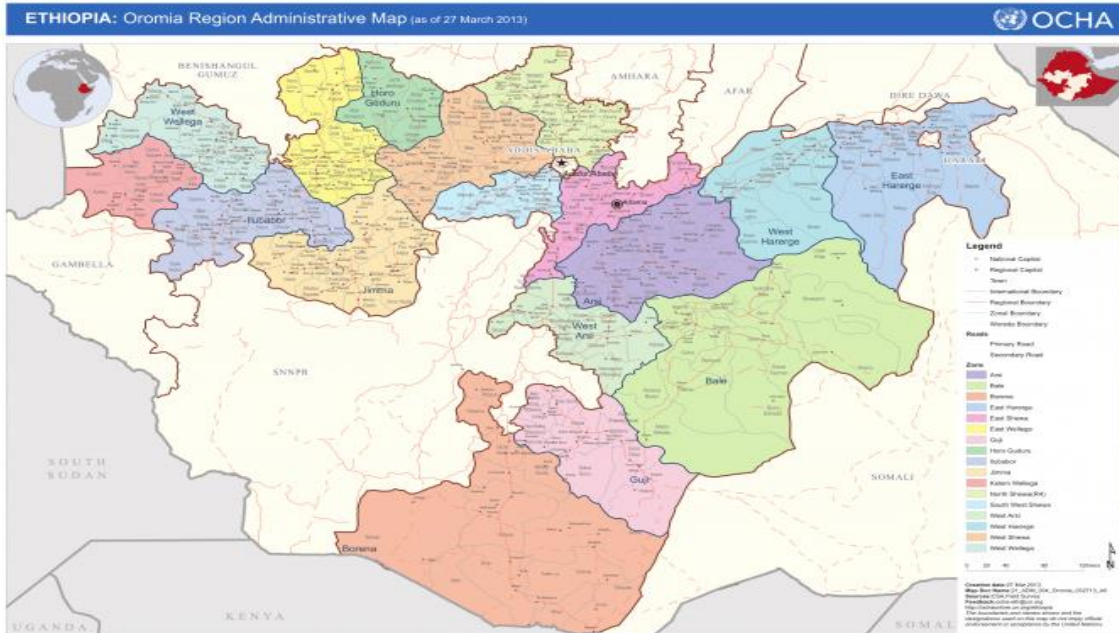
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Appendix A.

Ethiopia-Oromia Region Administrative Map (as of 27 March 2013)



These images were retrieved from:
https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/21_ADM_004_Oromiya_032713_A0.pdf

Appendix B.

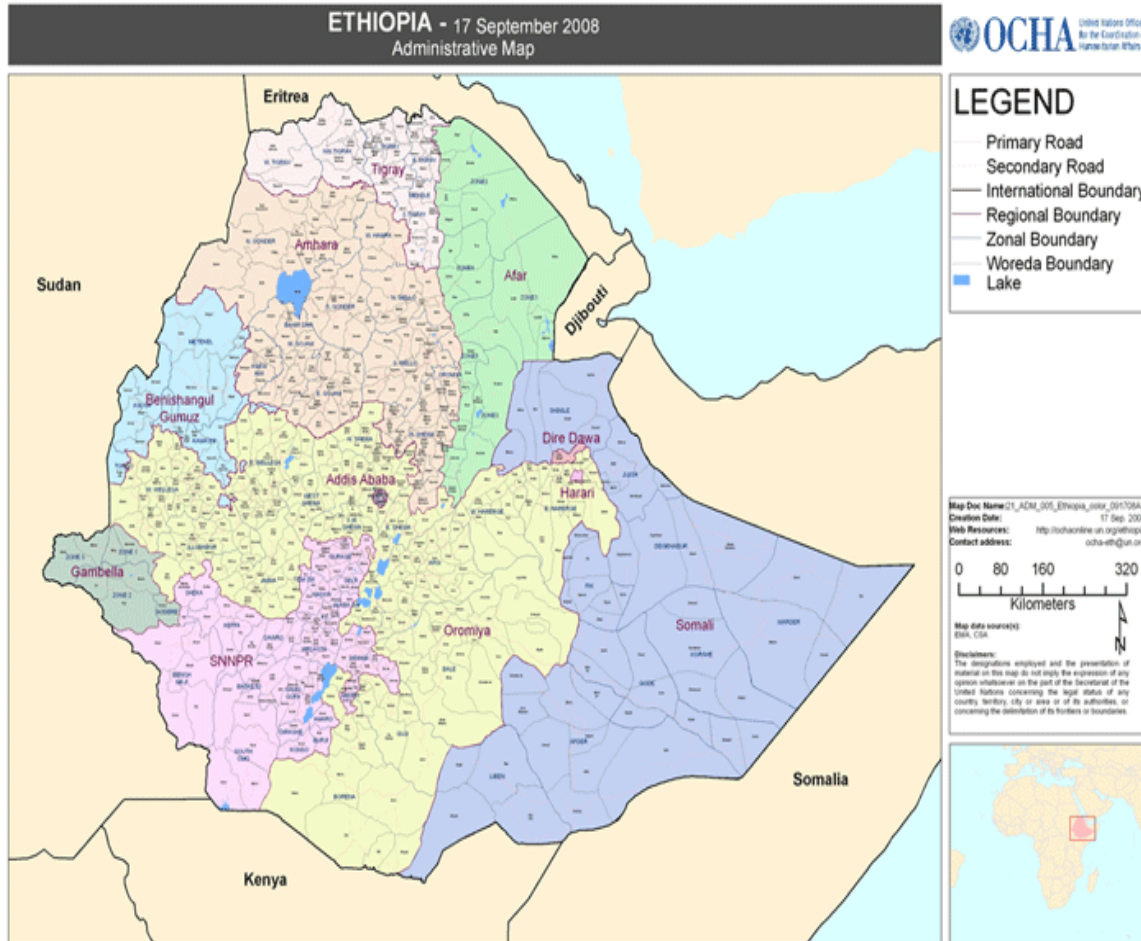
Ethiopia's Ethnic Regions



This image was retrieved from:
<http://springtimeofnations.blogspot.ca/2012/01/separatists-in-ethiopia-make-peace.html>

Appendix C.

Administrative Regions and Zones of Ethiopia



This image was retrieved from:
<http://www.idp-uk.org/Resources/Maps/Maps.htm>

Appendix D.

Ethics Approval Letter



Minimal Risk Approval – Delegated

Study Number: 2016s0158
Study Title: The Well-being of Oromo People

Approval Date: 2016 April 12
Principal Investigator: Yousuf, Biftu
SFU Position: Faculty

Expiry Date: 2017 April 12
Supervisor: Palys, Ted
Faculty/Department: Criminology

SFU Collaborator: n/a
External Collaborator: n/a
Research Personnel: n/a
Project Leader: n/a

Funding Source: n/a
Funding Title: n/a

Document(s) Approved in this Letter:

- Study Details, version 2, dated 2016 April 6
- Participant Information Sheet (Interviews), version 2, dated 2016 April 7
- Participant Information Sheet (Observations), version 2, dated 2016 April 7
- Interview Questions, version 1, dated 2016 April 7

The application for ethical review and the document(s) listed above have been reviewed and the procedures were found to be acceptable on ethical grounds for research involving human participants.

The approval for this Study expires on the **Expiry Date**. **An annual renewal form must be completed every year prior to the Expiry Date. Failure to submit an annual renewal form will lead to your study being suspended and potentially terminated.** The Board reviews and may amend decisions or subsequent amendments made independently by the authorized delegated reviewer at its regular monthly meeting.

This letter is your official ethics approval documentation for this project. Please keep this document for reference purposes.

This study has been approved by an authorized delegated reviewer.

Appendix E.

A Blank Copy of the Recruitment Email

Subject Line: Information about a Research Opportunity concerning the Well-being of Oromo People

My name is Biftu Yousuf and I am a Master's student at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver BC. I am looking to recruit participants for a research study that I am conducting about the well-being of Oromo people living in diasporic communities across Canada. You are receiving this email because you are affiliated with _____, and your email address was obtained from the _____ website. Given that your organization provides human-centered support for Oromo asylum seekers and refugees, I am certain that our partnership will further empower the Oromo community residing in British Columbia.

This study seeks to understand how Oromo people living in the diaspora strive to pursue well-being in various facets of their lives. Namely, I am interested in how Oromo people understand, achieve, maintain, and renew well-being (e.g., examining social and cultural factors of personal and/or community well-being). By identifying how Oromo people pursue well-being, my project will offer insights into strategies that can be implemented that continue to strengthen the health of refugee and forcibly displaced populations.

If members of _____ take part in this study, they would be required to participate in a one-on-one face-to-face interviews, with me, that could last roughly two to three hours. Alternatively, I am also interested in participating and observing select social events geared to Oromo community members (e.g., cultural gatherings, ceremonies, civic meetings, picnics). It is feasible for me to attend upcoming events and engage in dialogues with many people.

To be able to participate in this study, prospective participants would have to be at least 18 years of age and self-identify as Oromo. If your organization is interested in participating and/or facilitating my recruitment process or has any questions about the study, please email me at _____. I can also be reached on my mobile at _____.

Please note that this study has been approved by an authorized delegated reviewer from the Office of Research Ethics at Simon Fraser University, Vancouver BC.

I look forward to hearing back from you.

Sincerely,

Biftu Yousuf