



Yeab Kebede

Major:
Art – Digital Media

Mentor:
Dr. Frank Ortega

*Beyond My Name: Ethiopians and
Ethiopian Americans Confronting
Identity, Language, Culture, and
Education*

Biography

Yeab Kebede is a digital media artist with a focus on research and art as a tool of storytelling, documentary filmmaking, and experimental video production. Yeab is originally from Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and currently resides in San José, CA. With substantial experience working with departments, faculty, and staff at San José State University developing visual content, Kebede strives to maintain her playful, bold, and intricate style while promoting storytelling, individuality, and culture through her work with a focus on research. In her recent work, “Black Spartans (1907 – 1948),” Kebede featured an exhibition that showcased a series of nineteen portraits that represented an “ongoing research conducted by San José State University’s Special Collection and Archives identifying documentation of Black experiences throughout San Jose State University history” (SJSU News Center).

Additionally, Kebede is a Graphic Designer for the MOSAIC Cross Cultural Center, a center that is dedicated to advocating for social justice issues. Furthermore, Kebede serves as an Administrative Coordinator for the Greene Scholars Program, a non-profit organization that focuses on helping youth of African ancestry in San Francisco Bay Area communities successfully complete their higher education in science, technology, engineering and/or math (STEM). Kebede plans to pursue her graduate studies to continue conducting research on how to come about real equity within education and how art and research can have a significant impact in achieving equity. She plans to one day open up her own not-for-profit school in Ethiopia that will encourage youth to immerse themselves in STEM and art.

Kebede’s research interests include equity in education, racial injustice, multicultural experiences, Digital Humanities, African Philosophy, Emerging Technologies Within Art, and Africana and African Diaspora Studies.

Beyond My Name: Ethiopians and Ethiopian Americans Confronting Identity, Language, Culture, and Education

Abstract

This research project explores the cultural and educational paradigms present in both Ethiopian and American social systems. Ongoing ethnic tensions in Ethiopia have contributed to political instability and social upheaval resulting in shifts in identity formation and language usage in the United States. The central research question focuses on how Ethiopian Americans maintain their cultural practices in relation to American constructs of Blackness. 60 qualitative survey responses were gathered to examine the complexities of identity, language, and education within the Ethiopian diaspora. This demographic is under researched and requires additional inquiry and analysis to further contribute to the field of Africana/Black studies.

Research Plan

○ *What is the framework of this research?*

There are 4 steps to this research. The first step was recognizing the paradigms that exist within the Ethiopian diaspora community and the American way of life. The second step to this research is understanding that there is a lack of existing research that addresses this community which was addressed by collecting 60 qualitative responses that examine the complexities of identity, language, and education within the Ethiopian diaspora. Following that, the third step will be analyzing the collected data through a series of theories and models. The fourth step will be organizing and authoring a research paper that presents the findings.

○ *What does this research address?*

This research is relevant because the Ethiopian culture and community is extremely under researched. It addresses the lack of understanding of the Ethiopian cultural, social, and political paradigms. There is a great deal of history and relevant phenomena that have occurred within the last 50 or more years that have shaped the country and its people. In recent years, there have been unpleasant incidents where ethnicities in and out of Ethiopia have engaged in quarrels that have led to tension and violence – which paves way to this research – how do the current (or past) cultural, social, political paradigms cause these upheavals, how are they an outcome of the antagonism that the people have faced and continue to face, and why is this woven in the social fabric of Ethiopians and Ethiopian-Americans?

○ *How is this research achieved?*

Because of the lack of research on Ethiopian and/or Ethiopian-American culture and communities, there are a lot of elements in the culture and characteristics of the people that are overlooked or misunderstood. This research attempts to fill in the gap by directly surveying Ethiopian and Ethiopian-American diasporas found across the United States by asking

socially and culturally relevant open-ended questions (offered in English as well as Amharic) that addresses the personal experiences of each individual via Qualtrics, a web-based survey software. The list of questions can be found at the end of this document.

○ *What is the target demographic?*

This research targets the Ethiopian and Ethiopian American population residing in the United States (“Diasporas”).

List of survey questions

Section I

1. What is your age?

AT: ዕድሜዎ ስንት ነው?

2. Please select your sex

AT: እባክዎን ጾታዎን ይምረጡ

-Female

AT: ሴት

-Male

AT: ወንድ

3. What city do you currently live in?

AT: የት ከተማ ነው የሚኖሩት?

4. Where were you born?

AT: የት ነው የተወለዱት?

5. If you were born in Ethiopia, please state how old you were when you left

AT: የተወለዱት ኢትዮጵያ ውስጥ ከሆኑ ፣ እባክዎ ከሀገር ሲወጡ ስንት ዓመት እንደነበሩ ይግለጹ

6. If you were born outside of Ethiopia or the U.S., please state how old you were when you left

AT: ከኢትዮጵያ ወይም ከአሜሪካ ውጭ ከተወለዱ ፣ እባክዎ ከሀገር ሲወጡ ስንት ዓመት እንደነበሩ ይግለጹ

Section II

7. How would you describe Ethiopian-American culture compared to Ethiopian culture?

AT: ከኢትዮጵያ ባህል ጋር ሲወዳደር የኢትዮ-አሜሪካን ባህል እንዴት ይገልጹታል?

8. What are some specific ancestral traditions that you and your family members practice in the United States?

AT: በአሜሪካ ውስጥ እርስዎ እና የቤተሰብ አባልዎ ከትውልድ ሀገርዎ የሚከተሏቸው የተወሰኑ ባህሎች እና ወጎች ምንድናቸው?

9. As you reflect on your personal experiences, what is something that you miss from your childhood? Please provide a detailed example.

AT: ስለግል ሕይወትዎ ሲያስቡ ከልጅነት ጊዜዎ የሚናፍቁት ነገር ምንድነው? እባክዎን ዝርዝር ምሳሌ ያቅርቡ ::

10. A. Do you think that there is a heavy emphasis on adopting “Western” values within Ethiopian communities? Please explain your response.

AT: በኢትዮጵያ ውስጥ “የምዕራባውያን” እሴቶችን ለመቀበል ከፍተኛ ትኩረት የተሰጠው ይመስልዎታል? እባክዎን መልስዎን ያብራሩ ::

10 B. What other Western traditions have influenced your life?

AT: በሕይወትዎ ላይ ተጽዕኖ ያሳደሩ ሌሎች የምዕራባውያን (Western) ወጎች አሉ?

11. Some Ethiopian-Americans have discussed situations where people mispronounced/ misspelled/ misunderstood their name(s), have you ever experienced a similar situation?

AT: አንዳንድ ኢትዮ-አሜሪካውያን ሰዎች ስማቸውን በተሳሳተ መንገድ ወይም በተሳሳተ ፊደል ሚረዱባቸው ሁኔታዎች ላይ ተወያይተዋል፣ እንደዚህ ዓይነት ተመሳሳይ ሁኔታ አጋጥሞዎት ያውቃል?

-Yes

AT: አዎ

-No

AT: አይ

-Maybe

AT: ምን አልባት

12. If you answered yes (or maybe), did that make you feel out of place and/or excluded? Please explain.

AT: ያ እርስዎን የመገለል ስሜት እንዲሰማዎት እድርጓል?

13. Name some strategies that you or your family/friends have utilized to accommodate people around you. How about instances where you or your family/friends have confronted or challenged people around you? (in terms of maintaining your ethnic identity). For example; I always challenge those around me by correcting them when they mispronounce my name.

AT: እርስዎ ወይም ቤተሰብዎ በአካባቢዎ ያሉ ሰዎችን ለማስተናገድ ወይም ለመፈተን የተጠቀሙባቸው አንዳንድ ስልቶች ምንድናቸው? (ጎሳዊ ማንነትዎን ከመጠበቅ አንፃር) :: ለምሳሌ ፣ በዙሪያዬ ያሉ ሰዎች ስሜን በተሳሳተ መንገድ ሲናገሩ በማረም ሁሌም እገዳደራቸዋለሁ ::

14. Ethiopians are known for their hospitality all over the world. For example; one can never leave an Ethiopian’s house without eating or having coffee/tea - the host would be greatly displeased if they did. Despite this social norm, ethnic stereotypes have been widely practiced within recent years which has led people to disassociate themselves from those outside of their own ethnic group. What are some things we can do to help break those barriers?

AT: ኢትዮጵያውያን በመላው ዓለም በመስተንግዶ የሚታወቁ ናቸው :: ለምሳሌ ፣ አንድ ሰው ምግብ ሳይበላ ወይም ቡና / ሻይ ሳይጠጥ ከኢትዮጵያዊ ቤት መውጣት አልተለመደም - ሳይበሉ ከወጡ አስተናጋጁ በጣም ቅር ይላቸዋል:: ምንም እንኳን ይህ ማህበራዊ ደንብ ቢኖርም ፣ ነገር ግን ከቅርብ ዓመታት ጀምሮ የተከፋፈለ የጎሳ አመለካከት ተስፋፍቶታል :: ሰዎች ከራሳቸው ብሄረሰብ ውጭ ካሉ ሰዎች ጋር እንዲለዩ ተደርጓል:: እነዚያን መሰናክሎች ለማፍረስ ምን ማድረግ እንችላለን?

Section III

Prompt

The English language has been (and is being) used in schools within Ethiopia (as well as other African countries) as the major means/language in which curriculum is taught in primary and secondary school (and beyond). For example, I went to Macmillan Academy in Ethiopia until my sophomore year of high school. At that school, it was expected of us to speak only English when addressing our teachers, peers, and classmates. After reading this prompt, please answer the following three questions:

AT: የእንግሊዝኛ ቋንቋ ኢትዮጵያ ውስጥ ባሉ ት / ቤቶች (እንዲሁም በሌሎች የአፍሪካ ሀገሮች) በአንደኛ እና በሁለተኛ ደረጃ ትምህርት ቤት ውስጥም (ሆነ ከዚያ በላይ) ሥርዓተ-ትምህርት የሚሰጥበት ዋና ቋንቋ ሆኖ አገልግሏል ። ለምሳሌ፣ እኔ እስከ 10 ኛ ክፍል ድረስ ማክሚላን አካዳሚ ነው የተማርኩት ። በዚያ ትምህርት ቤት ከአስተማሪዎቻችን ፣ ከእኩዮቻቸው እና ከክፍል ዳደሮቻችን ጋር ንግግር ስናደርግ እንግሊዝኛ እንድንነጋገር ይጠበቅ ነበር ። ይህንን ካነበቡ በኋላ እባክዎ የሚከተሉትን ሰስት ጥያቄዎች ይመልሱ:-

15. How many languages do you speak? Please specify what those languages are.

AT: ስንት ቋንቋዎች ይናገራሉ? እባክዎ እነዚህ ቋንቋዎች ምን እንደሆኑ ይግለጹ ።

16. Have you or a family member/loved one had similar experiences [to the prompt above] while in Ethiopia?

AT: እርስዎ ፣ የቅርብ ቤተሰቦችዎ ወይም ዳደሮችዎ ኢትዮጵያ እያሉ በተማሩበት ትምህርት ቤት ከላይ ካለው ጽሕፈት ጋር ተመሳሳይ የሆነ መስፈርት አጋጥሙዎቹ ያቃል?

17. Should curriculum be taught in the English language (in Ethiopia)?

AT: ሥርዓተ-ትምህርት በእንግሊዝኛ መሰጠት አለበት ወይ (ኢትዮጵያ ውስጥ)?

-Yes

AT: አዎ

-No

AT: አይ

-Maybe

AT: ምን አልባት

18. Do you think that Ethiopia is in jeopardy of losing and/or experiencing a watered-down version of its culture and traditions? Please explain your answer.

AT: ኢትዮጵያ ባህሎቿን ማጣት አይጋ ላይ ናት ብለው ያስባሉ?
እባክዎን መልስዎን ያብራሩ ::