The cultural situation in socialist Ethiopia

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The purpose of this series is to show how cultural policies are planned and implemented in various Member States.

As cultures differ, so does the approach to them. It is for each Member State to determine its cultural policy and methods according to its own conception of culture, its socio-economic system, political ideology and technical development. However, the methods of cultural policy (like those of general development policy) have certain common problems; these are largely institutional, administrative and financial in nature, and the need has increasingly been stressed for exchanging experiences and information about them. This series, each issue of which follows as far as possible a similar pattern so as to make comparison easier, is mainly concerned with these technical aspects of cultural policy.

In general, the studies deal with the principles and methods of cultural policy, the evaluation of cultural needs, administrative structures and management, planning and financing, the organization of resources, legislation, budgeting, public and private institutions, cultural content in education, cultural autonomy and decentralization, the training of personnel, institutional infrastructures for meeting specific cultural needs, the safeguarding of the cultural heritage, institutions for the dissemination of the arts, international cultural co-operation and other related subjects.

The studies, which cover countries belonging to differing social and economic systems, geographical areas and levels of development, present, therefore, a wide variety of approaches and methods in cultural policy. Taken as a whole, they can provide guidelines to countries that have yet to establish cultural policies, while all countries, especially those seeking new formulations of such policies, can profit by the experience already gained.

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The author is responsible for the choice and the presentation of the facts contained in this book and for the opinions expressed therein, which are not necessarily those of Unesco and do not commit the Organization.
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I Ethiopia before and after the Revolution of 1974
History of the peoples of Ethiopia—up to the revolution

Ethiopia has been called a ‘museum of peoples’ because of its cultural diversity. Linguistically, the people are divided into four main groups: Semitic (including the Amhara, Tigre, Guraghe and Adere); the Kushitic (including the Oromo, Somali, Afar, Agaw and Beja); the Omotic (including the Ghimira, Kaffa and Welaita) and, finally, the Nilo-Saharan (including the Anuak, Gumuz and Baria).

As the mode of production and the level of development reached by the above Ethiopian nationalities varied, so also to a great extent did their cultural development. The highest level of economic and technological development has been reached in the areas adjacent to the Red Sea coast which have been exposed, since time immemorial, to external contacts and influence (Greek, Roman, Arabian, etc.). It was also in this region that farming with the plough and oxen was first introduced some thousand years ago. When we come to the Semitic Kingdom of Axum, we find a system that may be qualified as semi-slave, semi-feudal. The Axumites had skilled craftsmen in leather work, potters, iron, horn, stone and wood workers. The use of the plough with a pair of oxen was quite common during the Axumite period. Axumite obelisks and stelae still stand as a witness of the prominence of Axum among world civilizations. It was also through Axum that Orthodox Christianity was introduced into Ethiopia in the fourth century. It soon became a state religion, and together with the Amharic language, was an important arm in the expansion and administration of the Axumite and succeeding feudal kingdoms of Ethiopia until modern times. It is therefore easy to understand the predominance of Christian Orthodox culture expressed in the Amharic language throughout the centuries, and especially from the thirteenth century onward when, with the decline of Axum and the shift of the capital southwards, Amharic now implanted in a predominantly Agaw region, became the ‘language of the King’, replacing the ‘Geez’ language, which from this time onward served as the language of the Orthodox Church. The biggest challenge to
Axumite and later Christian expansion was the resistance of the motelami (or king), of the little-known powerful kingdom of Damot, who governed, until the latter part of the thirteenth century, a continuously expanding area south of the Blue Nile.

Although the extent of the Axumite Empire is not clearly known, there are indicators to show that Axumite influence extended to Sasso (probably the gold region of Fazogli in present-day Wellega) in the west, to Shoa and further south, and to Barbaria or Somaliland in the south-east, as well as the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden coast. The Semitic peoples of Harar and Guraghe are believed by some writers to be the descendants of Axumite settlers.

Following the rise of Islam on the other side of the Red Sea coast, in Arabia, in the seventh century, the religion propagated by Muhammad quickly reached the Ethiopian coast, and then penetrated into the interior of eastern Ethiopia. Indeed, by the thirteenth century, a number of powerful Muslim Sultanates (Ifat, Hadya, Dawaro, Bali, etc.) were established in southern Ethiopia, with Zeila and Harar acting as the principal centres for the expansion of Islam in the interior. All these had, one after another, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, come under the rule of the highland Christian emperor through peaceful political manoeuvres and intermarriage as well as through military campaigns. In this same period, the Ethiopian Empire included such regions as Welaita (Welamo), Kaffa, Janjero, and may have extended as far south as Gamu Gofa. In the sixteenth century, however, Mohamed Gragn (The Left-Handed) of the Harar areas, waged a long and bloody war as General of the Muslim army against the highland Christian ruling class, but his army was defeated after successive crushing victories over the Christian army. From this time onward (second half of the sixteenth century) Christianity predominated again, although this did not completely stop religious wars that continued to occur from time to time, on a much smaller scale. However, Islam still continued to occupy a very dominant religious position in Ethiopia accounting, according to some writers, for one-third of the total population. It is therefore not difficult to imagine the place of Muslim culture (religious literature, customs and traditions, education, etc.) in the overall cultural image of Ethiopia.

From about the seventeenth century onward, the reconquest and further expansion in the south of the Christian empire (which now had its capital at Gondar) was undertaken by the Christian Kingdom of Shoa, which, although originally subject to Gondar, grew fast in wealth and strength, and finally in the nineteenth century became an independent kingdom. The Kingdom of Shoa, which originated in the Menz area, first reconquered the surrounding regions occupied by the Oromos, who had migrated there en masse (at the same time as the Somali and Afar migration) beginning in the sixteenth century. The disunited Oromos, who originally followed a popular democratic system of government called 'Gada', had
by the nineteenth century established a number of semi-slave and semi-feudal kingdoms. These all gradually became dependent on the King of Shoa, through armed force or through political manoeuvres and assimilation. Towards the end of the nineteenth century, the Kingdom of Shoa had become so rich and powerful that Menelik, the king, was able to become emperor of Ethiopia (1889), and to move the capital of the empire to Addis Ababa. Menelik, whose ambitions were to reconquer the ancient limits of Ethiopia, expanded his realm to include other kingdoms (Kaffa, Welaita, etc.) as well as outlying people (such as the Nilo-Saharan) until by the end of the nineteenth century, Ethiopia, surrounded by European imperialist powers, finally assumed its present form.

As one can see from the above, the history of Ethiopia has been one of dynamic ‘push and pull’ among peoples of various nationalities and constant linguistic, cultural and religious interaction. Although the dominant factor in this process of assimilation appeared to come from the feudal ruling class of the highland Christian population, movement continued for several centuries in all directions and was felt mostly from the sixteenth century with the huge population migration of the Oromo-Somali-Afar north and westwards, engulfing or pushing back peoples of various nationalities, and creating in the process a relationship of harmony (or at times, of contradiction and subordination).

The force of this movement and assimilation has been so profound that identification of nationalities has become practically impossible in some regions of the country. Thus, it has been recently stated in a scientific work that two-thirds of the population of Arsi (commonly accepted as an Oromo region) are indeed Hadya and not Oromo, according to Braukamper (1979). Oromo influence is indeed felt not only among the Semitic, Omotic and Kushitic peoples who are mainly of southern Ethiopia, but goes as far as the Nilo-Saharan of the western border, in language, religion and everyday life. This constant movement and intermingling of the peoples of Ethiopia has in turn created dynamic cultural, linguistic and religious assimilation throughout the ages. Thus the Amharic language itself appears to have originally been a pidgin language that developed as a ‘contact vernacular’ of peoples from different language regions and with a Kushitic Agaw substratum. It is seen to manifest characteristics of practically all the major language groups of the peoples of Ethiopia, according to Bender (1976). In the field of religion, we find in Ethiopia the three major religions—Christianity, Islam and Judaism (among the Falashas, or the Black Jews, of Ethiopia)—but as a result of constant contact and interaction, the three religions have influenced each other, as well as taken considerable elements from the local pagan traditional religions. There was, therefore, in Ethiopia a constant movement towards physical, cultural, linguistic and religious unity, i.e. towards unity in diversity. In spite of this, however, we still find different cultural developments in Ethiopia among the northern Semitic speakers, or the southern and eastern
Kushitic, the Omotic or the Nilo-Saharan. Depending on the mode of production, and especially the instruments of production and dependence on nature, the cultural development varies from a quasi-primitive magic-bound superstructure in some outlying regions, to modern cultural sophistication in urban centres.

Ethiopia, because of its strategic geographical location, bounded by the Nile on the west and the Red Sea on the east, and its agricultural and climatic attributes, has attracted imperialist powers throughout history. In the sixteenth century, historical records relate the struggle between the Portuguese and the Ottoman Empire for the conquest of Ethiopia. While the Portuguese penetrated Ethiopia as far as the Imperial Court through the Jesuit missionaries, the Muslim Turks were chiefly limited to the coast (mainly the port of Massawa and the areas adjacent to it). To this day, Portuguese and Turkish material and spiritual culture can be detected, and more profound studies in the areas that were directly or indirectly under their influence may be more revealing. More recently, during the whole of the nineteenth century, the British, French and Italians were in one way or another struggling for the conquest of Ethiopia. Finally, the British occupied Somaliland, the French occupied Djibouti and the Italians carved out the northern part of Ethiopia under the name of Eritrea. From Eritrea, Italy intended to colonize the whole of Ethiopia and the result was the battle of Adowa in 1896 where Ethiopia gained a crashing African victory over European imperialism.

One major result of contact between Ethiopia and the above imperialist powers was the introduction of commercial capitalism in Ethiopia and the gradual transformation from a feudal subsistence economy to a monetized transaction system. Western entrepreneurs (supported by a nascent local bureaucratic capitalist class) began to penetrate and compete for the control of the import and export market of Ethiopia as well as for the exploitation of mines and agricultural cash commodities. The biggest factor in the transformation of Ethiopian economic and cultural life was the construction of the Franco-Ethiopian Djibouti-Addis Ababa railway at the beginning of the twentieth century. The construction of modern roads for the first motor-cars was under way. A modern postal and telecommunications system was also developed, joining Addis Ababa with the neighbouring imperialist powers: the United Kingdom in the Sudan and Kenya, France in Djibouti, and Italy in Eritrea. Such construction activities facilitated the penetration of an import-export trade, created the first wage-earning proletariat out of the feudal peasantry and brought about a revolution in their way of thinking. In royal palaces and aristocratic residences, such modern innovations as electricity and a piped water system were introduced and shook the superstitious feudal mentality. The import-export trade both by animal transport and by rail developed at a very high rate in the first two decades of the twentieth century. Small industries were developing and pushing aside traditional artisans. Urban
centres were springing up, and already signs of a class struggle were appearing. A modern health system and education had begun to replace traditional magic medicine and the Orthodox Church or Koranic schools. In the field of administration and government, the old feudal decentralized structure was giving way to a centralized government system with a central fiscal system, a state revenue, a standing army, and a salaried civil service. In the field of culture, a new capitalist, money-oriented value system was taking the place of the old feudal values based on charity, blood, high birth, bravery, etc. Modern education was now considered more valuable than military skill. Contacts, relations, marriage, etc., were now more and more influenced by finance as proverbs, songs and written literature clearly show. The development of towns gave rise to the development of Western urban habits among the town population. Another consequence of contact with European powers in the neighbourhood was the introduction of foreign languages, mainly French and English, in the educational and administrative system of Ethiopia. For a long time, until the Second World War, French was the most important international language in Ethiopia, and was commonly used at the court and in administration. However, with the Fascist Italian occupation of Ethiopia (1935-41), the French language ceded its position to Italian, and after the war, because of the military position of the United Kingdom in Ethiopia (1941-51), and because of American influence since then, English became the international language of education and administration.

This slow and gradual economic, political and cultural transformation of the feudal mode of production by the penetration of commercial capitalism and small-scale industries created the feudal-bourgeois feudal-capitalist economy over which was superimposed a modern capitalist superstructure affecting chiefly the urban centres, while the infrastructure as well as the corresponding cultural superstructure of rural Ethiopia remained largely unaffected.

Such was the economic, political and cultural image of Ethiopia until the Revolution of 1974. Agriculture being the mainstay of the country, the major problem was the appropriation of large tracts of land by a handful of the feudal-bourgeois class holding the mass of impoverished peasantry as tenants (tisega). These peasants served parasitic absentee landlords who led ‘la dolce vita’ in urban centres. The tenants, whose life was all the time deteriorating, had no security of tenure and were at the mercy of the landlord. The implement of production in agriculture was still, after several hundred years, a plough drawn by a pair of oxen. In some places, there were even worse methods of farming, such as the use of the digging stick. Production, therefore, remained stagnant, unable to meet the demand of a rising population. The result was that the mass of the oppressed peasantry left rural Ethiopia for urban centres, in search of a better life. This in turn created in the major cities and towns the well-known problems of unemployment, beggary, crime and prostitution. Although
modern industries started to appear at the beginning of the twentieth century, development in this sector has been very slow. The few industries that were in operation were largely owned by foreign entrepreneurs, often in collaboration with local bureaucratic capitalists. The number of industrial workers was consequently estimated never to have gone beyond 60,000. The working conditions (salary, sanitary conditions, insurance, etc.) of the proletariat were usually very bad, and the struggle of the workers to establish independent unions and fight for their rights was stifled by the oppressive machinery of the regime in complicity with foreign imperialism. National trading activity was very small, and again largely dominated by foreign business men, particularly in the import-export trade. While exports depended to a large extent on one commodity (coffee, which was exported mainly to the United States thus creating undesirable economic and political dependence), imports focused largely on luxury goods for the pseudo-bourgeois class at the expense of the most urgently needed agricultural and industrial equipment.

The end result was that Ethiopia was numbered among the twenty-five least-developed countries of the world. It was the rural masses (with no education, poor housing, health conditions, etc.) who were particularly affected by this deplorable state of affairs. The low, stagnant income of the urban workers and the petit-bourgeois class was not able to meet the inflationary price of food items, clothing, housing, etc., and dissatisfaction was very high among this sector of the population. However, the contradiction was not only of a class nature. The regime was totally negligent, and at times spiteful, to the many nationalities that made up Ethiopia. Their languages, their cultures and religions had been disregarded, and Amharic served as the only national language of administration, education, justice, etc., while Coptic Orthodox Christianity was the state-subsidized religion. In spite of the dictum ‘Religion is a private affair, the nation is our common concern’ often repeated by the government, other religions were given little or no significance, and Muslims, although totalling about one-third of the population, lived in oblivion. All this had worsened the contradictions among the nationalities of Ethiopia.

The oppressive and reactionary nature of the regime was blatant; no political organizations or parties were tolerated, and political opposition in any form was most harshly suppressed. The mass media (press, radio, etc.) were all monopolized by the government and there was no platform for alternative views. The constitution, which was promulgated in 1931 and revised in 1935, recognized the divine nature of the monarch and confirmed his absolute and unquestionable authority. The so-called parliament that was established by the same constitution was not a representative institution but a rubber stamp of the regime. This explains the justice of the placard ‘House to Let’ attached to the gate of the parliament building in the early days of the Revolution of 1974. However, this does not mean that there were no opposition movements. There was, among others, the
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staunch and ever-maturing student political opposition from the 1960s onward, which continued until the revolution in spite of the severe and inhuman methods of suppression. In the same way, among the several attempts to overthrow that government, mention should be made of the coup d’état of 1960 organized by the brothers Germame and Mengistu Newaye. It was this opposition, and the subsequent development of the political consciousness of the masses, coupled with the unbearable conditions that led to the Revolution of 1974. The pretexts that triggered off the revolution were the rise in prices (especially in the price of petrol which exasperated mainly the urban petit-bourgeois class), and more particularly the death of more than 100,000 Ethiopians as a result of the famine in the administrative region of Wollo. They were neglected completely by the regime, which tried to hide the whole affair from national and international public opinion.
The Ethiopian Revolution of 1974

Following the popular revolutionary outburst of February 1974 against the archaic and oppressive feudal monarchy, the liberation was not only political and economic but also cultural. The police state and the most suffocating censorship practised by the regime affected all branches of culture: literature, theatre, painting, music, the media, etc., in a leviathan manner, so that while all progressist ideas remained buried and progressist language stifled, superstition and witchcraft flourished. Culture was thus used as an instrument for the glorification and perpetuation of the regime.

Thus, the popular uprising of February 1974 was a liberation from this suffocating anti-progressist culture, which the progressist forces, and especially the student body, had for years been planning underground or semi-publicly. This liberation manifested itself in revolutionary marching songs, poetry, articles in the press, plays, etc., exposing the feudal oppression, corruption and crimes. The flagrant inhumanity committed by the feudal regime—the utter indifference to the death of more than 100,000 Ethiopians who perished as a result of the famine in the drought-stricken areas, and were completely left alone—was vividly demonstrated in plays, poems and revolutionary songs. The change in the press was spectacular. For the news media during the former regime, words like ‘coup d’état’, ‘labour strike’, ‘political assassination’ were taboo and journalists were not allowed to write about unemployment, student unrest, rises in the cost of living, religious and tribal inequality, land reform, increases in taxation, proliferation of public bars, or ‘tej bet’, proliferation of prostitution, southern Sudan, Eritrea, mines (specially the gold mines that belonged to the emperor), proliferation of gambling machines, the Orthodox Church, the army, the Addis Ababa bus transport monopoly

(which belonged to the royal family and the feudal oligarchy, etc.). After the popular uprising of February 1974, all these themes were in the press, the theatres, music and paintings.

It is well known that the feudal regime permitted no political parties. As a result, the country had no political bodies to shape the popular uprising of February 1974. This vacuum was filled by the Military Derg, a council composed of progressist individuals elected by the various sections of the army; the Derg eventually took power and gradually put an end to the feudal regime.

As culture is based on the political and economic structure of a society, let us first look at the revolutionary economic and political transformation of the country on which the cultural revolution was based. On Hamle 1, 1966 (8 July 1974), the policy of Ethiopia Tikdem (Ethiopia First) in thirteen points was declared. The main aspects of this policy were: the establishment of a new constitution, improvement of the labour law, elimination of anti-progressist traditions and cultural elements, encouragement of contributions for famine-stricken areas, encouragement of tourism, encouragement of foreign aid, and continuation of the revolution without bloodshed.

It is clear from the above that the earliest policy of 'Ethiopia First' had no real ideological economic or political grounds. In any case, it was not based on scientific socialism. Indeed, the first two points of this policy declaration stated that the Derg was aiming at something resembling a constitutional monarchy with a nominal emperor at the head. Hence, the works of art and literature (i.e. culture) in this period were as vague as the political directives. They were progressist in the sense that they were critical of the emperor's absolute and divine power, and critical of the power and wealth of the royal family and the feudal aristocracy, but that was all. Marxist revolutionary literature had started to appear but it did not represent the essential development of this period.

The emperor was deposed on 12 September 1974 and the Provisional Military Administrative Council, or the Derg, as a body, assumed the functions of head of state. On 20 December 1974, Ethiopian socialism was proclaimed. It was gradually made clear that Ethiopian socialism was nothing but scientific socialism.

After the proclamation of Ethiopian socialism the following decisions were taken:

The National Work Campaign for Development Through Co-operation was launched throughout the country (21 December 1974). This campaign in which some 60,000 university and high-school students, as well as teachers, participated, was intended to contribute to the economic, agricultural, transport, sanitary, educational and cultural development of Ethiopia's rural population of more than 90 per cent. This campaign was launched mainly to put into effect the Rural Land Proclamation.
More than a hundred industrial and commercial companies (3 January 1975) as well as financial institutions (January 1975) and insurance companies were nationalized. A new industrial workers’ proclamation was passed (6 December 1975). According to this, workers were to form unions first by factory, then by trade, and finally by the Ethiopian workers’ Trade Union Confederation.

On 4 March 1975, all rural land was nationalized and became the collective property of the Ethiopian people, thus bringing an end to the feudal system of land tenure and to the possession of extensive tracts of land by the feudal oligarchy, mainly in the south. Although some feudal elements were still in existence in the north, there was on the whole little tenancy farming, and following the ‘rest’ system of ‘descent-group’ holdings the peasant was master of his small share of farm land. By the proclamation nationalizing rural lands, each farming family was allotted a maximum of ten hectares. The principal organizations created for the proper execution of the proclamation were peasant associations established within a minimum area of 800 hectares. The peasant associations were, among other tasks, responsible for the distribution of land, for the creation of marketing and credit co-operatives, for the establishment (with governmental co-operation) of schools, clinics and similar institutions. The peasant associations in woredas (subdistricts) formed a woreda peasant association; and a delegation made up of each woreda association formed an awraja (district) peasant association.

Following the proclamation of 13 December 1975 for strengthening farmers’ associations, the association was empowered to defend the economic and political rights of the peasant class, to fight against feudalism and imperialism, and to expand among its members the teachings of scientific socialism. Each association had a judicial court, a revolutionary squad and a women’s association. Moreover, revolutionary development committees were established by this proclamation at the woreda, awraja, and provincial level, in which farmers’ associations took part, side by side with government officials and Zemcha representatives. All offices in the farmers’ associations were elective.

On 26 July 1975 a proclamation was passed nationalizing all urban land and extra houses. By this proclamation, every urban dweller was allowed to own only one house in which he had to live. Rent was abolished. The administration of this proclamation was divided between the Urban Dwellers’ Association and the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development. One urban dwellers’ association (qebele) was to be established for every area of 500 families. The association, which had an elected executive committee, was empowered to collect rent of up to 100 birr, and to pay monthly a fixed sum as compensation for nationalized houses in the same category. The co-operative associations of urban dwellers were also entrusted with the task of building, with governmental co-operation, schools, clinics,
roads, etc. Each urban dwellers' association had also a judicial tribunal, with jurisdiction over the qebele for cases relating to urban land and housing. The proclamation also envisaged the establishment of a Higher Co-operative Association of Urban Dwellers, which, among other things, would have a higher judicial tribunal. Furthermore, the proclamation of 9 October 1976 entrusted the qebele with the task of spreading socialism, the organization of women's and other similar associations, the establishment of co-operative shops, and (through its revolutionary squads) the defence of the revolution against reactionary forces. The judicial committee of the qebele was furthermore empowered by this proclamation to examine all civil law cases involving less than $500, and all criminal cases within the circumscription, related to theft, physical violence, insult, etc. It had the power of passing sentences of up to three months' imprisonment or a fine of $300.

By the proclamation of 29 September 1975, private schools were nationalized, and by a further proclamation of 26 September 1976, elementary and high schools were brought under the supervision and control of the peasant associations in rural Ethiopia, and urban dwellers' associations in towns. Education committees, composed of representatives of farmers' and urban dwellers' associations, as well as representative teachers and students, were to run the schools within the jurisdiction of the respective associations in co-operation with the Ministry of Education. Another major decision was the declaration on religious and cultural equality of all the 'nationalities' of Ethiopia. Although Amharic continued to serve as the national language, languages of other nationalities were to be used as far as possible in schools and in literature.

The Ethiopian Orthodox Church, which, hand in hand with the feudal monarchical system had for centuries dominated the Ethiopian cultural scene (education, painting, music, etc.), and which owned extensive tracts of land all over the country as well as urban land and rented buildings, was hard hit by the proclamation nationalizing rural and urban land and extra houses. The Church is now largely reduced to depending on contributions from its adherents.

Public holidays, which are now designated without religious bias, include Orthodox as well as Muslim festivals (proclamation of 21 December 1974).

The religious, linguistic and cultural equality of all the nationalities of Ethiopia was further strengthened by the New Democratic Revolution Programme (NDR). This programme was issued on 20 April 1976. Politically, it was anti-feudal and anti-imperialist, and advocated the joining of all forces holding such views to form a Democratic Popular Front under the leadership of the Working-class Party. Moreover, the programme advocated regional autonomy for all the 'nationalities' of Ethiopia. Economically, the programme stressed that while the people's socialist revolutionary achievements (nationalization of rural and urban land and extra houses, nationalization of industrial, commercial and financial
institutions, etc.) would be protected and advanced, regulated private capital of up to $500,000 would be authorized, in certain specified sectors, to participate in the transformation of the feudal mode of production and the development of the productive forces. Furthermore, the economic policy indicated that development priority will be given to the less-developed regions of Ethiopia. The new democratic culture was based on the above political and economic standpoint. It advocated the abolition of the illiteracy rate of more than 90 per cent in Ethiopia. It defended the religious, linguistic and cultural equality of all the nationalities of Ethiopia and encouraged anti-feudal and anti-imperialist cultural works (literature, art, music, theatre, etc.). The new democratic culture was not therefore a proletarian culture, as some wanted to demonstrate, but a culture of all the progressive and nationalist forces of Ethiopia.

Office for Mass Organization Affairs

The day the NDR programme was issued, a proclamation establishing a provisional Office for Mass Organizational Affairs (OMOA) was passed on 20 April 1975. The task of the Office, which had branches all over the country, was to: spread the teachings of socialism in the different languages of the Ethiopian ‘nationalities’; help in the organization of progressive forces to form parties; promote the formation of a popular front to lead the revolution; run the School for Political Education, which was established by the same proclamation for the propagation of scientific socialism; and prepare the draft bill for democratic rights (freedom of speech, of writing, assembly, demonstration, organization, etc.) and supervise its execution.

Accordingly, OMOA started to function in Addis Ababa with branches all over the country. As of 14 July 1977 the organization was composed of the principal members of the United Ethiopian Marxist-Leninist Organization (Imalidih). One of the major decisions taken in relation to its work of spreading scientific socialism and progressive teachings was to invite workers from all over the country, including industrial workers and public servants, to dedicate ninety minutes, twice a week, on Mondays and Fridays, to political education. Workers, peasants and public servants organized themselves in small discussion groups and received political education through texts prepared and distributed by OMOA.

The structure as well as the objectives of OMOA underwent successive changes in the course of the Ethiopian revolution, until its dissolution, following the creation of the Commission Organizing the Party of the Workers of Ethiopia (COPWE).
The Ethiopian Revolution of 1974

The passage from NDR to COPWE

On the political front, the government had gradually moved, as we have seen earlier, from the policy of 'Ethiopia Tikdem' to scientific socialism, and later NDR was proclaimed as a stage in the achievement of a scientific socialist programme to be carried out by the Working-class Party. However, this party had yet to be formed by genuine and authentic communists, and the problem was to identify those persons who could found it. The provisional government, led by the Derg, had expressed on every occasion its readiness to hand over power to the Working-class Party as soon as it was ready to take over. With this in mind, the government had co-operated, since its inception, with progressive individuals and underground organizations which it tried to unite. In 1977, after long and arduous endeavour, Imalidih was established in order to prepare the ground for the formation of the Working-class Party and to meet the ever-growing threat of internal and external counter-revolutionary forces. However, it was soon discovered that Imalidih, formed by the union of the five prevalent underground organizations, was not genuinely supported by all its members. While some dropped out and joined the opposition (like the All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement—Meison—which lost its supremacy under the balanced development and equal political opportunity that the Derg intended to give to all members of Imalidih), others sabotaged unity from within. Furthermore, instead of strengthening unity, it was found that the selfish competition and drive of the respective underground organizations to increase membership, and obtain a stronger quota in the future Working-class Party, had permitted the infiltration of pseudo-revolutionaries as well as reactionaries and opportunists who had joined the movement either to sabotage the revolution or for personal gain, under the umbrella of a revolutionary movement. It was thus that the three remaining underground organizations finally agreed upon the impossibility of forming the Working-class Party by the union of the underground organizations, and hence Imalidih failed. Instead, revolutionary experience showed that the Working-class Party could only be formed by unity of genuine communists who had proved themselves in action during the years of the revolution and whom the Derg could recruit on their own merit without affiliation to the former underground organizations.

As a result, in December 1979, COPWE was proclaimed, and, to the great jubilation and relief of the Ethiopian masses, the first historic congress of COPWE was held in Addis Ababa, in June 1980, under the chairmanship of Comrade Mengistu Haile Mariam.

Before concluding our discussion of the Ethiopian revolution, mention should be made of the National Revolutionary (Economic and Cultural) Development Campaign proclaimed in February 1979, by which the government aimed to pull Ethiopia out of its backward economic condition as rapidly as possible through a centrally planned economic programme.
This economic development is not geared to serve the advancement of a capitalist system based on profit and exploitation, but a system serving the masses, aiming at the creation of a just and equitable society. The Provisional Government of socialist Ethiopia has been most concerned by the development of a new koulak-type class in the rural areas who aim at profit-making and self-enrichment, at the expense of the majority, through illegal and secret storage of grain and excessive prices. The objective is to eradicate all such tendencies by encouraging, by all possible means, voluntary co-operativization in rural as well as in urban Ethiopia. The directives of 30 June 1979 and 21 July 1979 for the establishment of agricultural producers' co-operatives and handicraft producers' co-operatives, respectively, were formulated to achieve this goal.

However, the revolutionary development in Ethiopia did not have the opportunity to proceed in peace. The government had to fight internal armed opposition and coups d'état from elements of the former feudal-bourgeois class, from right-wing and left-wing dissenters in the Derg, from underground extremist wings that did not accept the Derg, as well as from secessionists of Eritrea financed by imperialism and reactionary foreign regimes. But a more serious threat came from the expansionist government which sent, and is still sending, its regular army into Ethiopia with the avowed intent of territorial aggrandizement. To withstand these internal and external armed threats to the territorial integrity of Ethiopia, the revolutionary government had not only to revolutionize the regular army as regards ideals and arms, but also to establish a people's militia from the oppressed masses who are the primary beneficiaries of the revolution. History will certainly record the assembling of the 300,000 militia men who came from all corners of Ethiopia, belonged to all the nationalities, and were trained at Tatek Tor Sefer (Tatek Military Camp) within a few months. The emergence of some 100,000 of these peasant soldiers, who had absolutely no notion whatsoever of modern military tactics, dress or armaments, as a perfectly trained uniformed people's militia, on 25 June 1977, was a feat that impressed the world at large. Thus organized, the Ethiopian Regular Army and People's Militia was in a position to repulse repeated aggression as well as to contain the secessionist armed revolt in Eritrea. All this, however, diverted the meagre resources of the nation from economic and cultural development, and the cost paid for war efforts in terms of material and human resources is not to be underestimated. In this connection, mention should be made of Jegnoch Amba (The House of Heroes) in Debre Zeit, where some 1,000 Ethiopian invalids from the war have been assembled to receive medical treatment, or to have artificial limbs fitted (produced on campus at a workshop run by expatriate experts of the Red Cross), as well as academic and vocational training. The efforts and the fruits of this institution, after only one year of experience, are highly impressive.
Axum obelisks. [Photo: Ministry of Culture.]

Rock-hewn churches of Lalibela (twelfth to thirteenth centuries). [Photo: Ministry of Culture.]
Gonder castles. [Photo: Ministry of Culture.]

Ethiopia, land of many nationalities. [Photo: Ministry of Information.]
The Ethiopian Revolution. [Photo: Ministry of Information.]

The literacy campaign. [Photo: Novosti Press Agency.]
Modern Ethiopian art by Afework Tekele.
[Photo: Afework Tekele.]

A traditional painting depicting Yared, creator of Ethiopian Orthodox Church music (sixth century). [Photo: Ministry of Culture.]
The cultural revolution

A summary review

The political revolution in Ethiopia was followed by serious attempts at cultural revolution in various fields: theatre, music, art, literature, etc. Naturally, at this stage, opinions on what constituted a revolutionary painting or song varied largely, and the discussion was intense and lively. However, the content, if not the form, remained largely within the framework of the New Democratic Revolutionary Programme: anti-feudal and anti-imperialist, although attempts at socialist proletarian culture were not uncommon. The problem was an acute one as it always is in such cases. The old playwrights, artists and writers were challenged, but the revolution did not yet have the time to create new ones. In most cases there was a compromise (some may call it 'opportunism') and the old had to adapt to the new conditions, and change their works in content, if not in form.

In the theatre, a number of Amharic plays were produced: A.B.C. in Six Months, Mother Courage [adaptation of Bertold Brecht] and others by Tsegaye Gebre Medhin, at the National Theatre (The Trap for the Poor, Heroes of the Revolution, Who is the Ethiopian?). Others were given at the Hager Fikr Theatre (When the Fire Burns by Ayalneh Mulat) and others at the Municipality Theatre. The plays were largely anti-feudal, bringing out the corrupt, parasitic and retrograde nature of the last regime, and the struggle of the students and other progressives against it, while trying to show the bright future for the masses through the revolution. The playwrights, directors, actors and the theatres were mostly the same as before the revolution. The theatre was largely used by the now-defunct regime to inculcate its moral and political values, and the sudden transformation was therefore not always convincing. Theatre was, at this stage, intended to serve not only as a forum of entertainment but also as an agency of political education, and an instrument for the elevation of the political consciousness of the masses. Hence, there was no art for art's sake in the theatre (as in
other areas) and high artistic quality, coupled with service and accessibility to the masses, was an expectation not always easily fulfilled on the stage. These and similar problems were raised in public discussion on the theatre following the outbreak of the revolution. One such issue was the lack of contact of playwrights with the masses of the Ethiopian peasantry and workers, whose plight they were supposed to proclaim. In this connection, the problem of ‘mobile theatre’ and ‘low pricing’, in order to reach the masses in rural as well as urban Ethiopia, was constantly raised. For theatres to give low-priced plays to the public and thus effectively play their political role, it was argued that theatres should not be self-financing, but government-subsidized. One final issue, which attracted much discussion, was the attack against the monopoly of theatres and the financial gains thereof, by one, or at most, very few playwrights, and the need to give more opportunity to new and young writers, as well as to distribute fairly the income from theatres among all those involved in the production: directors, actors, stage designers, orchestras, etc. There has been, all the same, quite an important theatrical activity going on in urban qebeles as well as in rural peasant associations. In the latter, plays in languages other than Amharic, were staged among the many nationalities of Ethiopia. However, no qualitative and quantitative evaluation of these popular theatres has yet been undertaken.

In music there has been likewise a clear change of content, if not of form since the revolution. Songs of work and struggle existed among the peasantry and other sectors of the working class and are common in Ethiopian history. Recent studies have also shown the existence of resistance songs of the oppressed nationalities of Ethiopia at one time or another. As far as the struggle for the overthrow of the feudal-bourgeois regime is concerned, most of the songs that we possess up to the revolution come from the heroic Ethiopian student movement against the monarchy. We also have one or two songs from the short-lived coup d’état of 1960 which were sung by crowds and students in the streets of Addis Ababa. Since the Revolution of 1974, over a thousand songs, mostly in Amharic, but also in the many languages of the Ethiopian nationalities, and sung chiefly on the radio, have been composed in praise of the revolution and its achievements. (Ethiopia Tikdem, Oppression is Over, Cry Ilil my Country, Land to the Tiller, Peoples of Ethiopia Unite, Assemble Oppressed Masses, Marx and Lenin, Class Struggle, Say No!, When the Fire Burns, Comrade Sister Awake, etc.) One of the first songs we were able to hear during the revolution was a translation of Eugène Pottier’s Internationale. There was also a new national anthem:

March forward, dear Mother Ethiopia, bloom and flourish,
Socialist ideas thou foster and cherish.

It was written by Assefa Gebre Mariam to a new tune composed by Daniel Yohannes. During this period of transition, revolutionary songs that
The cultural revolution

served as important instruments of agitation and education almost completely replaced love songs and moralist songs, as well as songs from Western countries that used to be heard on Radio Ethiopia during the feudal-bourgeois regime. As in other areas of art, in music, the radical transformation was to be seen most vividly in the content of the songs. As far as tunes or musical composition were concerned, the revolution had not yet developed sufficiently to penetrate the creative spirit of our composers, and with very few exceptions, revolutionary songs, frequently sung by vocalists from the last regime, were adapted to tunes and dances prevalent in pre-revolutionary days, and even earlier, and the contradiction was vivid in a number of cases. The same may be said of the form of the verses of revolutionary songs that remained entirely traditional. External foreign influence on Ethiopian revolutionary songs has not yet been studied. The biggest success in such songs, both in form and content, has been achieved in youth associations attached to mass organizations, i.e. peasant associations in rural Ethiopia, and the gebeles in towns. There is good reason to hope that it is in these mass cultural centres that revolutionary people’s music will flourish in the future.1 Since the revolution, musicians have formed the Union of Ethiopian Musicians to defend better their rights and interests.

In the fine arts, similar transformations have taken place. Ethiopia possesses a rich cultural heritage in this field, especially in paintings. Orthodox Christianity, introduced in Ethiopia in the fourth century, played a very important role in the development of religious art, mainly murals and manuscript paintings. Secular painting appeared much later—seventeenth or eighteenth century—and consisted of murals in churches and palaces, or manuscript paintings, of emperors, princes and princesses, as well as the high aristocracy. Secular painting became more common in the nineteenth century depicting subjects other than the traditional ones (battle scenes, hunting scenes, feasts and daily life of the people). In feudal Ethiopia, and until very recently, there was no commercialization of art. The painter received payment in kind for a specific painting from the Church, or from the feudal lord or prince who had commissioned it. With the development of capitalism in Ethiopia, in the twentieth century, works of art were sold in the streets and the buyers influenced the subjects of the new art movement. Thus, the famous episode of the meeting of the Queen of Sheba with Solomon became a major item of ‘tourist art’. The second half of the twentieth century has produced a number of artists, some of them trained in famous European schools of fine arts: Agegnehu Engeda, Ale Felege Selam, Afework Tekle, Gebre Krestos Desta, Alex Skunder Boghossian and a number of younger and more recent artists. Pre-revolutionary art exhibitions included works of

1. On songs since the Revolution see, Songs of the Ethiopian Revolution by the same author as above. (Addis Ababa, September 1979.)
high artistic quality, executed according to the latest international standard techniques. However, our famous artists of the past had little or no sense of ‘artistic responsibility’ to society. None of them played a role of edification or tried to improve the unjust conditions of the oppressed masses. Realist or abstract, they all painted either for psychic gratification or for the local or international market. Ethiopian painting was an élitist art that was aimed at the rich feudal-bourgeois magnates, diplomatic or international circles, the wealthy tourists and, in a few cases, the stock markets of the advanced capitalist world. The masses of peasants and workers were alien to most of our artists. With the outbreak of the revolution, the struggle to introduce its ideals into the fine arts was long and lively. Painting and sculpture, as well as other forms of art, were supposed to serve the revolution and advance its cause. The revolutionary painter does not accept to be a slave of the market. He does not paint only to sell and enrich himself. Painting, for the revolutionary artist, is an arm in the struggle of the oppressed. A number of exhibitions have been held in post-revolutionary years where the works of art shown have spoken the language of the revolution and heralded the cry of the masses. These works of art were executed by young revolutionary artists like Tadesse Mesfin and Eshetu Tiruneh who had lived in oblivion during the last regime with their works piled up in their tukuls. Among their paintings were: The Workers, The Woman Cleaner, The Woman Wood Collector, The Shoe Shiner, The Beggar, The Victims of Famine, Just to Live, etc. However, not all works exhibited were, as would be expected, genuine works of revolutionary art. The fate of the celebrated artists of the pre-revolutionary days was at first quite a difficult one. They were attacked for their past works and they had to defend themselves and to catch up with the progress of the revolution. Afework Tekle, who was most affected in this respect, never gave up or set aside his brush. Instead, with the rare discipline and diligence that characterizes this internationally famous artist, he set out to create works that depict the revolution and the Ethiopia he loves. The result was rewarding, and Afewerk, whose huge 3-metre by 5-metre work, The Victory of Ethiopia through Work, Productivity and Struggle, accomplished last year, now hangs at the Patriot Centre in Debre Zeit, has regained his former enviable position and is today once again the guest of honour of both Eastern and Western countries. Doubtless the famous artists of the past have lost their markets not only because of the defeat of the feudal and bourgeois magnates but also because non-political exhibitions aimed only at showing and selling exist no longer in Addis Ababa. However, the artists must live, and the question is how to accommodate them. One issue raised in this connection was the need for an objective standardization and localization of the prices of artistic creations so that they may not be beyond the reach of either individuals or museums. Although this is an intricate problem, it has been found necessary to solve it in order to keep in Ethiopia some of the best works of its artists and stop the artistic drain prevalent
The cultural revolution during the last regime. As a solution, some artists tend to introduce a double pricing system, one for Ethiopian purchasers and another for affluent foreigners. Very little is known about the development of revolutionary painting, or any painting at all, outside Addis Ababa, and this is one field for future exploration in order that the fine arts may reach the overwhelming majority of the Ethiopian peasantry through the agency of peasant, youth and women’s associations. A systematic effort must also be pursued to interest the mass of urban industrial workers who formerly had no contact with works of art. These are some of the areas that should occupy the newly formed Ethiopian Artists’ Association.

The development of poster or slogan art was also another aspect of the cultural revolution in Ethiopia. Since the outbreak of the revolution of February 1974, drawings or paintings of huge size, in warm colours and carrying slogans, were visible, hanging on big buildings or attached to wooden stands in busy centres of Addis Ababa. Photographs have also been used extensively for the same purpose, and photograph posters with slogans in different national and international languages are now commonly found hanging in every office building, in schools, hospitals, etc. A word may be said here about the attempted change in films and film production. Films imported during the last regime could very easily be criticized for their lack of consideration of Ethiopian reality and the objective condition of the people. Considering the cinema of those days, one could safely speak of ‘cultural imperialism’. The only preoccupation of the imperial censor was to stop the showing of films with progressive or revolutionary images. Since the revolution, through the gradual nationalization of the film business and the principal cinemas, the importing of pornographic or purely pleasure films has been controlled, and the showing of educational and progressive films, largely imported from the socialist countries, has been encouraged. Here again, although the public was quick to appreciate good films from these countries, not all the films were artistically attractive or sufficiently closely related to Ethiopian conditions to attract a large number of spectators. It was in order to solve this problem as well as to exploit the ease with which the cinema can reach the masses, that the government decided to establish a centre that is responsible not only for the control of the entire film business, but also for film production in Ethiopia and by the Ethiopians, and geared to satisfy the needs and tastes of the masses, while keeping up with the artistic and technical requirements of the modern age. Haile Gerima’s film, Harvest Three Thousand Years, which shows the hard life and oppression of a peasant gebar and his family in feudal Ethiopia, is a witness of the harmony of beauty and technique with socio-political progressive messages, hence its international success. A large number of documentary films have also been produced since the revolution and some by the Ministry of Information and National Guidance (like the film on the formation of the modern Ethiopian militia out of the rural peasantry assembled from all corners of Ethiopia.
in response to the call of the Motherland) were beautiful as well as highly instructive artistic achievements.

In the field of Ethiopian literature, which traditionally was represented largely by Geez Orthodox Church literature (and some works in Arabic), we see Amharic replacing the classic Geez from the middle of the nineteenth century onwards. Modern Ethiopian literature, composed almost completely of Amharic works (with a few works in Tigrigna and Oromo) starts at the beginning of the twentieth century when the first novels in Amharic and the first Amharic plays and poetry were written. This was the period of the introduction of commercial capitalism and Western ideas through Europeans living in Ethiopia as well as through Ethiopians educated abroad. Leaving aside the profoundly anti-feudal literature produced early in the century by the first Ethiopian novelist (Afewarq, G. Y.) shortly after his return from Europe and Gebre Heywet Baykedagn (who was also educated abroad), Ethiopian writing, interrupted by the five years of Fascist occupation (1935–41) passed through a number of stages that followed the economic and socio-political development. The ‘Ras’ writers (Makonnen and Kassa) or other spokesmen of the feudal aristocracy, mystified on the one hand the irremediable weakness of man and uselessness of this world, while, on the other they depicted the unaccountable power of God, and the good life in the next world. These conservative writers of the ruling class justified the feudal privileges enjoyed by the aristocracy and stood firm in their opposition to all innovations likely to shake the status quo. They abound in moralistic and didactic texts often described as ‘puerile’. Others (Heruy, W. S., Kebede Mikael, Germachew, T. H.) found themselves in a dilemma. While supporting technological progress and development on Western capitalist lines, and calling for the end of feudal privileges, they advocated the preservation of what they called ‘Ethiopian’ culture and traditions (which were largely a product of the feudal stage of development) as opposed to the materialistic, alienating and dehumanizing ‘culture’ of Western capitalism. Although one cannot be dogmatic about cultural development, its relation to, and dependence on, the prevailing mode of production is clear. This explains the inevitable cultural change as the capitalist mode of production and exchange in Ethiopia developed. However, these writers wanted to see Ethiopia advance economically while retaining the culture of a different period. This explains the persistence of the moralistic and didactic element in their writing. However, this should not lead us to forget the few post-First World War works with a clear and strong anti-feudal tone in the style of Afewarq, G. Y., such as the novels Fitawrari Belay and Figr Eske Meqabir. Most of the above Amharic literature (novels, poetry or drama) was described as very ‘literal’ with no room for phantasy, the unreal or surreal, abounding in unnecessary details while lacking in certain essentials. However, it was clear that literature as a work of art was gaining more and more ground. When we come to the new generation, we see literature
endowed with higher technical skill and developing as an art for art’s sake (Baalu Girma, Solomon Deressa and Tadesse Liben). There was no longer moralizing on human vices, but lucid depiction of character. There were still stories, but they were not meant to be didactic and were intended primarily to be read for pleasure. The healthiest development, however, was to be seen in the creation of Amharic literature which paid due attention to artistic considerations, and also served as a social and political vehicle. In other words, it was ‘social realist literature’, which demystified the old concept of a God-created world defiled by man’s sin in all its forms (prostitution, crime, alcoholism, corrupted justice, bureaucracy, etc.) and presented it as being an integral part and consequence of a decaying system which should be removed by a revolution! (Adegfres by Dagnachew Worqu and the works of Berhanu Zerihun.) ‘The words that make me happiest’, says Adegfres, ‘are these: “No! I refuse!” Of all words these seem to me to be most alive...’ Hence the call to revolt, and banish the shackles of oppression! The principal problem that hindered the rapid development of Amharic literature, as in the case of all artistic creation, was the poverty (low purchasing power of the people) and underdevelopment of the country, with over 90 per cent illiteracy, which curtailed readership (on the average 7,000 copies per book, printed for a population of over 30 million). This in turn limited both the quality and quantity of literary work. The writer in every case was unable to earn his living by writing only, and hence (an almost universal situation) was always obliged to do something else for a living and to write only in his leisure. Another equally stifling factor, affecting both quality and quantity, was the suffocating hand of censorship practised by the feudal-bourgeois regime, which killed many literary works in the bud. Finally, before the revolution, there was no system by which writers who did not have the financial means could publish their works.

With the outbreak of the Ethiopian revolution there was a flourishing of printed and unprinted literature which had no parallel in Ethiopian history—a true expression of freedom from the oppressive forces of the defunct regime. Poems and other literary works that had remained ‘political prisoners’ were liberated. The most spectacular change was, however, in the media, especially the newspapers, which were now filled with new material and attracted crowds who fought to buy them. New ‘progressive bookshops’ filled their shelves entirely with books by Marx, Engels and Lenin (and less frequently, those of Stalin and Mao Tse-tung), which could only be circulated ‘underground’ in the past. Hundreds of thousands of these books (mostly in English, but some also in French) flooded the market and long queues in front of bookshops became a very common scene. Libraries were also well stocked with these works and the number of readers was high. As the revolution proceeded, translations of Marxist books (including those of Lenin, Stalin and Mao Tse-tung) were made. This raised a new phenomenon—the creation of a socialist and revolutionary vocabulary which was not known to the official press in the past but which
was already developing among student revolutionary movements locally and abroad. With the creation of new words (such as *abeyot* (revolution), *Hebresebawinet* (socialism), etc.) a new ‘progressive’ dictionary was published (1967). However, the dictionary was very soon outdated as the avalanche of new words never ceased to increase. Naturally, at the beginning, it was no easy task to read and understand translated works or articles in the press. With the further development of the revolution we pass from translated socialist books to socialist books written by Ethiopians, mostly in Amharic, oriented more towards Ethiopian problems, and more accessible to Ethiopian readers. A book on dialectical materialism (1967) had created a heated discussion. The discussion on ‘Ethiopian socialism’ or ‘scientific socialism’ had been lively. Revisionism, extreme-leftism, Trotskyism, and anarchism were refuted and discredited as unhealthy deviations. Two books in support of Darwin’s theory of evolution had appeared. Books defending equality of women were frequent. Socialist revolutions elsewhere (the Bolshevik Revolution, the Cuban Revolution, Viet Nam) were separately treated. Following the revolution a number of periodicals, both government and private, appeared acting as a forum of discussion on the construction of socialist Ethiopia. Some of these periodicals appeared and disappeared in the course of the revolution. In these, as well as in the government newspapers (which are now published in different Ethiopian languages—including Oromo, Tigrigna and Arabic), people discussed burning political issues. One area in which there is still no rapid or real development is socialist revolutionary poetry and novels. Some collected poems, as well as novels (notably the *Call of the Red Star* by Baalu Girma), have been published. However, these should be considered as a continuation of the progressive evolution of Amharic literature carried over from the last years of the past regime, and not as a break with the past in line with the new socialist revolutionary situation in Ethiopia. This, of course, is an area in a very slow process of development, and it may be years before we see an Ethiopian Gorky. One way of encouraging writers towards this goal is the liberation of writers from other full-time occupations by which they earn a living. This may be done, as in some socialist countries (for example Bulgaria) by allowing creative writers and artists to work for only half a day so that they may dedicate the other half to creative work in art and literature.

In facilitating publication of works by writers who do not have the necessary financial means, the situation has improved since the revolution. Today, most printing companies have been nationalized and assembled under the Printing Corporation. Besides the Ministry of Culture, which published selected cultural works, we now have two publishing houses, one governmental (Kuraz) and the other private (Ethiopia Book Centre). The Ethiopia Book Centre, which is now in its third year, has very recently brought out four novels that could really be considered the first under the revolution that deal with the revolutionary situation. The state publishing
house, Kuraz, was formerly a private importing, publishing and distributing centre, established in June 1979, and concentrating mainly on socialist books. Its record shows the importation of over a million books in a year, distributed throughout Ethiopia, and the publication of a number of translations of socialist works, by full-time translators employed by the centre. The centre did not in the past accept any other works from outside for publication. Kuraz was nationalized recently (November 1980) and now, besides its former services, is acting as a publishing house for all types of literature to which individual writers may submit. This has been warmly welcomed by all concerned, as it will promote greatly the development of Ethiopian literature. With state subsidies, profit will not be the deciding criterion for the publication of a book, as in the past. Books will be cheap and will reach a larger public. State publishing houses need, therefore, to be multiplied, as in all socialist countries. Both Kuraz and the Ethiopia Book Centre pay a royalty of 10 per cent on retail prices. This is quite low, but it is justified by the high cost of printing. However the situation becomes ridiculous when one considers the 40 per cent tax recently imposed on royalties. This is contrary to the spirit of the Cultural Charter for Africa, which recommends (Chapter VI, Part VII, Art. 23b) tax exemption for creative works of art and literature as one means of promoting their development. Pressure is now being exerted to suppress this imposition that not only discourages literary initiative, but makes a contribution to government revenue which is microscopic. Underdeveloped countries should give a boost so that literature will bloom and the writers who are lacking in every field will emerge.¹

Since 1977 the Ethiopian writers have organized themselves into a union under the programme of the National Democratic Revolution. The Ethiopian Writers' Union commits itself, among other things, to developing creative literature, both qualitatively and quantitatively, to help the mass of the Ethiopian people raise the level of their consciousness and enlightenment, and to giving moral and professional support to all creative writers.

II The administration of culture and cultural agencies
Until the revolution, culture was administered partly by the Ministry of Education and partly by the Ministry of Information. What now became the Ministry of Culture consisted for a long time only of the National Library, the National Museum and the Archaeological Institute.

By a proclamation of August 1977, the Ministry of Culture and Sports was created and entrusted with the task of the construction of socialist culture in Ethiopia. Its main objectives are:

- To arrange for the organization and promotion of culture and the arts in accordance with the principles of socialism and to encourage the creative power of the masses in the fine arts.
- To administer and control the National Library as well as protect and preserve historical archives.
- To study Ethiopian pre-history, history and other ancient relics; make the necessary provisions for the discovery, protection and study of ancient monuments and documents, and keep a register of the antiquities with detailed descriptions.
- To promote the study of Ethiopian languages and the development of scripts for them.

The Ministry of Culture has five main divisions to dispense the above responsibilities.

**Department of Arts and Theatre**

This department supervises the arts: music, painting, theatre, cinema, and literary creation. It supervises at the moment, some forty-one cinemas and theatres all over Ethiopia. These are not evenly distributed. While some administrative regions like Shoa, Eritrea and Harar own a number of cinemas and theatres, others like Wellega, Gemu Gofa, Sidamo, and Bake have none at all. The National Theatre in Addis Ababa, which is the
The administration of culture and cultural agencies

biggest theatre in the country, also runs a two-year course for the training of actors. Since the revolution, a number of qebeks, and peasant associations have constructed halls that serve both as theatres and cinemas. The Department of Arts and Theatre hopes to co-ordinate this development more closely in future in collaboration with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development. In the field of theatre, the recent establishment of a children’s theatre section is worth mentioning. The Film Centre, also established recently, controls most of the formerly private cinemas in the country as well as film distribution. The centre, which has trained film technicians locally and abroad and equipped itself with the necessary materials, is expected to engage fully in film production in the near future. The Department of Arts and Theatre also supervises the development of music and musical groups throughout the country, and has one music school (established in 1956/57 and newly housed under the name of Yared School, with Bulgarian Government aid, since 1971). The study and development of traditional music and musical instruments of the Ethiopian nationalities, as well as their incorporation into the modern musical world, is also the responsibility of this Office. The promotion of the fine arts (painting, sculpture, etc.) through moral and material encouragement (construction of studios, organizing exhibitions locally and abroad, etc.), is one other major task of the department. In this field, the department runs the School of Fine Arts, established in 1957/58. By way of promoting literary creation, the Ministry of Culture, through the Department of Arts and Theatre, accepts selected works (novels, poetry, etc.) and finances their publication, or intervenes as a guarantor.

Department for the Study and Preservation of the Cultural Heritage

The department has under it the Institute of Archaeology, the administration of museums and the section for the preservation of the cultural heritage. The Institute of Archaeology, established more than twenty years ago, was started in co-operation with the French Government and employs French archaeologists. Its contribution in the field of archaeological findings has been immense, particularly in the north, in Eritrea and Tigrai, where ancient Axumite and pre-Axumite sites have been excavated and studied. The discovery of the prehistoric sites of Melke Qonture, a short distance from Addis Ababa, by experts from the French Centre National de Recherche Scientifique (CNRS), as well as the discovery by a Franco-American group of the 3-million-year-old skeleton of young Lucy, which may make Ethiopia the cradle of mankind, was made in association with the Institute of Archaeology. However, one shortcoming of this institute is that it has to date no Ethiopians trained in the science of archaeology to carry over the work of the expatriate experts.
Ministry of Culture and Sports

The Department of the Cultural Heritage is also responsible for the supervision of museums under the Ministry of Culture. The biggest such museum is the National Museum. Other cities that possess museums are Dessie, Meqele, Harar and Jimma. Outside the Ministry of Culture, the university contains the biggest ethnological museum within the Institute of Ethiopian Studies.

A major enterprise of the department in question is the preservation of the cultural heritage. This has been done in the past in co-operation with Unesco and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The restoration work on the rock-hewn churches of Lalibella (twelfth century or earlier), the Gondar castles (seventeenth century) and three monasteries in Lake Tana has been going on for some years now. A considerable number of items of the Ethiopian cultural heritage are now being listed as part of the world cultural heritage. This is why the Unesco General Conference of 1976 in Nairobi passed a resolution (19) to the effect that Ethiopia should launch an international campaign for the preservation of its cultural heritage with international support. A national committee has been established, and two of its members spent some time in Cairo and Indonesia to study the experiences of these countries in the restoration of historical relics. The Director-General of Unesco is expected to come to Addis Ababa in 1982 to launch the international campaign.

In connection with the cultural heritage, in 1979/80, a number of students were given a short training in registration and preparation of an inventory of cultural heritage objects, and the work has already been started.

National Library
and Historical Archives Department

The National Library was the first library to be established in October 1943 and was the nucleus of what has today become the Ministry of Culture. The aims of the library were to collect and conserve material of Ethiopian origin, to collect material relating to Ethiopia of foreign origin, and to create a general reference collection ‘where the more learned may come, that by their study they may contribute to the greater prosperity of the people’. However, in spite of this lofty ambition, the National Library started in a very modest way, without shelves, and without many books (apart from those left over from the Fascist occupation). None the less, the library has gone a long way since those days and today it is one of the biggest depositories both of books (for the public library section as well as manuscripts, archives and rare books on Ethiopia for the research library section). However, it still has a long way to go to merit the name of

1. The Institute of Ethiopian Studies contains at the moment the biggest library in the world for books and manuscripts on Ethiopia.
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‘National’ Library. By a proclamation of September 1975, the library was empowered to receive three copies of any material printed by a local printer. This, if applied correctly, would greatly enrich the collections of the library. However, the law fell short of the National Library’s earlier desire to control, co-ordinate and promote library services in Ethiopia. Such a body is still urgently needed, and under the present circumstances, we have no global idea of the library situation in Ethiopia. In the past, the public libraries were said to be the poorest in the Ethiopian library service, but since the revolution, all kinds of libraries have sprung up in mass organizations and military establishments. The Ethiopian Library Association, established in 1961, has come up with a recommendation for the establishment of an Ethiopian Library Information, Documentation, and Archives Council (ILDAC) to co-ordinate and develop library services throughout the country. A decision is still pending.

The question of national archives is still a burning issue which awaits a government decision. Ethiopia’s ancient and rich written literature (Sabaean, Greek, Geez and Amharic) is renowned. Even the correspondence of the emperor, as well as of the feudal chiefs, locally and abroad, are not to be underestimated. Most important of all the papers that have been piling up since the introduction of modern bureaucracy in Ethiopia at the beginning of this century and which are today dispersed all over, and partly assembled in, the former Ministry of Pen, necessitate the urgent establishment of National Archives.

The situation regarding ‘dead’ files has not been satisfactory, and was at times alarming, especially in the provinces. Moreover, in accordance with the Unesco resolution, and the Cultural Charter for Africa, Ethiopia should recover the historical documents and manuscripts taken out of the country by the European powers during the colonial era, either in their original form or in copy. Prospects of aid from foreign countries and international organizations in the field of training archivists, recovery of Ethiopian archives and manuscripts abroad, and in the construction of a proper National Archives building, etc. have not been discouraging. It is therefore hoped that the decree, establishing National Archives whose task will be collection, protection and restoration of archives, which will serve as a centre of scientific research and higher learning, will soon be made.

Ethiopian Language Academy

This was the former Amharic Academy which, since the revolution, in conformity with the NDR position of equal opportunity for all languages of

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Ethiopian nationalities, has now taken the name of Ethiopian Language Academy.

The academy is primarily engaged in the study of Ethiopian languages and the creation of alphabets for some fifteen of them. Rather controversial work has also been going on to modify the Amharic alphabet. Another major task of the academy is the preparation of a general Amharic dictionary, and a Marxist-Leninist Amharic glossary. The academy also develops new words for concepts not having an appropriate vocabulary in the Amharic language. The study of written literature (Amharic and Geez) as well as the collection of oral literature is also a function of the academy, which has already collected a considerable number of proverbs and sayings of the Ethiopian nationalities.

The proclamation, defining the status and function of the Ethiopian Language Academy, is expected to come out very soon.

Department of International Cultural Relations

This new department is now busy arranging agreements and protocols with friendly countries represented in Ethiopia. Naturally, the emphasis since the revolution has been towards the socialist countries and, to date, Ethiopia has signed cultural and sports agreements with the Soviet Union (May 1977), Bulgaria (October 1978), Yugoslavia (April 1979), Czechoslovakia, Cuba (March 1978), the German Democratic Republic (November 1979), the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (May 1977), Poland (December 1978), Hungary (May 1965, renewed September 1980), The Yemen People's Democratic Republic (May 1979), the Yemen Arab Republic (April 1980), and the Sudan Democratic Republic (May 1980). From the above list, it is clear that closer cultural contacts with African countries should be intensified, more so as Addis Ababa is the capital of the Organization of African Unity (OAU), and as cultural co-operation is intended to promote African unity. Moreover, the absence of Western countries is conspicuous, and this is also a trend that may require a second look. This refroidissement with the West is not only in the field of culture but also in political, economic and commercial relations. However, the situation has been improving in recent times and relations between Ethiopia and the West are acquiring a better image. If this trend continues, socialist Ethiopia may, in spite of the profit-oriented system of the West, benefit from its relations with these highly developed capitalist countries, in the field of science and technology, technical expertise, loans and aid, etc., which will contribute to the rapid transformation of its underdeveloped economy. In the field of culture, the Ethiopian revolutionary stand is against imperialist cultural domination, but the selective assimilation into Ethiopian culture of progressive, democratic and scientific cultural elements.
of all the peoples of the world is also the accepted road in the construction of a universal human culture. There are, therefore, strong reasons to have cultural exchanges with the West. Such relations do not have anything in common with the relations that existed between the defunct feudal-bourgeois regime and the West, which were based on the interests and luxury requirements of the ruling class. The relations of revolutionary socialist Ethiopia with the Western capitalist countries will be to enhance the productive forces in service of the broad masses. Therefore, so long as we know where we are going, so long as we know our socialist objectives, and the ways and means to achieve those objectives, so long as we know the objectives of imperialist and capitalist countries and watch vigilantly, the establishment and development of mass-oriented relations with both the West and the East are not only an option, but an obligation, of all underdeveloped countries. This practice, which is common to all socialist countries, will, instead of diverting us from the path of socialism, strengthen our commitment, through concrete development and the transformation of the mode of production.

The common articles of cultural exchange and co-operation, as stipulated in the agreements, include exchange of experts and scientific personnel in art, literature, theatre, music, archaeology, cultural heritage preservation, libraries and archives, etc., exchange of lecturers, exhibitions, musical and theatrical performances, films and sports teams. In the field of education, they include exchange of professors and teachers, documentation and expertise in science and technology, scholarships and fellowships, the reciprocal study of the history, civilization and culture of the contracting parties, exchange of books, periodicals and scientific publications, as well as the translation of selected works of culture; exchange of experience, materials and specialists in radio, television, cinema and the press.

The Ministry of Culture has opened offices in eight out of the fourteen administrative regions of Ethiopia, to carry out its cultural plans and projects for the whole of the country. However, the problem of the ministry remains, as well as the chronic shortage of skilled manpower in almost all fields of culture, and the problem of finance.
One of the great problems inherited by the revolution from the past regime was excessively high illiteracy—over 90 per cent of the population. Therefore, one of the primary tasks of the revolutionary government was to see that all school-age children went to school as soon as the limited resources of the country and international aid permitted, and to eradicate illiteracy at all stages, irrespective of age, following a short- and long-term plan. The efforts were rewarding, and it has been possible to double the total number of primary and secondary school students from 1,043,900 in 1974 to 2,182,400 in 1980; to raise the number of teachers during the same period from 24,800 to 39,590, and the number of schools of all types from 3,287 to 6,094. Progress has not only been quantitative, but also qualitative, as the other objective was to transform the content of education, which in the past was geared to serving a feudal-bourgeois society, and suffered from strong imperialist educational domination. Education had to be geared to the spirit of scientific socialism and to help pull the country and its people out of poverty and underdevelopment as quickly as possible. With this in mind, the Ministry of Education has been engaged, since the start of the revolution, in the transformation of the school curriculum, taking the Ethiopian New Democratic Revolutionary Programme as a point of departure. On education, the NDR declares:

There will be an educational programme that will provide education, step by step, to the broad masses. Such a programme will aim at intensifying the struggle against feudalism, imperialism and bureaucratic capitalism. All necessary measures to eliminate illiteracy will be undertaken. All necessary encouragement will be given for the development of science and technology, the arts and literature.

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The guiding lines in formulating a new educational policy have been: education for production, education for scientific research and education for political consciousness.

The regular government schools enjoyed the co-operation of the mass media and adult education centres, which are both departments of the Ministry of Education. Although the mass media centre started functioning long before the revolution, its contribution then was merely nominal. Indeed, until last year, only two 1-kwt radio stations functioned at all—the Addis Ababa and Welaita Soddo stations. (The station at Asmara—Mandafara—has been closed for some time now.) Currently, a huge network of educational radio stations are under construction throughout the country. It has been found more practical to use small 1-kW regional stations rather than one big national station, as this makes it possible to adapt programmes according to local needs and using local languages, and offers greater clarity of transmission. Very shortly, therefore, there will be eleven more stations (about six of them already completed) throughout the country. The radio receivers (about 12,000) for all the new centres, are expected to be donated by UNICEF, which had already offered about 3,000 radio sets in the past. A television mass-media educational service using the National Television is also being undertaken on a modest scale.

Another department within the Ministry of Education worth mentioning is the Adult Education Department, which serves five different fields: (a) Community Skilled Training Centres (by co-ordinating one to three months of vocational training in various skills—artisanal, industrial, as well as agricultural); (b) co-ordinating evening courses all over the country; (c) long-distance or correspondence education for grades 9-12 (to start quite soon); (d) basic education, which now concentrates on settlement areas (mainly Bale) with training in self-reliance using local manpower and resources to solve material problems (water, electricity, fuel, housing, roads, etc.) as well as educational and other social problems, and thus reducing dependence on government finance (this very exciting innovation in the use of appropriate technology has given rise to many useful inventions in the service of the peoples of the settlement areas); and (e) the Adult Education Department has begun to participate in the literacy campaign of the Ministry of Education, an aspect that we shall look at later in more detail.

The department prepares instructional materials for all adult education in the above fields, using the different Ethiopian languages.

Probably the greatest achievement in the field of education since the revolution has been the eradication of illiteracy. At the time of the fall of the old regime, 93 per cent of the 30 million Ethiopians were considered illiterate; 71.2 per cent of primary school-age children did not receive any schooling at all. Those living in the rural areas, who make up 90 per cent of the population, only received 50 per cent of the total schooling provided. The other schools served Addis Ababa, Asmara, Harar-Dire Dawa and
other urban centres. Therefore, the literacy campaign was launched to tackle this overwhelming problem. Its objectives are:

To achieve universal literacy (reading, writing and simple calculation) in the shortest possible time.

To use literacy to acquire knowledge and skills for effective participation in the social and political affairs of the country.

To apply literacy to gain knowledge and skills that will be useful in everyday activities aimed to improve living conditions.

To lay the foundations for continuing education.

The literacy campaign, which covered all Ethiopians irrespective of age and sex, was divided into different phases, with short- and long-term targets. The first phase, which started in July 1979 (a three-month summer literacy campaign) and which aimed at producing 1,368,000 literates, succeeded in producing four times that target: 5,403,433! The second and the third phases also exceeded expectations (773,038 for the second phase, and 1,922,637 for the third phase). The campaign will continue until 1986, when it is hopefully expected that illiteracy will be eradicated from Ethiopia. It was in recognition of this achievement (carried out in spite of the enormous obstacles of manpower and teaching material shortages) that Unesco selected Ethiopia as the literacy prize winner for the year 1980.

**Higher education**

Institutions of higher learning have been developing in Ethiopia for the last thirty years or so. Students are admitted to institutions of higher education after completing secondary school or its equivalent and passing the Ethiopian School Leaving Certificate or equivalent examinations. At this stage tuition has always been free for all Ethiopians. In most institutions of higher education, students are provided with full board. Where facilities are not available, students are given stipends. There are some twelve institutions of higher learning giving training in various fields: agricultural, veterinary, commercial and municipal skills, technical subjects, forestry, etc. However, the biggest higher education institution at present is the Addis Ababa University, which had, in 1978, 6,344 regular and 1,769 extension students. The Addis Ababa University embraces the Colleges of Agriculture, Pedagogical Sciences, Social Sciences, the Faculty of Medicine, the Public Health College, the Faculty of Technology, the Institute of Language Studies, the School of Pharmacy, the Law School, the School of Graduate Studies, and the University of Continuing Education (including University Extension). Furthermore, the university contains the following institutes of scientific research and publications: Institute of Ethiopian Studies, Institute of Development Research, Educational Research Centre, Institute of Pathobiology, Geophysical Observatory and Debre Zeit Agricultural Research Centre.
Higher education, and all other education, has been in the past (particularly in the social sciences) deeply impregnated with foreign imperialist ideas and systems that had little or no relevance to the Ethiopian situation. (In spite of this, as is well known, the university and other higher education institutions remained for many years the battleground for revolutionary struggle against the oppressive police forces of the defunct regime.) As a result, one of the urgent tasks in the post-revolutionary period was to transform the content of education in the higher institutions of learning in the spirit of scientific socialism, so that it could solve the actual needs of Ethiopia. To guide and promote this effort, a Commission for Higher Education was established in 1977. The aims and objectives of the commission are among others, to teach, expand and publicize socialism in higher educational institutions; to produce the manpower required for higher education institutions in accordance with the National Plan; to conduct scientific research on the country’s needs, and in co-operation with government and mass organizations, to make every effort to develop and enrich the country’s culture and free it from imperialist influence and reactionary content. To bring about this transformation of the content of education and scientific research, a number of seminars have been taking place in the different institutions of higher learning, and particularly in the university. The efforts have been rewarding but nevertheless, the shortage, in this period of transition, of appropriate textbooks, as well as academic personnel imbued with the ideas of scientific socialism, is being felt in all institutions of higher education, and more particularly in the social sciences. An effort was also made to revolutionize the selection of students by introducing a quota system, giving priority to the children of the peasantry of rural Ethiopia and to the most oppressed nationalities, as well as the most deprived classes in urban centres. However, this attempt, which had its own problems, did not run for long nor did it progress smoothly.

The Higher Education Commission, which is still in its infancy, is badly understaffed for undertaking the enormous task which it is expected to perform.

Science and Technology Commission

A National Science and Technology Commission was established in December 1975, to encourage, guide, co-ordinate, and support the search for scientific knowledge and the pursuit of technological development intended to alleviate hardship in the lives of the broad masses of Ethiopians as well as to raise their productivity. The commission, which supervises all scientific research in the country, is at the moment involved in different priority areas of research: food and agriculture, health and medicine, housing, urban and rural settlements and construction, education and
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manpower development, energy, mineral and water resources, the manufacturing industry, and transport and communication.

As in the case of the Commission for Higher Education, the Science and Technology Commission lacks the manpower it needs to undertake the huge task entrusted to it.
The mass media

The sector that felt most the oppressive hand of censorship under the former regime, was naturally that of the mass media. It served not so much as an agency for the dissemination of information, but more as an arm of propaganda fighting for and justifying the stand of the ruling class. With the outbreak of the Ethiopian revolution, as was said earlier, the most dramatic liberation was witnessed in the mass media, especially the newspapers. Since the revolution, the Ministry of Information, which was renamed the Ministry of Information and National Guidance by the Proclamation of 26 August 1977, has been entrusted with the task of educating and awakening the people so that they may fully understand the objectives of socialism. In contrast to the situation in the past, the ministry was charged to ‘present comments, constructive criticisms, and suggestions by the people on government objectives, plans and guidelines, the programme of work, the progress and outcome of each institution and endeavours to bring about improvements’.

The Ministry of Information and National Guidance has four main divisions.

Ethiopian News Agency

The Ethiopian News Agency (ENA) is divided in two: national news and international news. For national news, ENA has twenty-eight branches throughout the fourteen administrative regions and districts. For international news, the agency depends on Tass, Reuters, Agence France Presse, ADN (German Democratic Republic), Ceteka (Czechoslovakia), etc.
The mass media

Radio Department

The Radio Department also has two sections: domestic and international. There is a domestic daily programme of about one hour from the national radio in Addis Ababa, in Amharic, Oromo, Tigrigna, Arabic, Somali, Afar, English and French. Moreover, there are local radio stations in Asmara (in Tigrigna and Tigre) and Harar (in Oromo and Somali). The radio expansion programme, to come into effect by 1987/88, envisages the establishment of medium-wave stations in Dessie (in Afar and Amharic), Bahir Dar (for Gojam, Beguemidre and Wollo, in Amharic); Gimma (for Wellega, Ilubabor and Kaffa, in Oromo); Sidamo (for Hadya, Gemu Gofa, Welaita, in Hadya and Oromo). Local medium wave (instead of the powerful short-wave transmitter from Addis Ababa) has been chosen to facilitate localization of programmes as well as the use of local languages, and also because medium-wave transmitters give greater clarity. The international radio service of Voice of Revolutionary Ethiopia is transmitted in six languages (Amharic, Somali, Afar, Arabic, English and French) for six hours a day, one hour for each language. The coverage includes West, South and North-east Africa, the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and a large part of Asia.

At the moment, there are thirty-three different radio programmes covering a large range of subjects considered to be the most relevant to the Ethiopian situation. With an estimated number of radio sets of 3 million, the radio public (calculated at five persons per radio set) will be roughly 15 million.

Television Department

The department produces a daily programme of three and a half hours. This consists largely of items in Amharic (news, entertainment, education, etc.) and a short programme of news in English; 70 per cent of the television programmes are produced locally—with emphasis on agriculture and peasant life, the life of the industrial workers, artisanal and industrial production, urban problems, etc. At present, the National Television can be watched in Addis Ababa, Debre Zeit, Nazareth and Assela. Following the expansion of the micro-wave link, which is divided into five phases, the television service will expand throughout the country. The television station at Asmara is already completed and functioning; Harar and Dire Dawa will be included in the television orbit as of next year. The Gimma, Agaro, Dessie, Meqelle, and Bahir Dar will follow. With the help of the earth satellite system, which has been recently established at Sulukta (a short distance from Addis Ababa), it is now possible to transmit live programmes from the United States and Europe, either directly or through a relay system. However, as the venture is very expensive in terms of foreign exchange, it is not undertaken frequently.
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There are at present an estimated 32,000 television sets in Ethiopia (25,000 in Addis Ababa and the surrounding areas, and 7,000 in Asmara) and if five persons watch per television set, the television public will number about 160,000. If an allowance is made for public places, this figure may be raised to 500,000, still an understandably low figure for a population of 30 million.

Press Department

The Press Department runs the following newspapers: two dailies, Addis Zemen in Amharic, with a circulation of 30,000; and the Ethiopian Herald in English, with a circulation of 7,000–10,000; three weeklies, Ye Zareyitu Etiopia (in Amharic) with a circulation of 30,000, Berisa (in Oromo since September 1975) with a circulation of 2,000, and Al Alem (in Arabic) with a circulation of 3,000. All the above are printed in Addis Ababa. Moreover, there is one daily (Hebret in Tigrigna) and a weekly (Etiopia in Amharic) with a circulation of 5,000 each, printed in Asmara. Finally, the department supervises one monthly, Yekatit in Amharic (circulation: 10,000) and in English (circulation: 4,000) as well as a quarterly, Marxist Ideology (in Amharic), which serves as a forum for discussion of Marxist ideology, in solidarity with the international communist movement.

Audio-Visual Department

This department is responsible for taking still photographs that will interpret the action of the masses for the press, as well as producing films (three or four a year) of important events which are shown locally (by mobile units) as well as internationally.
Ethiopia possesses many traditional sports practised by its numerous nationalities. However, as far as modern sport is concerned its introduction can be traced by and large to the period of Italian Fascist occupation. The earliest federation, which was the Football Federation, was established in 1943-44, while the decree establishing the Ethiopian Sports Confederation was promulgated in 1948. The Athletics Federation was established in 1948-49, and the Basket-ball Federation in 1955-56. However, sport and physical culture had really no legal structure, office, or specialized personnel, and remained merely a show-case serving propaganda purposes for the duration of the Olympic Games. Indeed, the creation of federations, or the appointment of temporary personnel, most often coincided with an Olympic event and was an artificial consequence of Olympic requirements (which required at least five national federations for participation) rather than a natural development of sports and physical culture of one kind or another. A continued development was, however, inaugurated in 1960-61 with the allocation of a small annual budget (about US$10,000) and the appointment of Yidneqachew Tessema, a well-known sports veteran, as Secretary-General of the Ethiopian Sports Confederation. More federations were formed in the following years; the Boxing Federation (1961-62), the Cycling Federation (1963-64), the Volley-ball Federation (1963-64), the Hand-ball Federation (1969-70), and the Table Tennis Federation (1972). However, as mentioned above, these federations existed only in name and had no office, no budget, and no personnel. The small income, which they may have had, was generated through club membership fees, tickets, and a small annual subsidy (which could be as low as US$400 annually) from the Ethiopian Sports Confederation. Considering the high price of imported sports goods and the poverty and low purchasing power of the Ethiopian sportsman, it is easy to understand the forces that kept sports in Ethiopia in a state of constant underdevelopment. As a spokesman for the Cycling Federation said, ‘apart from buying a cycle (US$500)
and changing the tyres (US$15 each) for practice and competition, the Ethiopian sportsman finds himself at times too poor even to change his pair of football shoes. Sports, therefore, became, really, the domain of the privileged classes. Moreover, the federations had few or no sports fields at their disposal for training, practice, and competitions and few or no coaches for training sportsmen. Only a very few Ethiopians had been trained abroad in physical culture and sports, and there was no school locally for the training of sports and gymnastics teachers. Indeed, the limited sports and physical culture in Ethiopia was concentrated in the urban areas (particularly in schools) of some privileged regions, namely Shoa (Addis Ababa), Eritrea, Harar and Tigray. Some regions and nationalities were completely ignorant of most of these sports. However, Ethiopian sportsmen managed to compete well in African and international sports, including the Olympics, and to produce such world famous natural athletes as Abebe Bikila—the champion of the Marathon.

With the outbreak of the Ethiopian revolution, sports and physical culture were declared people’s domains which should be available to every Ethiopian all over the country, irrespective of age or sex, nationality, language or religion. The slogans were: ‘Sports and physical culture belong to the masses.; ‘Sports and physical culture will be the culture of the masses.; ‘Sports for health, for production, for struggle and victory.; ‘Sports for unity, equality, brotherhood, and international friendship.’ By a proclamation of May 1976, a Commission for Sports and Physical Culture was created under the Ministry of Culture and Sports with a National Sports Council to advise it. This was an enormous development over the past situation. The Sports Commission, which now has appropriate offices, a budget and personnel, is organizing itself to reach the Ethiopian masses, and particularly the rural youth. Congresses of Ethiopian National Sports Federations and Organizations, as well as of the Supreme National Sports Council, were held for the first time and intensive discussions have been going on to find ways and means of achieving this goal. Sports councils are now established in every administrative region, district and subdistrict. Moreover, the commission works in close co-operation with urban dwellers’ associations, and peasant associations, as well as with the All Ethiopian Workers’ Association.

However, the means at the disposal of the commission for the achievement of these goals are still very limited. The first problem is always finance. In this respect, the main issue is the excessively inflated price of imported sports goods. At present, the commission, and any sports association whose Ethiopian members constitute at least two-thirds of the membership, are exempted by law from any state or municipal tax on revenue. Moreover, the commission is exempted, upon permission of the Minister of Finance, from payment of customs duty and other taxes on sports equipment and materials imported from abroad. However, individual purchasers of sports goods still have to pay excessive prices. To solve this
Sports and Physical Culture

problem that drains foreign currency, the government has given directions to the commission to develop appropriate technology so as to produce as many sport materials as possible locally. A workshop, established for this purpose, has studied this venture in detail and the outlook appears to be promising. The next problem is that of fields and sport centres, which the commission is trying to co-ordinate with the Ministry of Housing and Urban Development. The commission also faces acute shortage of skilled sports personnel. The idea of a Sports Institute has been repeatedly presented to the government and is expected to materialize soon. In the meantime, the commission is giving locally short training courses to produce sports instructors and sport administrators. A number of students have also been sent abroad (mostly to socialist countries) for training in sports and physical culture.

In the field of sports, one area that has attracted government attention is the promotion and development of traditional, now called ‘cultural’, sports in Ethiopia. The commission has therefore established a Department for Cultural Sports and a survey conducted throughout the country has revealed the existence of some 150 such sports.

The commission is thus very actively engaged in the development of sports and physical culture all over Ethiopia, in schools, universities, among workers and peasants, and in the army and the police. Its achievements are praiseworthy. In the international arena, past contacts have been continued and new ties with socialist countries have been strengthened. Ethiopian sports groups often fly abroad to participate in sports activities and the commission organized international meetings in Ethiopia. In this respect, the achievement of Ethiopian sportsmen (particularly athletes, notably Miruts Yifter) at the Moscow Olympics, where Ethiopia had the best result in Africa, are worth mentioning. It is also appropriate to mention the role of Ethiopian sportsmen in the development of African sports in general, in the defence of the status of black African sportsmen, as well as in the struggle against South African apartheid.

In order to facilitate direct and rapid contact with the government as well as with international organizations, a decision has been reached that the Sports Commission will very soon be separated from the Ministry of Culture, to become an autonomous institution.

To conclude our discussion of the administration of culture and culture agencies, one obvious recommendation is that some sort of Culture Council should be established which will bring together all the above ministries and organizations involved in the field of culture, with a view to co-ordinating their activities.

2. Ibid., p. 62 seq.
Conclusion

Basis and general orientation of the cultural revolution

We have seen the cultural policy of NDR as being the construction of a progressive culture of the Ethiopian nationalities, free from imperialist domination and their own reactionary characteristics. With the establishment of the commission organizing the Party of the Workers of Ethiopia, emphasis is on the construction of a Marxist-Leninist culture. However, in the spirit of NDR, the proclamation establishing COPWE also states that the progressive elements of the culture of Ethiopian nationalities that will be useful in the construction of a socialist society will be protected and developed. COPWE will co-operate with concerned government organizations to eradicate the reactionary and retrograde cultural elements from society. Moreover, the commission has been charged with the task of sifting the literature, films, cassettes, records, etc., which enter the country. Only material useful for the development of science and technology, as well as for the construction of a socialist society, will be allowed to reach the Ethiopian public. Subversive material directed at the revolution or which may bring about cultural imperialism, will not be allowed to enter the country under any circumstances. The Ethiopian cultural orientation is therefore at the same time, progressive, socialist, nationalist and internationalist.

However, culture cannot be seen in isolation from economic development, and the development of science and technology. Indeed, as has been noted earlier, culture is largely a function of a given economic development—a given mode of production. Nevertheless, there is an interaction, and culture and cultural development have their effects and influences on economic development, and the development of science and technology. This is specially true of the present era which is characterized by the 'communications' explosion' where the developing countries cannot, even
if they want to, build their economic and cultural development in isolation. The Ethiopian cultural revolution is intended to help harness the economic and technological development of the country. As Chairman Mengistu Haile Mariam said:

Although in a revolutionary process, one has the impression that culture is lagging behind, its contribution to rapid development should not be forgotten. The cultural revolution is one principal chapter in our struggle and so that our endeavours in this respect bear the desired fruit, we should have a correct appreciation of it. . . . The development of our economy on socialist lines has an effect on our cultural development. The new working-class culture contributes in the same way to economic development. As we look always forward in our economic construction, so also we should look forward in the construction of the new culture. To look forward and broadly into economic questions and to look backward and narrowly into cultural questions will pose an obstacle to our global development.1

The Ethiopian cultural revolution aims at spreading culture in its diversity to every region, district and subdistrict, to all nationalities, irrespective of language and religion, and to every Ethiopian, irrespective of age and sex. This is the democratization of culture or cultural democracy, aimed in particular at serving the masses, in contrast to an elitist cultural policy limited to certain privileged classes, and to urban centres. The objective is ‘mass culture’, but also ‘high culture’. The Ethiopian cultural revolution is not intended to remain an ‘urban cultural revolution’. However, the great problem in the democratization of culture in underdeveloped countries is the high illiteracy rate. As Lenin wrote:

So long as there is such a thing as illiteracy in our country it is not possible to talk of political education. This is not a political problem; it is a condition without which it is useless to talk about politics. An illiterate person stands outside politics; he must first learn his ABCs. Without that, there can be no politics; without that, there are rumours, gossip, fairy tales and prejudice, but not politics.

This is why the government of Ethiopia has launched the campaign to eradicate illiteracy.

In line with the Cultural Charter for Africa passed by the OAU, another major aspect of the ongoing Ethiopian cultural revolution is the equality of the culture of all nationalities of Ethiopia. This means giving an equal opportunity to the development of written and oral history, and of written and oral literature, and to the development of the nationalities’ languages on a scientific basis. This has led to the collection of oral traditions of formerly forgotten nationalities, the construction of new alphabets, the preparation of school instructional materials in the languages of the different

1. Chairman’s Report to First COPWE Congress.

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nationalities, as well as to the preparation of radio programmes, and even some newspapers, in the different languages of Ethiopia. This cultural development of unity in diversity will no doubt soon show itself in the production of an enriched and dynamic Ethiopian culture.

In art (the fine arts, music, theatre, etc.) and literature, the cultural revolution aims at creating progressive anti-feudal and anti-imperialist works inspired by 'socialist realism'—and not 'art for art's sake'—and is intended to serve in educating the masses and raising their cultural level, to help in the construction of socialism, and to aid in building up nationalism and national unity. The government commits itself to supporting and promoting high-quality creative works produced in the manner indicated above, as well as to raising the status of artists.

The question of the cultural past has not presented a very serious problem in Ethiopia, following the revolution. There has been, naturally, as everywhere after a revolution, some groups who wanted to do away with the past and build a 'new culture' from 'the air'. Some books were burnt, but monuments were in general untouched. However, the government's firm position in this respect, nipped in the bud this negligible nihilist tendency, and a sound, constructive official policy was laid down. To quote Chairman Mengistu again:

Culture is not something that we create today, all of a sudden; but a heritage accumulated during the long history of mankind. Ethiopian society of the earlier periods transmitted to us culture permitted by the corresponding level of development and this is our history. However, to attempt to transmit our cultural past integrally to the future generation is to misunderstand the proper concept of culture. Culture is one aspect of our development which we enrich by taking only the progressive heritage of the past. Inversely, any cultural heritage that has no direct relevance, or is an obstacle to our development, should be placed in historical museums.

In the same way, the Ethiopian cultural revolution stands against cultural imperialism, and also for a selective and critical assimilation of the progressive elements of foreign culture from all countries of the world. Culture, in the end, should be human and universal.

Related to the theme of cultural heritage is also the need to promote an Ethiopian, African, cultural environment, with a planned environmental and urbanization policy, so as not to render Ethiopian cities and the countryside 'copies' of foreign 'originals'. In this respect, the study and development of an Ethiopian architecture, monuments, etc., as well as the preservation of the Ethiopian natural heritage, have been suggested for future implementation.
Titles in this series:

Cultural policy: a preliminary study
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Cultural rights as human rights
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