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COLLEGE OF EDUCATION

DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SCIENCE EDUCATION

STATE IDEOLOGY AND HISTORY EDUCATION IN ETHIOPIA SINCE 1943: WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON SECONDARY EDUCATION (GRADES 9-12)

BY:

YIMEGNUTAL NIBRET WORKYE

JUNE 2026

BAHIR DAR, ETHIOPIA

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BY:

YIMEGNUTAL NIBRET WORKYE

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE POST-GRADUATE PROGRAMS OFFICE OF BAHIR DAR UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF EDUCATION DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL SCIENCE EDUCATION IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DOCTOR OF EDUCATION IN HISTORY

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JUNE 2026

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Declaration

This is to certify that the dissertation prepared by Yimegnutal Nibret, entitled "State Ideology and History Education in Ethiopia since 1943: With Special Emphasis on Secondary Education (Grades 9-12)", submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Education in History is a record of original work carried out by me and has never been submitted to this or any other institution to get any other degree or certificate. The assistance and help I received during this investigation have been duly acknowledged.

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Approval of Dissertation/Thesis for Defense

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I believe that all people are inherently good. And, nothing in life is achieved alone. Every success is the result of collective effort, built on the talents, experiences, and knowledge of many people working toward a common goal. Whatever we accomplish in life reflects the contributions of the individuals and circumstances that have shaped our journey. This dissertation is no exception. Its successful completion was made possible through the invaluable support of many people and institutions. I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude, in particular, to the following individuals and institutions that made this work possible.

First, I am deeply grateful to my dissertation advisors, Professor Temesgen Gebeyehu and Dr. Geremew Eskezia, for their professional guidance, constant encouragement, and invaluable supports. Their mentorship with deep knowledge and understanding of historical inquiry has been instrumental in shaping this dissertation. In particular, Professor Temesgen, the way you treat your students and advisees is truly remarkable. I am also deeply thankful to Professor Shumet Sishagne and Dr. Fantahun Ayele, whose research experience and historical perspectives significantly enriched the conceptual foundations and analytical depth of this study. Moreover, your fortitude and outstanding scholarly skills have consistently served me as sources of inspiration. Words cannot fully capture my appreciation for your intellectual integrity. I owe each of you great respect and heartfelt gratitude. It is an honor to call myself your student.

I am also indebted to the informants and individuals who generously shared information and materials essential to this study. This research was conducted under extremely challenging circumstances, during a time of great turmoil in the country. Traveling from place to place to gather data often posed serious risks, at times threatening personal safety and demanding

immense sacrifice. In the face of such adversity, your support was indispensable. Without your cooperation and willingness to share your knowledge, experiences, and resources, the successful completion of this research would not have been possible.

My deepest gratitude goes to my parents and family. Nibret Workye, my father, has taught me the values of hard work, commitment, and reverence for God. Thank you, Father, for laying the foundation of my life. Negestie Belayneh, my mother, your strong belief in me and your constant encouragement have been priceless. Your love is beyond words. You are my hero. I honor you; I venerate you; and love you with all my heart.

To my dear siblings, Girma, Tirualem, Abraham, Sitotaw, Yonathan, and Addisu Nibret, your constant love, support, and encouragement have been a source of strength in difficult times. I am truly fortunate to have you in my life. All you are so special.

To my wife, Kassaye Atinaf, thank you for being my rock throughout this journey. Your love, patience, and devotion have been indispensable. I am especially grateful for the care you've given to our beloved sons, Peter and Philip, and for walking this life journey by my side. You are the woman of my dreams, and I am eternally thankful for the role you've played in shaping my life and destiny. Our sons are manifestations of God's infinite love and a source of inspiration and joy.

I would also like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to *Woizero* Rebecca Haile, co-founder of Haile-Manas Academy; *Woizero* Andrea Spinner, Head of School; and *Ato* Tesfaye Kifle, Deputy Head of School, for their invaluable support to me and my family. Your kindness and commitment to lasting change have brought ease to our lives and renewed our sense of hope. HMA has uplifted me, reawakened my motivation, and, above all, opened my eyes in many

meaningful ways. Thank you for believing in me. Your presence has left a lasting impact on our lives, and I will remain sincerely grateful.

I am also indebted to my dearest companions and friends: Hailemichael Tadelle, Messele Beza, Mesha Griffin (D.Ed.), Amdetsion Messele, Alemayehu Erkihun (PhD), Melesse Abere, Ayele Tariku (PhD), Derejaw Yesgat (D.Ed.), Abyot Ashenafi, Ewunetie Amare, Andargachew Mengesha (D.Ed.), and Fantahun Mekonnen. Your friendship, encouragement, and thoughtful contributions have been crucial to the completion of this research. Thank you all for standing by me.

In addition, I gratefully acknowledge the Ministry of Education for financing this study and for granting access to essential archival resources. I also extend my appreciation to Bahir Dar University for providing academic resources, accommodations, and a team of experienced faculty and advisors, and to Finote Selam College of Teacher Education for hosting my family during the course of my study.

Finally, and above all, I give thanks to God. His boundless grace and mercy have sustained me throughout this journey.

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ACRONYMS

A.A: Addis Ababa

A.D. Anno Domini

AAU: Addis Ababa University

AESM: All Ethiopian Socialist Movement

ANDM: Amhara National Democratic Movement

BA: Bachelor of Arts

BDU: Bahir Dar University

BED: Bachelor of Education

CC: Central Committee

CIDA: Canadian International Development Agency

COPWE: Commission for Organizing the Party of the Working People of Ethiopia

CTE: College of Teacher Education

DMU: Debre Markos University

E.C.: Ethiopian Calendar

EDU: Ethiopian Democratic Union

EMPDA: Educational Materials Production and Distribution Agency

EOTC: Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church

EPLF: Eritrean People's Liberation Front

EPRDF: Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front

EPRP: The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party

ERGESE: Evaluative Research of the General Education System in Ethiopia

ESLCE: Ethiopian School Leaving Certificate Examination

ESM: Ethiopian Student Movement

ESUE: Ethiopian Students Union in Europe

ESUNA: Ethiopian Students Union in North America

FDRE: Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

FFC: French Foreign Service

GCE: General Certificate of Education

HF: House of Federation

HOA: Horn of Africa

HSIU: Haile Selassie I University

IEG: Imperial Ethiopian Government

IES: Institute of Ethiopian Studies

MOE: Ministry of Education

MOEFA: Ministry of Education and Fine Arts

MOI: Ministry of Information

NALA: National Archives and Library Agency

NDR: National Democratic Revolution

NNP: Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples

OLF: Oromo Liberation Front

OPDO: The Oromo People Democratic Movement

PDRE: People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

PMAC: Provisional Military Administrative Council

REWA: Revolutionary Ethiopian Women's Association

SIDA: Swedish International Development Agency

SNNP: Southern Nations, Nationalities and Peoples

SPDM: The Southern Peoples Democratic Movement

TGE: Transitional Government of Ethiopia

TMS: Teferi Mekonnen School

TPLF: Tigray Peoples' Liberation Front

TTI: Teacher Training Institute

UCAA: University College of Addis Ababa

UCAA: University College of Addis Ababa

UNICEF: United Nations Children's Fund

USAID: United States Agency for International Development

USUAA: University Students Union of Addis Ababa

VSO: Voluntary Service Overseas

WPE: Workers' Party of Ethiopia

GLOSSARY

Abun: The title of the head of the Ethiopian Orthodox *Tewahedo* Church, equivalent to a patriarch.

Ato: A respectful title used for adult men, equivalent to *Mr.*

Awraja: A historical administrative unit in Ethiopia, ranked below a province and above a *woreda*, used primarily during the imperial and Derg periods.

Debtera: A highly educated layperson in the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, trained in liturgy, music, theology, poetry, history, and traditional medicine.

Dejazmach: A traditional Ethiopian military and noble title bestowed upon provincial governors or senior military leaders, ranking below *Ras* and above *Fitawrari* within the imperial hierarchy.

Derg: The military junta that ruled Ethiopia from 1974 to 1991; officially known as the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC).

Gebbar: A peasant tenant obligated to pay tribute, labor, or taxes to landlords under the imperial land-tenure system.

Junior Secondary: The educational level comprising Grades 7 and 8.

Neftegna: A term historically referring to soldiers, administrators, or settlers deployed during imperial expansion, particularly under Emperor Menelik II. The term has become politically sensitive and is sometimes used pejoratively in contemporary discourse.

Ras: A prominent Ethiopian noble title granted to high-ranking regional rulers or military commanders within the imperial system.

Senior Secondary: The educational level comprising Grades 9 to 12.

Woizero: A respectful title used for a married woman, equivalent to *Mrs.*

Woreda: A local administrative district; in contemporary federal Ethiopia, it is the basic unit of local government, ranking below a zone.

PREFACE

Ethiopia has had a long-standing literary and educational tradition that dates back to antiquity. Traditional forms of education in the country were rooted in the introduction of Christianity and Islam in the fourth and seventh centuries, respectively. In contrast, modern education was fairly recent. It was formally institutionalized only in the early twentieth century with the establishment of Menelik II School in Addis Ababa. From its inception until the Italian occupation, modern education remained largely confined to primary-level education in a few urban centers and served a limited number of children from elite social groups. It was only after the liberation of Ethiopia from Italian occupation in 1941 that secondary education was formally introduced, with the inauguration of the first secondary school in Addis Ababa in 1943.

Since the emergence of modern education, the Ethiopian education system has undergone significant transformations shaped by shifting ideological orientations, political philosophies, and policy reforms. Both general educational policy and, more specifically, history education have been influenced by the ideological orientations of successive regimes.

The primary objective of this study is to critically examine the relationship between state ideology and history education in Ethiopian secondary schools since 1943. To achieve this objective, the dissertation employed a historical research methodology that combines archival research with qualitative content analysis. Primary data were collected from four major archival institutions: the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES), Debre Markos University Archive Center, the National Archives and Library Agency (NALA), and the Ministry of Education (MoE). In addition, relevant documents were gathered from the libraries of selected secondary schools, including Tana Haik Secondary School in Bahir Dar, Damot Secondary School in Finote Selam,

Haile-Mariam Mamo Secondary School in Debre Birhan, Nigus Tekle-Haimanot Secondary School in Debre Markos, and Menelik II Secondary School in Addis Ababa. These materials include educational policy documents, official reports, correspondences, meeting minutes, curricular frameworks, syllabi, and secondary school history textbooks for Grades 9 through 12 from different historical periods.

Textbooks from the Derg period are relatively well preserved at the IES, while post-1991 textbooks are readily available at the Ministry of Education Archive and in many secondary schools. In contrast, textbooks from the Imperial period are more difficult to obtain. According to informants, many of the Imperial-era textbooks were discarded or destroyed during the early years of the revolutionary government. Nevertheless, the researcher was able to access some relevant materials from the IES and NALA, including history curricula and syllabi from 1957 and 1967. Oral testimonies from individuals who attended their education during the Imperial period also served as important supplementary sources.

Secondary sources were used to complement the primary data and included a wide range of scholarly works, such as peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, theses, and books. In addition, oral accounts from historians and educators with direct teaching experience during the periods under study were incorporated. These insights, obtained through interviews and discussions, some are available on platforms like YouTube, provided valuable perspectives on curriculum implementation, pedagogical challenges, and the ideological influences shaping the teaching of history across different regimes.

To ensure the reliability and validity of the data, rigorous source evaluation procedures were employed. Each archival document was assessed for authenticity and credibility, and findings

were cross-verified through triangulation with oral accounts and secondary sources. The data were then systematically analyzed, interpreted, and presented using a narrative and analytical discussion approach.

The thematic focus of the study is secondary school history education. The definition of secondary education has varied across regimes in accordance with changing educational policies. In most periods prior to the introduction of the Education and Training Policy of 1994 under the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), secondary education generally encompassed Grades 7 through 12. However, the specific analytical focus of this study is history education at the secondary school level, particularly from Grades 9 to 12.

Temporally, the study covers the period from 1943 to 2022. The year 1943 is selected as a critical historical benchmark because it marks the establishment of Teferi Mekonnen School, the first secondary school in post-liberation Ethiopia, followed by the gradual expansion of secondary education across the country. The study concludes in 2022 because that year marked the end of the implementation of the EPRDF curriculum.

In July 2018, the Ministry of Education launched the *Ethiopian Education Development Roadmap,* which introduced comprehensive curricular reforms across all levels of education. As part of this initiative, newly revised history textbooks for Grades 9 and 10 were published in 2022, followed by textbooks for Grades 11 and 12 in 2023. These developments signal a significant reframing of historical narratives under the Prosperity Party (PP) government led by Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed.

The dissertation is organized into six chapters. Chapter one provides the historical background of education in Ethiopia, outlines the conceptual framework of the study, and examines the evolution of modern education. It also discusses the structure of secondary education and the place of history teaching across different historical periods and ideological contexts.

Chapter Two examines the period from 1943 to 1974, focusing on the ideological foundations of the Imperial regime, particularly monarchical governance and the policy of Westernization, and their impact on history education. The chapter analyzes the development of history education under the British-influenced educational system of the 1940s and the American-oriented system that emerged in the 1950s and 1960s. It also discusses how the Westernization policies of Emperor Haile Selassie I shaped the content and orientation of secondary school history education. To this end, the 1949, 1957, and 1967 history curricula are examined in relation to imperial policies and ideological orientations.

Chapter Three analyzes the period from 1974 to 1991, which was characterized by the Marxist-Leninist ideology of the Derg regime. It investigates how revolutionary ideology restructured the education system and assesses the extent to which official historical narratives aligned with academic historiography in secondary schools. The chapter also explores how the Leninist-oriented history curriculum was employed to promote national unity and examines the degree to which historical content reflected the socio-economic and cultural foundations of Ethiopian society.

Chapter Four focuses on the post-1991 period, during which the EPRDF institutionalized ethnic federalism. The chapter assesses the implications of this ideological framework for history

curricula and textbooks, with particular attention to content selection, thematic emphasis, and adherence to disciplinary and historiographical standards.

Chapter Five offers a comparative analysis of the representation of Ethiopian history in secondary school textbooks from 1952, marking the publication of the first English-language Ethiopian history textbook for secondary schools, to 1999, which marked the end of the implementation of the Derg-era history curriculum. The grand narrative in the textbooks from 1952 to 1999/2000 promoted Ethiopian nationalism, although it was grounded in sharply contrasting ideological bases. The chapter evaluates the extent to which historical narratives were shaped by the ideological agendas of the two successive regimes.

Chapter Six examines the ideology of ethno-nationalism and the teaching of Ethiopian history in secondary schools after 1991. It explores the impact of contemporary political developments, including identity politics and the emergence of ethno-nationalist historiography, gender discourse, anti-Derg narratives, and the politics of victimhood, on history education. The chapter argues that, across periods, ideological impositions have consistently shaped the presentation of Ethiopian history in secondary schools.

Finally, the Conclusions section presents a synthesis of the main findings of the study and offers historically grounded analytical reflections anchored on principles of academic integrity and historiographical rigor.

ABSTRACT

Ethiopia's modern education system has undergone a series of changes in line with varying state ideologies since its inception in the early twentieth century. The main purpose of this study is to critically examine the relationship between state ideology and history education in Ethiopian secondary schools since the 1940s. Pertinent data were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include educational policy documents, reports, official letters, minutes, curricular materials, syllabi, and secondary school history textbooks. Secondary data comprises oral sources, books, peer-reviewed articles, internet sources, and MA and PhD theses. The study employed a qualitative historical methodology. Curricular materials were analyzed both through the ideological lens of the governments that produced them and from the perspective of academic historiography. The study focuses on how history was taught in Ethiopian secondary schools during successive regimes: the imperial government (1941–74), the Derg (1974–91), and the EPRDF (1991–2018). The findings reveal that the influence of three polarized ideologies, Westernization, Leninization, and Ethnicization, hindered Ethiopian history education from meeting professional standards. Contrary to the claims of academic historiography, history education in Ethiopian secondary schools has served as an ideological tool for successive regimes. Before 1974, Western experts heavily influenced history curricula to promote Western values, monarchical ideology, and glorification of the emperor. During the military regime (1974–1991), socialist ideology shaped the history curriculum. History was interpreted in terms of class struggle, and the subject was used to vilify pre-revolutionary Ethiopia and feudal society. In both the imperial and Derg periods, Ethiopian history was marginalized as the curricula emphasized the histories of the Western world and Eastern socialist countries, respectively. Afterwards, ethno-nationalist ideology became central to history

education in the post-1991 order. Unlike the Derg regime, which upheld the "class oppression" thesis as its main ideological foundation, the EPRDF government embraced a "national oppression" analysis. These discourses were reflected in numerous policy documents, including the teaching materials. Therefore, the history curriculum has emphasized the politicization of ethnic identity, multiplicity, and victimhood, in the representation of Ethiopian history in textbooks. Ultimately, this dissertation contends that history curricula should be designed to develop students' cognition, historical skills, and attitudes in line with disciplinary standards, thereby enabling the subject to foster national consensus.

CHAPTER ONE

THE BACKGROUND OF ETHIOPIAN EDUCATION

1.1 Conceptual Framework

The general objective of the study is to explore the gap between the claims of the discipline of history and the ways in which history has been taught in Ethiopian secondary schools (Grades 9–12) under changing state ideologies since 1943. The specific objectives are to:

- examine the extent to which the ideologies of successive Ethiopian governments since 1941 have influenced the objectives, contents, teaching materials, and practices of history education;
- explain the historical trends of history education from the perspective of the academic discipline of history;
- investigate whether the secondary school history curricula in Ethiopia have served political purposes;
- identify whether certain thematic areas were deliberately included in and/or excluded from school history textbooks in response to the ideological needs of successive governments; and
- analyze the contents of secondary school history textbooks within the ideological frameworks of each political period from 1943 to 2022.

To achieve these objectives, the study was guided by the following research questions:

- To what extent have the ideological priorities of the imperial regime (1941–1974), the Derg (1974–1991), and the EPRDF (post-1991) been reflected in the teaching materials and classroom practices of secondary school history education?
- How have the historical trends of history education in Ethiopian secondary schools evolved from the perspective of the academic discipline of history?
- What were the major political and ideological factors that impeded the effective implementation of the history curriculum in Ethiopian secondary schools?
- What were the main criteria for the inclusion and exclusion of content in the secondary school history curriculum?
- How have Ethiopian, African, and World History contents been selected, organized, and presented in Ethiopian secondary school history textbooks across different ideological periods?

As noted above, this dissertation examines the relationship between two key components of contemporary Ethiopian history: state ideology and its intersection with history education in Ethiopian secondary schools (Grades 9–12). The concept of *ideology* is inherently complex, elusive, and difficult to define with precision. To establish a coherent theoretical framework, this study draws on the works of John Gerring (1997), Michael Apple (2019), and Onur Saraph (2021).[1] These scholars critically examine the diverse uses and interpretations of ideology and collectively identify three principal dimensions: thought, practice, and discourse.

[1] Michael Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum*, 4th ed. (New York: Routledge, 2019); John Gerring, "Ideology: A Definitional Analysis," *Political Research Quarterly* 50, no. 4 (1997): 957–994; Onur Şaraph, *State Ideology and Education in Turkey, 1980–2015* (New York: Peter Lang, 2021).

1. **Ideology as Thought**: This dimension refers to political beliefs, values, attitudes, and principles that together form a conceptual worldview.
2. **Ideology as Practice**: The aforementioned authors conceptualize ideology not merely as belief but as action. Ideology is manifested in behaviors, routine practices, institutional arrangements, and sustained commitments informed by political or social convictions.
3. **Ideology as Discourse**: Ideology is also conveyed through language, symbols, and written texts. As Gerring argues, "Ideological thinking is inseparable from ideological language", which demonstrates the intimate relationship between belief systems and the linguistic forms through which they are communicated.[2]

Among these dimensions, *ideology as a thought* is particularly elusive for researchers of history education, who must rely primarily on written or recorded sources to reconstruct past realities. In the absence of explicit textual evidence, identifying the ideological convictions of past rulers becomes methodologically challenging. Consequently, this study adopts the latter two dimensions, *ideology as practice and ideology as discourse*, as its primary analytical lenses for examining ideological influences on history education.

Accordingly, the dissertation analyzes history education in Ethiopian secondary schools through ideological practices and textual representations found in official state documents. Central to this analysis are the preambles of four Ethiopian constitutions (1931, 1955, 1987, and 1995), which are examined to identify the dominant ideological orientations and political visions of successive regimes. These preambles are selected on the assumption that constitutions often serve as authoritative articulations of state ideology, offering insight into each regime's historical

[2] Gerring, "Ideology….", p. 967.

consciousness and interpretation and understanding of the Ethiopian past. In addition, other government documents reflecting ideological commitments, particularly educational policies and curricular objectives, are also examined.

The emergence of history education as a formal school subject is relatively recent in both global and Ethiopian contexts. Internationally, history has been part of school curricula since the late nineteenth century[3], while in Ethiopia its formal introduction dates to the late 1940s.[4] The purposes of teaching history have varied widely, generating debates over curriculum content, the nature of historical knowledge to be taught, and the overarching objectives of history education. These debates remain highly contested, particularly between political actors and professional historians, rendering history education an epistemological battleground.

Educational historians generally argue that school history should be grounded in the principles of disciplinary history and aim to foster disciplinary historical knowledge. This includes understanding key historical concepts such as change and continuity, time and space, causation, comparison, and historical significance, as well as developing skills in inquiry, analysis, critical thinking, and source evaluation.[5] At the same time, global trends indicate that history education is frequently used to promote values such as patriotism, national identity, and cultural heritage.[6]

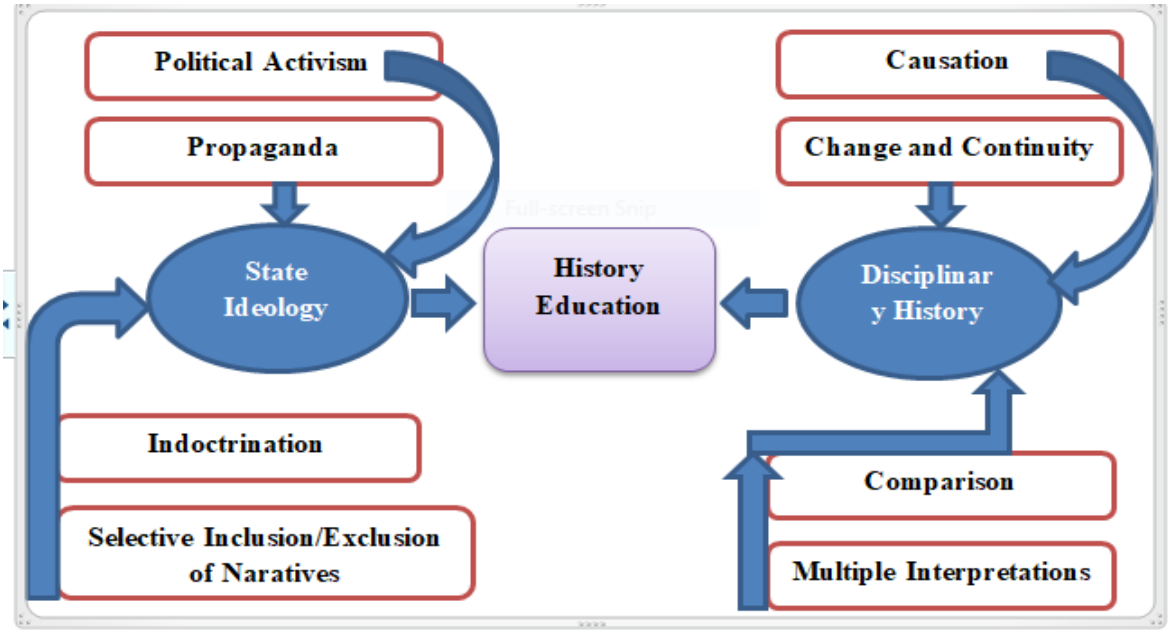
[3] Peter Seixas and Tom Morton, *The Big Six: Historical Thinking Concepts* (Toronto: Nelson Education, 2013), pp. 112-17.

[4] Abebe Fisseha, *An Investigation of History Teaching in Ethiopian Senior Secondary School: Historical Perspective and Current Status* (MA thesis, Addis Ababa University, 1992), pp. 91-5.

[5] Kaya Yilmaz, "A Vision of History Teaching and Learning: Thoughts on History Education in Secondary Schools," *The High School Journal* 92, no. 2 (2009), pp. 37–46; Arie Wilschut, "History at the Mercy of Politicians and Ideologies: Germany, England, and the Netherlands in the 19th and 20th Centuries," *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 42, no. 5 (2010), pp. 693–723; Joseph Zajda, "Nation Building and History Education in a Global Culture," in *Nation Building and History Education in a Global Culture*, ed. Joseph Zajda, Globalization, Comparative Education and Policy Research, vol. 13 (Dordrecht: Springer, 2015), pp. 185–191; Carla van Boxtel and Jannet van Drie, "Historical Reasoning: Conceptualizations and Educational Applications," in *The Wiley International*

The relationship between history education and political ideology has long been a focal point of intellectual debate. Fundamental questions persist in this regard. For example: What history should be taught in schools? What kind of historical knowledge should students acquire? What should be the primary purpose of history education? Which contents should be included or excluded from curricula? What does teaching and learning history as inquiry entail? Answers to these questions vary significantly, particularly between political actors and professional historians, reinforcing the characterization of history education as an epistemological battlefield between state ideologies and the academic discipline of history.

Figure 1: School History in Tension between State Ideology and Disciplinary History



Handbook of History Teaching and Learning, ed. Scott Alan Metzger and Lauren McArthur Harris (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley Blackwell, 2018), pp. 149–176.

[6] Zajda, "Nation-Building…..", p. 185-89; Girma Negash, "Adwa in Ethiopia's High School History Curriculum: The Interface among History, Pedagogy, Ideology and Nation Building," *Ethiopian Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities (EJOSSAH)* 18, no. 1 (June 2022), pp. 96–118; Tekeste Negash, *The Crisis of Ethiopian Education: Some Implications for Nation-Building* (Uppsala: Department of Education, Uppsala University, 1990), p. 6.

Some scholars, particularly in the field of education, argue that education, including history, cannot be ideology-free. Mikael Apple, for example, maintains that education is inherently shaped by dominant state ideologies, echoing the overstayed maxim of the ancient Greek educators "As is the state, so is the school".[7] From this perspective, educational content ultimately reflects the ideological needs of the state. In contrast, academic historians resist ideological imposition, asserting that history education should remain independent of political agendas. According to this view, any curriculum designed to promote the interests of a particular ideology or political group does not constitute history. As John Tosh argues, such an approach is better characterized as "propaganda" or political activism, rather than history.[8]

Furthermore, professional historians emphasize that professional historiography must adhere to two core principles: *scientificity and objectivity*.[9] Scientificity involves rigorous evaluation of evidence through source criticism, triangulation, and systematic documentation.[10] As an academic discipline, history seeks to establish credible interpretations through careful engagement with reliable sources. Objectivity, meanwhile, requires historians to "understand before judging", though this principle remains contested.[11] Carr famously argued that "objective historical truth" does not exist, underlining the interpretive role of historians.[12] Tosh similarly

[7] Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum*…, p. 90; Siraw Demas, *Ethiopian Identity in the Post-1991 New Nation-Building Process: Curriculum Responses and Student Perspectives* (PhD diss., Addis Ababa University, 2016), pp. 94-95.

[8] John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History: Aims, Methods, and New Directions in the Study of Modern History*, 5th ed. (Dorchester: Dorset Press, 2010), p. 191.

[9] Ibid;, p. 117; E. H. Carr, *What Is History?*, 2nd ed. (New York: Penguin, 1987); Timothy Slekar, "Disciplinary History versus Curricular Heritage: Epistemological Battle," *Journal of Thought* 36, no. 3 (2001): 63–70; Bahru Zewde, "Evolution of Professional Historiography in Ethiopia," in *What Is "Zemenawinet"? Perspectives on Ethiopian Modernity*, ed. Elisabeth Woldegiorgis (Addis Ababa: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung and Goethe Institute, 2012), 27–38.

[10] Bahru, "Evolution of….", pp. 28-9.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Carr, *What is History?*, pp. 2; 14.

noted that objectivity is constrained by source limitations and historians' cultural values, which inevitably shape historical interpretation.[13]

Therefore, this study employs the core tenets of disciplinary history as its conceptual framework to analyze the teaching of history in Ethiopian secondary schools since 1943 in relation to the shifting ideological orientations of three successive regimes: the Imperial government (1943-74), the Derg (1974-91), and the EPRDF (1991-2018). This approach is informed by extensive scholarship indicating that the principal purpose of history education should be the attainment of disciplinary historical knowledge.[14]

1.2 The Evolution of Modern Education in Ethiopia

1.2.1 Prelude

Modern education in Ethiopia did not emerge from scratch. Prior to the introduction of formal modern schooling, educational practices were largely transmitted through traditional religious institutions. In this context, the educational systems of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC), Islamic institutions, and later Christian missionary schools constituted the principal foundations of Ethiopia's pre-modern educational landscape and provided the historical basis upon which modern education developed.[15]

Church education in Ethiopia dates back to the fourth century A.D., following the adoption of Christianity as the state religion under Emperor Ezana of Aksum. From that period onward, the

[13] Tosh, *The Pursuit of....",* pp. 188-89.

[14] Reinhard Bendix, "Education and the Teaching of History," *The School Review* 53, no. 1 (1945): 15–24; Robert Thorp and Anders Persson, "On Historical Thinking and the History Educational Challenge," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 52, no. 8 (2020): 891–901.

[15] MoE, *A Historical Development of Modern Education in Ethiopia*, A.A: 1976 E.C, p. 12; Paulos Milkias, "Traditional Institutions and Traditional Elites: The Role of Education in the Ethiopian Body-Politic," *African Studies Review* 19, no. 3 (December 1976), pp. 79–93.

Church functioned as the country's primary intellectual institution. Instruction was conducted in Geez, which remained the liturgical and scholarly language. The content of traditional church education focused mainly on ecclesiastical music, poetry, philosophy, Ethiopian Christian history, theology, religious law, and moral values, with limited engagement with secular or foreign knowledge systems. Historical content also formed part of the curriculum. Scholarly works indicate that both Ethiopian and world history were taught alongside religious instruction. [16] Core historical texts included *Tarike Negest* (History of Kings), *Kibre Negest* (Glory of Kings), and *Fetha Negest* (Law of Kings). World history topics primarily covered the ancient world, the history of the Jews, and that of the Arabs.[17]

Alongside the Christian educational tradition, Islamic education constituted another enduring form of religious instruction in Ethiopia. Although Islam was introduced to the country in the early seventh century A.D., Islamic education became more institutionalized from the sixteenth century onward, particularly following the military campaigns of Ahmed Gragn.[18] Quranic schools, centered on mosques and led by religious scholars, became the primary means of education for Muslim communities across generations. Islamic educational institutions were especially prominent in regions with substantial Muslim populations, including Harar, Wollo, Arsi, Bale, Jimma, Kaffa, and the western and southwestern borderlands. In these areas, Islamic

[16] Paulos, "Traditional Institutions…. *"*, pp. 79–93; Woube Kassaye, "Curriculum Development and Research in Ethiopia," in *International Handbook of Curriculum Research*, 2nd ed., ed. William Pinar (New York: Routledge, 2014), pp. 11-13; Messay Kebede, "The Roots and Fallouts of Haile Selassie's Educational Policy". (2006), *Philosophy Faculty Publications*, Paper 113, pp. 6-8.

[17] Ibid.

[18] J. S. Trimingham, *Islam in Ethiopia* (London and New York: Oxford University Press, 1952), p. 14.

education played a crucial role in sustaining religious and cultural identity, particularly where state-sponsored education was limited or perceived as culturally unfamiliar.[19]

Furthermore, missionary education marked a further stage in Ethiopia's gradual transition toward modern education. Although Ethiopia's encounters with European missionaries date back to the sixteenth century, sustained and institutionally significant missionary involvement in education emerged only in the nineteenth century. During the 1830s, Protestant missionaries, backed by European mission societies, established schools in Showa. [20] These schools introduced subjects such as geography, history, and literacy in European languages, representing a clear departure from exclusively religious instruction. Despite resistance from local clergy, missionary schools gained popularity and benefited from royal protection. Their expansion accelerated during the reign of Emperor Menelik II. Consequently, missionary institutions remained influential, both in training early elites and in introducing Western pedagogical methods.[21]

In sum, Ethiopia possesses a long-standing literary and educational tradition rooted in its religious heritage. The introduction of Christianity in the fourth century A.D. and Islam in the seventh century was accompanied by the expansion of traditional educational institutions. Moreover, the growth of missionary education from the early nineteenth century onward facilitated the introduction of Western ideas, values, and instructional practices. Together, these developments laid the foundation for the establishment of a modern schooling system by the first decade of the twentieth century.

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[19] Yesuf, Omar. *A Descriptive Analysis of the Content Validity of the History Examination of the Ethiopian Secondary School Leaving Certificate Examination*. PhD diss., University of Illinois, 1975, pp. 80-82.

[20] Maaza, Bekele. *A Study of Modern Education in Ethiopia: Its Foundations, Its Development, Its Future, with Emphasis on Primary Education.* D.Ed. dissertation, Columbia University, 1966, pp. 55-59.

[21] Paulos, "Traditional Institutions*….",* p. 84.

1.2.2 The Early Modern Education to the Invasion of Italians (1908-1935)

The introduction of modern education in Ethiopia began with the establishment of Menelik II School in Addis Ababa in 1908. This initiative, launched by Emperor Menelik II, marked a strategic shift away from the exclusively religious instruction that had dominated Ethiopian education for centuries.[22] It was driven by Ethiopia's growing engagement with foreign powers and by the Emperor's recognition that educational modernization was essential to preserving national independence, strengthening diplomacy, and advancing the administration of a sovereign state. [23] The Menelik II School, along with a few others opened during his reign, offered a curriculum dominated by foreign languages, particularly French, which held primacy as the language of diplomacy. English, Italian, and Arabic were also taught. This modernization initiative met with strong resistance from the clergy. In an effort to mitigate tensions with the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, the government recruited teachers primarily from Egypt's Coptic Church, whose shared religious background with Ethiopia was seen as less threatening to ecclesiastical authority.[24]

Figure 2: Menelik II School, the First Modern School in Ethiopia



[22] Ibid.

[23] Bahru Zewde, *A History of Modern Ethiopia 1855-1991*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: James Currey; Athens: Ohio University Press; Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2002), pp. 111-112.

[24] Ibid.

Source: MOE, ***ከትምህርት ዓለም*** *(From the Education World),* A Special Issue prepared for the Tenth Revolutionary Festival of the Derg and Foundation of the WPE, Addis Ababa, 1976 E.C., p. 24.

From its inception, modern education in Ethiopia reflected the dual pressures of internal reform and external influence. Subjects taught in the early years included French, English, Geez, Amharic, drawing, arithmetic, and gymnastics.[25] Ethiopian priests taught traditional subjects like Geez and Amharic, while Coptic teachers handled the foreign language and science components. Despite the symbolic importance of this early effort, the scale of educational expansion under Menelik remained modest. By the time of his death in 1913, only a handful of government schools existed, located in Addis Ababa, Harar, Dessie, and Ankober, largely because of limited resources, resistance from the Church, and lack of institutional infrastructure.[26]

Menelik had not established a Ministry of Education. Instead, education was placed under the jurisdiction of the Ethiopian Orthodox Church. Abune Matewos, the head of the Church, insisted that education remain inseparable from religious authority.[27] This arrangement hindered the development of a secular and centrally administered education system. Even though Emperor Menelik did issue a public decree urging families to send boys and girls to school, even threatening to confiscate the property of parents who failed to do so, the decree failed to generate widespread enrollment. The Emperor's decree reads as follows:

> **እስካሁን ማንም የእጅ ስራ ዐዋቂ የነበረ ሰው በውርደት ስም ይጠራ ነበር፤ ስለዚህም ማንም ሰው ለመማርና ለመሰልጠን የሚደክም**

[25] MoE, *Secondary Education in Ethiopia: General and Vocational*, IES-67-5324/1960 (Addis Ababa, June 1960), p. 14-15.

[26] Maaza, *A Study of …*, pp. 60-64; Teshome, *Education in Ethiopia,* pp. 44-5.

[27] Ibid., Beletu Mengistu, "The Role of Abuna Matewos in the Emergence of Modern Education" (paper presented at the Historical Seminar, Department of History, Haile Selassie I University, 1972), pp. 1-3.

አልነበረም። በዚህ ጎጂ በሆነ ሁኔታ ብንኖር ቤተ ክርስቲያኖች ይዘጋሉ፤ ይልቁንም ክርስቲያንነት አይገኝም። በሌሎች አገሮች እያንዳንዱን ነገር ብቻ መማር ሳይሆን አዲስ ነገሮችም ይሰራሉ። ስለዚህ ከዛሬ ጀምሮ ለወደፊት ወንድ ልጆችና ሴት ልጆች ሁሉ ከስድስት አመታቸው በኋላ ወደ ትምህርት ቤት እንዲገቡ ይሁን። ልጆቻቸውን ለማስተማር ለማይተጉ ቤተሰቦች ወላጆቻቸው ሲሞቱ ንብረታቸው ለልጆቻቸው መሆኑ ቀርቶ ለመንግሥት ይተላለፋል። ተማሪ ቤቶችንና አስተማሪዎችን የሚያዘጋጀው መንግሥቴ ነው።[28]

Until now, anyone who was skilled in manual work used to be referred to with a derogatory term. As a result, no one was motivated to learn or train in such work. If we continue in this harmful way, churches will be shut down; more than that, Christianity itself will cease to exist. In other countries, people not only learn individual subjects, but they also create new things. Therefore, starting today and going forward, all boys and girls must begin attending school after the age of six. Families who do not send their children to school will forfeit their children's inheritance when the parents die; their property will not go to their children but will instead be transferred to the government. It is my government that will prepare the schools and teachers.

Following the brief and politically unstable reign of Lej Iyasu (1913–1916), the regency of *Ras* Teferi Mekonnen ushered in a renewed impetus for educational reform. In 1925, *Ras* Teferi established the Teferi Mekonnen School in Addis Ababa. The school employed foreign teachers and offered a curriculum focused mainly on foreign languages.[29] Between 1928 and 1929, the regent expanded educational access by founding schools in regional centers including Gore, Jigjiga, Nekemte, Dessie, and Dire Dawa. Complementing these efforts, members of the imperial family played a significant role in advancing education; notably, Woizero Sehen founded a

[28] Mahteme Selassie Wolde-Meskel, *Zikre-Neger*, 1950, pp. 599-600.
[29] Ibid.

French-language primary school in Dessie in 1928, and Empress Menen established a girls' school in Addis Ababa in 1931.[30]

Ethiopia's education system lacked formal institutional organization until the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts (MOEFA) was established in 1930. The new ministry enabled a more centralized coordination of education, although its reach remained largely limited to Addis Ababa, the capital, and nearby urban centers.[31] During this period, significant numbers of Ethiopian students were sent abroad, while a growing number of mission and government schools served the children of the nobility and administrative elite.[32] The curriculum across these schools continued to emphasize foreign languages, especially French, alongside basic literacy, arithmetic, physical training, and moral education.[33] History was nominally included as a school subject but remained traditional in approach, lacking critical engagement with historical sources or methods. The teaching of history primarily centered on the glorification of Ethiopian kings, relying heavily on the *Kebra Nagast* and *Tarika Nagast*, texts that promoted a largely unrealistic narrative of Ethiopia's past.[34]

During the pre-Italian invasion period (1908–1935), Ethiopia's education system lacked a clear national policy direction. There was no formally written curriculum and teacher training program. The system continued to rely heavily on foreign teachers, with both content and pedagogy largely imported, particularly from France. Foreign dominance extended beyond

[30] Mahteme Selassie, *Zikre-Neger*, p. 599; Maaza, *A Study of …*, p. 57.
[31] MoE, *A Historical Development of Modern Education in Ethiopia*, p. 2.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Solomon, "Trends of Educational Policy….", p. 266.
[34] Olle Erikson, "Education in Abyssinia", *Journal of the International African Institute*, Vol. 5, No. 3, (1932), pp. 338-43.

staffing and instructional language to curricular content, reflecting the limited sovereignty of the system. [35]

The expansion of schools in the early 1930s, from the capital to the provinces, offered glimpses of progress. By 1935, schools had been established in various provincial towns such as Jimma, Gondar, Debre Markos, Adwa, and Mekelle. Estimates suggest that by the time of the Italian invasion, about twenty government schools were in operation. Yet this modest growth was brought to a sudden halt in 1935. The Italian occupation dismantled Ethiopia's fragile educational infrastructure, converted schools into military barracks, and targeted a significant portion of the educated youth for execution, viewing them as politically threatening to the fascist regime.[36]

1.2.2 The Italian Period Education, 1936-41

As has been discussed earlier, the course of Ethiopia's educational development was violently disrupted with the Fascist invasion in 1935. Following the defeat of Ethiopian forces in various battles, the country was under Italian occupation between 1936 and 1941. The legacy of this short-lived but brutal period was one of destruction, repression, and the systematic dismantling of Ethiopia's modern education system. The invasion itself was driven, in part, by a desire to avenge the humiliating defeat Italy suffered at the hands of the Ethiopian army at the Battle of Adwa in 1896. During the occupation, the Fascist regime not only sought territorial domination but also psychological subjugation, using education as a key ideological weapon.[37]

[35] Richard Pankhurst, "Educational Language and History: An Historical Background to Post-War Ethiopia" *The Ethiopian Journal of Education,* VII (1), (1974), pp. 86-90.
[36] Ibid.
[37] Solomon, "Trends of Educational Policy .... ", p. 267.

Prior to the invasion, Ethiopia had a modest but growing network of modern schools. By 1935, there were about 21 government schools and several missionary institutions operating in the country. However, the Italian invasion led to the closure, destruction, or conversion of many of these schools into military facilities. Various schools were assigned Italian names during the occupation. For example, Teferi Mekonnen School was renamed *Liceo Vittorio Emanuele*. These schools were reserved primarily for the children of Italian settlers, while many others were converted into military garrisons. The few schools that remained functional were those operated by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church in rural areas, which lay beyond the immediate administrative and military control of Italian forces.[38]

Drawing on their experience in Eritrea, which had been under Italian colonial rule since 1890, the Italians imposed a racially segregated and ideologically charged education system across Ethiopia. The Italian education system was divided into two separate tracks: well-funded schools for Italian settlers and basic, limited schools for Ethiopians and other colonial subjects. Schools for Ethiopians were limited to the primary level, typically only up to grade four. These schools were not meant to empower, but rather to condition Ethiopians for subservience. Instruction emphasized Fascist ideology, glorified Italian history and nationalism, and promoted loyalty to the colonial regime. According to Pankhurst, history and geography were given particular emphasis, serving as tools to instill admiration for Italy's imperial and cultural achievements. History education, in particular, served as a central ideological tool for the Italian invaders.

[38] Maaza, *A Study of Modern Education……,* pp. 65-67.

Italian history, especially the nation's struggle for unification and its military triumphs, was the dominant theme in classroom instruction.[39]

According to the 1936 Italian educational decree for East Africa, the primary goal of colonial schools was to produce obedient servants, soldiers, and skilled laborers for the Fascist regime. Instruction was delivered in local languages, not to preserve indigenous culture or promote understanding, but as a deliberate strategy to tighten control and facilitate ideological indoctrination. Besides, the education system deliberately excluded Ethiopians from any meaningful opportunity for advancement. Access to secondary and higher education was completely denied. Even at the primary level, students received only minimal literacy and vocational training, preparing them solely for subordinate roles such as translators, domestic workers, or manual laborers. Rather than serving as a vehicle for empowerment, education under Fascist Italy became a calculated instrument of colonial domination and psychological subjugation.[40]

The cost of occupation was immense. Fascist authorities systematically targeted the small class of educated Ethiopians who had emerged since the early 20th century. These individuals, many of whom had combined traditional church education with modern schooling, were seen as a threat to colonial rule. As a result, a vast majority of Ethiopians who had received a modern education were killed during the occupation. This deliberate extermination of Ethiopia's intellectual elite severely undermined the country's post-war capacity to rebuild its educational infrastructure. [41]

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[39] Richard Pankhurst, "Education in Ethiopia during the Italian Fascist Occupation (1936-1941)" *The International Journal of African Historical Studies,* 1972, Vol. 5, No. 3, (1972), pp. 365-6.
[40] MoE, *A Historical Development of Modern Education……*, p. 20.
[41] Woube, "Curriculum Development…," p. 164.

The brief but devastating Italian occupation significantly hindered the progress in modern education that had been achieved under Menelik II and Haile Selassie I. School buildings were destroyed or converted for military use, educational materials were lost, and teachers and students were scattered as foreign instructors were expelled or fled.[42] By the end of the occupation in 1941, Ethiopia faced the immense challenge of rebuilding its educational system from ruins. With much of the local educated class decimated, the post-war revival relied heavily on foreign advisors and teachers. In short, the Italian occupation marked one of the darkest chapters in Ethiopian educational history, during which education was transformed into a tool of fascist domination and cultural erasure rather than a means for national progress.[43]

1.3 Education in Ethiopia during the Post-Liberation Period, 1941-74

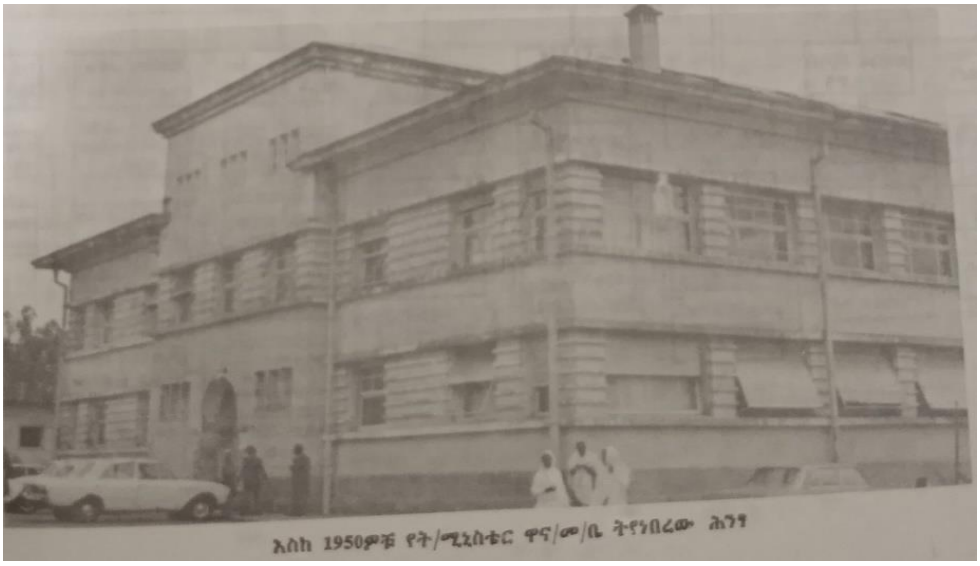
1.3.1 The British Decade, 1941-51

The year 1941 marked a turning point in Ethiopian history with the defeat of Fascist Italy and the restoration of Emperor Haile Selassie I. In fact, it would be inaccurate to suggest that modern education began only at this moment, as earlier initiatives had already laid modest foundations. However, the liberation marked the beginning of a new era, characterized by institutional reorganization, growing foreign influence, and renewed efforts at educational expansion and reform.[44] A new educational structure emerged under the authority of a Ministry of Education, initially headed by the Emperor himself, who retained this role until 1965, when *Ato* Akalewold Habtewold was appointed minister, formally assuming the responsibility. As part of the broader governmental reorganization that followed the end of the occupation, twelve ministries were

[42] Pankhurst, "Education in Ethiopia…." pp. 361–396.
[43] Messay, "The Roots and Fallouts….. *"*, p. 10.
[44] MoE, *Secondary Education in Ethiopia: General and Vocational*, IES-67-5324/1960, p. 14-15.

reestablished in May 1941, and the Ministry of Education was formally set up a month later within the compound of what is now Addis Ababa University.[45]

Figure 3: The First Ministry of Education Building before its Relocation to the Current Headquarters at Arat Kilo in 1954



Source: MOE, ***ከትምሕርት ዓለም*** (From the Education World), A Special Issue Prepared for the 10th Revolutionary Festival of the Derg and the Foundation of WPE, Addis Ababa, 1976 E.C., p. 13.

In the immediate aftermath of liberation, Ethiopia's educational infrastructure was in disarray. Schools had been closed or converted for military purposes during the occupation, and qualified teachers were scarce. The government was confronted with the daunting challenge of reconstructing an education system that had been nearly obliterated. School buildings previously seized or damaged during the occupation needed to be recovered and repaired. Teachers had to be recruited locally or brought back from exile. And basic educational materials had to be either

[45] Messay, "The Roots and Fallouts…", p. 6; Maaza, *A Study of Modern Education..*, pp. 44-5.

improvised from limited local resources or imported from abroad, often under severe logistical and financial constraints.[46]

The structure and content of Ethiopian education during this period were heavily shaped by the British. The new system broadly followed the British model with three main levels: elementary (grades 1–6), junior secondary (grades 7–8), and senior secondary (grades 9–12). Amharic was used as the language of instruction in the early elementary grades, but beginning in grade three, English became the primary medium of instruction, replacing French, which had been the dominant instructional language prior to the Italian occupation.[47]

A major policy milestone during the British decade was the development of a standardized national curriculum. In 1947, the first written curriculum was declared for both elementary and secondary schools. The 6–6 structure was adopted: six years of primary followed by six years of secondary education. Core subjects taught included Amharic, English, mathematics, science, geography, history, physical education, music, art, handcraft, and religion.[48]

However, the implementation of these curricular reforms encountered significant challenges. Despite the publication of curriculum documents, little was done to translate these plans into effective classroom practice. Teachers lacked access to appropriate textbooks or teaching guides, and no recommended reading materials were provided. As a result, teachers relied on foreign textbooks that were poorly suited to the Ethiopian context. For example, in elementary Amharic classes, the Bible was commonly used as the primary textbook for grades one through four. This

[46] Maaza, *A Study of Modern Education*….., pp. 72-73.

[47] IGE, *Second Five Year Development Plan, 1955-1959 E.C.,* Addis Ababa, p. 17/3; Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, *Elementary School Curriculum Years I–VIII*, IES/372-EDUe1 (Addis Ababa, December 1958), pp. 4-5.

[48] Imperial Ethiopian Government Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, *A Ten Year Plan for the Controlled Expansion of Ethiopian Education,* Addis Ababa, June 1955, p. x.

choice reflected both the country's Christian heritage and the scarcity of alternative materials but posed serious difficulties for non-Christian students required to study religious texts outside their own tradition.[49]

A similar challenge existed in history education, where no standardized teaching materials or textbooks were available. The lack of history textbooks written in English significantly hindered the teaching of Ethiopian history. Thus, in secondary schools, Tekle Tsadi Mekuria's *Ye-Ityopya Tarik ke Atse Tewodros Iske Qedamawi Haile Selassie* (History of Ethiopia from Emperor Tewodros to Emperor Haile Selassie) was used as the primary textbook for teaching Ethiopian history. This reliance on limited materials demonstrated the challenge of implementing curricular documents in a way that could meet the diverse needs of Ethiopian students.[50]

Moreover, the curriculum adopted from foreign models often did not reflect the Ethiopian context. Pupils failed to develop sufficient fluency in English during their elementary education, a shortcoming that negatively affected their academic success at the secondary level. The syllabus in secondary schools remained based on the British model, specifically the London School Leaving Certificate Examination, and gave little regard to local realities or educational relevance for Ethiopian students.[51]

Despite numerous challenges, the post-liberation decade witnessed significant progress in the development of Ethiopia's education system. During this period, schools expanded both in Addis Ababa and in provincial towns.[52] The country's first modern secondary school, Haile Selassie I Secondary School, was established in 1943. This was followed by the opening of General

[49] Ibid.
[50] Bahru, "Evolution of Professional Historiography…..", pp. 27–38.
[51] Maaza, *A Study of Modern Education in Ethiopia….*, pp. 71-3.
[52] MoE, *Secondary Education in Ethiopia: General and Vocational*, IES-67-5324/1960, p. 14-15.

Wingate School in 1946 and the introduction of secondary-level programs at Teferi Mekonnen School. These early institutions offered an entirely academic curriculum, modeled on the British system, and served primarily to a small, elite group of students, many of whom were boarders. [53] The following table illustrates the substantial growth in the number of schools and enrolled students in Ethiopia between 1948 and 1953 E.C.

Table 1: Pupils Enrolled in Primary and Secondary Government Schools, 1948-1953 (E.C.)

School year	Primary (1-8)	Secondary (9-12)	Total
1948	109,368	2,097	111,465
1949	135,749	2,628	138,377
1950	150,892	3,492	154,384
1951	158,005	4,496	162,501
1952	170,460	5,273	175,733
1953	176,726	5,626	182,352

Source: Adapted from IEG, *Second Five Year Development Plan, 1955-1959 E.C.*, Addis Ababa, Chapter 17, p. 2.

Teacher training also began during this period. In 1945, the first teacher training program was launched at Menelik II School with support from the British Council. The program lasted two years and covered eight subjects: Amharic, Religious Education, English, Mathematics, History, Geography, Teaching Methodology, and Educational Psychology. The first group of trainees included 32 graduates.[54]

[53] Ibid., pp. 75-6.

[54] Ministry of Information, *Ethiopia: Silver Jubilee, 1941-1966*, (Addis Ababa: Publications and Foreign Languages Press Department, 1966), p. 276.

Research findings in later periods have testified that the education system during the British decade served foreign interests more than the needs of the Ethiopian society. Imported curricula, costly foreign materials, and the dominance of foreign advisors created a system poorly suited to Ethiopia's rural agrarian society. Many of these foreign advisors lacked adequate knowledge of the country. Thus, while the British decade laid crucial institutional foundations for modern education, it also entrenched Ethiopia's dependence on foreign pedagogical models. This resulted in limited progress toward building an education system rooted in the country's own cultural and historical realities.[55]

1.3.2 The American-Oriented Education, 1952-74

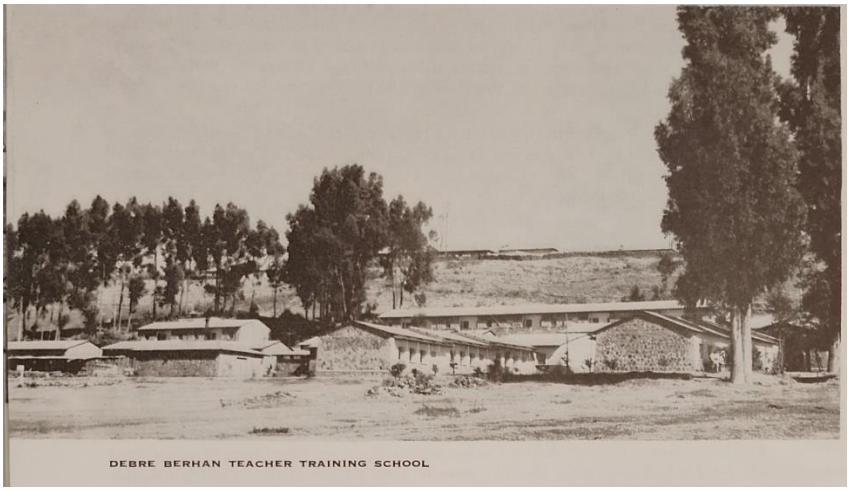
From 1952 to 1974, Ethiopia experienced a shift toward an American-oriented education system. This transformation significantly impacted both the institutional framework and the ideological direction of education under imperial rule. Following the British decade, the government turned increasingly to the United States for technical expertise, educational models, and financial assistance. This period witnessed major institutional expansion, structural reorganization, and curricular reform. However, these developments were constrained by continued reliance on foreign expertise and the failure to adapt the system to Ethiopia's social and cultural realities.[56]

By 1952, the government had reestablished much of the country's educational infrastructure. However, Ethiopia still faced a critical shortage of trained teachers, textbooks, and standardized curricula. To address these challenges, the government increasingly relied on foreign teachers, particularly Americans, and on foreign aid to support educational development.[57] That same

[55] Yesuf, *A Descriptive Analysis ……..,* pp. 9-22.
[56] Woube, "Curriculum Development…", p. 165.
[57] DMU Archive Center, Folder No. 208, File No. ማ/ተ-6, ስለ ውጭ ማምህራን (About Foreign Teachers), 1962–1974.

year, the Addis Ababa Teacher Training Institute was relocated to Harar and renamed the Harar TTI. The institute admitted students after Grade 8 and provided four years of training to prepare them as primary school teachers. As demand for trained educators grew, additional TTIs were established in the following decades, including Debre Berhan in 1957 (with support from the U.S. Point Four Program), Kotebe in 1959, and Jimma in 1969. [58]

Figure 4: A View of Debre-Birhan Teacher Training Institute in 1964



Source: The Imperial Government Ministry of Information, *Ethiopia: Silver Jubilee, 1941-1966*, (Addis Ababa: Publications and Foreign Languages Press, 1966), p. 292.

In 1955, the elementary curriculum for Grades 1–6 was published. This curriculum, drafted primarily by foreign staff, included Amharic, English, Mathematics, Science, History, and Geography, with future plans to introduce Morals, Music, and Art.[59] The curriculum for Grades 7 and 8 was issued shortly thereafter. New textbooks were introduced, including two volumes of "School Science" and a massive 600-page world history and geography textbook titled *The Old*

[58] Maaza, *A Study of Modern Education in Ethiopia*…., p. 32.
[59] Ibid.

World Past and Present. The Board of Education also approved a four-year secondary curriculum aligned with the British General Certificate of Education model.[60]

Around the same time, the country had only six academic secondary schools, five located in Addis Ababa (Haile Selassie I, Empress Menen, General Wingate, Teferi Mekonnen, and Menelik II) and one provincial school, Medhane Alem, in Harar.[61] The Ministry of Education's 1955 report made no reference to efforts aimed at training Ethiopian teachers for academic secondary schools. Instead, the government had already hired 77 foreign teachers and school directors, with plans to recruit an additional 67 from abroad. At the time, no Ethiopian nationals were teaching at the secondary level. Both the academic and administrative staff was composed entirely of expatriates.[62]

Table 2: Student Enrollment in Secondary Schools (9-12) during the U.S.-Oriented Education System

Academic Year	Male	Female	Total
1955-56	1880	217	2,097
1959-60	4875	398	5,273
1967-68	21,807	4,883	26,690
1970-71	42,031	11,205	53,236

Source: Randi Balsvik, *Haile Sellassie's Students: The Intellectual and Social Background to Revolution, 1952-1974*, p. 55.

[60] Maaza, *A Study of…*, pp. 83-4.

[61] IES, MOEFA, *Secondary Education in Ethiopia: General and Vocational*, Addis Ababa, June 1960, pp. 8-9.

[62] MOEFA, *A Ten-Year Plan for Ethiopian Education*, 1955, p. 38; DMU Archive Center, Folder No. 208, File No. ማ/ተ-6, ስለ ውጭ መምህራን (About Foreign Teachers), 1962–1974.

Higher education also expanded during the American period. Haile Selassie I University (HSIU) was established in 1950 as the University College of Addis Ababa. It became Ethiopia's first university and followed the American model. In 1963, the History Department and the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) were founded within HSIU. The History Department focused on teaching and research. IES concentrated on preserving and promoting Ethiopia's historical and cultural heritage. This marked the beginning of professional historiography in the country, replacing the traditional instruction offered in religious and secular schools. The department began with a BA program, and later introduced MA and Ph.D. programs in 1979 and 1990, respectively.[63]

By the mid-1960s, Ethiopia had developed a sizeable teaching workforce, with the majority serving at the primary school level. A growing number of Ethiopian students were pursuing higher education abroad, particularly in graduate programs, many of them supported by government scholarships.[64] Education was provided free of charge across all levels, with the state covering most of the costs. The government played the leading role in financing and managing the education system, while a smaller share of schools was operated by the Ethiopian Orthodox Church, missionary groups, and private organizations. These non-governmental institutions maintained some independence. However, they operated under the supervision of the Ministry of Education. Many of them also received government support in various forms, such as land, teaching materials, and staff.[65]

[63] Bahru, "A Century of Ethiopian Historiography…", p. 4.
[64] Imperial Government of Ethiopia, *Second Five-Year Development Plan, 1955-1959 E.C.*, Addis Ababa, 1955 E.C., p. 17.
[65] Ibid.

Throughout this period, access to education remained highly unequal. Most students enrolled in schools came from urban centers such as Addis Ababa, Shewa, Eritrea, Sidamo, and Wellega. This revealed a clear geographic imbalance in educational access. Rural areas, particularly those beyond the central and northern highlands, were mostly neglected.[66] Gender disparities persisted, with female participation in formal education remaining very low. The education system also faced criticism for its heavy reliance on foreign influence. Most secondary and tertiary teachers were non-Ethiopians. The curriculum was Western in content and orientation, disconnected from Ethiopia's history and culture. Teaching materials, including textbooks, were imported. Although the government made efforts to train Ethiopian teachers through teacher training institutes, foreign instructors continued to dominate secondary schools well into the early 1970s.[67]

1.4 Education in Ethiopia under the Military Government, 1974-91

Under the Derg regime (1974–1991), Ethiopia's education system experienced profound changes in several respects. These changes were closely tied to the Marxist-Leninist ideology adopted by the military government. After the 1974 revolution, the new regime swiftly dismantled imperial educational policies. It replaced them with a revolutionary framework aligned with socialist ideals. Education was redefined as a tool for class struggle and mass mobilization within a centralized system.[68]

One of the regime's earliest actions in early 1975 was the closure of senior secondary schools and Haile Selassie I University. Tens of thousands of students and teachers were then deployed

[66] MoE, "*A Historical Development of Ethiopian Education…..",* p. 57.
[67] Maaza, *A Study of Modern Education in Ethiopia*…., p. 8.
[68] Christopher Clapham, "Rewriting Ethiopian History," *Annales d'Éthiopie* 18 (2002): 37–54; Pietro Toggia, "History Writing as a State Ideological Project in Ethiopia," *African Identities* 6, no. 4 (November 2008), pp. 319–343.

to rural areas as part of the *Zemecha* (campaign) program. This campaign aimed to spread socialist consciousness, facilitate land reform, and promote rural development. As a result, formal education at the upper levels was effectively suspended for several years during the regime's politically unstable early period. Government figures claimed that literacy rates rose from under 10 percent during the imperial era to about 63 percent by 1984. Although these numbers may have been inflated, the campaign nonetheless had a broad impact by promoting functional literacy and including marginalized groups.[69]

During the 1970s and early 1980s, the government worked to expand school access, especially in rural areas. The number of junior and senior secondary schools grew significantly, particularly in regions such as Gojjam, Wollega, Arsi, and Wollo, alongside the schools already established during the imperial era in Addis Ababa and other provinces.[70]

Table 3: Number of Government Schools and Student Enrollment in Ethiopia during the 1982/83 Academic Year

No.	Grade level	Number of schools	Number of students	Remark
1	Primary (grades 1-6)	6600	2,526,300	
2	Junior secondary (grades 7-8)	813	278,900	
3	Senior secondary (grades 9-12)	207	238,722	

Source: MOE, *A Historical Development of Modern Education in Ethiopia*, pp. 122-23

[69] Ibid.

[70] MoE, ***ከትምህርት ዓለም*** (From the Education World), A Special Issue Prepared for the 10th Revolutionary Festival of the *Derg* and the Foundation of WPE, Addis Ababa, 1976 E.C., p. 31.

Despite these gains in access and literacy, educational quality remained poor. The system suffered from a lack of qualified teachers and inadequate facilities. Curricula were heavily politicized. Between 1975 and 1978, meaningful education was almost nonexistent at the secondary and tertiary levels. This was due to political repression, civil unrest, and interruptions caused by the literacy campaign. Even after schools reopened, ideological content dominated the curricula. Especially in subjects like history and political education, little room remained for independent thought or critical analysis.[71]

The education structure followed a 6-2-4 system, consisting of primary (grades 1–6), junior secondary (grades 7–8), and senior secondary (grades 9–12). In 1976, the Ministry of Education started curriculum development. It established fourteen panels, including a social science panel. This panel was responsible for creating textbooks and teaching materials for the subjects of history, geography, and political education. The panel produced history textbooks for grades 11 and 12 in 1979. Textbooks for grades 9 and 10 followed in 1980. These materials were criticized for being prepared hastily with limited scholarly input. They primarily served the regime's political agenda rather than genuine educational purposes.[72] The textbooks relied heavily on foreign sources. For example, the grade 11 and 12 history texts were based largely on *A Short History of the World* by Manfred (1974). This Soviet text emphasized European socialist revolutions. While the pre-revolutionary curriculum was criticized for Western bias, the post-1974 system replaced it with a Soviet-inspired orientation. The ideology changed, but the dependence on foreign models continued.[73]

[71] Ibid.
[72] Girma, "Adwa in Ethiopia's High School History Curriculum……", pp. 96–118.
[73] Tekeste, *The Crisis of Ethiopian Education,* pp. 67-8.

History was one of twelve subjects taught in secondary schools. Perhaps, two of the most serious challenges in teaching history were ideological imposition and a shortage of qualified teachers. Between 1974 and 1984, only Addis Ababa University offered a degree program specifically for training history teachers. Other institutions provided degree-level teacher training, but in different fields. Kotebe was the sole center offering diploma-level training for history teachers.[74] As a result, most secondary history teachers held diplomas or certificates, and many were unqualified. It is likely that many teachers taught history without sufficient subject knowledge.

1.5 The Post-1991 Period Educational System in Ethiopia

The fall of the Derg regime in 1991 brought a significant political and ideological shift. The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), dominated by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), came to power. The new government abandoned Marxist-Leninist ideology and introduced a system based on revolutionary democracy. It replaced the former unitary state structure with an ethnic federal system. This change had major implications for the education system.[75]

Following the regime change, a National Conference was held to form a transitional government. This conference ratified the Transitional Charter in 1991. The Charter served as a temporary constitution, establishing the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE). This arrangement remained in place until the establishment of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) in 1995. The new constitution introduced in that year recognized the rights of "nations, nationalities, and peoples." It granted them the right to self-determination, including the right to

[74] MoE, *A Historical Development of Modern Education in Ethiopia*, p. 37-9.

[75] John Markakis, "The Nationalist Revolution in Eritrea," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 26, no. 1 (1988): 51–70; Eva Poluha, *The Power of Continuity: Ethiopia through the Eyes of Its Children* (Stockholm: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 2004).

secede, as outlined in Article 39. Ethnicity became the foundation of political organization and administrative decentralization.[76]

In line with this ideological shift, the education sector was restructured. A transitional policy guideline issued in 1991 introduced major reforms. These included the use of nationality languages as medium of instruction. Amharic remained the medium where it was the mother tongue. Oromiffa, Tigrigna, Wolaitta, and Sidamigna were introduced as languages of instruction in the regions where these languages were predominantly spoken. Latin script was adopted for Oromiffa. Geʿez script continued to be used for Amharic and Tigrigna. English remained the medium of instruction in junior and secondary levels and was taught as a subject starting from grade one. [77]

In 1994, the government introduced a new Education and Training Policy. The policy aimed to address serious problems in the education system. These included unclear objectives, overemphasis on theory, rote learning, overcrowded classrooms, and lack of materials. It also criticized excessive centralization and the low relevance, quality, and equity of education. To solve these issues, the policy proposed decentralization, active learning, and improved access.[78]

The new policy restructured the education system into primary (grades 1–8), secondary (grades 9–12), and tertiary levels. Primary education was divided into first cycle (grades 1–4) and second cycle (grades 5–8). Secondary education was split into general secondary (grades 9–10) and preparatory secondary (grades 11–12). History was introduced as a school subject from grade five. In grades 5–8, it was taught as part of an integrated subject called "Social Studies," which

[76] FDRE, *The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia* (Addis Ababa, 1995).
[77] Woube, "Curriculum Development……*",* p. 14.
[78] Ibid.

also included civics and geography. From grade nine onward, history was taught as a separate subject. Two periods per week were allotted in grades 9 and 10, and four periods in grades 11 and 12.[79]

Despite being part of the curriculum, history received little attention. The government adopted a rejectionist policy toward history education. History had fewer teaching hours and was overshadowed by civic and ethical education. The government seemed more focused on shaping citizens through civics education than on developing historical knowledge.[80] This marginalization was strengthened by the 70/30 policy at the university level. Under this policy, 70% of students were admitted to science and technology fields, and only 30% to social sciences. As a result, many students moved into natural sciences starting from grade eleven. This caused a decline in students pursuing social science subjects, including history.[81] In the twenty-first century, when student choice plays a central role in stream selection and admissions, the EPRDF's 70/30 policy appeared particularly awkward in this regard. The policy affected not only the social sciences but also the natural sciences, as many students were required to enroll in natural science streams without their academic interests.

One of the most controversial developments in the post-1991 period was the removal of Ethiopian history from the freshman university curriculum since 2000.[82] This decision was likely tied to the unresolved and highly politicized debate over how Ethiopia's past should be

[79] Sisay Awgichew and Enguday Ademe, "Teaching History: Pedagogical Practices and Complexities in Upper Secondary Schools of Ethiopia," *Bahir Dar Journal of Education* 22, no. 2 (July 2022), pp. 40–55.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Abeje Berhanu, "The Social Sciences at the Crossroads: Challenges and Opportunities at Addis Ababa University," *Journal of Higher Education in Africa* 12, no. 1 (2014), pp. 93–110.
[82] Jon Abbink, "History Education in Ethiopia Post-1991: Rethinking the Nation's History in the Context of 'Decolonization' Debates," draft paper, *Africa Knows* Conference, African Studies Centre Leiden, December 2020–February 2021, p. 9.

interpreted. Two dominant perspectives shaped this discourse. The Ethio-nationalist view emphasized Ethiopia's long-standing statehood and national unity. In contrast, the Ethno-nationalist view, championed by the TPLF and its sympathizers, portrayed Ethiopian history as a legacy of domination, subjugation, centralization, and exclusion. From this perspective, Ethiopia was seen as a "prison of nations and nationalities."[83] Consequently, Ethiopian history was removed from freshman university programs since 2000 and replaced with civic education. This rejectionist policy severely weakened historical awareness and national consciousness among Ethiopian youth.

In recent years, the incumbent government has taken steps to reintroduce the common course *History of Ethiopia and the Horn* for first-year university students. However, the deeper historiographical debate remains unresolved. Ethiopia still lacks a shared understanding of its past, as polarized historical narratives continue to influence public discourse and shape curriculum content.

[83] Toggia, "History Writing….,", p. 338.

CHAPTER TWO

STATE IDEOLOGY AND HISTORY EDUCATION IN ETHIOPIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS, 1943-74

2.1 Ideological Orientation of the Imperial Government: A Tale of Two Constitutions

The ideological foundation of the imperial Ethiopian state between 1941 and 1974 can be best understood through a close reading of its two constitutions, those of 1931 and 1955. These texts were more than legal instruments. They symbolized a feudal monarchical order built on historical myth, dynastic continuity, centralized authority, and state-supported religion. Although they showed some changes in the political scene, both constitutions mainly reinforced the monarchy's supreme power.[1]

The 1931 Constitution emerged in a context of limited domestic pressure for reform but growing external exposure. As Ethiopia's first written constitution, it drew inspiration from the 1889 Meiji Constitution of Japan. It adopted many of its structural principles to consolidate imperial power while projecting a modernizing image to the international community. The constitution did not claim that the people held sovereign power.[2]

Supreme authority was vested unequivocally in the person of the Emperor (Art. 6), whose legitimacy rested on sacred descent from the Solomonic line, a myth linking Haile Selassie directly to King Solomon of Israel and the Queen of Sheba. Article 3 codified this lineage as a

[1] William Lewis, "Ethiopia's Revised Constitution", *Middle East Journal,* Vol. 10, No. 2, (1956), pp. 194-199.
[2] Ibid.

legal and historical truth, fusing divine ancestry with political legitimacy. This foundational myth was critical to the structure of governance. It also shaped national history education, which emphasized dynastic continuity and glorified imperial rule.[3]

The legend of the relationship between Saba and Solomon has been used by Ethiopian rulers since at least 1270 to consolidate their political power. This tradition was passed on to the Ethiopian people through the church educational system. One of the main purposes of the *Kibre-Nagast* in church education was to teach Ethiopian youth about the glory of their emperors. This tradition was further strengthened during Haile Selassie's rule. History became the most favored subject in secular schools to inculcate the connection between Ethiopian rulers and King Solomon of Israel.[4] This saga was officially incorporated into the 1931 constitution. Article 3 of the 1931 constitution stated that:

> **የኢትዮጵያ ንጉሠ ነገሥት ከኢየሩሳሌም ንጉሥ ከሰሎሞንና ከንግሥቱ ሣባ ከተባለችው ከኢትዮጵያ ንግሥት ከተወለደው ከቀዳማዊ ምኒልክ ነገድ ተያይዞ ከመጣው ከንጉሥ ሣህለ ሥላሴ ዘር ከተወለደው ከቀዳማዊ ኀይለ ሥላሴ ትውልድ እንዳይወጣ በሕግ ተወስኗል።**[5]
>
> According to the law, it is established that no one outside the lineage of Emperor Haile Selassie I, who descended from Menelik I, himself said to be descended from the union of King Solomon of Jerusalem and the Queen of Sheba, Queen of Ethiopia, and from the line of King Sahle-Selassie, can ascend to the Ethiopian throne.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Toggia, "History Writing…..", p. 320.

[5] The Imperial Ethiopian Government, *The 1931 Constitution,* Article 3, p. 6; *The Revised Constitution of 1955,* Article 2, p. 12.

The 1931 Constitution reinforced a highly centralized political order. From Articles 6 to 17, the Emperor is endowed with extensive powers. These include the right to declare war and peace (Art. 12), command the armed forces (Art. 13), negotiate treaties (Art. 14), and appoint princes and distribute land (Art. 15). Parliament was created but only approved decisions without real power. Both chambers were either appointed or indirectly elected through mechanisms that ensured the dominance of the landed elite. The Constitution gave only limited recognition to the rights of common people, who were treated as subjects. In Clapham's words, it was "an instrument designed to consolidate the power of those who already held it," with its legitimacy aimed mainly at external audiences. [6]

The 1955 Revised Constitution was issued to commemorate the 25th anniversary of Emperor Haile Selassie's coronation. It was crafted in response to internal calls for reform and external comparisons, particularly with Eritrea's more liberal postwar arrangement under British rule. While the document introduced elements that appeared modern, such as universal suffrage and a partially elected Chamber of Deputies, it preserved and, in key respects, reinforced the absolute authority of the monarchy. The preamble projected a mythic image of Ethiopia's past, claiming dominion over territories as distant as Egypt, Arabia, and the White Nile. The Solomonic descent narrative was constitutionally entrenched. Articles 4 to 6 affirmed that only male descendants of the Emperor, including those not yet born, could inherit the throne. [7]

Despite adopting the language of civil rights and parliamentary procedure, the 1955 Constitution ensured the Emperor's control over all key areas of governance. Out of 131 provisions, at least

[6] Bahru Zewde, "The Burden of History: The Constraints and Challenges of the Democratization Process in Ethiopia," in *Society, State and History: Selected Essays* (Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2008), p. 339.

[7] Lewis, "Ethiopia's Revised…..", pp. 194-199.

36 were explicitly concerned about imperial powers. Article 26 maintained that sovereignty resided in the Emperor, not the people. He retained full authority to appoint ministers (Art. 27), command the military and declare emergencies (Art. 29), direct foreign affairs (Art. 30), and dissolve or extend the life of Parliament (Art. 33). Legislative processes remained under the tight control of the Emperor. According to Article 34, all laws had to be either proposed by the Emperor or receive his approval to take effect. While Parliament was allowed to suggest new laws and examine the national budget, these roles were limited and subject to the Emperor's authority.[8]

Religious ideology remained closely tied to state power. Article 126 of the 1955 Constitution declared the Ethiopian Orthodox Church the state religion, while Article 127 gave the Emperor final authority over the church's administrative decisions. This formalized a centuries-old church-state alliance and further rooted imperial rule in religious tradition. Taken together, the 1931 and 1955 constitutions reveal a clear ideological pattern: the monarchy's power rested on royal descent, religious authority, and control over the military and economy. These constitutions were not designed to share power broadly but to preserve a rigid hierarchy under the appearance of constitutional rule.[9]

This ideological orientation had direct implications for history education in the post-war era. The myth of Solomonic descent and the narrative of uninterrupted imperial glory, as we shall see in unit five, were systematically embedded into school curricula. Textbooks presented Ethiopian history as the story of divine kingship and centralized governance. This educational strategy reflected the ideological foundations of Haile Selassie's regime. The use of history as an

[8] Imperial Ethiopian Government, *The Revised Constitution of 1955,* Article 34, p. 20.

[9] ESUE, ታጠቅ (Gird Yourself), Lisbon and Paris, January 1959, p. 23.

instrument of ideological legitimation demonstrates the intimate link between state power, identity formation, and pedagogical practice in imperial Ethiopia.[10]

2.2 Westernization Policy and Its Impact on History Education

Since the country's liberation from Italian occupation in 1941 to 1974, Western influence has shaped the structure, content, and administration of education, as Ethiopia sought to modernize and align itself with global powers. Various countries, including France, Italy, the United Kingdom, and the United States, played key roles by influencing the curriculum and educational policies, aiming to extend their political and cultural reach through Ethiopia's schooling system.[11] This period saw the introduction of foreign teachers, Western pedagogical models, and curricula that presented Ethiopian history and identity through predominantly Western perspectives, emphasizing the complex dynamics between modernization efforts and external influence until the imperial regime's fall in 1974.[12]

The imperial government relied heavily on foreign aid programs and technical experts, particularly from the United States, Britain, France, Canada, and Sweden. Major American initiatives, including the Point Four Program (launched in 1949 as a U.S. technical assistance effort), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID, active in Ethiopia from 1951 to 1966), and the Peace Corps (which operated in the country between 1962 and 1976), played central roles in shaping the education sector. Other Western nations also contributed through their respective aid agencies. These included Canada's Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), Sweden's Swedish International Development

[10] Ibid.
[11] Ministry of Information, *Ethiopia: Silver Jubilee, 1941–1966* (Addis Ababa: Publications and Foreign Languages Press Department, 1966), pp. 60-64.
[12] Ibid.

Cooperation Agency (SIDA), and Britain's Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO). France participated through the Aid and Cooperation Fund, known in French as Fund for Aid and Cooperation (FAC). [13]

These organizations not only provided technical and financial support but also sought to advance their own ideological and strategic interests through educational programs. Notably, most of these agencies terminated their support following the 1974 revolution, with the exception of SIDA. The Swedish government continued to support Ethiopian education even after the Revolution, presumably because of its policy of neutrality during the Cold War. The selective withdrawal of other aid organizations, or reduction of their aid to Ethiopian education after 1974, reflected the extent to which state ideology influenced foreign aid relations and international cooperation in education.[14]

The policy of westernization had far-reaching effects on the Ethiopian education system, creating a strong dependence on Western teachers, experts, and instructional materials. This reliance undermined the development of a culturally rooted curriculum and weakened national autonomy in shaping knowledge.[15] Moreover, Western influence extended beyond the classroom to affect school operations and national observances. For example, alongside traditional Ethiopian holidays such as Easter, Christmas, the Victory of Adwa, Martyrs' Day, and the Emperor's Coronation Day, schools were also officially closed during major European holidays. Based on government legislation, Ethiopian students observed European Christmas (**የአውሮፓዎች**

[13] Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, *የትምህርት አጠቃላይ ጥናት አጭር ሪፖርት (Sector Review Summary Report)*, trans. Assefa Gebemariam and Dagnachew Worku (Addis Ababa, October 1965 E.C. [1972/73 G.C.]), pp. 34-9.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.

የልደት በዓል), European New Year (**የአውሮፓዎች ዘመን መለወጫ**), and European Good Friday and Easter (**የአውሮፓዎች ስቅለትና ፋሲካ**).[16] This incorporation of European holidays into the academic calendar clearly illustrates how Western cultural norms became institutionalized in post-liberation Ethiopia, to the extent that school schedules mirrored European traditions.

From the 1940s through the 1960s, Ethiopia's education system became deeply influenced by Western models. One of the most visible impacts of this westernization was the heavy reliance on imported materials and foreign expertise. Curricula and textbooks were largely developed abroad, particularly in the United Kingdom and the United States. These educational materials, which were never intended to serve the Ethiopian context, reflected Western values, historical narratives, and worldviews.[17] As Messay has noted, modern education in Ethiopia was "imposed" from outside and "constructed to serve a different society than the Ethiopian one."[18] The imported curricula were not grounded in the country's social, cultural, or economic realities, and they offered little content that addressed the basic and immediate needs of Ethiopian society.

This misalignment created significant educational and cultural consequences. History textbooks, for example, emphasized European and American history. Students learned more about the western world than about their own country, and history education offered little meaningful engagement with Ethiopian civilizations, cultures, or contemporary challenges.[19] Ethiopian students found it difficult to connect with their own regions, traditions, and historical figures, which fostered an increasing sense of alienation from their national identity. The Ministry of

[16] Mahteme-Selassie, *Zikire-Neger*, p. 618.
[17] Maaza, *A Study of ....,* p. 1966, 54-6; Abebe, *An Investigation of .....*, pp. 56-67.
[18] Messay, "The Roots and Fallouts*...",* 2006, p. 14.
[19] Ibid., PP. 13-14.

Education's Sector Review cautioned that such an education system would produce "soulless and rootless robots," referring to students devoid of moral and cultural grounding.[20]

Although the Ethiopian government officially advocated the selective adaptation of Western ideas, it failed to exercise genuine control over the country's educational content. In practice, foreign educational advisors and teachers, mainly from India, England, and America, played a dominant role in curriculum development and classroom instruction. These expatriate professionals not only shaped what was taught but also how it was taught, often with little consideration for Ethiopia's developmental goals or cultural and ideological contexts.[21]

During the imperial era, Ethiopian secondary schools were overwhelmingly staffed by foreign nationals. In the 1950s and early 1960s, nearly all senior secondary school teachers were expatriates. By the late 1960s, more than 70 percent of the teaching staff remained foreign. Among these, Indian contract teachers constituted the largest group, followed by American Peace Corps volunteers, who began arriving after 1962, as well as British and Filipino educators. In 1960, there were approximately 570 foreign teachers in government secondary schools; by 1970, this number had doubled. Although junior secondary schools employed more Ethiopian teachers than their senior counterparts, they too depended heavily on foreigners.[22]

The lack of institutions capable of producing qualified Ethiopian secondary school teachers further deepened the dependence on foreign staff. Few local graduates held degrees, and those who did often came from Haile Selassie I Day School or were diploma holders from Kotebe Teacher Training Institute. Despite being designed for junior secondary education, Kotebe

[20] Tekeste, *The Crisis of Ethiopian Education….,* p. 67.
[21] Ibid.
[22] DMU Archive: Folder No. 208, File No. ማ/ተ-6. *ስለ ውጭ መምህራን (About Foreign Teachers),* 1962–1974.

graduates were frequently assigned to teach in grades 9 through 12 due to a shortage of qualified teaching staff. As a result, foreign teachers continued to dominate senior secondary education well into the late 1960s.[23]

Official reports stress the extent of this dependence. A 1963 government document revealed that:

> Of the 1096 senior secondary school teachers, 85.2% (934) have higher education; among them, 73.2% (803) are degree holders. The balance is made up of 58 (5.3%) graduates of teacher training institutes, 25 (2.2%) teachers without teacher training education, and 79 (7.2%) with unspecified qualifications. Breakdown of teachers by nationality is 287 Ethiopians, 40 of whom hold a university degree, 121 with less than four years of university education, and 773 foreigners, only 10 of whom do not hold degrees.[24]

These figures reveal not only the overwhelming presence of expatriate teachers but also the uneven distribution of academic qualifications within the teaching staff. Moreover, the reliance on foreign curricula and teachers facilitated the introduction of Western values among Ethiopian students. Consequently, many graduates struggled to critically engage with their own society or contribute effectively to local reform efforts, as their education lacked a foundation in Ethiopian cultural realities.[25]

Foreign teachers were required to refrain from engaging in religious or political propaganda, as stated in their formal contracts with the Ministry of Education. The employment agreement explicitly stated, in both English and Amharic:

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[23] Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, *Sector Review Summary Report*, p. 55.

[24] IES, MOEFA, *Primary, Secondary and Teacher Education Projects: Based on the Report of UNESCO Educational Investment Mission to Ethiopia*, December 10, 1963, p. 2.

[25] Ibid.

> ተቀጣሪው ማናቸውንም አይነት ስብከት እንዳያደርግና የሃይማኖት ወይም የፖለቲካ አስተያየቱን እንዳይሰጥ ወይም እንዳያስተምር ተስማምቶ ውል ገብቷል።[26]
>
> The employee further undertakes to engage in no propaganda and in no dissemination of religious or political views.

However, many expatriates influenced Ethiopia's ideological and political discourse both directly and indirectly. Their impact was embedded in the very frameworks of the education system. As curriculum designers, textbook authors, and implementers of instructional methods, foreign experts played a central role in defining the ideological orientation of the Ethiopian school system. This was largely because Emperor Haile Selassie granted Western scholars wide latitude to shape Ethiopia's socio-cultural and educational institutions, entrusting them with responsibilities that extended beyond the classroom.[27]

On the other hand, the imperial government's policy of Westernization created opportunities for Ethiopian students to pursue higher education abroad, which in turn helped address the shortage of educated personnel in both the education sector and government service. In fact, the practice of sending students overseas for advanced study did not begin after the liberation. Before the Italian occupation in 1935, more than 200 Ethiopians had already received higher education abroad.[28] However, during the five-year occupation, nearly 30 of these educated individuals were either executed by the Italians or died in the resistance struggle. Except for a few individuals in

26 NALA-ሙ.1.ወ.ቁ63.1.15.06. ***የትምህርት ሚኒስቴር ከውጭ አገር መምህራን ጋር ያደርግ ስለነበረው ውል*** (The Contract Formerly Made by the Ministry of Education with Foreign Teachers), Addis Ababa, 1963.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

exile, no Ethiopians were able to pursue higher education abroad during this period, resulting in a significant generational gap between pre-war and post-war educated officials.[29]

After liberation, the trend of studying abroad accelerated, especially during the period of close cooperation with the United States. Many Ethiopian students were admitted to prestigious universities in Europe and North America. A 1963 government report shows that by that time, 979 Ethiopian students were pursuing higher education overseas, while 1,101 had already completed their studies and returned home. These figures reflect the growing role of foreign scholarship in shaping Ethiopia's educated elite during the imperial era.[30]

Table 4: Ethiopian Graduates Returned by August 1961 and Students Studying Abroad by Field of Study

No.	Field of study	Returned	Studying
1	Social sciences	343	201
2	Engineering	197	180
3	Medical sciences	109	166
4	Agriculture	165	138
5	Education	169	148
6	Humanities	21	85
7	Natural sciences	35	5
8	Fine arts	47	39
9	Others	15	17
Total		**1,101**	**979**

Source: Imperial Government of Ethiopia, *Second Five-Year Development Plan, 1955-1959 E.C.*, Addis Ababa, 1955 E.C., p. 17.

[29] Ibid.
[30] Ibid.

Western scholarships also included the field of history. Many Ethiopians were sent abroad to study the subject, helping to address long-standing gaps in historical scholarship and Ethiopian historiography. These first-generation scholars made significant contributions to both the study and teaching of history in the country. [31]

Initially, the founding members of the History Department and the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) at Haile Selassie I University (HSIU) were Western scholars. The IES and the History Department were established in the early 1960s by Sven Rubenson and Richard Pankhurst, who played a foundational role in developing professional historical research in Ethiopia. Over time, Ethiopian scholars gradually replaced their foreign counterparts and assumed leadership in both teaching and research. HSIU became a center for training Ethiopian historians, many of whom pursued advanced studies at prestigious universities in Western Europe and the United States. Upon their return, these scholars played a vital role in advancing both academic research and history education at secondary school levels.[32]

Among the pioneering Ethiopian historians were Merid Wolde-Aregay, Sergew Hable-Selassie, and Taddesse Tamrat, all of whom specialized in medieval Ethiopian history. They authored numerous books and articles, including works on the history of southern Ethiopian societies, topics that had previously received little scholarly attention. For example, Merid's study

[31] Messay Kebede, "Eurocentrism and Ethiopian Historiography: Deconstructing Semitization", *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (summer/ fall 2003), pp. 1-3.
[32] Bahru, "A Century of Ethiopian Historiography…. *",* 2000, p.4.

Southern Ethiopia and the Christian Kingdom, 1508–1708 (1971) filled a critical gap in the historiography of the southern regions.[33]

The second generation of historians, including Bahru Zewde, Hussein Ahmed, Mohammed Hassen, Shumet Sishagne, and Tesema Ta'a, also emerged from this wave of Western-trained scholars. Their contributions were equally indispensable to the growth of Ethiopian historiography and the institutionalization of history education. Notably, Bahru Zewde's *A History of Modern Ethiopia, 1855–1991* (2002) has become one of the most widely cited works by both domestic and international researchers.

Indeed, the imperial policy of Westernization had far-reaching effects on history education. The early contributions of Western scholars, and later those of Ethiopian historians trained abroad, were instrumental in shaping the discipline of history in modern Ethiopia.

2.3 History Education during the British Period (1941-51)

Between 1941 and 1951, a period often referred to as the British decade in Ethiopian education, the foundations of formal history teaching began to take shape. This development was closely tied to post-war reconstruction efforts and the significant involvement of the British. Following Ethiopia's liberation in 1941, the Ministry of Education was reestablished amid growing pressure to rebuild a national school system.[34] While educational reconstruction was a top priority for the imperial government, its direction was heavily influenced by British advisers. The British had supported Ethiopia's liberation both militarily and administratively. In the postwar years, they

[33] Informants: Tekeste Birhan, and Teshale Aklilu; Merid Wolde Aregay, *Southern Ethiopia and the Christian Kingdom, 1508–1708, with Special Reference to the [Oromo] Migrations and Their Consequences* (PhD diss., University of London, 1971).

[34] IGE, *Second Five Year Development Plan, 1955-1959 E.C.,* Addis Ababa, p. 17/3; Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, *Elementary School Curriculum Years I–VIII*, IES/372-EDUe1 (Addis Ababa, December 1958).

extended their role beyond logistics and became key architects of the new educational framework. [35]

The reinstatement of the Ministry of Education in 1941 was immediately followed by the expansion of secondary education. This began in 1943 with the establishment of the Haile Selassie I Secondary School in Addis Ababa. At that time, only forty-three boys had completed primary education at a level sufficient to progress to secondary studies. In 1946, the Wingate Secondary School opened, alongside the introduction of secondary classes at the Teferi Mekonnen School. These early secondary institutions offered an almost entirely academic curriculum, with many students attending as boarders.[36]

However, there was initially no standardized curriculum for secondary education. Individual schools selected subjects largely based on the background and nationality of their expatriate teaching staff. British educators predominantly staffed Wingate, while Canadian teachers were common at Teferi Mekonnen. Although history was taught in some form, detailed records of its content and scope are limited. [37] A significant gap exists in sources regarding how history was taught during this period, as no official curriculum or textbooks were available. The content and instructional methods were left to the discretion of school directors and individual teachers, who chose subjects based on their own knowledge and experience. As Abebe notes:

[35] Abebe, *An Investigation……*, pp. 94-95

[36] Maaza, *A Study of ……*, 1996, pp. 75-6.

[37] Ageru Shume, *The Challenges of History Education in Ethiopian Secondary Schools (1943–2018)* (D.Ed. diss., Bahir Dar University, 2024), p. 56; Alebachew Kemisso, *Changes and Continuity in History Curriculum: An Assessment of Themes and Perspectives in Ethiopian History Courses at AAU (1961–2006)* (MA thesis, Addis Ababa University, 2009), p. 17.

> [T]here was variation in the kinds and numbers of subjects taught in the different schools, and the selection of school subjects [and contents] was highly determined by the nationalities, knowledge, and experiential background of the teaching staff. It appears, from some fragmentary evidence, that history was taught in these early secondary schools. It is, however, quite understandable that in the absence of a standardized curriculum, it is very difficult to talk about the nature of this provision.[38]

In response to these challenges, Ethiopia published its first national primary education curriculum in 1947. Its development was overseen by a committee composed largely of foreign experts, particularly British advisors. The curriculum introduced a twelve-year structure, comprising six years of primary and six years of secondary education. Subjects at the primary level included Amharic, English, science, art, geography, history, arithmetic, music, handicraft, and physical education. Amharic served as the medium of instruction for all subjects during the first two years. The secondary school curriculum was finalized in 1949.[39] Secondary education (grades 9–12) was designed to be academically rigorous, offering subjects such as English, Amharic, French, mathematics, physics, chemistry, biology, history, geography, economics, religion, music, art, and physical education.[40] English became the dominant medium of instruction at this level. Notably, more than 75 percent of secondary school teachers were foreign nationals, a reflection of Ethiopia's continued reliance on expatriate advisors and educators in both curriculum development and classroom instruction.[41]

[38] Abebe, *An Investigation of …..*, p. 93.
[39] Ageru, *The Challenges….,* pp. 80-1.
[40] Yesuf Omar, *A Descriptive Analysis of Content Validity of the History Examination of the Ethiopian Secondary School Leaving Certificate Examination.* PhD diss., Illinois University, 1975, pp. 9-22.
[41] Balsvik, *Haile Selassie's Students……,* pp. 9-10.

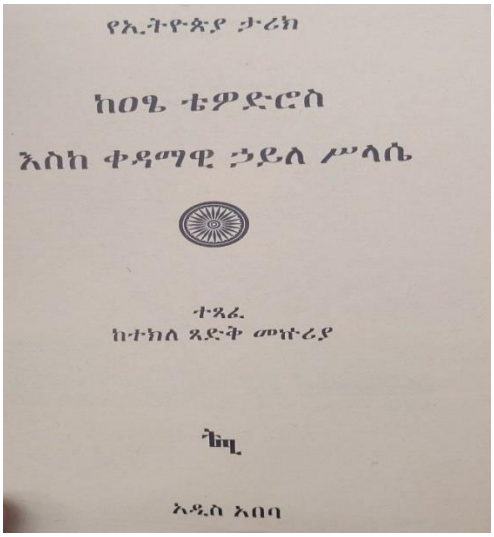
The post-war period marked a significant shift in the objectives of Ethiopian education. Unlike the pre-war era, which emphasized foreign language instruction, the new focus was on producing qualified civil servants and professionals to meet the demands of a modernizing state. [42] However, the 1949 curriculum, intended to support this transition, has been widely criticized for its inefficacy and detachment from Ethiopian realities. Although it aimed to systematize education, it remained heavily reliant on foreign models and content. Textbooks across subjects were often culturally irrelevant and failed to reflect the lived experiences of Ethiopian students. This made schooling alienating, contributing to a disconnection between education and society. The curriculum lacked alignment with the socio-economic needs of the country and ignored indigenous knowledge systems and Ethiopian values. [43] As Maaza observed, the curriculum was overly academic in orientation, and instructional materials were entirely foreign in both form and content. Moreover, teachers were left without proper guidance or textbooks, further weakening implementation.[44]

The 1949 curriculum, developed with the assistance of British experts, was the first to formally introduce history as a subject in Ethiopian secondary schools. However, it was implemented with minimal resources. No textbooks, teaching aids, or supplementary materials were available.[45] In response, the Ministry of Education commissioned *Ato* Tekle-Tsadik Mekuria to prepare instructional materials for Ethiopian history. He submitted a series of books written in Amharic, and *Ye-Ityopya Tarik ke Atse Tewodros iske Qedamawi Haile Selassie* (*History of Ethiopia from Emperor Tewodros to Emperor Haile Selassie*) was selected and distributed to secondary schools

[42] Solomon, "Trends of Educational Policy….", p. 69.
[43] Woube, "Curriculum Development…..", pp. 164-5.
[44] Maaza, *A Study of….*, pp. 83-4.
[45] Ibid., pp. 6-7; Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*…., p. 167.

as a textbook. [46] This created a pedagogical dilemma, as most history teachers at the secondary level were expatriates with little or no knowledge of Amharic, while English was the official medium of instruction. It remains unclear how Ethiopian history was taught under these circumstances, but it is likely that students used Tekle-Tsadik Mekuria's text as reading material while teachers, unable to use it effectively, focused instead on their own preferred content, primarily world history. [47]

Figure 5: Front Page of Tekle-Tsadik Mekuria's *Ethiopian History from Tewodros to Haileselassie*



Source: Tekle-Tsadik Mekuria, *Ye-Ityopya Tarik ke Atse Tewodros iske Qedamawi Haile Selassie* (History of Ethiopia from Emperor Tewodros to Emperor Haile Selassie) (Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Printing Press, 1943).

The first known attempt to produce a text in English specifically for teaching Ethiopian history was presumably made in 1952 by a teacher named Charles Isaac. As will be discussed in Chapter Five, Isaac's account of Ethiopian history, from antiquity to the rise of Haile Selassie, adopts a

[46] Bahiru, "The Evolution….. ", p. 33.
[47] Informants: Seid Kemal, Mekonnen Zewdu, Wossen Ali, Kassahun Simeneh.

pan-Ethiopian historiographical perspective, characterized by a strong bias in favor of the imperial monarchy. As a result, students were primarily exposed to dynastic narratives tracing the royal lineage from the legendary Emperor Menelik I to Haile Selassie I, rather than to broader or more critical interpretations of the Ethiopian past.[48]

In sum, the British period played a pivotal role in shaping history education in Ethiopia. On the positive side, they helped formalize its teaching at the secondary level by introducing the first standardized curriculum in 1949. This curriculum provided both content and instructional methods, marking a shift from informal, teacher-dependent instruction to a more organized system that incorporated global historical narratives. However, the British influence also had significant drawbacks. The curriculum reflected a strong ideological bias, emphasizing Western history while ignoring African and Ethiopian histories. There was also a severe shortage of instructional materials, particularly texts for teaching Ethiopian history. Moreover, the teaching staff in secondary schools during this period consisted almost entirely of expatriates. It was not until the 1960s that the History Department at Haile Selassie I University began producing Ethiopian nationals qualified to teach the subject. Ultimately, these developments created a disconnection between the real socio-economic needs of Ethiopian society and the content and methods of historical instruction.

2.4 The American Influence on History Education (1952-74)

From the early 1950s until the 1974 popular revolution, Ethiopia's foreign policy became closely aligned with the United States. This alignment coincided with the intensification of the Cold War, during which Western powers, particularly the U.S., sought to expand their influence in the

[48] NALA, 64/70ጠ, Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, *A Modern History of Ethiopia.* Compiled by Charles A. Isaac, Addis Ababa: Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, 1952.

Horn of Africa. During this period, the ideological motivations of Western countries were heightened. For the United States, Ethiopia represented both a strategic and ideological asset in its broader campaign to contain the spread of communism. As part of this global containment policy, the U.S. invested heavily in the ideological sphere, most notably in education, as a means of advancing its anticommunist agenda in the Third World.[49]

Thus, the United States appeared to want Ethiopia as an ally more than Ethiopia initially needed it. American interest was rooted in geostrategic concerns due to Ethiopia's location in the Horn of Africa. It also valued the Christian monarchy as a barrier against Soviet influence in Africa. This shift also marked the gradual replacement of British advisors by American ones in multiple sectors, including education. In the early 1950s, under the auspices of the U.S. Point Four Program, American advisors and Peace Corps volunteers were deployed across Ethiopia, serving as teachers and development facilitators in secondary schools throughout the country. [50]

2.4.1 The 1957 Secondary School Curriculum Reform

By 1953, a long-term planning committee concluded that the 1949 curriculum no longer reflected the realities of Ethiopian society. Its limitations, intensified by continued Western dominance and heavy dependence on expatriate teachers, led to growing calls for meaningful reform. In response, the Department of Research and Curriculum Development was established in 1956 to review and redesign the educational system. This process culminated in the

[49] Balsvik, *Haile Sellassie's Students….,* p. 55.
[50] Woube, "Curriculum Development….", p. 165.

introduction of a new national curriculum in 1957, which was developed by a committee composed of both Ethiopian and expatriate educators from various institutions.[51]

The curriculum aimed to make academic instruction more relevant to students' real-life experiences and local environments. This reflected a broader pedagogical shift toward contextualized learning. Central to its educational philosophy was the principle of moving from the known to the unknown, from the familiar to the unfamiliar. This approach was intended to root learning in students' immediate realities before gradually expanding outward to more abstract or global content. [52]

Structurally, the curriculum standardized the workload for both teachers and students. Teachers were expected to deliver a minimum of 25 instructional periods per week and supervise an additional five, leaving limited time for preparation. Students, in turn, were scheduled for 32 to 38 periods of instruction weekly, in addition to study hours and extracurricular activities. Although this program reflected the state's ambition for modernization, it placed heavy burdens on schools that faced shortages of qualified teaching staff and materials.[53] The following table summarizes the recommended weekly instructional periods for core academic subjects:

Table 5: Suggested Period Allotments for Academic Subjects in Secondary Schools (periods per week)

	Number of Periods per Week			
Subject	Grade 9	Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
1. Amharic	3-4	3-4	4	4
2. English	9-10	9-10	7-8	7-8

[51] Ibid.
[52] Maaza, *A Study of …….,* p. 8.
[53] Ibid.

3. Mathematics	6	6	5	5
4. General Science	5	5	5-6	5-6
5. Geography	4-5	4-5	4	4
6. History	***3-4***	***3-4***	***3***	***3***
7. French	4	4	4	4
TOTAL	**33 - 38**	**33 - 38**	**32 - 33**	**32 - 33**

Source: IES/377-EDU, Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, *Secondary School Curriculum (Provisional),* Addis Ababa, September 1957, p. 4.

This curriculum represented a major initiative by the Ethiopian state to modernize and standardize secondary education. It was not only a domestic response to the perceived needs of a rapidly changing society, but also mirrored broader international trends in postwar education reform. The influence of foreign advisors, particularly from the United States, and imported pedagogical models was evident in the curriculum's structure and underlying philosophy. Despite its ambitious design, the 1957 curriculum encountered significant challenges in implementation. Ethiopia lacked enough trained teachers. Instructional materials were limited or unavailable. Administrative systems were often weak. These constraints made it difficult to implement the curriculum as planned.[54]

By 1954, Ethiopia had only six academic secondary schools: Haile Selassie I, Empress Menen, General Wingate, Teferi Mekonnen, Menelik II, and Medhane Alem. Except for Medhane Alem in Harar, all were located in Addis Ababa.[55] Students in the provinces had little access to secondary education. This was because most schools were in the cities. This began to change in the 1950s and 1960s. During this period, American influence helped expand education beyond

[54] IES/377-EDU, Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, *Secondary School Curriculum (Provisional),* Addis Ababa, September 1957, p. 4.
[55] MoE and Fine Arts, "*A Ten Year Plan for Ethiopian Education…."*, 1955, p. 38.

urban areas. New schools were gradually established in regional centers such as Wollega, Sidamo, Shewa, Gojjam, Gonder, Kaffa, and Wollo. This expansion reflected increased access to education for rural and provincial populations.[56]

This rapid expansion of secondary education was paralleled by an acute shortage of Ethiopian teaching staff. A 1955 report prepared by the Long-Term Planning Committee of the Imperial Ethiopian Government revealed that the development of academic secondary schools relied heavily on the recruitment of foreign teachers. In that year, the Ministry of Education employed 77 foreign teachers and school directors to serve in these schools. The ten-year government plan proposed the recruitment of an additional 67 teachers over the following decade, all to be sourced from abroad. While a separate proposal for the preparation of Ethiopian secondary school teachers was submitted and reportedly under consideration by the Ministry, no concrete steps had been taken at that time. The report made no reference to any ongoing efforts to train local secondary school teachers. Consequently, the entire teaching and administrative staff at the secondary level remained composed of foreign nationals.[57]

During this period, student enrollment in government secondary schools increased significantly, reflecting the broader expansion of the education system. In the 1955–56 academic year, 2,097 students were enrolled nationwide. By 1959–60, that number had more than doubled to 5,273. The trend accelerated throughout the 1960s, reaching 26,690 students by 1967–68. By 1970–71, total secondary enrollment had more than doubled again, reaching 53,236. This consistent

[56] MoEFA, *Primary, Secondary and Teacher Education Projects: Based on the Report of UNESCO Educational Investment Mission to Ethiopia,* December 10, 1963, p. 35.

[57] MoEFA, *A Ten-Year Plan for the Controlled Expansion of Ethiopian Education: Proposal Prepared by the Long-Term Planning Committee of the Imperial Ethiopian Government,* Addis Ababa, June 1955, p. 51.

growth indicated rising public demand for education as well as the government's increasing investment in building a modern educational infrastructure. [58]

As shown above, history was one of the seven core academic subjects taught in secondary schools. The 1957 history syllabus was prepared by Mr. Barnes (Wingate School), Mr. Chambers (Medhane Alem School), Mr. Garreau (Teferi Mekonnen School), and Dr. Richard Pankhurst (UCAA). All of these contributors were foreign nationals. Their involvement reflects the continued dominance of foreign expertise in shaping educational content during the American advisory period (1952–1974).[59] At the time, the U.S. Education Advisory Group played a central role in national curriculum planning through its integration into the Long-Term Planning Committee. As the table below shows, only a few Ethiopians, mainly in Amharic and Mathematics subjects, participated in the reform process.

Table 6: Members of the 1957 Curriculum Reform Committee

No.	Subject	Curriculum Development Team	Name of School/Organization	Remark
1	Amharic	*Ato* Teklemariam Fantaye	Haile Selassia I Day School	Ethiopian
2	English	Miss Davis	Empress Menen Secondary School	
		Mrs. Oliver	Menelik II Secondary School	
		Mrs. Knowles	Empress Menen Secondary School	
3	Mathematics	Mr. George	Haile Selassie I Secondary School	

[58] Balsvik, *Haile Sellassie's Students,* p. 55.

[59] IES/377-EDU, Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, *Secondary School Curriculum (Provisional)*, Addis Ababa, September 1957, p. IV.

		Ato Alemayehu	University College of Addis Ababa	Ethiopian
4	General Science	Mr. Provost	Tefari Makonnen School	
		Mr. Kirby	Medhane Alem School	
5	Geography	Mr. Last	Medhane Alem School	
		Mr. Soloukhin	University College of Addis Ababa	
6	***History***	***Dr. Richard Pankhurst***	***University College of Addis Ababa***	
		Mr. Barnes	***Wingate School***	
		Mr. Chambers	***Medhane Alem School***	
		Mr. Garreau	***Tefari Makonnen School***	
7	French	Madame Danton	Empress Menen	
		Madame Lovelace	Haile Selassia I Secondary School	

Source: IES/377-EDU, Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, *Secondary School Curriculum (Provisional),* Addis Ababa, September 1957, p. IV.

Although the 1957 history syllabus integrated history into the national curriculum with clear educational goals, its classroom implementation was hindered by structural and material limitations. The curriculum promoted a humanistic and civic vision rooted in Enlightenment ideals, framing history as a tool for cultivating rational, morally grounded, and socially responsible citizens. It emphasized critical thinking, humility, and global awareness, advocating a "practical" approach grounded in students' real-life experiences. However, this vision remained largely theoretical, as the curriculum offered little guidance on how to translate these

ideals into classroom practice. This challenge was compounded by a shortage of appropriate textbooks and a reliance on imported content and teaching models.[60]

Consequently, the curriculum emphasized Eurocentric narratives at the expense of fostering national identity and collective consciousness. This Eurocentric focus was evident in the curriculum's structure, which devoted all four years of instruction to world history while neglecting Ethiopian history. The thematic structure is shown below:

Table 7: The 1957 History Syllabus for Ethiopian Secondary Schools- History Contents and Thematic Areas

Grade	Content	Thematic Area
9th	Ancient civilizations: Egypt, Rome, Byzantium; rise of Christianity and Islam; Rise and Fall of Franks; Feudalism in Medieval Europe; The Rise of Ottoman Empire; and the Medieval World and early contacts	World History
10th	Renaissance & Reformation; Exploration and Commerce; Nationalism and Autocracy in Europe; Maritime Expansion & Colonization (Holy Roman Empire, Spain, Dutch Colonization, England, France, Prussia and Russia); 18th Century European Society	World History
11th	Selected topics in European History (for internal/external exams)	World History
12th	Continued focus on European History (exam-oriented for internal and external exams)	World History

[60] Ibid.

Source: IES-67-5630/1967, Ministry of Education and H.S.I.U. Faculty of Education, *Secondary School Curriculum and E.S.L.C. Examination Seminar Final Report,* Addis Ababa, January 10-14, 1967, pp. 121-6.

In Grades 9 and 10, for example, the focus was overwhelmingly on European history; ancient civilizations, the rise of Christianity and Islam, medieval Europe, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment. Ethiopian history was marginalized or reduced to passing references within broader foreign contexts. This disconnect between the curriculum's stated objectives and its content, combined with practical constraints in the classroom, severely limited its capacity to achieve its intended educational outcomes. [61]

In Grades 11 and 12, the curriculum was aligned with the British General Certificate of Education (G.C.E.). This further distanced instruction from Ethiopian historical experience. Students were trained to take examinations based on foreign syllabi, specifically aligned with the British General Certificate of Education (G.C.E.). The history content they studied was not locally determined but varied depending on the particular European historical period selected for that year's G.C.E. exam. This meant that the curriculum lacked consistency and relevance to Ethiopian history, as it was largely dictated by external exam schedules rather than national educational needs. This reliance on external standards further undermined the development of a national historical consciousness and deepened dependence on foreign epistemologies.[62]

It is reasonable to generalize that history teachers were the primary, often the only, source of historical knowledge for students. Instruction relied heavily on lectures and dictation, as teachers were expected to provide notes either by writing on the board or dictating them. Textbooks and

[61] IES/377-EDU, Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, *Secondary School Curriculum (Provisional),* Addis Ababa, September 1957, pp. 49-86.
[62] Ibid.

reference materials were scarce, if not entirely unavailable. This lack of reading materials contributed to students' low proficiency in English. History was taught in English, a language many students struggled to understand, which made it especially difficult for them to engage with complex historical concepts, particularly those drawn from foreign and unfamiliar contexts. For rural Ethiopian students, this created significant barriers to comprehension. As a result, history became one of the most difficult and feared subjects in secondary education, largely due to these language-related challenges. Mr. Animesh Chakrabarti, a history teacher at Dejazmach Gebre-Egziabher Secondary School in Gimbi, Wollega, expressed deep concern over this issue, as:

> The standard of English is much below what is expected from them, as they happen to learn all these things in the medium of English. … It is beyond the capacity of a teacher of History to teach History as well as English simultaneously.[63]

During this period, history education became a contested space shaped by competing foreign interests. Experts from India, France, Britain, and the United States sought to insert their national histories into the Ethiopian curriculum. This ideological struggle was evident in seminar papers presented in 1967 by history teachers from various high schools, including those in provincial towns. These papers often took a prescriptive tone, debating which content should be included or excluded. For instance, an Indian teacher might advocate for the inclusion of Indian history. Similarly, English or French teachers often promoted the history of their own countries over

[63] IES-67-5630/1967, Ministry of Education and H.S.I.U. Faculty of Education, *Secondary School Curriculum and E.S.L.C. Examination Seminar Final Report,* Addis Ababa, January 10-14, 1967, p. 144.

other narratives. Such contestations revealed the history curriculum as an epistemological battleground for Western scholarship.[64]

Generally, the 1957 history syllabus reflected a deep conflict between Ethiopia's national goals and foreign educational influences. Although it aimed to promote civic responsibility and global awareness, it failed to connect these values to Ethiopia's own history and culture. By focusing primarily on European content and aligning with foreign examinations, the curriculum relegated local traditions and historical narratives to the margins. In this way, history education went beyond the mere teaching of facts; it became a battleground among different nationalities over identity, ideology, and cultural influence.[65]

2.4.2 The 1967 Secondary School Curriculum Revision

During the American era, the country underwent three major curricular reforms, in addition to earlier developments during the British period. The first reform took place in 1957, followed by a second in 1963, and finally, the third and last reform occurred in 1967 with the assistance of American educational advisors. The 1967 curriculum reform was introduced in response to dissatisfaction with previous efforts. Both the 1957 and 1963 curricula failed to address the educational and developmental needs of the country. These earlier curricula were entirely prepared by foreign experts and lacked relevance to the Ethiopian context. They focused mainly on European content and included insufficient Ethiopian history and local themes. Although the 1963 revision attempted some improvements, it did not bring significant change. These shortcomings demonstrated the need for a more meaningful, relevant, and nationally oriented

[64] Ibid.

[65] IES-67-5630/1967, Ministry of Education and H.S.I.U. Faculty of Education, *Secondary School Curriculum and E.S.L.C. Examination Seminar Final Report,* Addis Ababa, January 10-14, 1967, pp. 121-6.

curriculum, as growing demands for national identity and development goals fueled the push for reform, leading to a major revision in 1967.[66]

The 1967 curriculum reform occurred when Ethiopia's relationship with the United States was at its strongest. As a non-colonized nation and a prominent leader in Africa, Ethiopia held strategic importance for the U.S. After 1962, Ethiopia became the primary beneficiary of the Peace Corps Program. Since most African countries were still under European influence, Ethiopia served as a key focus for American outreach. At the same time, there was a growing concern, demand, and opposition from Ethiopian students against the Westernization of the Ethiopian education system.[67] In response, the 1967 reform sought to address many of these criticisms by revising the general objectives of education and striving to Ethiopianize the curriculum to better reflect the national demands and interests of the Ethiopian people. The general objectives of the new secondary education, as outlined in the 1967 curriculum, were:

a) To produce people who can think objectively and dispassionately;

b) To train the emotions properly and open the heart to the interests and concerns of others and the world at large;

c) To develop inner resources of spirit so that one need not depend all the time on the titillation of the senses from outside- There should be a segment of cultural interests in which one can find self-expression and achieve satisfactory growth.

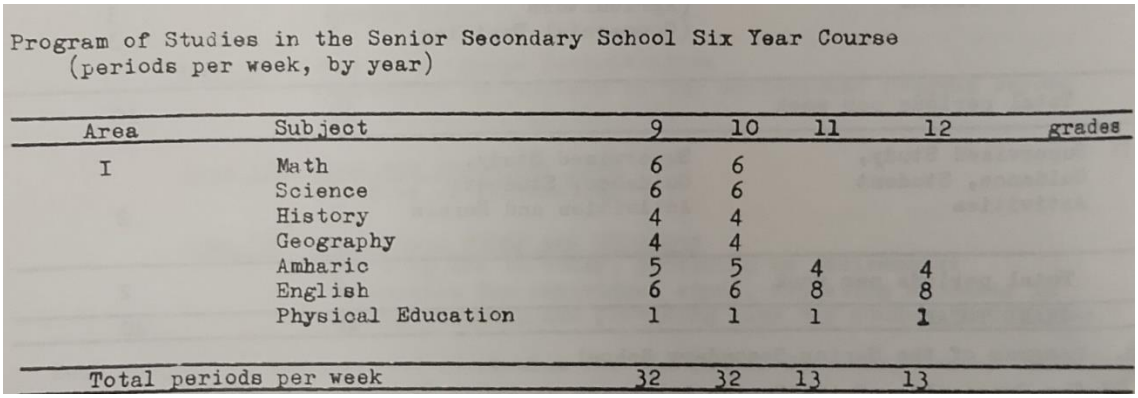
d) To prepare one to participate efficiently in the productive work of the world so that one may contribute something of value to society- This

[66] Ibid.
[67] ESUE, *Tatek* (Gird Yourself), Lisbon, Jan 1959, p. 23.

includes both love of work and appreciation of the dignity of all labor, and insistence on high standards of efficiency and workmanship.[68]

History was one of the seven core academic subjects taught in secondary schools. As shown in the table below, four periods per week were allotted for its instruction.

Figure 6: Weekly Period Allocation by Subject in the 1967 Secondary School Curriculum



Program of Studies in the Senior Secondary School Six Year Course
(periods per week, by year)

Area	Subject	9	10	11	12	grades
I	Math	6	6			
	Science	6	6			
	History	4	4			
	Geography	4	4			
	Amharic	5	5	4	4	
	English	6	6	8	8	
	Physical Education	1	1	1	1	
Total periods per week		32	32	13	13	

Source: IES-70-9971-1967, Ministry of Education, *Secondary School Curriculum: Book I.* 2nd ed., Addis Ababa, 1960 E.C. (1967), p. 6.

A vital milestone in the 1967 curriculum reform was the Seminar on Secondary School Curriculum and the E.S.L.C. Examination held from January 10 to 14, 1967. It was organized by Haile Selassie I University and the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts. The seminar brought together many key participants, including ministry officials, university leaders, secondary school teachers, school directors, and guests from government and private sectors. Its main goal was to review the relevance of the existing secondary school curriculum and evaluate how well the ESLC exam measured student achievement. The sessions took place at Haile Selassie I University, with commission meetings held at Menelik School in Addis Ababa. This seminar marked an important turning point by addressing concerns over the Western influence in

[68] IES-70-9971-1967, Ministry of Education, *Secondary School Curriculum: Book I.* 2nd ed., Addis Ababa, 1960 E.C. (1967), p. 2.

education and setting the stage for revising the curriculum to better meet Ethiopia's national needs and development goals. [69]

Among the most significant outcomes of the seminar were the recommendations put forward by the History Commission. The outdated 1963 history syllabus was deemed inadequate and replaced with a revised version that broke broad topics into smaller, more specific subtopics. This change aimed to help teachers focus on key themes and ensure greater consistency in history instruction across schools. The draft syllabus was to be circulated among secondary school teachers and members of the History Department at Haile Selassie I University for feedback before final approval by an expert committee. The commission also stressed the urgent need for Ethiopian- and African-centered textbooks and recommended providing schools with essential teaching aids to support history instruction. These proposals reflected a strong commitment to making history education more relevant, contextualized, and responsive to Ethiopia's national identity and development goals. [70]

Table 8: Members of the History Commission Responsible for Developing the 1967 History Syllabus

No.	**Name**	**Institution / Affiliation**
1	*Ato* Merid W. Aregay (Chairman)	History Department, Faculty of Arts, HSIU
2	*Ato* Kiros Gebre Selassie (Co-Chairman)	Curriculum Department, Ministry of Education

[69] MOEFA, ***የትምህርት አጠቃላይ ጥናት አጭር ሪፖርት*** (A Brief Report on General Study of Education), Addis Ababa, October 1965 E.C., pp. 1-2.; MOEFA, Education Sector Review, June 1972, Addis Ababa, pp. 1-2.

[70] IES-67-5630/1967, Ministry of Education and H.S.I.U. Faculty of Education, *Secondary School Curriculum and E.S.L.C. Examination Seminar Final Report,* Addis Ababa, January 10-14, 1967, pp. 121-51.

3	Mr. M. Gareau	T.M.S., Addis Ababa
4	Mr. J. P. Chaudrey	H.S.I. Secondary School, Addis Ababa
5	Mr. C. Coskran	Faculty of Education, HSIU
6	Mr. K. A. Cheriam	H.S.I. Day School, Addis Ababa
7	Brother John	St. Joseph's, Addis Ababa
8	Mr. Stanton	Yirgalem Secondary School
9	Mr. S. Singh	Assela Secondary School
10	John Castelino	Prince Makonnen, Asmara
11	*Ato* Tiku	Adi Ugri Secondary School, Eritrea
12	Mr. V. K. Sharma	Neqemte Secondary School, Wollega
13	Mr. Sakena	Debre Markos Secondary School, Gojjam
14	*Ato* Asgedom Mengistu	Faculty of Education, HSIU
15	Mr. C. Borsanyi	Senior Lecturer in History (UNESCO)

Source: IES-67-5630/1967, Ministry of Education and H.S.I.U. Faculty of Education, *Secondary School Curriculum and E.S.L.C. Examination Seminar Final Report,* Addis Ababa, January 10-14, 1967, p. IX.

The 1967 history syllabus marked a significant shift toward indigenization. The curriculum reform commission tried to align history education with Ethiopia's actual needs and development goals, viewing history not only as an academic subject but also as a means to promote national consciousness and critical thinking. At the secondary level, the goals of history education included developing students' research and analytical skills, deepening their understanding of

national and global history, fostering civic responsibility and national identity, and encouraging an appreciation of Ethiopia's and Africa's rich historical heritage.[71]

To achieve these objectives, the syllabus makers carefully selected specific themes with a stronger emphasis on Ethiopian and African history. It adopted a comparative and chronological approach, integrating World, African, and Ethiopian histories across Grades 9 to 12. Grade 9 focuses on early civilizations and developments up to 600 A.D., including Ethiopia, Africa, and the Mediterranean world. Grade 10 covers the period from 600 to 1648, focusing on medieval and early modern changes in Europe, Africa, and Ethiopia. Grade 11 examines the era from 1640 to 1855, emphasizing global revolutions and political shifts in Ethiopia. Grade 12 addresses modern history from 1848 to the present, with a focus on colonialism, independence movements, and contemporary developments.[72] The following table outlines the main content and thematic areas of the 1967 history syllabus for Ethiopian secondary schools:

Table 9: The 1967 History Syllabus for Ethiopian Secondary Schools- History Main Contents and Thematic Areas

Grade	Content	Thematic Area
9th	➢ important developments in prehistoric and historic times ➢ River valley civilization ins in Africa and Asia ➢ Ethiopia to 600 A.D. ➢ The Mediterranean World to 600 A.D.	World, Africa, and Ethiopian History

[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.

10th	➢ The Mediterranean World and Europe (600-1648) ➢ Ethiopian History (600- 1632) ➢ Africa (642-1640 A.D.)	World, Africa, and Ethiopian History
11th	➢ Ethiopia (1632- 1855) ➢ The World (1648-1848) ➢ Africa from 1640 to 1850	World, Africa, and Ethiopian History
12th	➢ The World from 1848 to 1950 ➢ Africa from 1850 to Present ➢ Ethiopia from 1855 to Present	World, Africa, and Ethiopian History

Source: IES-70-9971-1967, Ministry of Education, *Secondary School Curriculum: Book I.* 2nd ed., Addis Ababa, 1960 E.C. (1967), pp. 156-8.

The 1967 curriculum reform marked a fundamental shift in Ethiopian education, particularly in the teaching of history. It brought Ethiopian voices and concerns directly into curriculum development and emphasized Ethiopian and African histories that had previously been neglected. This effort to Ethiopianize the syllabus aligned education with national identity and developmental goals. Compared to earlier programs, the 1967 history syllabus showed significantly less ideological imposition. Western culture and world history remained part of the syllabus, but this global perspective helped students develop a broader understanding of the past and a more comprehensive worldview. Importantly, the syllabus was crafted largely from a professional and academic perspective, with less political and ideological interference than before.[73]

[73] Ibid.

The curriculum aimed to make history education more relevant to national needs. History was no longer treated only as an academic subject, but also as a tool to build national identity, promote unity, and support development. However, implementing the reform was not easy. It faced serious challenges. There were not enough trained teachers, especially in rural areas. Textbooks were also scarce, particularly for African and Ethiopian history. Teaching methods stayed traditional, relying on lectures and memorization. Many students had little or no access to learning materials. These problems made the new curriculum too difficult to carry out. [74]

Despite persistent challenges in implementation, the 1967 reform laid the foundation for a more self-reflective, nationally grounded, and pedagogically sound history education in Ethiopia. In terms of professional historiography, the 1967 syllabus was unmatched. It represented, relatively speaking, a stronger expression of scholarly rigor than any syllabus implemented before and has not been equaled since. In later years, history education came under the control of Marxist revolutionaries, who highly politicized and abused it, contradicting the objectives and purposes of disciplinary history, as will be discussed in the next chapter.

[74] Teshome, *Education in Ethiopia….,* pp. 57-58; 156-158.

CHAPTER THREE

HISTORY EDUCATION IN ETHIOPIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS DURING THE SOCIALIST *DERG* REGIME (1974-91)

3.1 Ideological Schooling of the *Derg*

The 1974 Ethiopian revolution marked a radical turning point in the political, social, and ideological landscape of the country. The imperial regime that had dominated for over four decades collapsed amid widespread unrest and discontent. In September 1974, Emperor Haile Selassie was deposed, and the military committee known as the Derg assumed power. Although it emerged from the armed forces, the Derg quickly moved beyond its original military character and began to present itself as the custodian of a revolutionary transformation.[1]

The early months of the Derg's rule were marked by political instability, ideological uncertainty, and competition among leftist forces. Initially, the Derg entered the revolutionary scene with economic demands and reformist intentions. However, it was soon drawn into a deeper ideological struggle, largely due to the influence of radical student movements. As Bahru notes, students largely shaped the tone and direction of the revolution, with their slogans, publications, and actions pushing the military into political and ideological confrontation.[2]

From 1974 to 1976, the Derg struggled to catch up with the civilian left, which had a stronger ideological grounding and clearer revolutionary vision. This period witnessed intense

[1] Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia…..,* pp. 243-44.
[2] Ibid.

competition over the meaning and direction of the revolution.[3] The Derg, recognizing the importance of ideological legitimacy, eventually adopted a more systematic political program. The turning point came on 20 April 1976**,** when the regime issued the *National Democratic Revolution (NDR) Program*. With this declaration, the Derg committed itself openly to Marxist-Leninist ideology, framing Ethiopia's problems through class-based analysis and declaring a socialist transformation as its ultimate objective.[4]

The NDR Program drew heavily on Marxist-Leninist theory, particularly the Chinese model of third world revolution. It identified feudalism, imperialism, and bureaucratic capitalism as the main enemies of the people. In opposition to these forces, the Derg envisioned a revolutionary alliance of the proletariat, the peasantry, and the progressive petty bourgeoisie. The NDR served both as an ideological framework and a tool for political consolidation. Through it, the regime sought to assert its role as the vanguard of the oppressed classes and to legitimize its monopoly on state power.[5]

The ideological shift of 1976 was followed by concrete political and socio-economic reforms. One of the earliest and most far-reaching measures was the nationalization of land**.** In March 1975, the Derg declared that all rural and urban land belonged to the "broad masses of the people." [6] This was followed by the nationalization of private rental housing, banks, insurance

[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Ibid, p. 245.
[6] Christopher Clapham. "The State and Revolution in Ethiopia", *Review of African Political Economy,* No. 44, (1989), p. 2.

companies, and major industries. These reforms were justified in Marxist terms as measures to eliminate exploitation and create the economic foundations of socialism.[7]

At the same time, the regime gave priority to mass mobilization and political education**.** It facilitated the formation of mass associations such as the Ethiopian Trade Union**,** Peasant Associations, and the Revolutionary Ethiopia Women's Association**.** These organizations were designed not only to mobilize the population but also to serve as vehicles for ideological indoctrination.[8]

One of the most significant initiatives of the early revolutionary years was the 1975 campaign**,** launched under the slogan *"Development through Cooperation: Campaign for Knowledge and Work."* Tens of thousands of secondary school and university students, along with teachers, were deployed to rural areas to combat illiteracy and spread the ideals of socialism. The campaign was framed as a development effort, but it was also a political project. It aimed to integrate the rural population into the revolutionary state and spread Marxist-Leninist ideology through education and propaganda.[9]

The Derg adopted Marxism-Leninism as the state ideology in 1975. However, it ruled without a constitution for more than ten years. During this time, the regime governed by decrees that had the force of law. Policies, including those on education, were shaped by revolutionary ideology rather than legal frameworks.[10] By the mid-1980s, the Derg had fully embraced its Marxist-Leninist identity. In 1984, it created the Workers' Party of Ethiopia (WPE) as the sole legal

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid, p. 5; MoE, ***የአስር ዓመት ጠቅሚ የትምህርት ፕላን*** *1973–1982* (A Ten-Year Directive Plan for Education, 1973–1982 E.C.) (Addis Ababa, 1972 E.C.), pp. 12-20.

[9] Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, p. 243.

[10] MoE, ***ከትምሕርት ዓለም*** (From the Education World), A Special Issue Prepared for the 10th Revolutionary Festival of the Derg and the Foundation of WPE, Addis Ababa, 1976 E.C., p. 9.

political party to protect the revolution's ideology. In 1987, the regime proclaimed the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (PDRE) and adopted a new constitution. This constitution officially confirmed the principles of the National Democratic Revolution (NDR) and Marxism-Leninism. It gave legal backing to the ideology the regime had followed since 1976. By then, Ethiopia had undergone deep political and ideological transformations. The Derg had fully aligned with the socialist bloc, especially the Soviet Union, and severed all ties with the West, particularly the United States. [11]

Within this broader ideological and political context, education, and especially the teaching of history, was transformed into a powerful tool of state propaganda. The next section will examine how the structure of the education system was reshaped to reflect the regime's ideological orientation, and how history instruction in particular was used to promote the goals of the revolutionary state.

3.2 Educational Philosophy and Policy of the Derg

The Derg socialist government adopted a new educational policy based on Marxist-Leninist ideology, developed with the assistance of educational experts primarily from Eastern European countries.[12] This policy emphasized the central goal of instilling Marxist-Leninist ideology in students. The Derg aimed to create an education system fully aligned with socialist philosophy, as reflected in one of its official documents describing the philosophy of socialist education as:

> **አብዮታዊት ኢትዮጵያ የማርክሲዝም ሌኒኒዝምን ርእዮተ-ዓለም የታጠቁ፣ አእምሯቸው በግለኝነት አስተሳሰብ ያልተመረዘ፣ ለኮሙኒዝም ግብ መምታት**

[11] Balsvik, *Haile Selassie's Students……..*, p. 14-7.

[12] Bahru, "*A Century of Ethiopian Historiography…",* pp. 4-5; Tekeste Negash, *Education in Ethiopia: From Crisis to the Brink of Collapse*, (Uppsala: Nordic Africa Institute, 2006), p. 18.

በቆራጥነት የሚታገለና ፍጹም ለሠርቶ አደሩ ዲሲፕሊን ተገዥ የሆኑ አምራች ዜጎች ከት/ቤቶች እንዲመነጩ ትፈልጋለች፡፡ ይህን ፍላጎቷን ማሟላት የሚቻለው ግን የዛሬዎቹ ሕጻናት በሶሻሊስታዊ ስነምግባር ታንፀው ማደግ ሲችሉ ነው፡፡[13]

> Revolutionary Ethiopia seeks to produce from its schools productive citizens shaped by the worldview of Marxism-Leninism, individuals whose thinking is not influenced by individualism, who are committed to the cause of communism with determination, and who demonstrate complete obedience to socialist discipline. However, this goal can only be achieved if today's children are raised and nurtured in accordance with socialist ethics.

The Derg's educational policy strongly condemned the imperial era and its feudal system that preceded the 1974 revolution. It especially criticized the Western-oriented education policy of the Imperial government, describing it as elitist and disconnected from the needs of the Ethiopian masses. According to the Derg's official documents, Ethiopia's deep poverty was the result of long-standing feudal exploitation and the poor leadership of past rulers. [14] The pre-revolutionary education system was dismissed as outdated and ineffective, focused on superficial content with little practical relevance for national development. The Derg officials argued that the curriculum inherited from the Imperial regime served the interests of imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism, three forces they labeled as class enemies. Consequently, a new school curriculum was introduced in the late 1970s to fulfill the regime's political and ideological goals. [15]

[13] MoE, *From the Education World…*, p. 9.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Tekeste, *Education in Ethiopia….,* p. 18.

In the eyes of the Derg, socialist education aimed not only to impart knowledge and skills but also to foster revolutionary commitment. Education was expected to instill discipline, political clarity, and a readiness to serve the revolution. Schools were tasked with developing students' ability to identify and resist the enemies of the revolution while preparing them to contribute to the socialist state. Marxist-Leninist thought was not merely a theoretical foundation but the guiding principle of the entire education system. It was meant to cultivate an understanding of revolutionary struggle and core socialist values. Moreover, students were expected to embrace patriotism, nationalism, and internationalism, becoming conscious citizens equipped to defend socialism and actively participate in transforming country. [16]

On 20 April 1976, the Derg proclaimed the "*Ye-Beherawi Democrasiyawi Abeyot Program*" (National Democratic Revolution Program). Its main goal was to establish the People's Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. The program officially abolished the pre-1974 education system and introduced a new one based on Marxist-Leninist ideology. Education was now expected to serve the development and meaningful life of the broad masses. It had to be accessible to students and support the struggle against feudalism, bureaucratic capitalism, and imperialism.[17] The program first examined the problems of the old system. It then assessed the current situation and outlined new educational goals. The general objective of education was clearly stated:

> **የትምህርት ዘርፍ ዓላማ በማርክሲዝም ሌኒኒዝም በመመስረት የወጣቱን ትውልድና የሰፊውን የኢትዮጵያ ህዝብ የአካል፣ የመንፈስና የአእምሮ**

[16] Bahru, " A Century of Ethiopian Historiography…", pp. 1-26; Tekeste, *Education in Ethiopia….*, p. 18.
[17] Ibid.

> ችሎታዎችና ክህሎት በተስተካከለ መንገድ በማበልጸግ……..የተሟላ አምራች ሶሻሊስት ዜጋን ማፍራት ነው።።[18]
>
> The objective of the education sector is to develop the physical, spiritual, and intellectual capacities and skills of the youth and the masses of the Ethiopian people in a balanced way, based on Marxism-Leninism……. in order to produce a fully developed, productive socialist citizen.

In the eyes of scholars, however, the true objectives of education extend far beyond political indoctrination. Tekeste argues that, historically, education has served as an ideological tool used by ruling elites to maintain social and political order. Since the 1960s, especially in developing countries, education has been seen as a form of human investment essential for national development. In contrast, the Derg regime's educational objectives, narrowly focused on cultivating Marxist-Leninist ideology, were rigid and limited. Tekeste criticizes this approach, pointing out that Marxist ideology has always been a minority view. He contends that it is ill-suited to the Ethiopian context, where traditional values and the need for productive citizens call for a broader educational vision. Tekeste also emphasizes that promoting Ethiopian nationalism and patriotism would have been a more inclusive and practical goal, better aligned with the needs of the wider population.[19]

In the early years of the Derg regime, Ethiopia, and its educational system in particular, stood at a critical crossroads, uncertain about which direction to take. Despite this confusion, there was an urgent need to replace existing curricular materials with new, explicitly "revolutionary" content. However, policymakers lacked a clear vision or consensus on which country's model to follow. This uncertainty was reflected in competing slogans such as "education for production,"

[18] MoE, *A Historical Development of Modern Education,* p. 61.
[19] Tekeste, *The Crisis of Ethiopian Education…*, p. 66.

"education for social change," and "education for class struggle," all of which circulated among teachers, experts, and students. Nonetheless, Marxist-Leninist ideology became the dominant framework and guiding principle for curriculum development. [20]

After establishing the political foundation for education, the Ministry of Education focused on curriculum development. In 1976, the MoE created the Curriculum Main Division, tasked with producing syllabi, curricula, textbooks, and teachers' guides for all grade levels. To handle this extensive workload, the division was organized into fourteen panels, each specializing in subjects such as Amharic, English, Mathematics, Science (physics, chemistry, and biology), Social Science (history, geography, and political science), Physical Education, Home Economics, Production Technology, Agriculture, Bookkeeping and Economics, Music, Art, Kindergarten, and Primary Education. Each panel developed subject-specific materials to support the implementation of a more centralized national education system.[21]

The regime sought to embed its ideological principles through multiple mechanisms. The 1976 curriculum was explicitly based on Marxist-Leninist doctrine, with textbooks and syllabi aligned accordingly. Ideological training became widespread, particularly for secondary school teachers, who participated in political consciousness programs led by government cadres. These short-term sessions introduced the state's socialist educational agenda.[22] Teachers received indoctrination often equal to, or even greater than, their pedagogical training. Between 1975 and 1981, for example, over 26,000 teachers and teacher-students took part in "political

[20] MoE, *Evaluative Research of the General Education System in Ethiopia*. A Quality Study (Summary Report in English), Addis Ababa, 1986, p. 2; Girma, "Adwa in Ethiopia's….", p. 100.

[21] MoE, *A Historical Development of Modern Education in Ethiopia,* p. 76.

[22] DMU Archive, Folder No. 87, File No. ጠ/ፐ-1, **የደ/ማርቆስ አጠቃላይ 2ኛ ደ/ት/ቤት ኢሠፓ መሰረታዊ ድርጅት ቃለጉባኤ** (A Minute by WPE Members of Debre Markos General Secondary School), 1979–1981 E.C. (1986–1989 G.C.).

consciousness" training aimed at familiarizing them with Marxist-Leninist ideology. These trainings were mandatory at all school levels and were sometimes supplemented by live broadcasts on radio and television. [23]

Additionally, many teachers and educational experts were sent abroad, mainly to Eastern European countries, particularly the Soviet Union and East Germany, for further professional development. Around the turn of 1980, approximately 340 educators from the education sector participated in workshops, seminars, and training programs in socialist countries, ranging from one week to one year in duration.[24] This reflects the military government's strong determination to embed its socialist ideology into the education system and to use education as a central tool for advancing its ideological goals.[25]

3.3 History Education during the Derg Regime

History education in Ethiopia under the Derg regime was strongly shaped by Marxist historiography. This approach sees history as driven by the struggle of societies to meet their material needs. According to Marx, economic forces and class conflict are the true engines of history. Other factors like ideology, culture, and individuals play a lesser role. He believed that history is about increasing human productive power and that real fulfillment comes only when everyone's basic needs are satisfied. This view was very different from earlier histories that focused on nationalism or religion. Since the 1950s, Marxist historiography has influenced many historians worldwide, including those not affiliated with communist parties.[26] Using these ideas,

[23] Ibid., pp. 87-88.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Informants: Birhanu Adugna, Abebe Hunegnaw, and Gemeda Akuma.
[26] John Tosh, *The Pursuit of History…,* pp. 226-27.

the Derg shaped the history curriculum to build class consciousness and promote Marxist-Leninist ideology among students. [27]

This philosophy was clearly articulated in key government documents, including the National Democratic Revolution Program (NDRP), the educational policy, and the 1987 constitution of the PDRE. The preamble of the 1987 constitution begins with the words "we the working people of Ethiopia," reflecting the regime's strong emphasis on class struggle. The constitution stressed Ethiopia's history as one marked by harsh class oppression, particularly under the feudal system. It stated:

> The working people of Ethiopia, having passed through different socioeconomic systems in the course of their long history, have, in the process, experienced bitter class oppression and exploitation. In particular, it is well-known that the relationship prevalent in the feudal system had subjected the peasants to the abhorrent yoke of oppression. Moreover, the people were victimized in the clashes frequently waged among the feudal lords, through various means, robbed of the fruits of their labor, and alternately subjected to hunger, disease, and mass death.[28]

This idea dominated the history curriculum, where history was interpreted primarily through the lens of class struggle. In the textbooks, the people were referred to as "the working class" or "the broad masses." However, in the Ethiopian context, this working class did not emerge naturally from an industrial system, as Marx had theorized.[29] The 1974 revolution took place in an agrarian society, where no unified identity existed under the name of "working forces" before the uprising. As a result, such an identity had to be consciously constructed. The revolutionaries

[27] Ageru, *Challenges of History Education…*, p. 117.
[28] PDRE, *The 1987 Constitution of PDRE,* Preamble.
[29] Toggia, "History Writing…..", pp. 319–343.

sought to instill a new collective consciousness under the banner of the working class through widespread political agitation and ideological instruction. The education system was seen as an ideal tool for this purpose. Accordingly, the history curriculum and textbooks were designed to cultivate class-conscious students.

In line with this, the Derg introduced a 6-2-4 education system in 1976: six years of primary, two years of junior secondary, and four years of senior secondary education. History was a core subject in secondary schools. Students in grades nine and ten had two history classes per week, while those in grades eleven and twelve had three.[30] The Social Science Panel was tasked with developing the history curriculum and textbooks, ensuring full alignment with the regime's political goals. Thus, history education was not simply academic. It was a deliberate political tool to promote Marxist-Leninist ideology and foster class consciousness among Ethiopian youth. The aim was to shape students' understanding of the past and prepare them for their expected role in the socialist future.[31]

3.4 History Textbooks for Secondary Education

3.4.1 History for Grades 9 and 10

During the Derg regime, the preparation of secondary school history textbooks was undertaken by the Social Science Panel, one of the 14 curriculum panels established by the Ministry of Education. This panel, comprising experts in history, geography, and political science, took swift measures to replace the old imperial syllabi with materials aligned to the ideals of the revolution. [32] Initially, in 1975, temporary history teaching notes, largely unchanged from imperial-era texts

[30] Tekeste, *The Crisis*…., p. 48; Girma, "Adwa in Ethiopia's….."*,* p. 101.
[31] Ibid.
[32] MoE, *A Historical Development of Modern Education,* p. 67.

and focused solely on world history, were issued, with Ethiopian history entirely excluded. These notes were meant only for teachers, leaving students without textbooks. [33] It was not until 1979 that the Social Science Panel produced new history textbooks for grades 11 and 12, followed by grades 9 and 10 in 1980. These materials were prepared hastily, with little scholarly input, and reflected the urgency and political tone of the era. The revolutionary government aimed to restructure education along Marxist-Leninist lines. As part of this campaign, the history textbooks were prepared rapidly and without thorough research, prioritizing political indoctrination over academic rigor.[34]

The 1980 Grade 9 history textbook, the first of its kind after years of relying on teacher notes, introduced a revised curriculum that combined selected topics from world, African, and Ethiopian history. The content spanned from the English Bourgeois Revolution of the seventeenth century to the emergence of scientific communism in the mid-nineteenth century. Organized into nine units, the textbook opened with a discussion of the beginnings of modern history, followed by three units on African history, one unit on Ethiopian history (Unit 5), and four units on broader world developments[35]

The treatment of Ethiopian history in the Grade 9 textbook was notably limited. Of the 184 total pages, only 38 were allocated to Ethiopian history content. As indicated in the succeeding table, Ethiopian history is addressed solely in Unit Five. This section begins abruptly with the Muslim–Christian conflicts of the sixteenth century and concludes with the rise of Emperor Tewodros II in the second half of the nineteenth century, entirely omitting the country's rich ancient and

[33] IES-937-EDU, Provisional Military Government of Socialist Ethiopia, Ministry of Education, *History Notes for Grade 9* (Addis Ababa, 1975).

[34] Girma, "Adwa in Ethiopia's*…."*, p. 100; MoE, *Evaluative Research and the General Education System in Ethiopia*, p. 84.

[35] MoE, *History Student Textbook for Grade* 9, (Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Printing Press, 1980), p. i.

medieval past.[36] Nonetheless, it is worth noting that Ethiopia's ancient and medieval history was covered at the junior secondary level (Grades 7–8), where history instruction was delivered in Amharic.[37]

In addition, the textbook was largely compiled from external sources. The world history sections were adapted from A. Manfred's *A Short History of the World*, and African history from André Sík's *History of Black Africa*. The source of the Ethiopian history section remains unidentified. Although the textbook was reprinted in 1981 and 1983, its structure and content continued to reflect the Derg regime's rushed and ideologically driven approach to curriculum development.[38]

Table 10: History for Grade 9 (1980) Content and Thematic Focus

Unit	Content	Page	Thematic focus
1	The English Bourgeoisie Revolution, Feudal Absolutism in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Century Europe	1-18	World history
2	The Slave Trade in Africa	19-36	African history
3	The Peoples of East Africa in the 16th to the 18th Centuries	37-58	African history
4	Characteristics of Portuguese Colonization in the 16th tot the 18th Centuries	59-66	Africa and world history
5	Ethiopia in the 16th to the Early 19th Centuries	67-106	Ethiopian history
6	The North American War of Independence	107-116	World history

[36] Ibid.
[37] Tekeste, *The Crisis….,* p. 48; Girma, "Adwa in Ethiopia's….", p. p. 101.
[38] Ibid.

7	The French Revolution	117-146	World history
8	The Development of Capitalism in Europe and America- The Growth of the Working Class Movement and the Birth of Scientific Communism	147-164	World history
9	Revolutionary Ferment in 1848 in Europe	165-184	World history

Source: MoE, *History Student Text for Grade 9,* 1980.

The Grade 10 history textbook, first published in 1980 and reprinted in the following three years, was produced by the "Social Science Panel" under the Ministry of Education. It consisted of ten chapters, with eight devoted to world history, one to African history, and two covering Ethiopian history. The world history sections were heavily influenced by Marxist-Leninist ideology. Chapters emphasized themes such as the rise of capitalism, class struggle, and the advancement of socialist revolutions. For example, chapter one focused on capitalist development and the workers' movement, while chapter four glorified socialism and described capitalism as a decaying system. [39] Discussions of the First World War in chapters seven and eight were shaped by ideological interpretations, giving more space to Lenin's revolutionary theory than to the war's actual events. These chapters presented history not as a balanced academic subject, but as a means of reinforcing the Derg regime's worldview.[40]

The Ethiopian history sections, found in chapters nine and ten, reflected strong ideological biases. Chapter nine, which covers the period from 1850 to 1916, presents Ethiopian history mainly through the lens of class struggle. Prominent historical figures such as Emperor Menelik II and Haile Selassie I are portrayed as feudal exploiters, with little attention given to their

[39] MoE, *History Textbook for Grade 10,* (Addis Ababa: Artistic Printers, 1980*)*, pp. 1-32.
[40] Ibid.

political, diplomatic, or nation-building roles. Chapter ten, focused on the 1974 revolution and its aftermath, reads more like political propaganda than historical analysis. It presents political organizations such as the Ethiopian Democratic Union (EDU), the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP), and the All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement (MEISON) as "class enemies" and "counter-revolutionaries." The overall treatment of Ethiopian history in the textbook is highly subjective, ideologically charged, and lacks scholarly depth. [41]

Table 11: History for Grade 10 (1980) Content and Thematic Focus

Unit	Content	Page	Thematic focus
1	The Advance of Capitalism and the Working Class Movement in Europe and America Beginning from the 1850s	1-32	World history
2	Black Africa in the Period of Industrial Capitalism (1789-1870)	33-53	African history
3	The Paris Commune (1987)	54-74	World history
4	The Continuing World Revolutionary Movement	75-110	World history
5	Imperialism: The Highest and Last Stage of Capitalism	111-128	World history
6	The Partition of Africa	129-147	Afrcan history
7	The First World War and the Overthrow of Tsarism in Russia	148-179	World history
8	First World War: End and Aftermath, Redivision of the World	180-201	World history

[41] Ibid.

9	Rise of the Ethiopian Feudal Empire State: Anti-Imperialist Struggle of the Ethiopian Masses (1850-1916)	203-260	Ethiopian history
10	Ethiopia: Pre and Post February 1974 Revolution	262-322	Ethiopian contemporary political issues

Source: MoE, *History Student Text for Grade 10*, 1980.

In both Grade 9 and 10 textbooks, ideological infiltration by the Derg government was extremely severe. Historical narratives were clearly presented to support the ruling regime's socialist ideology. Events were framed through the lens of class struggle, portraying capitalism and feudalism as inherently negative forces. The textbooks harshly criticized, blamed, and sometimes insulted past individuals, institutions, and actions associated with Ethiopia's Imperial government. Feudal and capitalist elements were condemned using terms such as reactionary, oppressive, exploitative, arrogant, and greedy. Conversely, revolutionary activities and socialist changes in Ethiopia and other socialist countries were praised in romanticized language. The content aimed to convince students of the harshness and evils of capitalist ideology, presenting capitalism as the root cause of war, conflict, and suffering. In short, history education under the Derg suffered from intense ideological imposition. As Tekeste observes:

> The language in the grade ten textbook is inspired by the pamphlet culture of the 1960s, where sweeping generalizations and facts were taken for granted. This was due to the fact that these pamphlets were written for a very small elite audience.[42]

[42] Tekeste, *The Crisis of ....,* p. 60.

Furthermore, the review questions at the end of each chapter were deliberately crafted to reinforce the textbook's ideological narratives. Rather than encouraging critical thinking or open discussion, these questions guided students to accept and internalize the ruling government's political viewpoints. For example, all the review questions in chapter ten of the Grade 10 history textbook clearly reveal the authors' intention to indoctrinate students with a political agenda. This approach limited students' ability to analyze historical events objectively and instead promoted a one-sided understanding aligned with government propaganda. Some examples of these ideologically driven questions are as follows:

1. Discuss the characteristics of the feudal, imperialist, and bureaucratic capitalist oppression and exploitation of the masses in Ethiopia.
2. Discuss the working and living conditions of the workers and peasants of feudo-bourgeois Ethiopia.
3. Discuss the nature of the struggle of the peasant masses, workers, men-in-uniform, etc., throughout Ethiopia against feudal, imperialist, and bureaucratic capitalist oppression and exploitation.
4. Explain the decadent feudo-bourgeois ruling class under the leadership of Haile Selassie and its attempt to destroy the struggle of the broad masses.
5. The February 1974 revolution was a result of the cumulative struggle that various sectors of society had waged for a long period of time. Discuss.
6. Discuss how the Committee of the armed forces, the police, and the Territorial Army, by taking the revolutionary demands of the broad Ethiopian masses and the men-in-uniform as its guiding principles, paved the way for the intensification of the struggle.
7. Discuss the counter-revolutionary activities of the reactionary Mogadishou regime and the so-called EDU, EPRP, AESM, and the reactionary secessionists in Eritrea in collaboration with international imperialism.[43]

[43] MoE, *History Student Text for Grade 10*, 1980, pp. 322-23.

In 1985, the Ministry of Education conducted a general evaluation of secondary school textbooks in six subjects: English, Amharic, history, biology, chemistry, and electricity. The history textbooks were reviewed by two history teachers, *Ato* Tegene Bayu and *Ato* Birhanu Dibaba, who offered a critical assessment. They observed that the textbooks were largely reproductions of materials from socialist countries, particularly influenced by Manfred's *A Short History of the World*, and lacked relevance to Ethiopia's historical and cultural context. The content was described as abstract, heavily ideological, and inappropriate for the cognitive level of secondary school students. [44] The evaluators stressed that the historical and political concepts presented were too complex for students to understand, and that the language used was unnecessarily dense and bombastic. The report even noted that many terms were difficult for teachers themselves to comprehend. As they wrote in Amharic:

> **[አብዛኛው] ቃላቶች እንኳንስ ለተማሪው ለአስተማሪው እንኳን ስለሚከብዱ በቃላት አጠቃቀም በኩል ጥንቃቄ መደረግ ይኖርበታል። ለተማሪዎች ግልጽ አይደለም። የመጽሐፉ የቋንቋ ውስብስብነት አሳሳቢ ነው። መፍትሔም ያሻዋል። መጽሐፉ ቀለል ባለ ቋንቋ እንደገና መዘጋጀት ይኖርበታል። የ9ኛ ክፍል ተማሪዎች እስከ 8ኛ ክፍል የታሪክን ትምህርት የተከታተሉት በአማርኛ በመሆኑ በ9ኛ ክፍል ትምህርቱን በእንግሊዝኛ መከታተሉ በጣም ከባድ ስለሚሆንባቸው ጉዳዩ የሚያሳስብ ነው።**[45]
>
> Most of the words are difficult even for teachers, and especially for students, so care should be taken in the choice of words. The language is not clear to students. The textbook's linguistic complexity is problematic and requires a solution. It should be rewritten in simpler language. Since Grade 9 students

[44] MoE, ***የሁለተኛ ደረጃ የተማሪው መጽሐፍ ግምገማ ሪፖርት*** (Secondary School Student Textbook Evaluation Report), vol. 1, no. 4 (Addis Ababa, 1985), pp. 112-13.
[45] Ibid., p. 117.

> have studied history in Amharic up to Grade 8, the Grade 9 course in English becomes extremely difficult for them. This is a matter of serious concern.

This evaluation confirms that the Derg-era history textbooks were not only deeply saturated with ideological content but were also pedagogically ineffective. Their excessive abstraction, politicized vocabulary, and rigid Marxist-Leninist orientation discouraged critical engagement with the past in history teaching. The politicized linguistic density and conceptual overload placed an unjustifiable cognitive burden on both students and teachers, which in turn hindered comprehension and meaningful learning. As a result, students were denied opportunities to develop contextual and analytical understandings of history beyond ideologically prescribed interpretations.

3.4.2 History for Grades 11 and 12

The Grade 11 history textbook was produced in 1979 by the Social Science Panel, whose members remained anonymous. It contains four chapters, all shaped by Marxist-Leninist ideology. The first chapter, titled *"October Revolution in Russia Ushers in New Era in History of Mankind,"* presents the Russian socialist revolution as a major turning point. It describes how the revolution changed the social, economic, and political life of the masses. The First World War is also discussed, but through an ideological lens. The 1917 conflict in Russia is portrayed as an imperialist attack by Western powers. The chapter also presents Soviet support for Iran, Afghanistan, and Turkey as part of the global anti-imperialist struggle. The second chapter focuses on the capitalist world between the two world wars. It emphasizes the failures of capitalism and praises the socialist revolutions as a global inspiration. The chapter also covers

the Great Depression, the Sino-Japanese War, the Spanish Civil War, and the rise of fascism, all interpreted as outcomes of capitalist failure. [46]

The third and fourth chapters extend this ideological narrative to the broader context. The third chapter is dedicated to national liberation movements in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, all described as anti-imperialist struggles inspired by the Russian model. The Soviet Union is portrayed as a supporter and guide for oppressed peoples. However, African history receives limited attention, with only 11 pages out of 91 in the chapter, and focuses narrowly on Egypt, Morocco, and South Africa. The fourth chapter deals with the Second World War and offers a relatively more chronological presentation of events. Despite this improvement in structure, the ideological framing remains: the capitalist system is held solely responsible for the outbreak and consequences of the war. In brief, the textbook uses world history as a vehicle to promote class struggle, anti-imperialism, and the supremacy of the Soviet model, reducing complex historical events to fit its ideological aims. [47]

Table 12: History for Grade 11 (1979) Content and Thematic Focus

Unit	Contents	Page	Thematic focus
1	October 1917 Revolution in Russia Ushers in the New Era in History of Mankind	1-37	World history
2	The Capitalist World between the Two World Wars	38-80	World history

[46] MoE, *History Student Textbook for Grade 11*, (Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press, 1979), pp. 1-37.
[47] MoE, *History Student Text for Grade 11* (1979), pp. 81-170.

3	The National Liberation Movement of the Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America in the Period between the Two World Wars	81-170	World & African histories
4	The Second World War	171-207	World history

Source: MoE, *History Student Text for Grade 11*, 1979.

The 1979 Grade 12 history textbook, produced under the military regime, was shaped by a strong Marxist-Leninist ideological framework. It set out four major objectives for the teaching of history, which served as the basis for selecting and organizing content across all chapters. The objectives were stated as follows:

- To help students understand that social progress follows certain historical laws (from primitive societies to the socialist system);
- To develop awareness about the global class struggle, liberation movements, imperialism's opposition to peace, freedom, and democracy, and the growing influence of socialism;
- To enable students to understand that freedom, justice, and democracy are the results of bitter struggle;
- To instill in them a strong conviction in the superiority of the socialist system. [48]

The Grade 12 history textbook, like that of Grade 11, has four chapters focused mainly on world history. Chapter one, titled "The World Socialist System," deals with the achievements of socialist countries. It shows how working-class forces took power and established people's

[48] MoE, *የሠላሳተኛ ደረጃ…..*(Secondary School….), pp. 138-39.

democracies in Central and Southeast Europe, ending landlord and capitalist dominance. The chapter covers revolutionary processes and socialist state-building in countries such as China, Korea, Vietnam, Poland, Mongolia, Cuba, Yugoslavia, Bulgaria, Romania, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Albania. Chapter Two focuses on the USA and capitalist Europe after World War II. It emphasizes the weaknesses and crises these countries faced. It also describes growing opposition from their peoples and working classes. Additionally, it narrates the economic and military rise of socialist countries, the successes of anti-colonial revolutions, and increasing class conflicts in the West, especially in the USA, Britain, France, and West Germany.[49]

Chapters Three and Four continue this ideological perspective. Chapter Three examines national liberation movements in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, presenting them as "anti-imperialist struggles" aligned with socialist ideals. However, African history is given minimal coverage, with only brief mentions of a few countries. Chapter Four, titled "Forces of Peace Versus Forces of War," contrasts the socialist "forces of peace" with the capitalist "forces of war." It addresses the nuclear arms threat and explains how communist states, led by the Soviet Union, coordinated mutual defense against potential capitalist attacks, particularly from the United States. Overall, the textbook offers a strongly ideological view of history. It portrays socialism as a positive and progressive force, while depicting capitalism as the root of global problems and conflicts. Alternative perspectives are largely ignored. African history receives very limited attention, and national history is completely abandoned. [50]

[49] MoE, *History Student Textbook for Grade 12* (Addis Ababa: Central Printing Press, 1979), pp. 1-55.
[50] MoE, *History Text for Grade 12* (1979), pp. 94-163.

Table 13: History for Grade 12 (1979) Content and Thematic Focus

Unit	Contents	Page	Thematic focus
1	The World Socialist System	1-54	World history
2	The USA and the Capitalist Countries of Europe after the Second World War. Aggressive Blocks Emerge	56-93	World history
3	Intensification of the Anti-Imperialist Struggle of the Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America. Disintegration of the Colonial System	94-163	World & African histories
4	Forces of Peace Versus Forces of War	164-177	World history

Source: MoE, *History for Grade 12*, 1979.

The Grade 11 and 12 history textbooks reflect strong ideological impositions. They show clear bias in how they present capitalist and socialist states. Capitalism is described in negative terms, war, tyranny, oppression, and lack of democracy. Socialism, in contrast, is portrayed as a system that brings change, ends despotism, ensures peace, and promotes development. The textbooks were used not only to teach history but also to spread the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism. Most of the content was directly taken from Russian sources.[51] It was a carbon copy, created without any clear understanding of Ethiopia. There was no effort to adapt it into proper teaching material. Additionally, the texts were not suited to the grade levels or to Ethiopian students. Ethiopian history does not appear in any chapter of the texts. Instead, global conflicts are

[51] Girma, "Adwa in the Ethiopia's…", p. 102; Tekeste, *The Crisis of Ethiopian Education*….., p. 67.

explained as class struggles between working people and reactionary capitalists or landlords. The ideological tone is especially clear in the final lines of the Grade 12 textbook:

> During the brief period of its existence, the socialist community has achieved outstanding success in all spheres of social life and proved beyond any doubt its superiority over capitalism, especially in the spheres of economic development. In 1970, the socialist community accounted for 39 percent of the world's industrial production. The rapid pace of production growth in the Soviet Union and other socialist countries is marked by a steadiness that the capitalist mode of production is incapable of attaining.[52]

The ideological imposition of the Derg regime on history textbooks was a deliberate effort to align education with Marxism and Leninism. Curriculum makers did not see education as a neutral transmission of knowledge but as a political tool serving the ruling class. They believed the Ethiopian education system since 1908, had served European imperialists and the local feudal elite. After the 1974 revolution, the Derg aimed to reverse this by redirecting education to serve the broad masses, especially workers and peasants.[53] Drawing from Lenin's educational philosophy, they emphasized that true education must combine intellectual training, ideological formation, and technical skills. This, they argued, would elevate the working class and advance socialism.[54] To achieve this, members of the Social Science Panel introduced Soviet-style ideological content into secondary school history textbooks. Their goal was to shape students' political consciousness and secure loyalty to the socialist state. Consequently, history was no

[52] MoE, *History Student Text for Grade 12, 1979,* p. 172.

[53] Bahru, "A Century of……", , pp. 4-5; Tekeste, *Education in Ethiopia….*, p. 18.

[54] DMU Archive, Folder No. 87, File No. **መ/ፐ-1**, **የደ/ማርቆስ አጠቃላይ 2ኛ ደ/ት/ቤት ኢሠፓ መሰረታዊ ድርጅት ቃለጉባኤ** (A Minute by WPE Members of Debre Markos General Secondary School), 1979–1981 E.C. (1986–1989 G.C.).

longer a field of critical inquiry but a tool to promote class struggle, glorify revolutionary victories, and assert socialism's moral and historical superiority.

Moreover, many terms and concepts in the textbooks are difficult for secondary school students to understand. The content appears to be written for advanced-level politicians rather than for students. As noted earlier, these topics were copied directly from Russian sources without meaningful adaptation to the Ethiopian context. Consequently, the texts are highly politicized, hard to comprehend, and irrelevant to the socio-cultural and historical realities of Ethiopian students.[55] The textbooks resemble political documents rather than educational materials. Because of these issues, textbook evaluators and professional historians called for revision or complete rejection of the texts. Despite strong criticism from academics, the textbooks remained the primary teaching materials in Ethiopian secondary schools until they were replaced by the 2000 syllabus. For example, in 1985, Birhanu and Tegene submitted a strong critique of the Grade 12 history textbook to the Ministry of Education as follows:

> **በይዘት አቀራረብ መጽሐፉ** [grade 12 history] **ለክፍለ ደረጃ የማይመጥን ሆኖ ስለሚታይ እንደገና ሙሉ በሙሉ መለወጥና መደራጀት ያለበት ነው።።**[56]
>
> In terms of content presentation, the textbook [Grade 12 History] appears to be inappropriate for the students' level and therefore needs to be completely revised and reorganized.

In addition to the ideological influence and lack of relevance discussed earlier, several other problems seriously affected the teaching of history in Ethiopian secondary schools. One major issue was the removal of Ethiopian history from the upper-level curriculum. While some

[55] MoE, *ERGESE Report*, p. 27.
[56] MoE, *Secondary School Student Textbook Evaluation*, p. 140.

Ethiopian history was taught in grades 9 and 10, it was completely excluded from grades 11 and 12. This denied students the opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of their own national past. The quality of teaching materials was also very poor. Textbooks were too difficult to understand due to complex language, long sentences, and abstract ideas. History lessons focused mainly on rote memorization and were often delivered through one-way lectures. This made the subject boring and tiresome for both students and teachers. Many teachers were not properly trained, and language barriers made communication even harder, especially in overcrowded classrooms, sometimes with up to 100 students in a single class.[57]

The exercise questions in each textbook chapter were often left unanswered, with little or no discussion between teachers and students. According to informants, this was because the questions were too difficult and often not appropriate for the students' grade level. In addition, history teachers often felt that the review questions were designed not from the perspective of academic history but with an ideological motive.[58] All these factors made teaching and learning history boring and uninteresting. History became one of the most feared and dreaded subjects in secondary schools. As Girma pointed out, the reliance on lecture-based teaching under these conditions made learning frustrating and ineffective. Furthermore, resources were severely limited, students did not receive individual textbooks, and other teaching aids were rarely available. Together, these problems seriously weakened the quality of history education during the period.[59]

During the 1980s, a serious shortage of qualified history teachers further affected secondary education in Ethiopia. After the 1974 revolution, only three institutions, Addis Ababa University,

[57] Girma, "Adwa in Ethiopia's…….", pp. 101-102.
[58] Informants: Nigus Ali, Solomon Tsehay, Henok Ahmed, Abebe Hunegnaw, and Mustefa Seid.
[59] Girma, "Adwa in Ethiopia's……., p. 102.

Bahir Dar College of Teacher Education, and Asmara University, offered degree-level teacher education programs. Among them, only AAU had a history department. Even then, history graduates from the imperial period were not trained to teach; they studied applied history without taking pedagogical courses. It was only in 1976 that AAU began producing professional history teachers by incorporating education courses into its history program. However, this reform came too late to meet the growing demand for secondary school teachers.[60]

The following table summarizes the higher education institutions that were training secondary school teachers in Ethiopia during the 1983/84 academic year, including their areas of specialization and the level of qualification they offered:

Table 14: Higher Education Institutions that Trained Secondary School Teachers in 1983/84

No.	Training Institute	Training modality	Degree/diploma
1	***Kotebe TTI***	***Amharic, English, history, geography, math, biology, chemistry, physics, home economics, health and physical education, book keeping, metal work, and wood work***	***Diploma***
2	Bahir Dar CTE	Adult education, math, and physics	Diploma
		Pedagogical science	Degree
3	***AAU: Social Science Faculty***	***Geography and history***	***Degree***

[60] MoE, *A Historical Development of Modern Education*, p. 89.

4	AAU: Science Faculty	Biology, chemistry, math, and physics	Degree
5	Alemaya Science Teachers' Training	Biology and chemistry	Diploma
6	Institute of Language Studies	Amharic and English	Degree
7	AAU: Faculty of Education	Automotive, commerce, drafting, electricity, and metal technology	Diploma
		Educational administration and psychology	Degree
8	Library Science	Library science	Degree
9	Asmara University	Physics, biology, chemistry, and English	Degree

Source: Ministry of Education, *A Historical Development of Modern Education in Ethiopia*, p. 90

As the table indicates, only a few institutions offered degree-level training in history. To address the teacher shortage, the government relied on transferring primary school teachers to secondary schools without upgrading their academic qualifications. Most history teachers held only diplomas or certificates, and many had no formal training in history at all. Institutions like Kotebe Teachers' Training Institute, which offered a diploma in history education, helped to some extent, but could not meet the nationwide demand. By 1983, there were 207 senior secondary schools (grades 9–12), yet it remained difficult to find history teachers with a BA or B.Ed. degree in many of these schools. As a result, unqualified teachers taught the subject

without fully understanding the material, further weakening the quality of history education at the secondary level.[61]

In conclusion, every official document produced by the Derg regime began with a strong criticism of the feudal system, which was identified as the root cause of all social, economic, and political problems in Ethiopian history. This narrative was prominently reflected in the history curriculum, where anti-feudal narratives and Marxist historiography dominated the textbooks. Yet, scholars in the field have argued that the principal purpose of history education should be the creation of national consciousness. According to Tekeste, for instance, history instruction should "provide historical knowledge, national pride, and patriotism".[62] Similarly, Girma contends that the main purpose of school history is to equip students with the fundamentals of "living together" and "nation-building," fostering a shared national consciousness and community cohesion. [63] He further emphasizes that "education for nation building" is a central principle, where teaching common values, shared traditions, and civic virtues helps students develop a sense of identity, strengthen bonds, and embrace civic responsibilities.[64]

Overall, history was one of the main subjects taught in Ethiopian secondary schools during the Derg era. The textbooks published in 1979 and 1980 remained in use until they were replaced by new materials in 2000 and 2001 under the EPRDF. Although the EPRDF took power in 1991, it did not establish a structured curriculum until the late 1990s. As a result, the Derg's curriculum shaped the historical knowledge of an entire generation for nearly two decades. During this

[61] MoE, *A Historical Development of Modern Education in Ethiopia*, pp. 89-90; *Evaluative Research of the General Education System in Ethiopia: A Quality Study (Summary Report Presented to the Executive Committee of ERGESE in English)* (Addis Ababa, 1986), pp. 71-72.
[62] Tekeste, *The Crisis of.....*, p. 66.
[63] Girma, "Adwa in Ethiopia's…..", pp. 98-115.
[64] Ibid., pp. 96-97.

period, history education served the ideological interests of the small political elite, aiming to indoctrinate students with socialist ideas. From a professional standpoint, the 1967 history curriculum was more rigorous and adhered better to academic standards than the 1976 version. However, the Derg regime discarded all previous policy frameworks and curricular materials, replacing them with Marxist-Leninist content. This shift turned history education into a vehicle for promoting hatred, contempt, division, and ideological confrontation.

CHAPTER FOUR

STATE IDEOLOGY AND HISTORY EDUCATION IN THE POST-1991 PERIOD

4.1 Ideological Foundations of the TPLF

The establishment of the TPLF occurred shortly after the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution, a period of significant political upheaval marked by the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie and the subsequent rise of the Derg military regime. Although the revolution initially generated hope for social and political reform, it quickly gave way to instability and repression. Amid this turmoil, the TPLF commenced its armed struggle from the most remote and peripheral regions of northwestern Ethiopia.[1] By cultivating strong ties with local communities and utilizing their intimate knowledge of the rugged terrain, the TPLF developed effective guerrilla warfare tactics. This approach enabled a relatively small and poorly equipped force to contest the military dominance of the central government. Over time, the TPLF expanded its influence throughout northern Ethiopia, evolving into a well-organized armed resistance that emerged as the principal force opposing the Derg regime. [2]

The ideological foundation of the TPLF was complex, ambiguous, and pragmatic, shifting over time in response to national and international developments. From the outset, its founding members embraced the principle of self-determination as the main driving force behind their

[1]Aregawi Berhe, *A Political History of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (1975–1991): Revolt, Ideology and Mobilisation in Ethiopia* (PhD diss., University of Amsterdam, 2008), pp. 353-357; Paul Henze, *Rebels and Separatists in Ethiopia: Regional Resistance to a Marxist Regime* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1985), pp. 23-24.

[2] Temesgen Thomas, "Ethnic Federal System in Ethiopia: Origin, Ideology and Paradoxes", *International Journal of Science and Development*, Vol. 4 (1), (2016), pp. 7-8.

struggle. Initially identifying as Marxists, the TPLF leadership interpreted self-determination as the right of Ethiopia's ethnic groups to freely express their political will. However, this idea lacked a clear practical definition.[3] As the movement progressed, some leaders began to equate self-determination with the right to secede and establish an independent state, a view formally expressed in the 1976 manifesto. Nevertheless, this secessionist attitude was controversial within the leadership and failed to gain broad support among the Tigrayan population, who maintained strong historical, cultural, and economic ties with the Ethiopian state. Consequently, the TPLF temporarily abandoned the demand for secession, though the issue remained unresolved. Instead, the organization prioritized cooperation with other dissident groups to overthrow the military regime, which they regarded as a common enemy.[4]

The TPLF's ideology was largely shaped by the Ethiopian Student Movement (ESM) of the 1960s and 1970s, in which many of its founders had been active. The ESM promoted a Marxist-Leninist agenda that emphasized the "Nationality Question" and supported the right of ethnic groups to self-determination, including secession.[5] The TPLF embraced this principle, making ethnic-based mobilization central to its struggle. The flexible concept of self-determination allowed the Front to adjust its political stand as circumstances changed. The TPLF found ethno-nationalism to be a powerful tool to shape public opinion and mobilize support. Central to this ideology was the belief that addressing the "nationalities question" was crucial to mobilizing social forces and transforming the political order, captured in the slogan "**የብሔር ጥያቄ**

[3] Ibid.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Tegegne Teka, "Amhara Ethnicity in the Making," in *Ethnicity and the State in Eastern Africa*, ed. Mohammed Salih and John Markakis (Stockholm: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1998), 116–126.

ያታግላል" ("The national question propels the struggle forward"). [6] For the TPLF, recognizing and empowering ethnic groups was both a matter of justice and a strategic means to control economic and political power. As a result, ethno-nationalism took precedence over class struggle as the main ideological foundation for building authority and dominating state institutions. [7]

From the outset, the TPLF kept its position on the Tigrayan question intentionally vague. It was never clear whether the Front aimed for full independence or autonomy for Tigray within a federal Ethiopia. The 1976 manifesto called for an independent Tigray, reflecting one side of the debate, but later statements showed that secession was not the only option. This deliberate ambiguity helped the TPLF gain significant support from various political factions. Many TPLF leaders and members of the Tigrayan community were hesitant to push for full independence. Still, the idea of secession remained part of their political strategy.[8] After liberating Tigray from the Derg's control in the late 1980s, however, the TPLF shifted its focus from regional autonomy to broader national politics and formed alliances with other ethnic nationalist groups. This change was seen both as a practical move to avoid military conflict and economic isolation, and as an attempt to restore Tigrayan political domination within a reorganized Ethiopian state. [9]

Hence, the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) was a coalition of ethnically defined parties, namely the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF), the Amhara National Democratic Movement (ANDM), the Oromo People's Democratic Organization

[6] Shumet Sishagne, *"Historiography of Ethiopia"* (lecture, Historiography and Advanced Historical Writing course, Bahir Dar University, 2021).

[7] Tesfaye Aaron, "Identity Politics, Citizenship, and Democratization in Ethiopia", *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 2, No. ½ (Summer/Fall 2005-2006), pp. 55-75.

[8] Eva Paluha, "Ethnicity and Democracy – A Viable Alliance?" in *Ethnicity and the State in Eastern Africa*, ed. Mohammed Salih and John Markakis (Stockholm: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1998), pp. 83–95.

[9] Merara Gudaina, The State, Competing Ethnic Nationalism and Democratization in Ethiopia, *African Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 9, No.1, (2004), pp. 27-50.

(OPDO), and the Southern Ethiopian Peoples' Democratic Movement (SEPDM), formed to reflect Ethiopia's diverse linguistic and cultural makeup.[10] Despite this appearance of inclusivity, the TPLF remained the dominant force, exercising exclusive control over political, economic, and military spheres. Ethnicity served not only as a basis for political mobilization but also as the core principle of state restructuring. [11] After ousting the Derg in 1991, the EPRDF dismantled existing institutions and introduced a new political order rooted in ethnic lines. The Transitional Charter granted ethnic groups the right to self-determination, including secession, and reorganized the country into ethno-linguistic regions. To gain international legitimacy, the EPRDF adopted the rhetoric of liberal democracy, but internally it remained committed to revolutionary democracy and ethno-nationalist ideology. This dual strategy allowed the TPLF to maintain control over the multi-ethnic federation while hiding its authoritarian rule behind the language of pluralism. As class struggle gave way to national struggle, ethno-nationalism became the defining principle of post-1991 Ethiopia, shaping its political structure, federal arrangement, and educational system.[12]

4.2 The 1995 FDRE Constitution

The adoption of the 1995 constitution marked a turning point in the historical and ideological reconfiguration of the Ethiopian state. After dismantling the previous unitary structure in 1991, the EPRDF introduced an ethnic-based federal arrangement that was formalized through the new constitution. This foundational legal document redefined Ethiopia as the *Federal Democratic*

[10] Abbink, "Ethnicity and Constitutionalism….." p. 165.
[11] Temesgen, "Ethnic Federal System……", pp. 9-10.
[12] Bahru Zewde, "The Burden of History: The Constraints and Challenges of the Democratization Process in Ethiopia", in *Society, State and History: Selected Essays*, Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2008, p. 326.

Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE) and established a multinational federation grounded in the recognition and empowerment of diverse ethno-linguistic groups. [13]

Symbolic changes accompanied this constitutional transformation. The traditional Ethiopian flag, green on top, yellow in the middle, and red at the bottom, was retained, but the new government added a central blue emblem featuring a five-pointed star. According to the Constitution, this emblem was intended to "reflect the hope of the Nations, Nationalities, Peoples as well as religious communities of Ethiopia to live together in equality and unity."[14] In addition, Article 3(3) gave member states the right to adopt their own flags, visually reinforcing the ethno-federal structure and the autonomy of constituent units.[15]

At the core of the 1995 Constitution was the explicit recognition of the collective rights of Ethiopia's "Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples" (NNPs). The preamble and several key articles emphasized that state sovereignty derives from these groups rather than from individual citizens or a unified national identity. Article 8(1) clearly stated: "All sovereign power resides in the Nations, Nationalities and Peoples of Ethiopia." This provision shifted the source of political authority from a centralized state to the constituent ethnic communities. Among the most controversial and defining features of the Constitution is Article 39, which codified the right to self-determination. Article 39(1) affirms:

[13] FDRE, *The Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*. Proclamation No. 1/1995 adopted on 8 December 1994 and entered into force on 21 August 1995. Addis Ababa: Federal Negarit Gazeta, 1995, Article 3, Sub-Article 2, p. 3.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.

> Every Nation, Nationality, and People in Ethiopia has an unconditional right to self-determination, including the right to secession. [16]

This marked a radical departure from Ethiopia's earlier constitutional regimes. The 1931 and 1955 Imperial Constitutions had concentrated political authority in the hands of the monarchy, promoting strong centralization. The 1987 Constitution, under the socialist Derg regime, emphasized the supremacy of the working masses and class-based governance. In contrast, the 1995 Constitution foregrounded the collective rights of Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples. Alongside the right to secession, Article 39 guaranteed cultural and linguistic rights. Sub-article 2 affirmed the right of NNPs to speak, write, and develop their own languages, to express and promote their cultures, and to preserve their "histories". Sub-article 3 ensured a full measure of self-government, including the right to establish institutions within their territories and to participate equitably in federal and state governance. Despite the repeated use of the terms "nation," "nationality," and "people," the Constitution does not clearly differentiate among them. Instead, Article 39(5) provides a single, integrated definition for these three entities:

> A 'Nation, Nationality or People' for the purpose of this Constitution, is a group of people who have or share a large measure of a common culture or similar customs, mutual intelligibility of language, belief in a common or related identity, a common psychological makeup, and who inhabit an identifiable, predominantly contiguous territory.[17]

This expansive and flexible definition allowed for the recognition of a wide range of identity groups and provided the ideological and legal foundation for organizing the federation along ethno-linguistic lines. Furthermore, Article 46(2) reinforced the ethnic basis of the federation by

[16] FDRE, *The 1995 Constitution*, pp.13-14.
[17] Ibid.

stating that regional states "shall be delimited on the basis of the settlement patterns, language, identity and consent of the people concerned." This principle guided the formation of regional states aligned with dominant ethnic groups and justified their claims to self-rule. [18]

In line with this framework, Article 47 established Ethiopia as a federation composed of nine ethnically defined regional states. These include the States of Tigray, Afar, Amhara, Oromia, Somali, Benishangul-Gumuz, the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples, the Gambela Peoples, and the Harari People. In addition, two cities, Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa, were granted special status as autonomous administrations. Each regional state was given the constitutional right to self-governance, including the power to draft its own constitution and establish its own institutions of government.[19]

Figure 7: Post-1991 Administrative Divisions of Ethiopia



Source: Asebe Regassa, *Ethnicity and Inter-ethnic Relations: The 'Ethiopian Experiment' and the Case of the Guji and Gedeo* (M.Phil. thesis, University of Tromsø, Norway, May 2007), p. 110.

[18] FDRE, *The 1995 Constitution*, p. 17.
[19] Ibid.

This ethno-federal arrangement marked a fundamental departure from previous models of state-building in Ethiopia, which were largely centralized. Earlier administrative divisions, such as *Kiflehager*, *Awuraja*, and *Woreda*, were based on geographical boundaries rather than ethnic or linguistic identities. By recognizing group rights, codifying ethnic self-determination, and permitting secession, the 1995 Constitution redefined Ethiopia not as a singular nation-state but as a federation of historically and culturally distinct communities. In doing so, it established ethnic identity as the primary organizing principle of political authority, sovereignty, and territorial administration.[20]

The shift was also evident in the use of language. In the pre-1991 period, the word "people" was commonly used to describe Ethiopian society as a unified whole. After 1991, this changed to "peoples" to emphasize plurality and diversity. This semantic shift reflected deeper ideological changes. For instance, the 1987 Derg Constitution began with the phrase: "We, the working people of Ethiopia…" while the 1995 FDRE Constitution opened with: "We the Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples of Ethiopia…" The difference is striking. These contrasting phrases symbolize the opposing visions of the two regimes. The former viewed Ethiopia as a single political and historical entity, whereas the latter recognized it as a federation of distinct groups with separate identities and histories.[21]

All these ideological shifts directly influenced the writing and teaching of Ethiopian history. This was largely because the TPLF's historical outlook was grounded in a deconstructionist approach. Guided by its ethno-nationalist ideology, the TPLF fundamentally reshaped how Ethiopia's past was interpreted. It dismissed the dominant narratives of the imperial and Derg regimes as biased,

[20] Ibid.
[21] Ibid.

centralist, and exclusive. The TPLF condemned these accounts as "*debteras'* history", clerical and ideological writings that upheld Amhara dominance and glorified the unbroken dynastic rule.[22] This representation emphasized a unified, ancient Christian empire and served to legitimize a centralized state. The TPLF challenged this version of history as a tool for suppressing ethnic identities. Instead, it promoted a pluralistic narrative that acknowledged the distinct histories and autonomy of Ethiopia's nations and nationalities.[23] This perspective was clearly expressed in the 1995 Constitution's preamble, which declared: *"We the Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples of Ethiopia… recognize that our common destiny can be served by rectifying historically unjust relationships."* [24] Through this constitutional framework, the TPLF marked a decisive break from traditional Ethio-nationalist historiography and advanced a new discourse rooted primarily in ethno-nationalist thought. [25]

Following the adoption of the 1995 Constitution, Ethiopia underwent a comprehensive institutional reorganization. All major sectors, including education, were restructured to align with the new constitutional framework. Article 90 of the FDRE Constitution affirms the right to education free from religious, political, or cultural bias.[26] In practice, however, educational policies, particularly in curriculum development, were shaped by ideological influence. Notably, the Education and Training Policy was introduced a year before the Constitution's publication, yet it closely reflected the core ideological principles of the TPLF. This alignment between the

[22] Getachew Haile, "Interview on Reyot Media," YouTube video, August 6, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wDnNoLsi2vM&list=PPSV.

[23] Mulugeat Gebrehiwot and Feseha Habtetsion, "Nationalism and Self-determination in Contemporary Ethiopia", *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 27, (2021), pp. 96-111.

[24] FDRE, *The 1995 Constitution*, p. 2.

[25] Bahru, "*The Burden of History…..",* p. 333.

[26] Ibid.

policy and the Constitution ensured that the education system played a central role in reinforcing and institutionalizing the ethno-linguistic federalism established by the 1995 Constitution.

4.3 The 1994 Educational and Training Policy

The 1994 Education and Training Policy, introduced a year before the 1995 Constitution, laid the groundwork for the post-1991 Ethiopian education system. Emerging in the early years of the EPRDF regime, the policy reflected the ideological orientation of the new federal state, which emphasized ethnic diversity and the reorganization of institutions along ethno-linguistic lines. It framed education as a tool for promoting human rights, democratic values, equality, and mutual understanding among Ethiopia's diverse peoples.[27] In doing so, the policy articulated both educational and ideological objectives, positioning the education sector as a vehicle for political and cultural transformation. Critiquing the pre-1991 system for its lack of relevance, quality, accessibility, and equity, the policy portrayed earlier educational practices as overly centralized and negligent to the country's cultural and linguistic diversity. In contrast, the new framework sought to establish a more inclusive and participatory system by promoting localized educational planning within a decentralized federal structure. [28]

The restructured education system was organized into three main levels: primary, secondary, and higher education. Primary education was extended to eight years and divided into two cycles: the first covering grades one to four, and the second covering grades five to eight. Secondary education also comprised two cycles: general secondary education, which included grades nine and ten, and preparatory education, encompassing grades eleven and twelve. At the end of each stage, students were supposed to sit for national examinations that certified completion and

[27] FDRE, *Education and Training Policy*, (St. George Printing Press: Addis Ababa, 1994), pp. 1-2.
[28] Ibid., p. 2.

determined eligibility for progression. Higher education followed, offering programs that led to diplomas, first degrees, and postgraduate qualifications.[29] Some of the specific objectives of general education, as outlined in the policy framework, included the following:

- To provide education that promotes democratic culture, tolerance, and peaceful resolutions of differences and that raise the sense of discharging societal responsibi1ity.
- To provide education that can produce citizens who stand for democratic unity, liberty, equality, dignity, and justice, and who are endowed with moral values.
- To provide education that promotes the culture of respect for work, positive work habits, and high regard for workmanship
- To recognize the rights of nations/nationalities to learn in their language, while at the same time providing one language for national and another one for international communication.[30]

As reflected in the specific objectives outlined above, the rights of nations and nationalities were among the highest priorities of the policy framework. The use of mother tongues in primary education was strongly emphasized. Moreover, regional states were granted the authority to design and implement their own primary education curricula, allowing them to adapt educational content to the needs, histories, and identities of their respective populations. Amharic remained one of the subjects taught across all regions, while English was introduced as a subject from grade one and designated as the medium of instruction at both the secondary and higher education levels. [31]

[29] FDRE, *The Education and Training Policy* (1994), pp. 14-15.
[30] Ibid., pp. 10-11.
[31] Ibid., pp. 23-24.

The decentralization of curriculum development at the primary level marked a significant departure from the centralized systems of the pre-1991 period. It also demonstrated that the policy served not only pedagogical aims but also political objectives. This shift was a direct expression of the EPRDF's ideological commitment to self-determination and the empowerment of nations, nationalities, and peoples. In practice, education became a tool for legitimizing the new ethno-federal arrangement, with schools functioning as spaces for the reproduction of localized historical and cultural identities. [32]

Unlike primary education, which remained highly decentralized, the secondary curriculum was developed centrally by the federal Ministry of Education, with uniform instructional materials distributed across all regional states.[33] One particular challenge arising from this arrangement was the language issue. Students received primary-level social studies instruction in their respective local languages, but were required to study history at the secondary level in English. This abrupt language transition posed a significant barrier to effective history teaching. More broadly, the policy's emphasis on regional autonomy in primary education, combined with its promotion of ethnic identity, laid the groundwork for a fragmented and contradictory narrative of Ethiopia's past. Consequently, the 1994 Education and Training Policy should be understood not merely as a response to educational shortcomings, but as an ideological document constructed to institutionalize the political values of the post-1991 order.[34]

[32] Toggia, "History Writing…. ", pp. 323-338.
[33] MoE, *History for Ethiopian Secondary Schools: Syllabi for Grades 9-12*, July 1998, Addis Ababa, p. 1.
[34] Ibid.

4.4 Secondary School History Education since 1991

The EPRDF inherited a country fractured by prolonged civil war and political instability. As a result, its early years in power were focused on restoring peace and rebuilding state authority. Although the Derg regime was overthrown in 1991, its curricular documents remained in use throughout the 1990s, as the new government gave priority to institutional restructuring. As a result, a new history syllabus for secondary schools was introduced only in July 1998. It was prepared by the Social Science Development Panel, though no individual authors were named. The document aimed to redefine the purpose of history education by promoting democratic Ethiopian nationalism rooted in equality among the country's diverse peoples. It called for an objective engagement with the past, emphasizing the importance of drawing lessons from history to address present challenges and shape future progress.[35]

The 1998 history syllabus outlined the principal purposes of teaching history at the secondary school level. Most of its objectives align with the principles of disciplinary history, emphasizing critical thinking and historical understanding.[36] However, the syllabus also places strong emphasis on the notion that Ethiopia's various ethnic and cultural groups possess distinct historical identities. This focus reflects the broader political context of the post-1991 period, during which the recognition of ethnic plurality became central to national discourse. Consequently, the aims of the 1998 syllabus were shaped by both academic and ideological considerations. According to the syllabus, some of the main purposes of history education at the secondary school level were to:

[35] Ibid.
[36] Ibid.

- Develop an objective and democratic outlook in dealing with the distinct and *diverse histories* [emphasis added] and also the common history of the nations, nationalities, and peoples of Ethiopia and, adhere to their equality and unity as members of one Ethiopian nation;

- Recognize the changing and developmental nature of human society and actively participate in the continuity of development in the Ethiopian society;

- Appreciate the cultural and historical heritages of the Ethiopian peoples as the material and spiritual substances symbolizing a collective Ethiopian identity;

- Identify and help eliminate historically rooted harmful outlooks and cultural practices, and contribute towards the preservation and improvement of the good ones; and

- Identify, evaluate, and actively participate in contemporary (current) and topical issues.[37]

These objectives were designed to guide the overall purpose of history education in secondary schools. They appeared consistently in the introductions of the history syllabi for grades 9 through 12. At each grade level, they served as a common framework for shaping both general and specific learning goals. The stated aims were to balance the teaching of diverse group histories with the promotion of a shared national identity. However, in practice, the emphasis on ethnic and cultural diversity often took precedence over efforts to foster a unified national history. Consequently, the aspects of Ethiopian history that promote unity and integration were frequently neglected or overlooked.[38]

[37] MoE, *History for Ethiopian Secondary Schools: Syllabi for Grades 9–10* (Addis Ababa: Ministry of Education, 1998), p. 2.
[38] Ibid.

Unlike the previous educational systems that treated history as an independent subject in upper elementary grades (7 and 8), the post-1991 period introduced history as part of a broader "social studies" curriculum covering grades five to eight. This integrated subject combined geography, history, and civics. A major influence behind this shift was the 1994 Education and Training Policy, which strongly emphasized mother tongue instruction and granted regional states the authority to develop their own curricula. Consequently, social studies syllabuses varied across regions. According to the policy document, this variation was rooted in both the pedagogical advantages of learning in one's first language and the rights of nations and nationalities to promote their own languages and cultures. As the policy clearly stated:

> Cognizant of the pedagogical advantage of the child in learning in the mother tongue and the rights of nationalities to promote the use of their languages, primary education will be given in nationality languages.[39]

This policy has had multifaceted implications for history education at the secondary level. Firstly, students received their primary education in their mother tongue. However, upon completing grade eight and entering grade nine, they were suddenly required to study history in English. This language shift posed, and continues to pose, a serious challenge to effective history teaching at the secondary level. Similar challenges existed during previous regimes. For instance, under the Derg, history was taught in Amharic in grades seven and eight, leading to comparable difficulties when students transitioned to English-medium instruction in high school. In contrast, during the Imperial period, the medium of instruction at the upper primary level was English. As

[39] FDRE, *The Education and Training Policy* (1994), pp. 23-24.

a result, students in that era had a relatively stronger grasp of key historical concepts in English by the time they entered grade nine.[40]

Secondly, the decentralization of the primary education curriculum allowed regional states to develop their own social studies syllabi and textbooks based on local historical contexts.[41] This approach may have supported cultural and linguistic diversity. However, it also hindered the development of a unified Ethiopian national sentiment among students. Learners were primarily exposed to local heroes and regional narratives, relegating national figures that played central roles in the formation of a united and independent Ethiopia. Historically, Ethiopian patriots did not fight for ethnic or linguistic identities, a trend virtually unknown in Ethiopian history. Instead, they resisted foreign aggression collectively, sharing common suffering and striving toward shared national goals. In contradiction to these historical realities, many regional curricula adopted narratives shaped by the political tone of the post-1991 era, often distorting or neglecting the broader national context in favor of ethnically framed histories.

Furthermore, the time allotted for history teaching was limited, particularly at the lower secondary levels. Grades 9 and 10 were assigned only two credit hours per week, while grades 11 and 12 received four credit hours. Given that each period lasts only 40 minutes, students in grades 9 and 10 have just 80 minutes of history instruction per week. [42] This limited allocation posed significant challenges to effective history teaching and learning. The syllabus at these levels is broad, covering diverse historical themes ranging from early human evolution and

[40] Informants: Demelash Gizachew, Solomon Tsehay, and Doctor Telila (*Ato*).

[41] MoE**,** *Social Studies Syllabi for Grades 5–8* (Addis Ababa, 1990).

[42]FDRE Ministry of Education, *Curriculum Framework for Ethiopian Education (KG–Grade 12)* (Addis Ababa, May 2009).

ancient civilizations to regional and national histories. However, the short instructional time made it difficult for teachers to cover all the required content thoroughly. As Girma notes:

> Not a single enterprising teacher whom I know in my high school teaching career managed to finish these books within the time limit. [43]

As a result, history classes tended to be rushed and content-heavy, with teachers primarily focused on completing the syllabus within the constrained timeframe. The emphasis on content coverage often limited students' opportunities to develop essential historical thinking skills, such as analyzing sources, constructing historical arguments, and engaging in critical reflection. Students were rarely given the chance to participate in meaningful discussions, debates, or activities that would help them understand historical causality, continuity, and change. [44]

4.4.1 History for Grades 9 and 11

The history syllabus for Grade 9 was prepared by the Ministry of Education in July 1998. The accompanying student textbook was first published in 1999 and later revised in 2005. The syllabus's introduction emphasized that it was developed in response to national needs and aspirations, drawing on key federal documents such as the 1994 *Education and Training Policy* and the 1995 *Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*. It adopted a thematic approach to content organization, guided by the principle of providing balanced coverage of political, economic, social, and cultural history. The syllabus also gave due attention to the roles of both individuals and the masses, including the historical contributions of women.[45] The educational objectives set forth in the syllabus reveal a clear alignment with the political

[43] Girma, "Adwa in Ethiopia's…*",* p. 106.
[44] Informants: Abebe Hunegnaw, Minichel Belay, Mustofa Seid, Kindachew Zeru.
[45] MoE, *History Syllabus for Grade 9 (1998)*, p. 1.

orientation of the post-1991 government. Among the thirteen general objectives, several are explicitly shaped by the ideological priorities of the state. According to the syllabus, students who study Grade 9 history will be able to:

- Realize and appreciate the meaning of and the values of the existence of the variety of nations, nationalities, and peoples of Ethiopia and their languages;
- Realize that the peoples of Ethiopia are interrelated by language (among others) among themselves and the rest of the peoples of the African continent;
- Describe the fundamental features of the development of states in the Ethiopian region and the interactions among the various peoples and among states from about 1543 to 1855;
- Develop an attitude of respect and tolerance towards the nations and nationalities of Ethiopia;
- Show the continuity of cultural and economic relations not only among the peoples and states of the Ethiopian region but also their continuity with the outside world.[46]

These objectives illustrate that history education in post-1991 Ethiopia was designed not only to transmit historical knowledge but also to actively cultivate political values central to the state's ideology, such as diversity and interconnection among peoples. This approach reflects the government's effort to foster a sense of unity within Ethiopia's multicultural and multinational framework. In line with these general objectives, the content of Ethiopian history was carefully selected and organized in Chapter Three of the Grade 9 textbook. The chapter is divided into three main sections: *Nations and Nationalities of Ethiopia and Peoples of the Horn of Africa*, *Peoples and Languages of Africa*, and *Equality of Nations and Nationalities*. Together, these

[46] MoE, *History Syllabus for Grade 9 (1998),* p. 9.

sections emphasize the cultural and linguistic diversity of Ethiopia and its surrounding region, representing the core principles enshrined in the 1995 Constitution. [47]

The Grade 11 textbook introduces students to the fundamentals of historical inquiry, encouraging them to view history not merely as content but as a method of critical analysis. It follows a thematic structure similar to that of Grade 9, reflecting the post-1991 government's political values in the interpretation of Ethiopian history, but it offers significantly greater depth and breadth.[48] A key feature of both syllabi is their unprecedented emphasis on the "histories" of the southern states. For the first time in Ethiopian history education, substantial space is devoted to the histories of peoples and states from the eastern, southern, and western regions. Both textbooks attempt to incorporate historically marginalized polities, including the southern states (Kaffa, Walayta, Hadya, Yam), the Gibe states (Jimma, Limu-Enarya, Gera, Gomma, Gumma), the western states (Benishangul, Leqa-Qellem, Leqa-Neqemte), and the eastern states (Harar, Awsa). Muslim polities long overlooked in earlier curricula, such as Dahlak, Showa, Ifat, Fatagar, Dawaro, Dara, Arbabani, Sharka, Bali, Hadya, and Adal, are also given due attention. In addition, medieval states like Damot, Kambata, Agaw, Gojjam, and the Gurage polities are included. [49]

Moreover, the Grade 11 textbook devotes substantial space, approximately 14 pages (pp. 85–99), to Oromo history within the 70-page section covering the broader medieval period (1270–1855). This section explores the Oromo's original homelands, military strategies, the Gada system and other indigenous political and social institutions, religious beliefs, and the causes, directions, and

[47] Ministry of Education, *History Grade 9 Student's Text book*, (Addis Ababa: Bole Printing Enterprise, 2005), pp. 21-35.

[48] Ministry of Education, *History for Ethiopian Secondary Schools: Syllabi for Grades 11–12* (Addis Ababa: Ministry of Education, 1998), pp. 2-4.

[49] Ibid.

consequences of their movements. [50] The depth and scope of this coverage mark a significant shift from earlier curricula. Imperial-era textbooks entirely ignored Oromo history, emphasizing instead a narrative of national unity under imperial authority.[51] During the Derg period, the Grade 9 textbook offered only minimal attention to Oromo history, presenting it in a distorted manner.[52] The inclusion of these topics in the 1998 syllabus thus signaled a conscious effort to construct a more pluralistic historical narrative aligned with the federal and multicultural ethos of the post-1991 period. [53]

Both the Grade 9 and Grade 11 history textbooks are organized thematically, covering three broad domains: world history, Ethiopian history, and African history. World history occupies a large portion of the curriculum in both grades. It covers major themes such as the origins of human society, ancient civilizations, the rise of capitalism, colonialism, and the development of democracy. African history is also included, especially through the study of pre-colonial societies and states. This section discusses African states, economies, and cultures before the onset of European colonization. Additionally, Ethiopian history remains the central focus of the syllabi. It traces the country's historical development from early human settlements and ancient states to the medieval Christian kingdom, regional polities, the Oromo population movements, and other developments up to the end of the Era of Princes in 1855. The content is presented chronologically, helping students grasp patterns of continuity and change over time. Compared to the pre-1991 period, the 1998 syllabi gave greater attention to Ethiopian history, though they

[50] MoE, *History Student Text for Grade 11* (2006), pp. 85-199.
[51] Bahru, "A Century of Ethiopian Historiography*…"*, p. 10.
[52] Tekeste, *The Crisis of Ethiopian Education…*, p. 56; Alebachew, *Change and Continuity….*, p. 86.
[53] Abbink, "History Education……..", pp. 12-13.

emphasized the diversity and plurality of the Ethiopian state more than the unifying elements of national history.[54]

Table 15: Common Historical Themes in Grade 9 and 11 History Textbooks (with Minor Variations in Titles)

No	Common Themes	Grade 9 Units and Pages	Grade 11 Units and Pages	Thematic Focus
1	Early human development and origins of society	Unit one (pp. 1–27)	Unit two (pp. 9–20)	World History
2	Ancient world civilizations	Unit two (pp. 28–57)	Unit three (pp. 21–46)	World History
3	Medieval world history	Unit four (pp. 78–98)	Unit four (pp. 47–82)	World History
4	History of the Ethiopian region and the Horn of Africa up to 1529	Unit three (pp. 58–77)	Unit seven (pp. 148–173)	Ethiopian History
5	The Christian kingdom and regional states (1543–1855)	Unit six (pp. 117–142)	Unit nine (pp. 201–227)	Ethiopian History
6	Inter-state conflicts and Oromo population movement	Unit five (pp. 99–116)	Unit eight (pp. 174–200)	Ethiopian History
7	Peoples and states in pre-colonial Africa	Unit seven (pp. 143–159)	Unit eleven (pp. 282–300)	African History
8	The Development of Early Capitalism	Unit eight (pp. 160–171)	Unit ten (pp. 228–281)	World History
9	Foundations of historical study	Not covered	Unit one (pp. 1–8)	Historiography

[54] MoE, *History Student Textbook for grade 9*, 2005; *History Student Textbook for Grade 11*, 2006.

10	Capitalism and the Growth of Democracy	*Partially touched in units four and eight*	Unit six (pp. 108–147)	World History
11	History of the Ethiopian region up to 1270	*Briefly referenced in Unit three*	Unit five (pp. 83–107)	Ethiopian History

Source: MoE, *History Student Textbook for grade 9*, 2005; *History Student Textbook for Grade 11*, 2006.

As indicated in the table above, the Grade 9 and Grade 11 history syllabuses of the EPRDF period sought to provide a more balanced treatment of Ethiopian, African, and world histories. Unlike the Imperial and Derg curricula, which were shaped by strong Western and Eastern ideological alignments respectively, the post-1991 syllabuses attempted to avoid excessive reliance on either tradition. During the Imperial period, Ethiopia's ideological alignment with the West, together with the dominance of Western scholarship, produced world history curricula that largely reflected Western historical experiences. Eastern civilizations received no coverage across successive curricular developments. By contrast, following the 1974 revolution, the Derg realigned the country toward the Eastern bloc, and history curricula relied heavily on Soviet models and texts. These syllabuses focused predominantly on the revolutionary histories of Eastern European countries, while ancient civilizations of the Western world were entirely excluded.

The end of the Cold War in 1991, coinciding with the rise of the EPRDF to power, created a new curricular context in the history of history education in Ethiopia. Freed from rigid geopolitical and ideological alignments, the EPRDF gained greater latitude to select world and African

history content aligned with its own policies and strategies. Consequently, the post-1991 Grade 9 and Grade 11 curricula adopted a more blended and pluralistic approach to world history, including substantial attention to the pre-colonial peoples and states of Africa. Topics from both the Eastern and Western worlds were incorporated. Notably, for the first time, the ancient civilizations of China and India from the Eastern world were given appropriate space in the secondary school history syllabus. Most importantly, the inclusion of historiography in the first unit of the Grade 11 history text marked a modest shift away from ideological commitment toward methodological awareness.[55]

4.4.2 History for Grades 10 and 12

The Grade 10 history syllabus, developed in 1998 by the Social Science Curriculum Development Panel, reflects both educational and political objectives shaped by the post-1991 ideological context. The syllabus comprises fourteen units, with political influence particularly evident in Units 4, 7, 9, 13, and 14. Among the ideologically driven general objectives for teaching Ethiopian history in Grade 10, the syllabus includes the following:

- Understand the fact that Ethiopia witnessed a transfer from the status of a nation composed of autonomous petty-states to a centralized empire, and then to a federal state;
- Recognize the role of external forces in the restoration of the Ethiopian autocratic state and the factors that led to the consolidation of the state;
- Understand the consolidation of the Ethiopian autocratic state and its role in bringing about popular discontentment;
- Realize that popular movements in Ethiopia were frustrated by the military dictatorship established in 1974; and

[55] MoE, *History Text for Grade 11* (2006), pp. 1-8.

- Understand that Ethiopia is being transformed to democratic governance after seventeen years of military dictatorship.[56]

These objectives carry clear ideological implications by presenting Ethiopia's modern history as a linear progression toward federal democracy, closely aligned with the political narrative of the post-1991 regime. Both the objectives and the narratives derived from them suggest that earlier forms of governance, particularly the imperial and military regimes, were inherently oppressive and illegitimate.[57] In contrast, the federal system introduced after 1991 is portrayed as the culmination of a long and justified popular struggle for democracy. The current political order is thus depicted as a positive transformation and a necessary remedy for the prolonged exploitation under past authoritarian rulers. This representation of Ethiopia's past appears to be a deliberate attempt by the ruling party to legitimize its federal arrangement based on ethno-linguistic divisions. At the same time, it discourages critical engagement with alternative interpretations of the country's political history.[58]

Similarly, the Grade 12 history syllabus reflects the broader ideological and pedagogical orientation of Ethiopia's post-1991 educational framework. Developed in accordance with the 1994 Education and Training Policy and the 1995 Constitution of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), the syllabus presents history not merely as a subject of academic inquiry, but as a means of cultivating citizenship aligned with the values of the federal state. It explicitly states its aim to produce "citizens with national and international consciousness" and "*tolerant citizens who respect the equality of the nations, nationalities and peoples of Ethiopia*."

[56] MoE, *History Syllabus for Grade 10*, pp. 1-2.

[57] Ministry of Education, *History Student Textbook for Grade 10*, (Addis Ababa: Mega Publishing Enterprise, 2005), pp. 66-80.

[58] Informants: Demelash Gizachew, Solomon Tsehay, and Doctor Telila (*Ato*).

[59] These goals show the curriculum's role in reinforcing the state ideology rooted in the constitutional order.

Structurally, the syllabus is divided into thirteen units, each accompanied by general and specific objectives, content outlines, time allocations, suggested teaching methodologies, recommended instructional materials, and assessment strategies. Some of the general objectives of Grade 12 history education are outlined as follows:

- Explain that a number of states existed immediately before the formation of the modern Ethiopian empire in the Ethiopian region;
- Recognize and work for the maintenance of the rights of nations and nationalities;
- Understand that Ethiopia underwent transformations from a land composed of autonomous petty states to a centralized empire, and finally to a democratic constitutional federal state;
- Understand that the consolidation of autocracy led to the expansion of territories and suppression of cultural institutions and practices of many nations and nationalities;
- Explain that in Ethiopia, democratic governance is evolving after seventeen years of dictatorial military rule.[60]

These objectives reflect the rights of nations and nationalities, echoing the 1995 Constitution's ethno-federal vision. The content presentation, particularly in the first chapter of the textbook, offers a superficial and politically charged account of the southern Ethiopian states prior to their incorporation into the Ethiopian empire. The representation of these states and their relationships with the central government is unbalanced, reducing complex interconnections to a simplistic

[59] MoE, *History Syllabus for Grade 12*, p. 1.
[60] MoE, *History Syllabus for Grade 12 (2001)*, pp. 2-3.

narrative of domination and resistance.[61] Such an approach overlooks Ethiopia's historical patterns of peaceful coexistence, cultural exchange, and integrative institutions, thereby narrowing students' understanding of the nation's multifaceted past. It is true that historical injustices are real, but they should be contextualized within a broader narrative that also values unity and shared heritage.

The thematic structure of the Grade 10 and 12 textbooks generally follows the familiar division into world, African, and Ethiopian histories. World history occupies a significant portion of the syllabus, covering major political, economic, and social transformations, from the rise of capitalism to the two World Wars and post-World War II global developments. Ethiopian history focuses on the formation and consolidation of the modern Ethiopian empire, resistance to colonial aggression, and political upheavals of the twentieth century. Grade 12 further expands the national narrative by including the complex histories of southern Ethiopian peoples and states in the nineteenth century, thereby recognizing regional diversity within the country's past. African history is framed through anti-colonial movements and liberation struggles. This thematic organization reflects the government's effort to help students understand Ethiopia's position within the continental and global historical landscape. However, the frequent focus on "peoples and states" and the way Ethiopian history is primarily told through stories of ethnic independence and resistance reveal the strong influence of the post-1991 government's ideology on the education system. [62]

[61] Ministry of Education, *History Student Text Grade 12, Revised Edition* (Addis Ababa: Kuraz International Publisher, 2006), pp. 2-13.
[62] MoE, *History Student Text for Grade 10*, 2005; *History Student Text for Grade 12*, 2006.

Table 16: Common Historical Themes in Grade 10 and 12 History Textbooks (with Minor Variations in Titles)

No.	Common Themes	Grade 10 Units and Pages	Grade 12 Units and Pages	Thematic Focus
1	Development of capitalism and colonialism	Unit one (pp. 1–27)	Unit two (pp. 21–53)	World History
2	Formation and expansion of the modern Ethiopian empire	Unit two (pp. 28–80)	Unit three (pp. 54–116)	Ethiopian History
3	Emergence of autocracy in Ethiopia	Unit three (pp. 81–104)	Unit eight (pp. 239–293)	Ethiopian History
4	Italian aggression and the Italo-Ethiopian war	Unit five (pp. 133–161)	Unit five (pp. 146–172)	Ethiopian History
5	First World War	Unit four (pp. 105–132)	Unit four (pp. 117–145)	World History
6	Second World War	Unit six (pp. 162–186)	Unit six (pp. 173–204)	World History
7	Post-Second World War global developments	Unit six (pp. 162–186)	Unit seven (pp. 205–238)	World History
8	African resistance, liberation, and independence movements	Unit four (pp. 105–132); Unit seven (pp. 187–207)	Unit nine (pp. 294–311)	African History
9	Ethiopia in the 20th century: autocracy to revolution	Unit eight (pp. 208–224)	Unit eight (pp. 239–293)	Ethiopian History
10	Southern Ethiopia in the 19th century	*Not Covered*	Unit one (pp. 1–20)	Ethiopian History

Source: MOE, *History Student Text for Grade 10*, 2005; *History Student Text for Grade 12*, 2006.

Like the Grade 9 and Grade 11 syllabuses discussed above, the EPRDF introduced a blended curricular model in Grades 10 and 12, maintaining a focus on global developments, including capitalism, colonialism, the world wars, and the post–Second World War period. However, unlike the Derg-era curriculum, which framed international events such as the First and Second World Wars as ideological battlegrounds, the EPRDF history syllabuses for Grades 10 and 12 presented these events as historical processes. African resistance and independence movements were addressed at these levels without being entrenched in a rigid socialist narrative. Efforts were made to align the history curriculum with post–Cold War global developments in its treatment of both African and world histories. This approach reflects a deliberate effort by the post-1991 government to distance the history curriculum from both Imperial-era Westernization and Derg-era Eastern revolutionary orthodoxy by consciously considering with the post–Cold War global developments.

Moreover, attempts were made to align the history curriculum to situate Ethiopian history within broader African and global historical contexts. Nevertheless, one of the most pressing concerns for Ethiopian historians lies in the final chapters of the Grade 10 and Grade 12 history textbooks, which address the Derg's conflicts with dissident and separatist groups and the subsequent political developments. These sections appear to have been used by the EPRDF as a medium to transmit its political perspectives. Crucially, these chapters fall short of being proper historical lessons, as they are not grounded in scholarly research conducted by professional historians. Much of the content was likely drawn from government-issued pamphlets and partisan sources.

When the textbooks were compiled in 1999 and 2000, archival materials and official documents related to the EPRDF's transitional period were not yet accessible for historical investigation.

This practice reflects a continuation of earlier curricular traditions. For example, the final chapter of the 1980 Grade 10 history textbook was entirely devoted to praising the supposed achievements of the 1974 revolution and the early accomplishments of the military regime. In reality, the narratives in that textbook amounted to political propaganda, lacking historical accuracy. A similar pattern is evident in the post-1991 textbooks, especially those used in Grades 10 and 12. This continuous use of school history curricula as tools of ideological dissemination, rather than as vehicles for critical historical understanding, is a serious problem that demands thoughtful consideration.

CHAPTER FIVE

PAN-ETHIOPIANIST IDEOLOGY AND THE REPRESENTATION OF ETHIOPIAN HISTORY IN THE SECONDARY SCHOOL HISTORY TEXTBOOKS (1952-1999)

5.1 The Role of History Education in National Identity Formation

Educational historians have argued that school history should be aligned with the core principles of disciplinary history. A substantial body of research conducted on the relationship between academic history and school history has emphasized that the primary goal of history education is, or should be, the development of disciplinary historical knowledge.[1] This form of knowledge encompasses an understanding of key historical concepts such as change and continuity, time and space, and cause-and-effect relationships. It also involves cultivating inquiry and analytical skills, the ability to critically evaluate and interpret sources, and the acquisition of historical understanding necessary for fostering critical thinking.[2]

Moreover, global trends indicate that many nations have used history education as a tool to instill values such as patriotism, national identity, and cultural heritage.[3] This suggests that nation-building and the construction of a shared national identity often take precedence in the development of history curricula. In the Ethiopian context as well, scholars such as Tekeste and Girma have argued that the principal purpose of teaching history should be to foster national consciousness and contribute to nation-building. Tekeste maintains that history education should

[1]Yilmaz, "A Vision of History……", pp. 37–46; Wilschut, "History at the Mercy of….", pp. 693–723.
[2] Thorp and Persson, "On Historical Thinking…..", pp. 149–176.
[3] Zajda, "Nation Building……", p. 5.

"*provide historical knowledge, national pride, and patriotism*".[4] Similarly, Girma contends that the primary goal of school history is to equip students with the foundations for "*living together and nation-building, the consolidation of national consciousness, and community cohesion*".[5] Thus, it can be concluded that the main purpose of teaching history in schools is to develop disciplinary historical knowledge in the service of cultivating a shared national identity.

Scholars widely agree that common rallies, especially those involving resistance to external domination or internal repression, play a vital role in shaping and reinforcing collective identity. Such shared historical experiences are powerful symbols in the construction of collective memory and serve as effective tools for forging a sense of national unity. In this context, Alemseged emphasizes the symbolic power of history as:

> History plays the chief symbolic role in identity formation, and it has been the main forger of cohesion during the political struggles. The emotion that legitimate political and economic grievances cannot generate, history can. Periods of hardship were invoked to map and remap popular identity consciousness because these tend to be stronger forgers of nationhood than happy times.[6]

Therefore, the Ethiopian past is marked by a series of shared historical experiences and collective achievements that provide a strong foundation for constructing a common national identity. For instance, among the most prominent are the landmark victory at the Battle of Adwa in 1896, the sustained five-year resistance against Italian occupation (1936–1941), and the national mobilization during the 1977–78 war against the Somali invasion. These moments

[4] Tekeste, *The Crisis of Ethiopian Education…*, p. 66.
[5] Girma, "Adwa in Ethiopia's….", p. 96–118.
[6] Alemseged Abbay, *Identity Jilted or Re-Imagining Identity? The Divergent Paths of the Eritrean and Tigrayan Nationalist Struggles* (Asmara: The Red Sea Press, 1998), p. 206.

represent more than military triumphs. They embodied shared struggles, common threats, and collective aspirations that united Ethiopians across regional, ethnic, and religious lines. In these episodes, Ethiopians endured suffering together, fought together, and celebrated victory together, creating a reservoir of collective memory that can serve as a unifying resource in history education. Additionally, in all these moments, Ethiopians rallied for a common cause, setting aside their parochial enclaves.[7]

Furthermore, Ethiopia's historical experience is marked by enduring interconnections among its diverse peoples, forged through political interaction, intermarriage, and cultural exchange. As Abbink notes, the long history of center–periphery relations, characterized by both cooperation and conflict, has played a more formative role in shaping communal identities than any external influence.[8] Teshale further illustrates this interconnection through patterns of royal intermarriage, in which rulers, such as those of Shewa, sought spouses from distant regions like Tigray, Lasta, Gojjam, or even farther south, thereby forging kinship ties that transcended ethnic and regional boundaries. [9] Paluha reinforces this view by explaining how the expansion of Christian highland society led to the diffusion of group boundaries, with elite exchanges through marriage and warfare fostering integration rather than division. Together, these perspectives underline the historical reality of interaction, blending, and mutual influence across Ethiopia's many

[7] Bahru Zewde, "The Vexed Questions of Identity in Ethiopia: A Historical Perspective," *STIAS Public Webinar Series*, October 25, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hyBdM_3P528&list=PPSV.

[8] Abbink, *History Education*……, p. 17.

[9]Teshale Tibebu, *Interview on ESAT*, February 23, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPjHD6OJ7Vg&list=PPSV.

communities.[10] This legacy of interdependence provides an ideal foundation for history education to promote a national identity rooted in shared experiences.

5.2 Teaching Ethiopian History during the Imperial Period

5.2.1 The Marginalization of Ethiopian History in the Curriculum

The teaching of history in Ethiopian secondary schools during the 1940s faced significant challenges, most notably the absence of instructional materials and qualified Ethiopian teaching staff. Prior to the introduction of a formal secondary school curriculum in 1949, history instruction proceeded without a standardized curriculum, syllabus, or textbook.[11] In this context, foreign teachers delivered history lessons based on their own judgments regarding what content would be suitable for Ethiopian students. Consequently, both the content and pedagogical approaches were shaped primarily by the individual teacher's background and experiential knowledge. In some instances, it has been reported that foreign teachers attempted to teach Ethiopian history using self-prepared instructional notes derived from their personal interpretations. However, these materials were often framed through a Eurocentric lens. The historical narratives produced by foreign teachers typically relied on European travel accounts and missionary writings, largely disregarding indigenous sources and oral traditions.[12]

For instance, sources indicate that the Ethiopian resistance to the Italian occupation (1936–1941) was frequently misrepresented in early teaching materials.[13] Several textbooks portrayed this period as of a complete colonial domination, thereby disregarding the widespread and

[10] Eva Paluha, "Ethncity and Democracy- A Viable Alliance?", in Mohammed Salih & John Markakis (eds*), Ethnicity and the State in Eastern Africa,* Nordiska Africainstitutet: Stockholm, 1998, pp. 3-7.

[11] MoE, *Secondary Education in Ethiopia: General and Vocational*, IES-67-5324/1960 (Addis Ababa, June 1960), p. 14-15.

[12] Abebe, *An Investigation of History Teaching….*, pp. 93-5.

[13] Messay, "Eurocentrism and Ethiopian Historiography…", pp. 1- 3.

determined resistance, particularly in rural areas. This characterization served to undermine Ethiopia's longstanding history of sovereignty and self-determination. The five years of armed resistance, during which Ethiopian patriots engaged in sustained struggle against the fascist forces, were misleadingly depicted by Western textbook authors as a colonial era.[14] However, serious historical scholarship has shown that the Italian colonial administration was never fully established during this period. Italian control was largely limited to a few urban centers, while vast rural regions remained under the influence of Ethiopian resistance fighters. Accordingly, it is historically inaccurate to classify 1936–1941 as a "colonial period." A more accurate and contextually appropriate designation would be "the period of Italian aggression against Ethiopia.

This imbalance in the representation of Ethiopian history in secondary schools was largely the result of unstructured instructional practices conducted in the absence of a formally written curriculum. The lack of accessible written sources, coupled with many foreign teachers' limited knowledge of Ethiopian history and culture, further contributed to the distorted representation of the country's past. These conditions reflected broader efforts by some Western teachers to impose a form of psychological colonization, using the history curriculum as a tool of intellectual manipulation and subjugation. Historical evidence confirms that Italy was never able to achieve a decisive military victory over Ethiopia, as Ethiopian forces repeatedly repelled their advances since the late nineteenth century. Nevertheless, Western teachers played a significant role in shaping narratives that undermined this reality. As Messay notes, the Italians *"had accomplished what military means had failed to achieve"* by influencing the historical consciousness of Ethiopian students through a history curriculum aligned with foreign interests.[15]

[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid., p. 3.

In addition, foreign history texts deliberately used the term "Abyssinia" rather than the historically and officially recognized name "Ethiopia," reflecting a clear colonial connotation. The term "Abyssinia" is believed to have originated from "Habashat," one of the early ethnic groups inhabiting the Ethiopian region. Ethiopians have consistently identified themselves as "Ethiopia," a designation officially used since at least the fourth century A.D.[16] The refusal of Western educators to adopt the name preferred by Ethiopians can be understood as a response to Ethiopia's resistance to colonial domination and defiance of white supremacist ideology. Recognizing the name "Ethiopia" would have implied acknowledgment of the nation's historical legacy, sovereignty, and legitimacy of self-identification. Naming carries profound implications, serving as a symbol of control, ownership, and manipulation. Throughout Afro-European colonial relations, it was a common practice for colonial powers to rename African countries. Accordingly, by insisting on the use of "Abyssinia," Western educators aimed to exert symbolic control over Ethiopia's historical narrative through the history curriculum.

The first significant effort to prepare teaching materials on Ethiopian history for secondary schools was undertaken in 1952 by Charles A. Isaac. Drawing on his extensive teaching experience in English, history, and geography at the secondary level, Isaac identified a critical lack of relevant textbooks for Ethiopian learners. At the time, students in secondary classes were compelled to rely on foreign textbooks, which were often disconnected from the Ethiopian context. Isaac also observed that foreign teachers faced considerable difficulties in teaching Ethiopian history due to the absence of appropriate materials. In response, he sought to write a

[16] Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia……,* p. 1.

textbook that addressed the practical needs of both teachers and students by providing content-based texts on Ethiopian history. [17]

In the preface to his textbook, Isaac explicitly stated that his objective was not only to provide an instructional resource but also to promote an Ethiopian-centered approach to education. He argued that, as far as possible, the content of education in Ethiopia should reflect Ethiopian realities and values. Furthermore, he emphasized that Ethiopian professionals ought to play a central role in curriculum development and implementation. While the textbook primarily focused on Ethiopia's modern history, it also included topics from the ancient past, beginning with the first century A.D. Simultaneously, Isaac intended the text as a valuable introductory resource for foreign readers interested in Ethiopia's historical development. His work, *A Modern History of Ethiopia*, thus represented a significant early effort to ground history education in organized and written materials.[18]

Nevertheless, Isaac's text had its limitations. As will be discussed in subsequent sections, it focused almost exclusively on the imperial monarchy, overlooking broader socio-economic and political developments in Ethiopian history. A significant portion of the content was devoted to tracing the genealogy of Ethiopian rulers from the Aksumite period to the contemporary imperial era. As a result, one could argue that Ethiopian history was not meaningfully integrated into secondary education until the introduction of the first comprehensive history curriculum in 1967. The marginalization of Ethiopian history in the school curriculum became a growing concern among the Ethiopian intelligentsia. Various sources confirm that the exclusion of Ethiopian

[17] NALA, 64/70ጠ., Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, *A Modern History of Ethiopia*, comp. Charles A. Isaac, 1952.

[18] Ibid.

history was among the most urgent issues raised by the Ethiopian Student Movement during the 1960s. As Teshale observes:

> **አብዛኛው የኢትዮጵያ ታሪክ የተጻፈው በውጭ አገር ሰዎች ነው። እነርሱ ስለ አገርህ ታሪክ ያስተምሩሃል። ግን ቋንቋህን አይናገሩም፤ ባህልህን አያውቁም። ኢትዮጵያም ሂደው ሪሰርች ሲያደርጉ አስተርጓሚ ቀጥረው ነው። ኤክስፐርት እነርሱ ናቸው። አማካሪ ተብለው በንጉሱ ጊዜ የመጡ እነርሱ ናቸው። ካሪኩለሙን የፈጠሩት እነርሱ ናቸው። እኛ ስንማር ስለ በላይ ዘለቀ፣ ስለ ገረሱ ዱኪ አላስተማሩንም። እነ ጃጋማ ኬሎን አናውቃቸውም። የተማርነው ስለ ፈረንሳይ አብዮት ነው። ስለ ቸርቺል ነው። የኢትዮጵያ ተማሪዎች አንዱ ጩኸታቸው ስለ አገራችን ታሪክ እንዳናውቅ ተደርገናል፤ የኢምፔሪያሊስት ትምህርት እያስተማራችሁን ነው የሚል ነበር።**[19]
>
> Most of Ethiopia's history has been written by foreigners. They are the ones teaching you about your own country's history. Yet they do not speak your language, nor do they understand your culture. Even when they conduct research in Ethiopia, they do so through interpreters. They are considered the experts. They are the ones who came during the time of the king as "advisors." They are the ones who shaped the curriculum. We were never taught about heroes like Belay Zeleke**,** Geresu Duki**,** or Jagama Kello**.** What we learned was about the French Revolution, about Churchill. One of the recurring complaints among Ethiopian students has been that we don't know our own history, and what we are being taught is imperialist education.

As noted above, the first meaningful and sustained effort to integrate Ethiopian history into the secondary education curriculum was undertaken in 1967. The curriculum development process was comprehensive and participatory, involving a series of seminars, research presentations, and

[19] Teshale Tibebu, "Interview on ESAT," YouTube video, February 23, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPjHD6OJ7Vg&list=PPSV.

consultations with Ethiopian educators. For the first time, Ethiopian scholars, particularly from the Department of History at HSIU, played an active role in shaping the curriculum. Among them, Merid Wolde Aregay and Kiros Gebre-Selassie, serving as chairman and co-chairman of the curriculum committee respectively, were instrumental in the indigenization of the syllabus.[20] Through their leadership and scholarly contributions, Ethiopian history, from antiquity to the modern period, was systematically incorporated into the curriculum. The 1967 syllabus introduced the following major themes related to Ethiopian history:

Table 17: Ethiopian History Contents in the 1967 History Syllabus for Secondary Education

Grade	Main Title	Subtitles
9th	Ethiopia to 600 A.D.	➢ Religion, Trade, Architecture, Writing ➢ The people of Ethiopia ➢ The Indian Ocean and the Red Sea in Early Times ➢ The Origin of Aksumite Civilization ➢ King Ezana and the Spread of Christianity ➢ King Kaleb in South Arabia
10th	Ethiopian History (600-1632)	➢ The Rise of Islam and the Decline of the Aksumite Kingdom ➢ The Zagwe Dynasty, Lalibela and the Architecture of Roha ➢ The Restoration of the Solomonic Line and the Growth of the First Shoa Kingdom and its Administration ➢ Culture and Religion ➢ Geez and the Development of the Modern Ethiopian Languages ➢ The Political Account of Ethiopia at the Rise of Lebna Dengel ➢ The Conflict between Ahmad Gran and Lebna Dengel

[20] IES-70-9971-1967, Ministry of Education, *Secondary School Curriculum: Book I.* 2nd ed., Addis Ababa, 1960 E.C. (1967), pp. 156-8.

		➢ The Jesuit Mission to Ethiopia
11th	Ethiopia (1632-1855)	➢ The Establishment of Gondar and Reign of Fasiledes ➢ Iyasu the Great ➢ The Architecture of Gondar and the Accounts Left by the Foreign Visitors ➢ The Disintegration of the Gondar Empire and the Zemene Mesafint ➢ The Regional Kingdoms (Kaffa, Wollamo, Sidamo, etc.)
12th	Ethiopia from 1855 to Present	➢ Tewodros (1855 – 1868) ➢ Yohannes IV ➢ Menelik II ➢ The Reign of Lij Yasu, Empress Zauditu and the Regency of Ras Tafari ➢ Haile Selassie I

Source: IES-70-9971-1967, Ministry of Education, *Secondary School Curriculum: Book I.* 2nd ed., Addis Ababa, 1960 E.C. (1967), pp. 156-8.

Following the curriculum development process, a major challenge was the lack of textbooks for teaching Ethiopian history. To address this gap, Patrick Gilkes, commissioned by the MoEFA, wrote *Ethiopia: A Short Illustrated History* in 1969, which was later edited by Kiros Habte Selassie and Mazengia Dina. The text was designed to help Ethiopian students learn about their country's past, but its content was heavily shaped by the legend of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba, a foundational myth used to legitimize the imperial monarchy. The early chapters focus largely on establishing the historical credibility of this tradition, framing the origins of northern Ethiopian civilization through Sabean migrations and cultural fusion.[21]

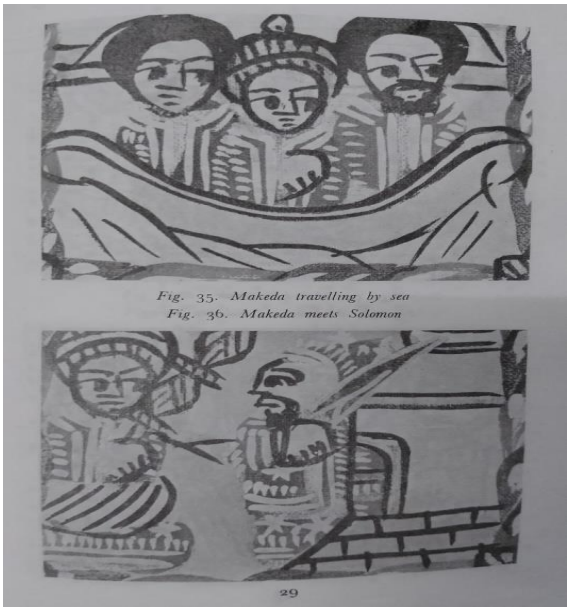
[21] Gilkes, *Ethiopia: A Short Illustrated History*, ed. (Kiros Habte Selassie and Mazengia Dina, 1969).

Gilkes's text is essentially a consolidation of what Charles Isaac had written in 1952, which traced the origins of Ethiopia's ancient civilization and system of government to South Arabian immigrants. As Messay observes, the attribution of Aksumite civilization to Semitic immigrants from South Arabia is the most prominent and pervasive outcome of Eurocentric interpretations of Ethiopian history. The Semitic theme is so central that it shapes the organization and meaning of Ethiopian historical events and cultural identity. However, according to local sources, the civilization of ancient Ethiopia was indigenous, not imported from outside. [22] Gilkes's text demonstrates a strong effort to legitimize this narrative, which has two possible implications. First, it reflects broader attitudes within Eurocentric scholarship. Second, the narrative likely served to support the imperial rule of Haile Selassie by legitimizing his genealogy from the chosen lineage of King Solomon and David.

Although the text acknowledges the lack of archaeological and historical evidence supporting the legend, it devotes extensive space to traditional narratives and illustrations emphasizing the relationship between King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. [23] As such, the textbook functions more as a tool to bolster imperial legitimacy than as a means to foster students' critical historical thinking.

Figure 8: The Story of King Solomon and Queen of Sheba as Illustrated in the Traditional Style in the 1969 History Text

[22] Messay, "Eurocentrism and Ethiopian Historiography…", p. 3.
[23] Gilkes, *Ethiopia…,* pp. 24-35.



Source: Ministry of Education, *Ethiopia: A Short Illustrated History*, ed. Kiros Habte Selassie and Mazengia Dina (Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Haile Selassie I Printing Press, 1969), p. 29.

Richard Pankhurst also prepared a teaching note in 1970 for use in secondary schools. Compared to earlier instructional materials, his text marked a notable improvement in terms of academic integrity and organization. It presents a structured, state-centered historical narrative that emphasizes Ethiopia's antiquity, continuity, and uniqueness. Beginning with the Red Sea trade networks and the Land of Punt, the text situates Ethiopia as an early participant in global commerce and diplomacy. Through its treatment of Aksumite inscriptions, coinage, and the adoption of Christianity, ancient Ethiopia is depicted as a powerful and civilized empire closely linked to the wider Christian world. The textbook traces the decline of Aksum and the rise of successive dynasties, notably the Zagwe and the restored Solomonic dynasty, framing them within a long-standing imperial tradition. Encounters with Muslim powers, Jesuit missionaries, and European explorers during the medieval period are also presented in ways that show

Ethiopia's resilience as an ancient Christian state and its active engagement in global religious, commercial, and political dynamics. [24]

In the later sections, Pankhurst's textbook turns to modern emperors such as Tewodros II, Yohannes IV, and Menelik II, depicting them as reformers who laid the groundwork for a unified and modern Ethiopian state. Menelik's territorial expansion and diplomatic engagements with European colonial powers are presented as strategic acts of leadership that safeguarded Ethiopia's sovereignty and territorial integrity. Unfortunately, such a narrative becomes rare in the history textbooks of the Derg and EPRDF periods, as will be discussed later. The concluding chapters examine the modernization efforts of Ethiopian emperors, culminating in the reign of Haile Selassie. His centralization policies, educational reforms, and international diplomacy are depicted as extensions of the imperial legacy. Throughout the text, themes of imperial authority, dynastic legitimacy, and resistance to colonization are used to construct a national narrative rooted in unity, continuity, and state-led modernization. Pankhurst's textbook offers a relatively balanced and scholarly account of Ethiopian history, grounded in verifiable facts and intended to promote a cohesive national identity by avoiding divisive interpretations. [25]

Figure 9: The Depiction of Emperor Menelik II and His Seal in the 1970 History Textbook

[24] Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, *History of Ethiopia: Teaching Notes for Secondary Schools,* (Compiled by Richard Pankhurst), Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Haile Selassie I Printing Press, 1970.
[25] Ibid., pp. 101-21.



Source: Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, *History of Ethiopia: Teaching Notes for Secondary Schools*, (Compiled by Richard Pankhurst), Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Haile Selassie I Printing Press, 1970, p. 111.

Despite the imperial government's efforts to incorporate Ethiopian history and its unifying elements into the curriculum and the subsequent production of textbooks, these initiatives ultimately proved short-lived. Pankhurst's 1970 history textbook was used for only four years. The rise of the Derg regime in 1974 brought profound changes to the education sector, marked by the systematic destruction or disposal of numerous curricular materials, including history textbooks. This shift was driven by a change in state ideology, moving from imperial narratives to a more rigid socialist framework. Ethiopia's educational history reveals a recurring pattern of discarding previous curricula following regime changes, reflecting the use of the education system in general, and the history curriculum in particular, as tools for political and ideological manipulation.

5.2.2 Forging a Unified Ethiopia under Imperial Authority

The two imperial constitutions of 1931 and 1955 served as the ideological foundation for consolidating imperial authority in Ethiopia. These constitutions were developed to establish a

unified and centralized Ethiopian state under the supremacy of the imperial monarchy. The preamble of the 1931 constitution recounts Ethiopia's extensive historical legacy, asserting that the origins of the Ethiopian state date back to ancient times.[26] It specifies that, beginning with Emperor Menelik I, the monarchy's history spans approximately 2,937 years and includes a lineage of 221 monarchs. According to the constitution, the structure of the Ethiopian monarchy, which predates the birth of Jesus Christ, reflected a system in which military strength was the principal means of governance, employed both to defend the empire's territories and to expand its frontiers. [27] Furthermore, the 1931 constitution explicitly articulates one of its main objectives as enabling Ethiopians to coexist peacefully under the imperial crown despite their diverse identities. This is encapsulated in the preamble, which states:

> **ኢትዮጵያ ወገን ያልተለያየበትና አንድ ቤተሰብ ሆኖ ሕዝቡ ባንድ ተወስኖ ባንድ ንጉሠ ነገሥት ተገዝቶ በመተባበር እንዲኖር ሃሠ።** [28]
>
> Ethiopia has remained undivided and unified as one family, with its people united under one emperor, living together in cooperation and harmony.

Therefore, the writing and teaching of Ethiopian history during the imperial era were fundamentally aimed at legitimizing a unified Ethiopia under the authority of the imperial monarchy. Historical narratives of this period were shaped by a framework that emphasized a unitary state, portraying the literate elites as the chief architects and holders of power. These aristocratic elites viewed themselves as custodians of a civilized tradition, guided by a mission to

[26] Imperial Government of Ethiopia, *The 1931 Constitution*, p. 1.
[27] Ibid.
[28] Ibid.

rule and unify Ethiopia. [29] This perspective was strongly reflected in historical writings produced by Western-educated Ethiopian intellectuals closely affiliated with the monarchy. Notable figures such as Gebre-Heywot Baykedagn, Afework Gebre-Euesus, Heruy Wolde-Sellasie, and Taye Gebre-Maryam authored multiple history books that aligned Ethiopian history and identity with the Christian monarchy under the supremacy of the emperor. [30]

Among later historians, Tekle-Tsadik Mekuria emerged as a key figure in Ethiopian historiography. He authored a series of influential texts narrating Ethiopian history from ancient times to the modern era. His works, usually titled after emperors and linked to the theme of national unity, became foundational in shaping the historical consciousness of the period. Prominent titles include *Emperor Tewodros and Ethiopian Unity*, *Emperor Yohannes IV and Ethiopian Unity*, *Emperor Menelik II and Ethiopian Unity*, and *Emperor Haile Selassie I and Ethiopian Unity*. Through these works, the author aligned the Ethiopian emperors with the country's unification. With the expansion of secondary education in the 1940s and the absence of formal history textbooks, his Amharic texts, mainly *Ye-Ityopya Tarik ke Atse Tewodros iske Qedamawi Haile Selassie* (History of Ethiopia from Emperor Tewodros to Emperor Haile Selassie), were adopted as instructional materials. The dominant narratives in his texts sought to forge a cohesive Ethiopian identity anchored in imperial authority.[31] Despite their prominence, the texts were rarely used in classrooms, largely because many teachers were non-Ethiopians and unfamiliar with the Amharic language.[32]

[29] Abbink, "History Education…..", p. 6.
[30] Marzagora, "History in the Twentieth-Century….", p. 430.
[31] Bahru, "Evolution of Professional….", p. 33.
[32] Abebe, *An Investigation of History Teaching…..*, p. 84.

The teaching of Ethiopian history had very little or no choice beyond echoing the mainstream historical narrative of the era and the state's ideological order. Although efforts to produce history teaching materials in English emerged during the 1950s and 1960s by expatriate historians, the dominant historiographical trend remained firmly linked to Ethiopia's imperial monarchy. Early history textbooks devoted extensive attention to the "Royal House," listing Ethiopian rulers from Menelik I to Haile Selassie I. For example, Charles Isaac's text included a chronological list of 224 emperors (see appendix). Throughout this period, historical narratives consistently emphasized a united Ethiopian state under the Imperial rule. [33]

Figure 10: The Map of Ethiopia as Presented in Secondary School History Texts



Source: NALA, 64/70ጠ, Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, *A Modern History of Ethiopia*, compiled by Charles A. Isaac (Addis Ababa, 1952).

[33] NALA, 64/70ጠ, Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, *A Modern History of Ethiopia*, Compiled by Charles A. Isaac, 1952, pp. 72-80.

Not only was the Solomonic dynasty exalted, but Emperor Haile Selassie himself was also the subject of extensive veneration. His name adorned prominent urban landmarks in Addis Ababa, including schools, a hospital, a theatre, a stadium, the main avenue, and a central square, as well as numerous institutions in rural towns. His birthday and coronation day were established as national holidays, celebrated widely by the public. [34] Schools throughout Ethiopia were closed on these imperial holidays, alongside national commemorations such as Victory of Adwa and Martyrs' Day, as well as religious observances like Christmas and Easter.[35] Regarding the glorification of the emperor, Bahru writes:

> An assiduously fostered cult of personality stripped Hayla-Sellase of all human attributes, and elevated him to superhuman heights. The media played a crucial role in this regard. In the early stages, the educational system served the same purpose. Pupils grew up chanting songs praising the emperor and wishing him a life as long as that of Abraham and Methuselah.[36]

In the same vein, history textbooks portrayed Emperor Haile Selassie predominantly as a reformist ruler. His contributions to modernizing the Ethiopian state through administrative centralization, legal reforms, infrastructure development, education, and diplomacy were given significant emphasis. This elite-centered version of Ethiopian history presented modernization as a project chiefly initiated by imperial rulers. Reflecting the ideological priorities of the imperial regime, the textbooks avoided any critique of feudal institutions, topics that would be heavily emphasized in post-1974 history texts. Instead, the imperial-era textbooks celebrated national unity, centralization, territorial integrity, and sovereignty as grand achievements attained under imperial leadership.

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[34] Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia…*, p. 202.
[35] Mahteme-Selassie, *Zikire-Neger*, p. 618.
[36] Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*…., p. 202.

Haile Selassie's exaltation in history texts was unparalleled compared to other emperors. He was represented in textbooks with direct parallels to biblical kings, particularly King David and King Solomon. For example, *A Modern History of Ethiopia* (1952) by Charles A. Isaac offers a highly favorable representation of Haile Selassie's reign. In Chapter XI, titled "Emperor Haile Selassie the First: The Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah," Isaac writes:

> If King Menelik II was the King David of Ethiopia, then Haile Selassie the First can certainly be said to be her King Solomon. When this country required a wise ruler to strengthen and reform the empire which Menelik had won with his sword, the Hand of God had raised the son of Ras Makonnen to the ancient throne of Ethiopia, as we learned in the last chapter. The country had suffered much from three years of unrest under Empress Taitu and three years of misrule under Lij Yasu. It was left for Haile Selassie (first as Regent, and then as Emperor) to set matters right and to bring the country forward to its present state of progress.[37]

Such representations reinforced the emperor's image as a divinely appointed, fatherly figure guiding Ethiopia toward progress, stability, and unity. Beyond textual glorification, this reverence was reflected in educational materials. The emperor's image appeared on the opening pages of all teaching materials, including history textbooks. Additionally, students received exercise books and school supplies adorned with the emperor's images and messages. Notebooks, pencils, pens, and even khaki fabric for uniforms were provided free of charge, further fostering loyalty to the emperor through the educational experience.[38]

[37] NALA, 64/70ጠ., Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, *A Modern History of Ethiopia*, comp. Charles A. Isaac, 1952, p.32.

[38] Informants: Seid Kemal, Wosen Ali, Mekonnen Zewdu, Kassahun Simeneh, and Gashaw Abate.

Figure 11: Emperor Haileselassie I Depicted on the Opening Page of Student Textbooks (Left) and the Back Cover of Exercise Books (Right)



Source: Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, *History of Ethiopia: Teaching Notes for Secondary Schools*, (Compiled by Richard Pankhurst), Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Haile Selassie I Printing Press, 1970; Abebe Haregewoin, Photograph, *Facebook*, July 24, 2025, https://www.facebook.com/share/1L7mjztio4/.

The Amharic texts in the image on the right may be translated as follows:

His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, King of Kings of Ethiopia

We built the schools,

We hired the teachers,

We urged you to pursue knowledge,

To grow through learning, to bloom with wisdom,

Our country might benefit from you and be proud of you.

Do you know this?

That by studying with dedication,

You may help our country through committed learning

Ethiopia is calling on you,

You may not be lost to her future.[39]

[39] Abebe Haregewoin, Photograph, *Facebook*, July 24, 2025, https://www.facebook.com/share/1L7mjztio4/.

In sum, the representation of Ethiopian history during the imperial era suffered from several major problems. First was the influence of Westernization. The imperial government's Western-oriented policy attracted a large number of foreign history teachers, particularly from Great Britain, Canada, the United States, and India. Their dominance in secondary schools led to a lopsided presentation of Ethiopian history, mostly interpreted through the lens of Western scholarship. Second, the early curricular frameworks largely neglected Ethiopian history. It was only in 1967 that Ethiopian history was formally included in the national curriculum. Prior to that, it had been almost entirely excluded from secondary school syllabi.

Thirdly, there was a serious shortage of textbooks and teaching materials. Tekle-Tsadik Mekuria's attempt to produce Ethiopian history texts in Amharic proved ineffective, as most history teachers were expatriates unfamiliar with Ethiopian culture and unable to use Amharic in the classroom. Although foreign historians such as Charles A. Isaac (1952) and Patrick Gilkes (1969) made early contributions by writing texts on Ethiopian history, their works were heavily politicized in favor of the ruling elite, disregarding historical objectivity. A more serious and relatively balanced effort was made by Richard Pankhurst in 1970, but his textbook was short-lived due to the outbreak of the 1974 revolution. Fourthly, and most significantly, the ideological imposition of the ruling regime played a decisive role in shaping historical narratives. The imperial government aimed to build a unified and centralized Ethiopian state through the history curriculum by promoting the Imperial monarchy as the symbol of national unity and continuity.

5.3 The Representation of Ethiopian History in Secondary School History Textbooks (1979-2000)

5.3.1 Ideological Imposition

The Derg's National Democratic Revolution Program of 1976 outlined the main educational goals as a tool for fostering production, scientific inquiry, and socialist consciousness.[40] Hence, the government prepared the history curriculum in a way that could fulfill its ideological objectives. History teaching emphasized Marxist historiography, portraying "working forces" as true makers of history while depicting imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism as adversaries of the people. The curriculum also promoted class consciousness by reinterpreting Ethiopian history through the lens of class struggle, a concept previously unfamiliar in Ethiopia before the 1974 Revolution.[41]

The historical narratives presented in the Grade 9 and 10 history textbooks harshly criticize Ethiopia's pre-1974 eras, attributing the country's poverty and underdevelopment solely to its feudal past. This perspective is most explicitly articulated in the final chapter of the Grade 10 textbook, where the regime's ideological influence becomes particularly evident. In this section, Ethiopia's socioeconomic backwardness and challenges are portrayed as direct consequences of the feudal system. As the textbook states:

> The feudal system which had dominated the social scene of the country for over many centuries had made the people of Ethiopia remain at a shamefully low level

[40] Ministry of Education, *Evaluative Research Report of the Secondary Education Student Textbook*, vol. 1, no. 4 (Addis Ababa, 1977 E.C.); Ministry of Education, *የኢትዮጵያ አጠቃላይ ትምህርት የእድገት ታሪክ (A Historical Development of Ethiopian General Education)* (Addis Ababa, 1976 E.C.).

[41] Christopher Clapham, "The State and Revolution in Ethiopia," *Review of African Political Economy* 44 (1989), p. 4–17.

> of social development by arresting their socio-economic and political advance and thereby shutting off their creative spirit. Consequently, when Ethiopia's level of social development is examined today in terms of the various scales measuring growth, it is invariably found that she holds the last place in all aspects. In economic development, she is one of those countries which are classified as the poorest in the world. In terms of health, she is one of the most disease-ridden countries of the world. In terms of education, she is one of those countries where mass illiteracy reigns supreme. The same holds true in other areas as well. *The sole factor that accounted for this miserable social condition was the feudal system* [emphasis added] that had reigned supreme in Ethiopia for a long time.[42]

Though there may be some validity to this claim, the narrative oversimplifies a complex historical reality that demands a more critical analysis. True, the feudal system might be one of the factors but other factors might contribute to Ethiopia's poverty and backwardness. Tekeste argues that the feudal society played a significant role in maintaining Ethiopia's independence and unity. Despite this, the curriculum heavily politicized Ethiopian history, paying great attention to the 1974 Revolution while neglecting other vital historical topics. Shortly, the revolutionary government used history to fulfill its ideological needs glorifying socialism and vilifying the pre-revolutionary elites and activities.[43]

The textbooks for grades eleven and twelve also extended this ideological bias to world history, promoting socialism as an ideal force for peace and progress while criticizing capitalism as oppressive and reactionary. I addition, the textbooks, often direct copies of Russian sources, were criticized for their complexity and irrelevance to the Ethiopian students' socio-cultural context.[44] Overall, the secondary school history textbooks were prepared to serve as a tool for

[42] MoE, *History Student Text for Grade 10*, 1980, pp. 262-3.
[43] Tekeste, *The Crisis of Ethiopian Education…, p. 72.*
[44] Ibid.

political indoctrination and propaganda, sacrificing educational relevance and objectivity that the disciplinary history claims, for the dissemination of state ideology.[45]

5.3.2 The Neglect of Ethiopian History and Its Unifying Elements: An Ideological Absurdity

Ethiopian history received limited attention in the high school curriculum of the 1980s, which was largely dominated by world history across all grade levels. It was taught only in grades nine and ten, and even then, the coverage was minimal. For example, the Grade 9 history textbook devoted just 38 out of 184 pages to Ethiopian history, focusing on the period from the 16th-century Muslim-Christian conflicts to the rise of Emperor Tewodros II in 1855. Within this section, the textbook addresses major political, religious, and social developments, beginning with the campaigns of Ahmad Gragn and their impact on the Ethiopian highlands. It discusses the resulting destruction in terms of economy and population, along with their effects on the monarchy.[46]

The Oromo population movement is presented as a significant historical development, with accounts of expansion routes, military encounters, and the Gada system. Additionally, the Sidama are briefly discussed, with reference to their early states and interactions with Christian and Muslim powers. According to the 1980 text, the Sidama were described as a large Cushitic-speaking population in the south, comprising groups such as "Bako, Gibe, Janjaro, Kaffa, Maji, and Ometto," as well as additional eastern groups, most notably the Kambatta and the Konso.[47] Overall, the textbook offers a concise overview of the internal dynamics and historical

[45] Informants: Mustefa Seid, Gashaw Abate, Yiheyis Ferede, and Azaze Alemu.

[46] Ministry of Education, *History Student Textbook for Grade 9* (Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Printing Press, 1980), pp. 69-105.

[47] Ibid., p. 81.

developments that shaped Ethiopia during this period, covering the sixteenth to the mid-nineteenth centuries.[48]

Similarly, the grade ten textbook devoted only two of its ten chapters to Ethiopian history, 117 out of 322 pages (36.3%), focusing on the period from 1850 to 1974, with 60 pages (50%) centered on the Ethiopian Revolution and its aftermath. After grade ten, Ethiopian history was entirely excluded from the succeeding grade levels.

Table 18: Distribution of Thematic Areas across Grades by Pages and Percentages

Grade	No. of units	Total pages	Thematic areas					
			World history		African history		Ethiopian history	
			No. of pages	Percent	No. of pages	Percent	No. of pages	Percent
9	9	184	102	55.4%	44	23.9%	38	20.6%
10	10	322	156	48.4%	49	15.2%	117	36.3%
11	4	207	194	93.7%	13	6.3%	0	0%
12	4	177	150	84.7%	27	15.3%	0	0%

Source: Ministry of Education, *History Textbooks for Grades 9 and 10 (1980) and Grades 11 and 12 (1979)*

As noted above, the history textbooks were dominated by world history topics, particularly focusing on socialist revolutions and national liberation movements in foreign countries. These

[48] Ibid.

subjects, however, held little relevance to the socio-cultural and historical realities of Ethiopian students. While the Derg government promoted the idea of a unified and strong Ethiopia, along with fostering Ethiopian nationalism, its actions in shaping the history curriculum contradicted its grand rhetoric. By neglecting Ethiopian history, the regime undermined its own proclaimed commitment to the slogan "Ethiopia First!" This contradiction showed the significant gap between the government's rhetorical emphasis on national pride and its actual approach to educating the youth about their country's rich historical legacy.

Figure 12: Map of Ethiopia with the Highly Publicized Motto of "Etyopia Tikdem" (Ethiopia First) as Represented in the Opening Pages of All Textbooks during the Derg Regime



5.3.3 The Failure to Harness the Country's Glorious Past for National Cohesion: A Missed Opportunity

Alemseged asserts that "history plays the chief symbolic role in identity formation and it has been the main forger of cohesion during the political struggles".[49] Ethiopia, with its magnificent history, offers an ideal foundation for teaching patriotism, unity, and togetherness. Unfortunately, the military government failed to grab this opportunity. The Pan-Ethiopian unity propagated by the state media was absent in the history curriculums. The curriculums did not capitalize on unifying elements of Ethiopian history, such as its magnificent victories, to promote social cohesion. For instance, the monumental civilizations of Aksum and Zagwe periods were omitted from history lessons at all secondary school levels.

Similarly, Ethiopia's glorious victories were underutilized as tools to solidify Ethiopian nationalism. The Adwa victory, for example, was presented in a manner that diminished Emperor Menelik's effective leadership and the far-reaching impacts of the battle. The tenth-grade history textbook criticized the emperor and Ethiopian patriots for "not dislodging" the Italian army from territories north of the Mereb River. As described in the tenth grade history text:

> After defeating the Italian colonial army at Adowa, the ruling land-owning classes headed by Menelik did not try to peruse and dislodge the defeated and retreating enemy no farther than 10-15 kilometers from the battlefield. The ruling class was over excited with the military gains it took hold of and therefore instead of heading forward to liberate the

[49] Alemseged, *Identity Jilted…*, p. 206.

> coastal lands including Massawa from the disintegrated colonialist invader, it decided to return back.[50]

Bahru, a prominent Ethiopian historian, commented that Emperor Menelik, along with Empress Taytu, played a major role in the victory of Adwa. He emphasized that this fact cannot be ignored. Therefore, whenever Adwa is commemorated, both Menelik and Taytu must necessarily be remembered.[51] On his part, Shumet described that Empress Taytu was free to manifest her talent, and she did so boldly, in public. She was not merely an asset to Emperor Menelik II; she was a powerful force in her own right. Her contributions were instrumental in the victory at Adwa. Beyond her role in nursing the wounded, she served as a general, commanding her own contingent. She did not assist the army, she led it. During the Siege of Mekele, for instance, a large Italian force was compelled to surrender, a strategic outcome largely credited to Taytu's initiative and leadership. Her prominent role was crucial to the eventual Ethiopian victory at Adwa, marking her as one of the key architects of that historic triumph.[52]

However, these remarkable leaders have not been given the recognition they deserve in the official texts. Empress Taytu's name is notably absent in the discussion of the Adwa victory, despite her decisive role in that historic event. While Emperor Menelik is mentioned, the portrayal is far from favorable, failing to acknowledge his leadership and strategic contributions. Instead of appreciating Emperor Menelik's leadership ability and heroic stature as a source of pride and inspiration, the writer/s of the text chose to vilify him and the patriots with foolish

[50] MoE, *History Student Text for Grade 10*, 1980, pp. 240-1.

[51] Bahru Zewde, "Interview on EBC," YouTube video, August 7, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3TowI2ZbofU&list=PPSV.

[52] Shumet Sishagne, "Interview on Amhara Media Corporation," YouTube video, March 15, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1RaZilKUco&list=PPSV.

words. The criticism that the text writers presented against Menelik has no any support from the historical scholarship.

Scholars have identified several reasons behind the decision the Ethiopian ruling class to halt military action further north. Alemseged explains that prominent Eritrean leaders, such as Dejazmach Debeb Ararya and Bahta Hagos, "collaborated with the Italians for their selfish interests without any demur".[53] Additionally, Ethiopia was recovering from the great famine (1888–92), which caused severe shortages in supplies, making it impractical to pursue further military campaigns.[54]

Professional historians also have argued that Emperor Menelik's decision to halt his advance at the Mereb River following the Battle of Adwa was justifiable given the circumstances. In an interview with the Voice of America, Professor Shumet Shishagne asserted that it would be inappropriate to criticize Menelik's decision in light of the political and military realities on the ground. He noted that prominent Eritrean nobles, including *Dejazmach* Debeb Araya of Akale Guzai and *Dejazmach* Sebhat, submitted to Italian authority within a few months of Emperor Yohannes's death at the Battle of Metemma.

Alemseged offers a similar interpretation:

> Having lost their emperor in Metemma, being stricken by a deadly famine and having consumed their energy fighting the Mahdists, the trans-Mereb feudalists posed no serious challenge to the Italian advance. On the contrary, Bahta Hagos of Akele Guzai, Hadgembes of Hamasien and other *Kebessa* [highland Eritrea] as well as *Metahit*

[53] Alemseged, *Identity Jilted*, pp. 22-23.
[54] Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia…*, pp. 71-72.

> agrarian elites collaborated with the Italians for their selfish interests without any demur. [55]

According to this view, many of these elites had already rebelled against Emperor Yohannes before the Italian occupation, making effective resistance unlikely. In light of this complex situation, Menelik opted to conclude the Treaty of Addis Ababa in October 1896, effectively recognizing Italian control over the territories north of the Mereb River.[56] According to Professor Shumet, this decision reflected Menelik's prudence and farsightedness. He argued that had Menelik attempted to pursue the retreating Italian army into Eritrea, Ethiopia's history might have taken a far more disastrous course. Shumet described the decision as follows:

> **አጼ ምኒልክ የኢጣሊያንን ወደ ደጋው መምጣት የተቀበሉት ሁኔታው ሊመለስ ከማይችልበት ደረጃ ካለፈ በኋላ ነበር።።**[57]
>
> Emperor Menelik accepted the Italians' advance toward the highlands after the situation had reached a point of no return.

The victory of Adwa carried profound implications both nationally and internationally.[58] Domestically, Adwa instilled a sense of independence and self-confidence among Ethiopians. Internationally, it challenged Eurocentric narratives and demonstrated that Africa has a history and capable leaders. Adwa became a symbol of Pan-Africanism and black dignity, inspiring many African nations to adopt Ethiopia's tricolor flag. [59]

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[55] Alemseged, *Identity Jilted….,* pp. 22-23.

[56] Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*…, pp. 83-4.

[57] Shumet Sishagne and Gebrekidan Desta, "Interview on VOA," YouTube video, October 20, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2FKlbUUEsU&list=PPSV.

[58] Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*…, pp. 83-4.

[59] Shumet Sishagne and Gebrekidan Desta, "Interview on VOA," YouTube video, October 20, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2FKlbUUEsU&list=PPSV; Teshale Tibebu, "Interview on ESAT," YouTube video, February 23, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPjHD6OJ7Vg&list=PPSV.

Ethiopians from diverse backgrounds united at Adwa, transcending parochial divisions for a shared cause. Alemseged noted that "wars can serve as crucibles for a collective sense of [national] identity".[60] Thus, Adwa's legacy offers a powerful tool for fostering unity and Ethiopian nationalism.[61] However, instead of using this true historical achievement effective for nation-building, the tenth-grade (1980) history textbook narratives fostered strife, discord and contempt. As Tekeste observed:

> The view of the authors on Ethiopian history and society is that of shame, contempt and disgust. Even the battles of Dogali and Adwa are presented in a manner that tended to blame Ethiopian ruling classes for the continued presence of the Italians in Eritrea.[62]

Ethiopian history offers numerous figures deserving of heroic recognition. Teaching about these heroes could cultivate mutual respect and nationalism. Yet, Marxist historians avoided celebrating figures from the feudal past, impeding social cohesion and nation-building. Emperor Menelik II, a military genius of the 19th century, is a prime example. Textbooks unjustly depicted him as sluggish, ignoring his crucial role in Adwa's victory. Nevertheless, balanced historical accounts acknowledge Menelik's extraordinary leadership and the people's determination as key factors to Adwa's success. Professional historians such as Bahru, Shumet, and BeaureGard praise Menelik's extraordinary achievements in military, political, and diplomatic domains. Hence, the victory of Adwa, inseparable from Menelik's pinnacle leadership, remains a testament to Ethiopia's stamina and unity.[63]

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[60] Alemseged, *Identity Jilted…*, p. 189.
[61] Girma, "Adwa in Ethiopia's….", p. 115.
[62] Tekeste, *The Crisis of Ethiopian Education…*, pp. 63-64.
[63] Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia…*, pp. 83-85; Erving E. Beauregard, "Menelik II: Another Look," *Transafrican Journal of History* 5, no. 2 (1976): 21–31; Shumet Sishagn, "The Genius of Adwa: Menelik II,

The world was dominated by imperialist powers by the end of the 19th century. The African continent was under the control of European powers, and much of Asia, including India, was subjected to European colonialism. This was a world in which white power prevailed, fostering the myth that Black people were created to serve whites.[64] Europeans argued that Africans had no history and were incapable of making it. The victory at Adwa, therefore, essentially shattered a myth perpetuated by European colonialists. It is valid to argue that Adwa marked the beginning of African independence and the emancipation of the Black race. The secret behind this historic triumph was the Ethiopian leadership's ability to mobilize a diverse population around a shared national identity. At Adwa, people from different linguistic and ethnic communities came together in unity. They recognized the common threat of colonial destruction and refused to divide themselves into tribes or clans. Instead, they marched as Ethiopians.[65]

Every Black American became internationally minded following the Battle of Adwa. As soon as news of the victory spread, it was Black communities who most actively congregated around it. What did it mean for the Black race? They saw it as redemption, as the beginning of liberation. Many Black organizations were formed in its aftermath. The Battle of Adwa proved that Africans have history, and that they were capable of defeating a well-organized white army. The implications for racial pride and consciousness were profound. Many around the world drew strength from the victory. As Shumet remarks:

> If Ethiopians are to have greater courage and self-confidence, they must cultivate this true achievement. Many established false myths and

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Consensus Builder and Master Mobilizer," in *Proceedings of the Adwa Victory Centenary Conference* (Michigan State University, 1996), p. 4.

[64] Shumet Sishagne, "Interview on Amhara Media Corporation," YouTube video, March 15, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1RaZilKUco&list=PPSV.

[65] Ibid.

> legends in order to create strength and self-confidence. In our case we are ignoring the real achieved victories that would give greater strength and stamina and resilience.[66]

5.3.4 Contemptuous Explanations

The texts were filled with a series of slanders and contemptuous explanations. Especially, the last two chapters of grade tenth history text were overwhelmed by insults and disrespectful words. The main targets of such verbal assaults were the feudal system, Emperor Haile-Selassie, and other elites and rival political organizations. Let us quote a few sentences from the 1980 grade 10th history text. Please note that the emphases are added by the researcher.

- "Haile Selassie was *a feudal Mussolini, aspiring to be a demigod*." (p. 251)
- "The members of the ruling feudal aristocracy were a collection of *lazy, ignorant and arrogant* lot. The burden of satisfying their extravagant life was placed at the shoulder of the broad Ethiopian masses, particularly at the toiling peasant masses" (pp. 263-4)
- "The Ethiopian teachers rose up against the *rotten* feudo-bourgeois system. Likewise the Ethiopian students who have been exposing the *decadent* feudo-bourgeois system to the progressive and democratic forces of the world took their politics to the street." (p. 282)
- "Haile Selassie was made to be seen not in his angelic garb but for what he really was: *a common thief and a common criminal*." (p. 286)
- "Elements of the bourgeoisie, the petty-bourgeoisie, the working class and *lumpen* proletariat emerged as a result of the coming of imperialism to Ethiopia." (p. 272)
- "The struggle of the oppressed masses waged after the war persisted against black oppressors and exploiters who were equally *diabolic* in their unmitigated subjugation of the exploited peasantry ….." (p. 259)
- "The *anti-people and fascist organization*, EDU, began attacking the Ethiopian revolution in the areas of Mettema, Abderaffi and Humera from the Sudan." (p. 311)

[66] Ibid.

As noted earlier, the textbook writer/s vilified the feudal elite in general and Emperor Haile Selassie I in particular, through a series of defamatory statements. They portrayed the Emperor as if he had no any positive achievement. All the paragraphs dedicated to him were filled with slanderous accusations and biased interpretations. Like any individual, the Emperor had both strengths and weaknesses. It is the historian's responsibility to present these facts objectively to students, allowing them to form reasoned judgments after engaging with multiple historical sources. This is what the academic discipline of history requires. As Carr asserted "historians are not judges".[67] It is unreasonable to evaluate past societies and individuals using contemporary moral standards. Similarly, Von Ranke stated that:

> The main task of the historian became to find out why people acted as they did by stepping into their shoes, by seeing the world through their eyes and as far as possible by judging it by their standards.[68]

In historical narratives, in fact, Emperor Haile Selassie's image has been portrayed in contending representations. Perceptions on his personality and political life vary widely. Some regarded him as a caring and loving father, a transformative leader, a modernizer of Ethiopia, and the father of African unity. Others, in contrast, viewed him as a tyrant, a selfish ruler, or even a thief. The task of history educators is, therefore, a valid and objective representation of the period and the Emperor using authentic historical accounts. As Bahru observes:

> **በአመለካከት ደረጃ አጼ ኃ/ሥላሴ ለአንዳንዶች ጭራቅ፤ ለአንዳንዶች ደግሞ መልአክ ናቸው፡፡ ግን ሰውየው ጭራቅም መልአክም አልነበሩም፡፡ ሰው ናቸው፡፡ እንደ ሰው ነው በሚዛናዊነት መገምገም ያለባቸው፡፡ በታሪክ አጻጻፍ ሂደት ውስጥ ሚዛናዊነት**

[67] Carr, *What Is History?*, p. 126.
[68] Tosh, *The Pursuit of History…*, p. 8.

> በጣም አስፈላጊ ነው። ዳኛ ግራና ቀኙን አይቶ እንደሚፈርድ ሁሉ የታሪክ ጸሓፊም እንደዚያ ሚዛናዊ መሆን አለበት።[69]
>
> Perceptually, Emperor Haile Selassie is viewed by some as a demon and by others as an angel. Yet, he was neither; he was a human being who must be assessed objectively. In interpreting history, impartiality is vital. Just as a judge evaluates both sides before making a decision, a historian must also strive for objectivity.

Emperor Haile-Selassie rose to power in the early 1930s during a period of significant internal and external challenges. The Emperor introduced reforms aimed at modernizing the country. His contributions to expanding and improving modern education are indisputable. He established and strengthened government institutions such as the police, army, civil aviation, telecommunications, and ministerial offices to enhance governance system.[70] He also played a pivotal role in promoting Pan-Africanism, working towards the unification of the African continent. He condemned apartheid and supported the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, while also actively contributing to the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963.[71] As his age deteriorated in the 1970s, his reign faced challenges, culminating in his overthrow during the 1974 popular revolution. These contributions of the Emperor to Ethiopia and the African continent cannot be disregarded.[72]

In general, history textbooks should not serve as tools for spreading insults, hatred, or negative sentiments. Any kind of filthy communication has a negative consequence. Students can learn nothing from hatred but develop negative attitude toward others. Needless to say, cursing the

[69] Bahru Zewde, "Ethiopian Historiography: Developments and Challenges," public presentation on Andafta, YouTube, January 10, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0urq3XlufhI&list=PPSV.
[70] Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, p. 73.
[71] Teshale, *Interview on ESAT*, 2019.
[72] Informants: Mustefa Seid, Gashaw Abate, Yiheyis Ferede, and Azaze Alemu.

past and developing negative attitudes are not the purposes of history teaching. They have no any relevance to the real goal of education too. But, the textbooks under discussion, contrary to the purpose of education and the values of disciplinary historical knowledge, reflected a series of vilifications and contemptuous explanations against the past individuals and institutions, which have no any significance to the development of students' personality and national unity.

5.3.5 Selective Exclusion of Historical Facts

One of the primary limitations of the texts is the selective inclusion and exclusion of narratives. The authors incorporated narratives that aligned with the government's political ideology while selectively ignoring significant narratives and facts of Ethiopian history that were perceived to support the feudal society. The positive achievements of the pre-1974 Ethiopian governments were either overlooked or deliberately ignored. This included the progressive reforms and modernization efforts initiated by Ethiopian rulers since the 1850s. The authors failed to recognize or acknowledge the modernization projects undertaken by Emperor Tewodros II and Emperor Menelik II. They also disregarded the socio-economic developments made during the post-liberation period under Emperor Haile Selassie, depicting these periods negatively due to their feudo-phobia, an extreme and irrational fear and hatred of the feudal system.

For instance, in the grade ten history textbook, the writer/s dismissed all positive achievements, depicting the Ethiopian ruling class as having "an absolute contempt and hatred for knowledge and technical skills", and condemning them for ostracizing and oppressing artisans and craft workers. [73] However, this description contradicts the historical reality. Feudal rulers such as Emperor Tewodros II, Menelik II, and Haile Selassie were known for their commitment to the

[73] Ministry of Education, *History Student Textbook for Grade 10*, (1980), p. 246.

expansion of knowledge and modernization. These leaders proved their dedication through tangible actions.

The primary cause of the Ethio-British war of 1868 was Emperor Tewodros's request for the introduction of European knowledge, particularly technical skills and crafts, to manufacture modern arms. Tewodros succeeded in producing weapons at Gafat with the assistance of European prisoners. He also established a training school at Gafat, near Debre Tabor, to provide Ethiopians with literary and technical skills.[74] However, the textbook authors abandoned these crucial facts. The historical factors leading to the Battle of Maqdala were excluded, with the narration jumping directly to the event itself, despite cause-and-effect analysis being fundamental to professional historiography.

Similarly, Emperor Menelik II made remarkable efforts to modernize Ethiopia by introducing modern technologies, ideas, and practices from abroad. Yet, the textbook writers failed to acknowledge these contributions. They tried to appeal that modernization efforts such as the establishment of modern education, healthcare systems, transportation infrastructure, the issuance and minting of currency, and the banking system were solely aimed at consolidating absolutism and the feudal system in Ethiopia.[75]

The tenth-grade textbook also excluded the post-liberation period of Ethiopian history (1941–1974), a time of significant socio-economic and political developments. This era witnessed key events, such as the restoration of Ogaden, the federation and subsequent union of Eritrea with Ethiopia, and peasant uprisings in various regions. These events have profoundly shaped the character of contemporary Ethiopian society and state. However, the textbook ignored these

[74] Bahru, *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, p. 34.
[75] MoE, *History Student Text for Grade 10*, 1980, p. 243.

developments for obvious reasons. Consequently, Ethiopian students were denied the opportunity to learn these critical aspects of their history, since grade 10 marked the end of Ethiopian history courses at the secondary school level.

At all levels of secondary education, religious identities are not given due attention. The 1974 Ethiopian Revolution marked the formal separation of church and state, and the Derg regime openly criticized the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC), accusing it of playing a central role in consolidating Ethiopia's feudal system.[76] However, the introduction of Christianity in the 4th century AD and Islam in the 7th century AD had a profound and lasting impact on the course of Ethiopian history. Both religious institutions have contributed, positively and negatively, to shaping the country's past and therefore cannot be disregarded. For instance, the religious rivalries of the sixteenth century significantly influenced the evolution of Ethiopian society, fostering intermingling among different communities. In particular, the EOTC exerted substantial influence over state affairs. Nevertheless, the Derg removed the contents related to church-state relations and the broader history of religious institutions from the curriculum. One government document produced in 1984 E.C. states:

> **በጥንታዊት ኢትዮጵያ የትምህርት ሥርዓት በቤተክህነትና በቤተመስጊድ ተዋቅሮ ይካሄድ የነበረ ሲሆን፣ ፊውዳሎች ሰፊውን ህዝብ በሃይማኖት አደንዝዞ ለመግዛት በሰፊው ሲጠቀሙበት ኖረዋል፡፡ የቤተክህነቱም ይሁን የቤተመስጊድ ትምህርት ሠፊው ህዝብ ለስርዓቱ ተገዥ እንዲሆን የማድረግና ያለፈውን ቅርስ እንዳለ አቆይቶ ለመጭው ትውልድ**

[76] Abbas Haji Gnamo, "Islam, the Orthodox Church and Oromo Nationalism (Ethiopia)," *Cahiers d'Études africaines* 165, no. 42/1 (2002), p. 105.

> **የማስተላለፍ ዓላማ ስላልነበራቸው የወጣቱን የፈጠራ ችሎታ የሚያዳብሩ አልነበሩም።**[77]
>
> In ancient Ethiopia, the education system was centered on the church and the mosque. Feudal lords widely used religion to control and dominate the broader population. Both the church-based and mosque-based education aimed to make the masses obedient to the system. While they treated past heritage as fixed and unchangeable, they did not aim to preserve it with the intention of passing it to future generations. As such, they did not cultivate or encourage the creative potential of the youth.

This vividly demonstrates the Derg's ideological stand toward religious institutions. Derg officials viewed these institutions, particularly Christianity and Islam, primarily as instruments of feudal domination and exploitation in Ethiopian history. As a result, rather than presenting a balanced account of Ethiopia's long-standing state–church relations and the treatment of other religious identities, the curriculum excluded the multifaceted roles of religious institutions in literacy, cultural transmission, governance, and state formation from the teaching of Ethiopian history. Needless to say, the Grade 9 history text contains a few paragraphs on the sixteenth-century religious conflict between Catholicism and Ethiopian Orthodoxy during the reign of Emperor Susenyos (1607–1632).[78]

Yet, the negative attitude of the writers toward religious institutions and leaders, especially the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church (EOTC), is most clearly expressed in the following excerpt from the Grade 9 history text:

[77] MoE, *The Historical Development of Modern Education in Ethiopia*, p. 14.
[78] MoE, *History for Grade 9* (1980), pp. 92-3.

> The behavior of the Ethiopian bishops at this time had certainly been quite enough to justify a reformation of some kind; corruption, rape and adultery were well known public scandals.[79]

This representation illustrates two points. First, it reveals the text writers' lopsided view of religious institutions. Second, it shows how historical narratives were shaped to conform to revolutionary ideology, leading to the systematic exclusion of religious identities and interactions from Ethiopian secondary school textbooks.

5.3.6 Deliberate Historical Distortions

One of the most misrepresented events in the tenth-grade history textbook is the Second Italo-Ethiopian War (1935–41). This conflict had both international and national significance. Internationally, it played a crucial role in world history, with some historians linking its outbreak to the origins of the Second World War. For example, Henig argue that the international community's failure to deter the Italian aggression contributed to the escalation of global conflict leading to World War II.[80] Ethiopia, therefore, became a central symbol of the global anti-fascist struggle, being the first country to wage this fight. Nationally, the war carried diverse meanings for Ethiopians. The Ethiopian patriots fought a challenging war against the enemy with outdated weapons. The fascist Italian army, seeking to avenge its defeat at Adwa, invaded Ethiopia with well-prepared military forces. Moreover, Ethiopia faced leadership challenges, as the patriots fought without centralized military command after the Emperor had left the country with his family and close companions. Despite these adversities, including brutal assaults by the enemy and the Emperor's exile, Ethiopian patriots endured in their resistance.

[79] Ibid., p. 93.
[80] Ruth Henig, *The Origins of the Second World War, 1933–1941* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 82-91.

Similar to the victory of Adwa, the five-year resistance is a significant historical theme for history educators, emphasizing a shared history. During these years, the patriots demonstrated resilience and unity, enduring collective hardships such as afflictions, imprisonment, and mass killings. They shared the burden of suffering regardless of cultural differences and ultimately triumphed over a common enemy. Bahru argued that the history of the five-year anti-fascist struggle could serve as a powerful tool for teaching Ethiopian youth the values of togetherness and national integrity.[81]

However, textbook author/s missed this opportunity, presenting the event in a complex and ambiguous manner filled with distortions and defamatory representations of resistance leaders. Rather than honoring the patriots' sacrifices, the textbook authors criticized them for their alleged affiliation with the feudal ruling class. The resistance's achievements were not appreciated in the textbook, and the patriots' devotion went largely unrecognized.

The textbook divided Ethiopians into three groups during the resistance: the peasant masses, the feudal ruling class who organized guerrilla movements, and the exiles. The peasant masses, central to Marxist historical narratives, received extensive recognition in the text for their fierce and patriotic efforts against the enemy.[82]. However, the elite forces, who organized guerilla movements and made significant sacrifices, were not given due consideration in the text. The ruling class made considerable sacrifices during the Italian occupation. Numerous patriots from this group played leading roles in organizing and mobilizing guerrilla units, and they fought persistently against the enemy in their respective regions throughout the five-year resistance. However, this historical reality was largely unacknowledged by the textbook authors. Instead,

[81] Bahru Zewde, "The Vexed Questions of Identity in Ethiopia: A Historical Perspective," STIAS Public Webinar Series, YouTube, October 25, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hyBdM_3P528&list=PPSV.
[82] MoE, *History Student Text for Grade 10*, 1980, p. 258.

they presented a distorted and imbalanced portrayal in which the patriots were depicted as having fought primarily for "personal profit and material gain."[83]

In response to such misrepresentations, Birhanu and Tegegne, in their 1985 evaluation of the textbook, offered the following critique:

> **ከገዥው መደብ አካባቢ ከፍተኛ ስልጣን የነበራቸው እስከ ድል ድረስ የተዋጉና ኋላ ጀግኖች የተባሉ ስላሉ ማጠቃለሉ ትክክል አይደለም።።**
>
> It is inappropriate to make a generalization, since there were individuals from the ruling class who held high positions, fought until victory was achieved, and were later referred to as 'patriots'.[84]

The efforts of the third group, the exiles, including the Emperor, were also denigrated to a greater degree. The textbook referred to them as "traitors" and "absconders".[85] Yet, the fact is that their diplomatic efforts, particularly the Emperor's, were crucial. The Emperor's speech at the League of Nations, his interviews with the BBC, and successful diplomatic campaigns resulted in the British military support, which was indispensable in Ethiopia's triumph in 1941.[86] The Emperor's return to Addis Ababa on May 5, 1941 (*Miazia* 27, 1933 E.C.), alongside the British forces and Ethiopian patriots, marked a historic triumph. Although *Miazia* 27 (May 5) was celebrated as Victory Day during the Imperial period, it was replaced by *Megabit* 28 (April 6) during the Derg era, reflecting clear political biases.

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[83] Ibid., pp. 257-8.

[84] Ministry of Education, *የሁለተኛ ደረጃ የተማሪው መጽሐፍ ግምገማ ሪፖርት (Secondary School Student Textbook Evaluation Report)*, vol. 1, no. 4 (Addis Ababa, 1985), p. 121.

[85] MOE, *History Student Text for Grade 10*, 1980, pp. 257-58.

[86] Teshale Tibebu, "Interview on ESAT," YouTube video, February 23, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sPjHD6OJ7Vg&list=PPSV.

Furthermore, the presentation of the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution and its aftermath in the textbook suffered from significant distortions. The text portrayed political organizations such as EPRP, EDU, TPLF, and EPLF subjectively, labeling them as "counter-revolutionaries".[87] It condemned key figures like Aman Andom, Atinafu Abate, and Sisay Habte as "enemies of the revolution," reflecting political rather than historical narratives.[88] Aman, for instance, an Eritrean-born general, was notable for his attempts at peaceful reconciliation in Eritrea. Scholars including Okbazghi, Markakis, Mesfin, Keller, and Henze have emphasized Aman's pivotal role in advocating administrative reforms and political solutions, in contrast to Mengistu's focus on pursuing military action. Historical accounts testified that Aman's assassination marked the end of peaceful negotiations, intensifying the Eritrean insurgency and solidifying irreconcilable positions on the Eritrean question.[89]

Many nations honor their historical figures, patriots, and national icons. Unfortunately, Ethiopia is perhaps the only country that has undermined and humiliated its own patriots. We failed to provide the respect and recognition that these patriots deserved, particularly in our educational materials. The treatment of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War (1936–41) and the 1974 Revolution in textbooks prioritized political agendas over objective historical analysis, disregarding the

[87] MoE, History Student Text for Grade 10, 1980, pp. 262-322.
[88] Ibid.
[89] Edmond J. Keller, "Drought, War, and the Politics of Famine in Ethiopia and Eritrea," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 30, no. 4 (1992): 609–624; John Markakis, "The Nationalist Revolution in Eritrea," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 26, no. 1 (1988), pp. 51–70; Mesfin Araya, "The Eritrean Question: An Alternative Explanation," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 28, no. 1 (March 1990), pp. 79–100; Paul Henze, *Rebels and Separatists in Ethiopia: Regional Resistance to a Marxist Regime* (Santa Monica: RAND Corporation, 1985); Okbazghi Yohannes, "The Eritrean Question: A Colonial Case?" *Journal of Modern African Studies* 25, no. 4 (December 1987), pp. 643–68.

nuanced contributions and sacrifices of Ethiopian patriotic leaders. As Tekeste noted, the tenth-grade history textbook aligned more with political education than historical reality.[90]

In sum, the first attempt to prepare teaching notes for Ethiopian history in secondary schools was made in 1952 by Charles Isaac. Prior to this, Ethiopian history was entirely absent from the curriculum, which was dominated by Western content that had little relevance to Ethiopia's historical and cultural context. Subsequent efforts by scholars such as Patrick Gilkes and Richard Pankhurst to produce Ethiopian history teaching materials emerged only after the introduction of the 1967 curriculum. However, these initiatives were short-lived, as the Derg regime rejected the materials following the 1974 revolution, claiming they did not align with its socialist ideology. As a result, Ethiopian history was significantly marginalized in the secondary school curriculum. It was taught only in Grades 9 and 10, and completely excluded from Grades 11 and 12 during the Derg period.

This neglect of national history stood in sharp contrast to the official rhetoric of both the imperial and Derg regimes, which emphasized unity, centralization, and a shared Ethiopian identity. Government publications actively promoted the ideology of a greater Ethiopia, stressing national unity and peaceful coexistence. However, the education system, particularly the teaching of history, failed to reflect these ideals, revealing a clear contradiction between political ideology and educational practice. At the same time, many history syllabi and textbooks were constructed to serve the ideological interests of the ruling elite, prioritizing content that legitimized their control of political power. This pattern illustrates how successive Ethiopian regimes prioritized

[90] Tekeste, *The Crisis of Ethiopian Education*, p. 66.

their political and economic dominance over the educational and cultural well-being of the nation and its people.

CHAPTER SIX

ETHNO-NATIONALIST IDEOLOGY AND THE TEACHING OF ETHIOPIAN HISTORY IN THE POST-1991 ORDER

6.1 The Rise of Ethnic Identity Politics and Its Impact on the Secondary School History Curriculum

From the late 1950s, Ethiopian state policy promoted a unitary national identity in which all inhabitants were regarded as Ethiopians. Ethnic issues were rarely acknowledged in official contexts. Rooted in the ideology of Ethiopianism, this approach framed nationalism as a cultivated virtue, unity as an essential necessity, and tribal sentiment as a threat to be suppressed in order to prevent separatism and discord. It asserted a shared history and strongly promoted Ethiopian nationalism. Multiple identities were expressed only slightly. A common language, history, and culture were heavily emphasized. Ethiopianism thus embodied an outlook that transcended personal, tribal, and regional loyalties, resting on the belief in an ancient and continuous state spanning three thousand years of shared history. In this narrative, regional identity was considered more important than ethnic identity, and the unity of the Ethiopian state was paramount.[1]

By the 1960s, however, this long-standing political culture came under sustained challenge from emerging political movements. The Ethiopian student movement emerged as a transformative force, targeting the monarchy with slogans "land to the tiller," "national equality," and "social justice." Over time, its demands evolved to focus on class, identity politics, and self-

[1] Balsvik, *Haile Sellasie's Students……*, pp. 44-7; Messay, "The Roots and Fallouts ….", pp. 6-8.

determination, shaped by a growing historical consciousness. The ideas of the student movement would later influence the political destiny of the country, with many of its concepts and contentious issues incorporated into the 1995 constitution and serving as pillars of the post-1991 political order. Internal divisions arose within the students as radical factions pursued incompatible strategies, leading to factionalism and sectarianism. The politicization of ethnic identities found its roots in these debates.[2] A 1970 issue of *Struggle* captured this shift, declaring:

> Whether they be [Oromos], Amharas, Tegreans, [Wolaitas], [Gumuzs], Muslims, or Christians we support the right to self-determination of the Ethiopian people which means that only the popular masses have the right to determine their destiny; that no one, no group, or a combinations of groups, has the right to interfere in their lives, to destroy their institutions, to violate their customs, to repress their languages, to revile their cultures, or to take their lands.[3]

The fall of the military regime and the ascent of the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF)-dominated coalition marked a decisive turning point in Ethiopia's political order. The ethno-nationalist discourse that had emerged in the 1960s reappeared as state ideology after the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) took power in 1991.[4] Ethnicity became a central and preferred principle of political organization, forming the basis of the new federal system. Ethnic groups established their own political organizations, while the TPLF-dominated EPRDF government institutionalized ethnicity as the organizing framework for decentralization.[5] This reflected a broader African pattern in which ethnic identity served as a

[2] Ibid.

[3] USUAA, ታግል (Struggle), A Quarterly Magazine, Printed by the Under-Ground Revolutionary Press, Addis Ababa, May 1970, p. 84.

[4] Abbink, "History Education…", p. 16.

[5] Toggia, "History Writing…", pp. 323-338; Marzagora, "History in the Twentieth Century….", p. 439.

powerful tool for political mobilization.[6] Under the EPRDF, it became the ideological foundation of political and administrative structures, formally enshrined in the 1995 Federal Constitution. The late Meles Zenawi, the coalition's most prominent leader, openly questioned the concept of a unified Ethiopian national identity, advocating instead a politics rooted in ethnicity. His ideological stand was encapsulated in his controversial 1992 statement:

> The Tigreans had Axum, but what could that mean to the Gurague? The Agew had Lalibela, but what could that mean to the Oromo? The Gonderes had castles, but what could that mean to the Wolaita?[7]

This shift marked a deliberate break from the long-dominant Ethiopian-nationalist tradition. It replaced the prolonged Pan-Ethiopian narrative with a constitutionally anchored ethno-federal order that reimagined Ethiopia as a union of autonomous ethnic entities rather than a single national state.[8] This ideological transformation had a profound impact on the education system, particularly on the teaching of Ethiopian history. The post-1991 history curriculum adopted a new historiographical approach aligned with the government's political ideology, presenting a multinational state narrative. The government asserted that Ethiopia is home to diverse nations and nationalities and that there is no single national identity.[9] The secondary school history curriculum was required to reflect this new political orientation. Consequently, the 1998 secondary school history syllabus included the following statement as one of the main purposes of history education: the principal goal of learning history was defined as to "*acquire an*

[6] Tegegne, "Amhara Ethnicity*…"*, p. 82; Sisay and Engday, "Teaching History…..", pp. 49-50.
[7] Abbink, "History Education*……"*, pp. 6-7.
[8] Mohammed Girma, "Cultural Politics and Education in Ethiopia: A Search for A Viable Indigenous Legend," in *Journal of Politics and Law*, Vol. 5, No. 1, (March 2012), P. 119; Clapham, *Rewriting Ethiopian History*, pp. 43-45.
[9] Tesfaye Aaron, "Identity Politics, Citizenship, and Democratization in Ethiopia", *International Journal of Ethiopian Studies*, Vol. 2, No. ½ (Summer/Fall 2005-2006), p. 58.

objective and balanced picture of the historical paths their country has travelled to become a modern multi-national state." [10]

Additional specific objectives in the 1998 syllabus for teaching Ethiopian history included the following:

- Point out that different autonomous states existed in the Ethiopian region before the formation of the modern Ethiopian empire;
- Make a short analysis of politics, economy, culture, and society in the autonomous states; and
- Discuss the various peoples found in Ethiopia and the conditions of their lives.[11]

Table 19: Ethiopian History Content in Secondary School History Textbooks Reflecting Ethnicized Discourse of the Post-1991 Period

Grade	Unit No.	Unit Title	Pages
Grade 9	Unit One	Emergence of States and Peoples and Languages of Ethiopia and Africa	pp. 6-25
	Unit Three	States in the Ethiopian Region and the Horn of Africa up to 1529	pp. 58-77
	Unit Five	Inter-State Conflicts in the Horn of Africa and the Oromo Population Movement	pp. 99–116
	Unit Six	The Christian Kingdom and Peoples and States in the Rest of the Ethiopian Region (1543-1855)	pp. 117-142
Grade 11	Unit Seven	The Ethiopian Region and Horn of Africa Up To 1529	pp. 148–173

[10] MoE, *History Syllabus for Ethiopian Secondary Schools*, 1998, p. 2.
[11] MoE, *History Syllabus for Grade 12*, 2001, p. 5.

	Unit Eight	Major Events in the Sixteenth Century Ethiopian Region and the Horn of Africa and their Impacts	pp. 174–200
	Unit Nine	The Ethiopian Christian Highland Kingdom (1543-1855)	201-227
Grade 12	Unit One	States and Peoples of the Southern Ethiopia in the 19th Century	pp. 2-20

Source: Ministry of Education, *History Student Text for Grade 9,* 2005; *History Student Text for Grade 11,* 2006; *History Student Text for Grade 12,* 2006.

The Grade 9 history textbook (2005) begins by engaging with the complex and politically charged concepts of "nations" and "nationalities." The first chapter, titled *Peoples and Languages of Ethiopia and the Horn* (pp. 15–26), clearly reflects the political interests of the post-1991 government. It attempts to define vague terms such as "nation" and "nationality" and to describe early societal formations like clans and tribes.[12] However, the textbook does not provide precise definitions or clearly distinguish between nation and nationality. Instead, it lists Ethiopia's diverse nations, nationalities, and languages. The chapter concludes with a politicized assertion emphasizing the protection of the rights of these groups as guaranteed by the 1995 Constitution. The conclusion of the first chapter states:

> Ethiopia is a multi-national state. The nations and nationalities of the country speak a variety of languages and practice diverse cultures. They have lived side by side, interacting with each other. They have had many common experiences, including the class oppression they have suffered. But very recently, conditions have begun to change, and the national oppression has started to fade away. In particular, the democratic changes which are introduced to Ethiopia after 1991

[12] MoE, *History Student Text for Grade 9,* 2005, pp. 15-26.

> have ensured the equality of the nations and nationalities of the country. This and other rights are guaranteed by the Ethiopian federal constitution of 1995.[13]

In addition, as shown above in the table, the textbooks contain titles such as *States and Peoples in the Ethiopian Region, States and Peoples in Southern Ethiopia, and Inter-State Conflicts in the Horn of Africa*. The textbooks give only superficial treatment to various southern and western polities, such as Kaffa, Wolayta, Yem, Sheka, Hadya, the Harar Emirate, the Gibe states (Jimma, Limu-Enarya, Gera, Gomma, Gumma), the Shiekdoms of Asosa, Beneshangul, and Komosha, Muslim states like Dahlak, Showa, Ifat, Fatagar, Dawaro, Adal, Bizamo, Gafat, Damot, and others.[14] The most serious challenge in addressing these polities is the lack of documented historical data.[15] Without sufficient sources, the texts present the region as if there were no peaceful or mutual coexistence among these states. They also suggest that these states enjoyed absolute internal autonomy before their incorporation to the Ethiopian empire in the second half of the twentieth century.

The texts contain little to no discussion of a center-periphery relationship between the Ethiopian central government and the regional states. Moreover, they offer scant evidence of mutual coexistence or peaceful relations through intermarriages, economic ties, or other socio-political interactions. Notably, half of the chapters in both textbooks are devoted to the ancient and medieval periods, providing a comprehensive exploration of Ethiopia's diverse ethnic and linguistic groups, each with its own distinctive historical identity.

This fragmented representation attempts to undermine Ethiopia's long history of mutualism by portraying different Ethiopian polities as alien to one another. This approach is evident in the

[13] MoE, *History Grade 9 Student's Textbook*, (2005), p. 21.
[14] MoE, *History Student Text Grade 12, Revised Edition* (2006), pp. 2-13.
[15] Informants: Negus Ali, Workayehu Getahun, Henok Ahmed, and Minale Geremew.

Grade 11 history curriculum in its treatment of the ancient Ethiopian kingdoms. The textbook categorizes the causes of the decline of the Aksumite Kingdom and the Zagwe Dynasty into internal and external factors. In the case of Aksum, the invasion of Muslim Arabs via the Red Sea coast is identified as an external cause, while the rebellion of the Beja people is presented as an internal factor contributing to the kingdom's decline in the seventh century AD. The Aksumite case is relatively clear, as the Muslim Arabs were unquestionably external forces that contributed to the decline and eventual collapse of the Aksumite Kingdom. Following the loss of access to the Red Sea, the Aksumite economy rapidly declined, which in turn facilitated the deterioration of its military power. This narration enabled students to clearly grasp the distinction between internal and external factors.

The treatment of the Zagwe Dynasty, however, is conceptually confusing and analytically inconsistent. The same textbook categorizes opposition from Tigrayan and Amhara rulers as an external cause of the Zagwe Dynasty's decline in the thirteenth century AD, while power struggles within the Agaw ruling class are identified as an internal factor.[16] This distinction doesn't represent the historical reality in the Ethiopian context. The Zagwe Dynasty governed nearly all the territories formerly controlled by the Aksumite Kingdom, including regions inhabited by both Tigrean and Amhara populations. As such, Tigray, Amhara, and Lasta existed within a shared geographic and political space under Agaw rule, rather than as separate sovereign entities.[17] By labeling opposition from Tigrayan and Amhara elites and religious leaders as an external factor, the textbook encourages students to perceive these regions as historically independent and external to the Ethiopian body politic.

[16] MoE, *History Student Textbook for Grade 11* (2005), p. 105.

[17] Bahru Zewde, *A Short History of Ethiopia and the Horn* (Addis Ababa: Department of History, Addis Ababa University, 1998), pp. 55.

This form of representation may appear worthwhile from an ethnocentric perspective and may serve contemporary ideological narratives. From an academic standpoint, however, conflicts among regions operating within the same politico-geographical framework cannot be equated with genuinely external factors, such as the invasion of Muslim Arabs who originated outside the Ethiopian political and territorial landscape. Treating intra-state conflicts as external causes, therefore, constitutes a historical distortion that undermines a coherent understanding of the Ethiopian past. This is because different peoples and polities coexisted in close proximity and interacted under both peaceful and hostile conditions.

It is also worth noting that the textbook's treatment of the Solomonic Dynasty exemplifies the regime's ethnicized narrative approach. As noted above, the Zagwe dynasty's decline is described as resulting from opposition by both the Tigray and Amhara regions. In Tigray, the clergy of the Churches of Aksum and Debre Damo played a key role in initiating resistance against the Agaw rulers by invoking the legend of the Queen of Sheba. According to this legend, all Christian Ethiopian kings must trace their lineage to Menelik I, the son of King Solomon of Israel and the Queen of Sheba, traditionally regarded as Ethiopia's queen. Since the Zagwe kings could not claim descent from Menelik I, they were portrayed as illegitimate successors to the ancient Aksumite throne. The promotion of this legend aimed to restore the ancient Aksumite dynasty. Despite opposition from Tigray, the textbook emphasizes that the actual initiative and practical effort to overthrow the Zagwe came from the Amhara region, specifically southern Wollo and northern Shewa. The Grade 9 history text explicitly states that the Solomonic dynasty was established in 1270 by "an Amhara chief" and that the Ethiopian rulers who governed until 1974 were entirely Amhara. The text reads:

> An Amhara chief, Yekuno Amlak, organized a movement against the Zagwe rule. He defeated Yetbarek, the last Zagwe king, on the battlefield in 1270 AD…….. Yekuno Amlak and his successors had used this legend as an ideological arm to legitimize their political power, and the tradition of identifying the Christian kings of Ethiopia with ancient Israel continued until 1974.[18]

The term "Solomonic" is usually placed in quotation marks in history texts because the assertion that rulers descended from King Solomon of Israel cannot be proven through historical inquiry. Similarly, there is no historical evidence to confirm whether Yekuno Amlak and his successors belonged to the Amhara ethnic lineage. This issue is beyond the scope of history as a discipline, which cannot conclusively determine the ethnic identity or group origin of a ruler. Such narratives oversimplify the purpose of history education and distort historical realities. The Solomonic rulers did not explicitly identify themselves as belonging to the Amhara or any specific ethnic group.

Scholars such as Bahru argue that Ethiopian political tradition historically emphasized regional and territorial identities rather than ethnic identity. Political authority and social belonging were largely defined by geographical affiliation and allegiance to rulers, whereas ethnic identification played a limited, if any, role in state formation, governance, and inter-state interactions.[19] Ethiopian rulers often spoke Amharic but did not consider themselves Amhara. Moreover, Solomonic monarchs neither necessarily belonged to the Amhara ethnic group nor claimed descent from it.[20] Rather, their legitimacy was based on descent from the Judean line,

[18] MoE, *History Student Text for Grade 9*, 2005, p. 61.

[19] Bahru Zewde, "The Changing Fortunes of the Amharic Language: Lingua Franca or Instrument of Domination?" In *Society, State and History: Selected Essays*, Addis Ababa: Addis Ababa University Press, 2008, p. 83.

[20] Shumet Sishagne, Interview on Amhara Media Corporate, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1RaZilKUco&list=PPSV, March 15, 2023.

specifically, from King Solomon of Israel via the Queen of Sheba, linking their authority to a sacred biblical heritage rather than to any Ethiopian ethnic group.[21] This tradition was formalized in Article 3 of the 1931 Imperial Constitution, which stipulated:

> The law determines that the imperial dignity shall remain perpetually attached to the line of His Majesty Haile Selassie I, descendant of King Sahle Selassie, whose line descends without interruption from the dynasty of Menelik I, son of King Solomon of Jerusalem and the Queen of Ethiopia, known as the Queen of Sheba.[22]

Emperor Haile Selassie's imperial seal also reads:

> **ሞዓ አንበሳ ዘእምነገደ ይሁዳ፣ ቀዳማዊ ኃይለ ሥላሴ ሥዩመ እግዚአብሔር፣ ንጉሠ ነገሥት ዘኢትዮጵያ።**[23]
>
> The Conquering Lion of the Tribe of Judah, His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, Elect of God, King of Kings of Ethiopia.

This shows that the use of ethnic identity for political purposes is a relatively new phenomenon. It is also an emerging trend in the representation of Ethiopian history, both in mainstream discourse and educational materials. Thus, the post-1991 ethno-nationalist discourse on Ethiopian history, prominently reflected in state narratives and curricula, has not been accepted by local or international scholars. Many have critically challenged this ethnic-centered discourse, arguing that it oversimplifies the purpose of history education and distorts Ethiopia's complex historical reality.[24]

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[21] Alemseged, *Identity Jilted…*, pp. 179-80.
[22] The IEG, *The 1931 Constitution*, p. 3.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Informants: Nigus Ali, Kindachew Zeru and Sendek Gelagay.

Shumet, for instance, remarks that Ethiopia's abundant historical records from the Aksumite period reveal a polity composed of diverse linguistic and ethnic groups. Rather than a homogeneous entity, the Aksumite kingdom exemplified a tradition of diversity and political pluralism that has shaped the course of Ethiopia's history. Shumet cautions that contemporary Ethiopian society's over-fixation on ethnicity and tribalism is alien to much of the country's past. Central to the Ethiopian state was always a unifying authority, the Ethiopian emperors, who governed over multiple and varied political communities. In response to ethno-nationalist historians, Shumet advocates for a broad, integrative historical perspective. He uses a powerful metaphor to illustrate the dangers of a narrow nationalist viewpoint:

> **አንዲት ጉንዳን ከዝሆን አንደኛው አካል ላይ ሆና ሌላውኛን የዝሆን አካል ማየት አትችልም። ለእሷ እግሩ ላይ ከሆነች የዚያ ፍጥረት የእግሩ ቅርጽ ብቻ ነው ሊታያት የሚችል። ጆሮው ላይ ከሆነችም ጆሮውን ብቻ ነው ዝሆን ብላ ልትጠራው የምትችል። የታሪክ ፀኃፊ ከላይ ሆኖ ሰፊውን ለማየት መሞከር አለበት። ሁሉንም አካላትና ሁሉንም አካባቢዎች ማየትና መቃኘት መቻል አለበት። ከተወሰነች ጠባብ እይታ ከተነሳ የመሳሳት እድሉ ሰፊ ነው።**[25]
>
> If an ant is on one part of an elephant's body, it cannot see the other part. If it is on the foot, it can only see the shape of the foot of that creature. If it is on the ear, it can only call it an elephant by seeing the ear alone. A historian must rise above and try to see the whole. He/she must be able to see and understand all parts and all contexts. If the viewpoint is limited, the chance of committing an error is high.

This metaphor illustrates a critical methodological point that Ethiopian history must be studied in its entirety, encompassing all regions, peoples, and their interactions, rather than through a

[25] Shumet Sishagne and Gebrekidan Desta, "Interview on VOA," YouTube video, October 20, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2FKlbUUEsU&list=PPSV.

narrow ethno-nationalist lens. Complementing Shumet's position, Getachew Haile, a historian and philologist, critiques the ethno-nationalist emphasis on tribal histories within Ethiopian historiography. He argues that such studies belong more properly to anthropology than to history. Getachew contends that Ethiopian history should be understood as the unified narrative of one nation, not as a fragmented collection of multiple ethnic or regional stories. His position is clearly expressed in his words:

> **ጎሳዎችንና ነገዶችን ነጥሎ ማጥናት የኔ ሳይሆን ጎብረተሰባዊ መዋቅሮችንና ባህሎችን የሚመረምሩ የአንትሮፖሎጂስቶች መስክ ነው፡፡ ለኔ የኢትዮጵያ ታሪክ ያንድ ሀገር፣ ያንድ ሕዝብ፣ ያንድ መንግሥት አንድ ታሪክ እንጂ የየጎሳው ወይም የየክልሉ ታሪክ ጥርቅም ሆኖ አይታየኝም::**[26]
>
> It's not my concern to study clans and tribes in their specific contexts; this is a field for anthropologists who investigate societal structures and cultures. To me, the history of Ethiopia is a history of one nation, one people, [and] one state rather than an assemblage of multiple tribal and regional stories.

This perspective aligns with the broader scholarly consensus that excessive emphasis on ethnic particularism in Ethiopian historiography can undermine national unity and obscure the political and social forces that have long sustained the Ethiopian state. [27] The view advanced by Shumet and Getachew is also supported by a range of scholarly works by foreign researchers. Studies by Paluha and Markakis, for example, show that long-term population movements and the resulting coexistence of diverse groups fostered shared survival strategies and interethnic interactions, and

[26] Getachew Hayle, *Ye-Abba Bahrey Dersetoch* (The Works of Abba Bahrey) (Collegeville, MN: Minnesota, 2002), p. 55.

[27] Messay Kebede, *Ideology and Elite Conflicts: Autopsy of the Ethiopian Revolution* (Dayton University: Philosophy Faculty Publications, 2011), pp. 4-6.

integrations.[28] The adoption of Amharic as a national language from at least the late thirteenth century further reflects this integrative tradition. As the language of administration and the royal court, employed regardless of a ruler's ethnic origin, it was even used by non-Amhara emperors in official documents and diplomacy. Emperor Yohannes IV, for instance, conducted international correspondence and signed treaties with European powers in Amharic, and reportedly addressed legal and court matters with Tigrayans through translators to uphold the tradition. Such linguistic and cultural interactions exemplify the supra-ethnic character of the Ethiopian state, history, and political authority. [29]

Additionally, political marriages among the elite, including between ruling families, reinforced these integrative tendencies by consolidating power and binding regions together. Over time, such interactions weakened rigid ethnic boundaries, fostering shared values and a common historical heritage among Ethiopia's diverse populations.[30] This integrative view is further supported by findings from research symposiums organized by the Ethiopian Historians Association, which have produced numerous studies revealing close historical linkages among Ethiopia's societies. As Bahru, the association's chair, noted, seventeen papers were presented within the first few years after its establishment, all of which consistently showed that Ethiopian societies have historically been connected through trade, intermarriage, political alliances, and cultural as well as linguistic exchanges. Collectively, these findings depict Ethiopia's past as a

[28] Eva Paluha, "Ethnicity and Democracy- A Viable Alliance?", in Mohammed Salih & John Markakis (eds*), Ethnicity and the State in Eastern Africa*, Nordiska Africainstitutet: Stockholm, 1998, pp. 3-7; Mohammed Salih and John Markakis, *Ethnicity and the State* (eds), Nordiska Africainstitutet: Stockholm, (1998), p. 8

[29] Getachew Haile, "Interview on Reyot Media," YouTube video, August 6, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wDnNoLsi2vM&list=PPSV.

[30] Balsvik, *Haile Selassie's Students*…, p. 279.

dynamic, interconnected landscape shaped by the continuous interaction of central and peripheral forces, balancing the authority of the state with the autonomy of its regions over centuries. [31]

Leaving aside the aforementioned historical evidence, the EPRDF enacted a significant historiographical shift from unity to multiplicity in the teaching of Ethiopian history. Before 1991, curricula consistently referred to Ethiopians collectively as "the people of Ethiopia." After 1991, history education deliberately shifted to using plural terms like "peoples," "states," and "histories," reflecting a clear ideological reorientation. This linguistic transformation demonstrated the government's commitment to a political ideology anchored in ethnic nationalism. Textbooks no longer portrayed Ethiopian history as a unified narrative but rather as a complex of distinct peoples with their own unique historical identities. This representation of Ethiopia's past clearly reflects the influence of state ideology in the history curriculum. Teaching multiple ethnic identities in history classes may pose a significant pedagogical challenge, as adequately addressing the histories of Ethiopia's more than eighty ethnic groups within the secondary school curriculum seems impossible.[32]

Certainly, attempts to teach a multinational history were not entirely new in Ethiopian education. The 1980 grade 9 history textbook, for instance, included efforts to address the history of regional kingdoms such as Showa, Sidamo, Kaffa, Wolaita, and the Oromo Gibe kingdoms. While acknowledging the lack of precise historical data, it nonetheless sought to broaden historical perspectives.[33] A multinational narrative was also reflected in the 1987 constitution of the military regime, which recognized Ethiopia as a multinational state whose nationalities and

[31] Bahru Zewde, "Interview on EBC," YouTube video, August 7, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3TowI2ZbofU&list=PPSV.
[32] Informants: Azaje Alemu, Shimeles Lewoye, Haile Muluken, and Birhanu Adugna.
[33] MoE, *History Student Textbook for Grade 9* (1980), pp. 80-88.

diverse communities forged unity through cultural exchange, population movements, commercial ties, and other interactions in both peace and war. It affirmed that Ethiopia's long history of independence was the history of the united existence and common struggle of its nationalities.[34] Notably, an institution dedicated to the study of Ethiopia's nations and nationalities was also established. Although multiculturalism and ethnic issues received some recognition during this period, they did not receive the level of emphasis that has been seen in the post-1991 era.

Unlike the pre-1991 order, the main difference after 1991 is that the EPRDF government manipulated questions of nationality to consolidate political power. This political instrumentalization led to the misuse and distortion of Ethiopian history. Textbook narratives frequently portrayed southern states and peoples as historically isolated, lacking meaningful relations with the central Ethiopian government and other groups. The assertion that these states enjoyed autonomy before the formation of the modern Ethiopian empire implies a distinct and separate historical identity. In this context, "autonomy" refers not only to political independence but also to the existence of a distinctive history separate from the Ethiopian state's dominant narrative. This interpretation of Ethiopian history is wholly unacceptable within professional scholarship. Scholarly critique of post-1991 ethno-nationalist historiography is grounded in comprehensive historical analysis that emphasizes Ethiopia's historical unity within diversity. Such analysis challenges reductive ethnic narratives and promotes the integrative political traditions and social interactions that have long defined Ethiopian history.

[34] PDRE, *The Ethiopian Constitution of 1987*, Proclamation No. 1 of 1987, *Negarit Gazzeta,* Vol. 47, No. 1, Addis Ababa, 12 September 1987, p. 1.

6.2 The Politics of Victimhood and its Impact on Secondary School History Education

As discussed above, Ethiopian historiography since 1991 has been shaped primarily by the dominance of ethno-nationalist narratives. Within this framework, two central theses have emerged: the "colonial thesis" and the "national oppression thesis." Both are rooted in interpretations of the territorial consolidation and state-building schemes followed by modern Ethiopian rulers.

The colonial thesis is most prominently associated with the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF) and its sympathizers, as well as with Eritrean nationalist discourse. This thesis portrays the nineteenth-century territorial expansion to the south, southeast, and southwest under Emperor Menelik II as a colonial conquest. According to this interpretation, the Oromo and other southern peoples were violently incorporated into the Ethiopian state, subjected to cultural suppression, and deprived of their linguistic and political autonomy.[35] Likewise, Emperor Haile Selassie's 1962 annexation of Eritrea, carried out in disregard of the United Nations–approved federal arrangement, has been described by the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) and the Tigrean People's Liberation Front (TPLF) as an act of colonial domination.[36] These political groups viewed Ethiopia not as a historically continuous polity but as a multiethnic empire held together by colonial conquest.

Parallel to this is the national oppression thesis, which gained greater influence in the post-1991 political order. This thesis depicts Ethiopia as historically been a "prison of nations and nationalities," where successive rulers imposed assimilationist and centralizing policies that

[35] Marzagora, "History in the Twentieth-Century… ", p. 439.
[36] TPLF, *The TPLF Manifesto*, (1976), pp. 32-34.

suppressed ethno-linguistic diversity.[37] Within this narrative, pre-1991 Ethiopian leaders are uniformly condemned as tyrants and oppressors, accused of erasing the cultural autonomy of subordinated ethnic groups. The TPLF, as the dominant force within the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), made this thesis the cornerstone of its political ideology. The national oppression thesis received greater prominence in the history curriculum and secondary school textbooks than the colonial thesis. The latter remained influential mainly in Oromo nationalist writings, particularly those published in the *Journal of Oromo Studies*, rather than in the school curriculum.[38]

The ascendancy of these narratives was accompanied by a broader policy of delegitimizing Ethiopia's historical institutions. The post-1991 government targeted elements once regarded as central pillars of national integration and shared heritage, recasting them not as symbols of unity but as instruments of domination and oppression.[39] As a result, the secondary school history curriculum shifted its emphasis away from common cultural and historical experiences toward a politics of multi-nationalism and victimhood. Narratives placed past ethnic grievances at the center of identity, rather than fostering a sense of national cohesion. This approach to history had profound consequences for education. Students were increasingly encouraged to define themselves primarily as ethnic subjects, tied to the sufferings of their ancestors rather than to a shared memory and identity. Although younger generations had no direct link to historical conflicts, they were drawn into a politics of memory centered on the concept of victimhood. As Mohammed Girma has observed, the ethno-federalist system cultivated the "dark side" of

[37] Toggia, "History Writing…. ", pp. 323-338; Marzagora, "History in the Twentieth Century….", p. 439.
[38] Christopher Clapham, "Rewriting Ethiopian History", In *Annales d'Ethiopie,* Vol. 18. (Annee 2002), pp. 43-45.
[39] Ibid.

historical metanarratives, associating national unity with repression rather than integration.[40] Within such representations of the Ethiopian past, the very idea of unity was delegitimized and cast as an oppressive construct, saturated with stories of agony and victimhood.[41]

The politics of victimhood was further reinforced through the government's deliberate policy of renaming numerous places and peoples in Ethiopia. This reconfiguration of historiography was directly incorporated into the school curriculum, where political activists argued that many existing names had been imposed by oppressors and had replaced original identities. As a result, many terms regarded as derogatory were replaced with new ones: for example, *Galla* became *Oromo, Wallamo* became *Walayta*, *Janjaro* became *Yem*, and *Shankella* became *Gumuz.*[42] Indeed, the practice of changing the names of people was not initiated by the EPRDF; it had already been introduced in the curricular materials of the military period. A review of Ethiopian history textbooks across different periods reveals notable shifts in the terminology used to identify various groups, reflecting changing ideological and historiographical orientations.

In the 1952 Ethiopian history textbook for secondary education, different groups received little attention, as the text focused exclusively on the ruling authority. By the 1970 textbooks for Grades 9–12, various groups began to appear. The Oromo, for example, were discussed under the heading "The Galla Wars," a term now widely regarded as carrying pejorative connotations. [43] Nevertheless, the 1980 Grade 9 textbook marked a significant shift in language use. By this time, the Oromo were discussed in terms of "The Oromo Migrations," a reframing that moved

[40] Mohammed, *Cultural Politics……,* p. 119; Informants: Nigus Ali, Kindachew Zeru and Sendek Gelagay.
[41] Ibid.
[42] Ibid.
[43] Pankhurst, *History of Ethiopia*…., p. 73.

away from militarized and derogatory descriptors toward a more neutral historical account. [44] By 2005, Grade 9 and 11 textbooks demonstrated further terminological refinement and sensitivity. The Oromo were described using the phrases "Oromo Population Movement and Expansion" in Grade 9 and "The Oromo Population Movement" in Grade 11.[45] This presentation has two implications. First, it framed Oromo history and its interactions with other societies as demographic and social processes rather than as primarily conflict-driven events. Second, unlike earlier narratives, it portrayed the Oromo as indigenous to Ethiopia rather than as outsiders.[46]

Changing names has also been common among other societies. For instance, the term *Beni Shangul* appeared in the 1970 history text to denote Ethiopia's border territory along the Sudan frontier and was mentioned only in the context of Emperor Menelik II's territorial expansion in the second half of the nineteenth century.[47] Beyond this limited reference, the Gumuz were entirely absent from pre-1991 history textbooks and were instead referred to as *Shanqella* until recent times.[48] By 2005, the history textbooks discontinued the use of *Shanqella* and officially adopted the name *Gumuz*. Similarly, the term *Yem* was introduced for the first time in the 2005 history syllabus to identify a people in southern Ethiopia who had previously been called *Janjaro*, a name consistently used in earlier texts, including the 1980 edition. [49] Other southern societies, such as Wolayta and Kaffa, retained consistent naming between the 1980 and 2005 history textbooks, except that Wolayta had been identified as *Wolamo* in the 1970 text. [50]

[44] MoE, *History Student Text for Grade 9* (1980), p. 80.
[45] MoE, *History Student Text for Grade 9* (2005), pp. 105-115; *History for Grade 11* (2006), pp. 185-199.
[46] Ibid.
[47] Pankhurst, *History of Ethiopia*…., p. 115.
[48] Abdussamad Ahmad, "The Gumuz of the Lowlands of Western Gojjam: The Frontier in History 1900–1935," *Africa*, no. 1 (1995), p. 54.
[49] MoE, *History Student Text for Grade 9* (1980), pp. 87-88.
[50] Pankhurst, *History of Ethiopia*…., p. 115.

Similar changes were also made to the names of various provinces and towns. [51] This policy of renaming was closely tied to the politics of victimhood. People were told that their original identities and names had been altered by earlier oppressive rulers from the north, which was framed as a sign of repression and domination. Teachers sometimes faced difficulties adapting to these changes, since reference materials and earlier scholarship used the older names. Using such terms in classrooms could even lead to severe punishments, particularly in higher education.[52] In this way, teaching Ethiopian history became highly political, shaped by state ideology and closely linked to the government's effort to redefine Ethiopian identity.[53]

Teaching the second half of twentieth-century Ethiopian history has long been a focal point of intellectual debate and contention. The historiography of Menelik's expansion illustrates how interpretations of empire formation have shifted across different eras and political contexts. During the imperial period, for example, history textbooks emphasized themes of national pride, unification, and state-building. Emperor Menelik was depicted as the architect of modern Ethiopia, whose exceptional leadership secured the nation's sovereignty against European colonial encroachment from all directions. This representation showed Ethiopia as a unique nation in Africa, the only country to successfully resist the European scramble. The imperial era history texts framed Menelik's southern expansion as a continuation of a historic mission

[51] Fisseha Yacob, *Conceptualizations and Impacts of Multiculturalism in the Ethiopian Education System*, Ph.D. Dissertation: University of Toronto, 2016, p. 161.

[52] Informants: Haile Muluken, Jemal Adem, Ayenew Mamo, and Tekeste Birhan.

[53] Sisay & Enguday, "Teaching History….", p. 40; Informants: Nigus Ali, Kindachew Zeru and Sendek Gelagay.

initiated by medieval kings, a mission of unification and the restoration of Ethiopia's glorious past.[54]

With the downfall of Haile Selassie, however, this narrative underwent significant revision. The influence of the Derg's Marxist-Leninist ideology led to the replacement of the "empire-building" motive in Menelik's expansion with a rhetoric centered on class oppression. Menelik was no longer celebrated as a heroic leader but was instead condemned as a feudal monarch who extended systems of land expropriation and exploitation into the south. The 1980 Grade 10 history textbook exemplifies this shift, framing the incorporation of southern regions primarily in terms of feudal exploitation, peasant subjugation, and landlord domination. This class-based critique formed part of the Derg's broader ideological project of delegitimizing the feudal order to justify its revolutionary ideals.[55]

After 1991, the EPRDF's ethno-federalist system introduced yet another reinterpretation, centered on the national oppression thesis. The Grade 12 textbook of 2006, for example, described Menelik's expansion to the south not as a nation-building project but as driven by *"the traditional interest in land, tribute, and control of trade routes.*"[56] In this account, economic motives were considered the primary objective of Ethiopian rulers in expanding their territories. Menelik is thus depicted as the founder of a system of ethno-political domination, whose military campaigns deprived newly incorporated peoples of their sovereignty and imposed Amhara cultural hegemony. In contrast to the Derg's class-based analysis, the EPRDF's historiography emphasized ethnicity as the central theme of historical explanation. Despite their differences in

[54] Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, *History of Ethiopia: Teaching Notes for Secondary Schools,* (Compiled by Richard Pankhurst), 1970, pp. 108-119.
[55] MoE, *History Student Text for Grade 10,* 1980, pp. 200-205.
[56] MoE, *History for Grade 12,* 2006, p. 70.

ideology and interpretation of Ethiopian history, both regimes, the Derg and the EPRDF, have employed the rhetoric of victimhood, framing Menelik's expansion as a narrative of subjugation and forceful conquest rather than one of national integration achieved through other mechanisms such as peaceful negotiation.

A closer examination of Menelik's expansion reveals a far more complex reality than either imperial accounts that glorified him or revolutionary accounts that vilified him suggest. His approach combined military force with pragmatic governance, relying on indirect rule and negotiated authority. Many local rulers in newly incorporated regions were retained as vassals, enjoying loyalty and a degree of internal autonomy. Collaboration also played a crucial role in empire formation, as regional leaders actively participated in subsequent campaigns alongside Menelik's army. Menelik's expansion further reflected the strategic imperatives of the late nineteenth century, creating buffer zones against encroaching European powers and securing Ethiopia's borders. By the early twentieth century, a combination of military, diplomatic, and negotiated measures, including treaties with Britain, France, and Italy, effectively established Ethiopia's modern territorial extent. These patterns show that empire formation under Menelik was a complex process, combining diplomacy, collaboration, coercion, and pragmatic adaptation, rather than a simple story of conquest or oppression.[57]

Disregarding the historical reality, the Grade 10 and 12 history textbooks depict the relationship between Menelik's army and the newly conquered southern regions in a tone marked by agonies and detestations. They reported that the fate of the peoples and rulers in these incorporated areas depended on their responses to Menelik's expansion. Regions whose rulers submitted peacefully

[57] Bahru, "The Burden of History… ", pp. 328-9.

to the conquerors were saved from raids, devastation, and the enslavements. Initially, they were also exempt from the quartering of Menelik's soldiers, known as the *Neftegna*. In such cases, local rulers were permitted to retain their positions and govern their territories autonomously, though they were required to pay annual tributes to the central government.[58]

In contrast, regions that resisted the royal army faced severe repercussions. Beyond the bloodshed and destruction of the wars of conquest, local populations were looted, many were enslaved, and others were forced to flee their homelands. Local rulers were deposed and replaced with Menelik's appointees, often individuals who had played prominent roles in the expansion campaigns. The conquerors were quartered in peasant households, with residents obliged to meet all their domestic needs. Additionally, peasants were compelled to provide various forms of labor for the conquerors' farms and households.

While discussing Menelik's territorial expansion, the textbooks tend to exaggerate the nature of relations between the central army and the local population. They assert that the "harsh" relationship extended to the level of destroying the traditional institutions, beliefs, and practices of local communities. Furthermore, the texts portray the newly incorporated populations as being systematically suppressed on the basis of their ethnicity, language, and religion by the "conquerors." The following statement, excerpted from the tenth-grade textbook, reflected political interests of writers more than historical accuracy or the educational purpose of teaching history:

> Excessively exploitative and harsh *neftegna-gebbar* relations developed in these regions. The incorporated regions faced harsh feudal exploitation. They had to

[58] Ministry Of Education, *History Student Text Grade 12, Revised Edition*, (2006), pp. 2-13.

> pay heavy tributes. They suffered ethnic and religious oppression. The conquerors worked at suppressing local traditional institutions, beliefs, and practices.[59]

Also, the Grade 12 textbook presents a highly one-sided analysis of the incorporation of southern, southwestern, and southeastern regions into the Ethiopian state. It emphasizes the hardships experienced by local populations while largely neglecting Emperor Menelik's broader vision of state-building. According to the text, the treatment of these regions depended on their response to the central army. Areas that resisted faced severe punishments, including the removal of local dynasties, replacement with central government appointees, alienation from land, and harsh economic and social exploitation by settlers from the north known as the *Neftegna*. This oppression, the textbook further argues, manifested in inequalities between local populations and northern settlers, disregard for local languages, religions, and cultural practices, injustices, poor governance, the absence of the rule of law, and continued economic exploitation. In doing so, it constructs a narrative that amplifies suffering, discord, and resentment, while minimizing the broader political and administrative objectives of Menelik's expansion and its contribution to national unity and state consolidation.[60]

The representation of Menelik's expansion in both Grade 10 and Grade 12 textbooks conveys an overtly negative picture, shaped more by ideological perspectives than by scholarly analysis. It is true that conquest and expansion involved violence, exploitation, and displacement. However, the exclusive focus on brutality obscures the more complex realities of state-building, diplomacy, and cultural integration that also characterized the period. Such representations of Ethiopia's past

[59] Ministry of Education, *History Student Textbook for Grade 10*, (2005), p. 66.
[60] Ibid.

align with narratives advanced by ethnic-centered nationalist historians, who often contend that "Ethiopia has historically been a prison house of nations and nationalities."[61]

Oromo scholars such as Assefa Jalata and Mohammed Hassen, for instance, contend that the Oromo had lived independently for centuries under their own laws as a sovereign people.[62] They emphasize that the Oromo maintained autonomy and mutual respect with their neighbors until Emperor Menelik's conquests, which they describe as relying heavily on modern firearms imported from abroad. According to these accounts, Menelik conducted seven separate military campaigns in the Arsi region alone during the 1880s. In 1886, he is said to have adopted a brutal policy of amputating the right hands of men and the right breasts of women in Arsi. The conquest of Arsi is therefore portrayed as exceptionally harsh, and from this perspective, the modern Ethiopian empire that emerged under Menelik was built on the destruction of Oromo political power.[63] Following the conquest, Oromo cultural institutions, sovereignty, and identity were systematically undermined. They lost their lands, saw their properties plundered, and in many cases were reduced to *Gebbars* (serfs) in their own homeland. Other groups, such as the Wolayta and the Kaffa, are similarly described in this discourse as having suffered land dispossession, serfdom, and slavery.[64]

These narratives are largely published and disseminated in journals maintained by Oromo nationalist intellectuals, such as the *Journal of Oromo Studies*. They depict extreme cases of

[61] Toggia, "History Writing….. ", pp. 323-338.

[62] Mohammed Hassen, "Interview on FNN," YouTube video, February 5, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1UXvGLDl-BE&list=PPSV; Ezekiel Gebissa, "Public Presentation on the Oromo Professionals Group (OPG)," YouTube video, June 9, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ao2yZbMk-eE&list=PPSV.

[63] Mohammed Hassen, "A Short History of Oromo Colonial Experience, 1870s–1990s," *Journal of Oromo Studies* 6, nos. 1–2 (July 1999): 109–158.

[64] Asafa Jalata, "The Impact of a Racist U.S. Foreign Policy on the Oromo National Struggle," *Journal of Oromo Studies*, ed. Asafa Jalata, 6, nos. 1–2 (July 1999): 49–90.

harsh relations that allegedly occurred in the past between the central government and peripheral regions, as well as among different peoples. Nonetheless, serious historians, particularly those advocating Ethiopian nationalism, approach Ethiopian history from an integrative perspective, striving to balance the metanarrative with ethno-nationalist accounts. They recognize that hardships were real and that both positive and negative experiences occurred in the past. History, they contend, should serve as a lesson to better understand the present, promote collective development, and prevent future problems. Accordingly, history should not be a source of discord or strife in school education. Bahru, a seasoned historian, expressed this concern with remarkable clarity:

> **በኢትዮጵያ ታሪክ ብዙ በደሎች ተፈጽመዋል። ይህንን መካድ አይቻልም። ግን ያንን ማላዘንና ሁልጊዜ መቆስቆሱ ለአገር የሚሰጠው ፋይዳ የለም። ታሪክ ት/ቤት ነው እንጅ እስር ቤት መሆን የለበትም። በታሪካችን መታሰር የለብንም። ከዚያ መማር ግን አለብን። ያለን ምርጫ ወይ አብሮ ማደግ ነው፤ አለዚያ ተያይዞ መጥፋት ነው። ህሊና ያለው ሰው የትኛውን እንደሚመርጥ ግልጽ ነው።**[65]
>
> Many wrongs have been committed in Ethiopian history. This cannot be denied. However, constantly lamenting them and dwelling on them brings no benefit to the nation. History should be a school, not a prison. We should not be imprisoned by our past, but we must learn from it. Our only choice is to grow together; otherwise, we perish together. For anyone with a conscience, the path to choose is clear.

In a similar vein, Haile Larebo and Shumet Sishagne have emphasized the indispensable role of the Oromo and other societies in the making of modern Ethiopia. Haile drew a comparison

[65] Bahru Zewde, "Ethiopian Historiography: Developments and Challenges," Public Presentation on Andafta, YouTube video, January 10, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0urq3XlufhI&list=PPSV.

between Emperor Menelik and Otto von Bismarck of Germany, noting that just as Bismarck unified Germany through a comparable strategy and was celebrated for his extraordinary achievements, Menelik similarly unified Ethiopia using a comparable approach. Yet, his accomplishments have not received equivalent recognition, particularly among ethno-nationalist elites. Haile acknowledged that Ethiopia, during Menelik's era, experienced feudal exploitation, injustice, and maladministration. However, he emphasized that these problems affected all Ethiopians across all regions, including the societies from which the rulers originated, rather than targeting any specific ethnic group. [66]

Pan-Ethiopian historians criticized the politics of victimhood reflected in the post-1991 period. They called for a more balanced perspective, one that acknowledges shared achievements and hardships rather than adhering to a reductionist and politicized historiography focused on agony and victimhood.[67] As Shumet pointed out, modern nation-states across the world rarely emerged through peaceful consensus or referenda. Instead, he argued, many modern states were shaped by a combination of diplomacy, conquest, and coercion. The Ethiopian state's expansion and consolidation followed these same historical patterns. What distinguishes Ethiopia, however, is not the use of force in state formation by former rulers, but the failure of successive generations to transform that inherited system into a more democratic and equitable order. Rather than blaming past rulers, Shumet contended, Ethiopia should have sought to refine and improve the system it inherited, creating one that fosters inclusivity and shared progress through its education system. With regret, he observed the consequences of how history has been taught in Ethiopian schools as:

[66] Bulcha Demeksa, Haile Larebo, and Shumet Sishagne, "Interview on Deutsche Welle (DW) Radio," YouTube video, December 9, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L5HbkxaVpi0&list=PPSV.

[67] Ayele Tariku, "The Annole Monument and Negus Menelik's Expedition towards Arsi: A Bibliographic Essay," *Ethiopian Journal of Social Science* 4, no. 1 (2018), pp. 14-18.

> Ethiopia is the only country that has never offered history to its students in schools and universities. Ethiopian history has been banished. How is it possible to socialize this young generation if there is no curriculum that teaches the communality and the unity of the Ethiopian nation-state? How can you produce citizens who would pull together if you don't cultivate them or educate them? Instead, of course, we have educated our youth to look back at history and use history as instruments of fighting and of bitterness and of revenge and of resentment. What has been taught to the Ethiopian youth is to hate each other. And that, of course, is yielding results today; we see people biting each other like dogs and are unable to live with each other. This did not come by accident. It was cultivated. They worked on it to produce this kind of scenario. This is a folly. The end result is not going to be good, even for those who are now advancing that policy of fragmentation.[68]

In sum, the post-1991 Ethiopian historiography and secondary school history curriculum have been heavily shaped by ethno-nationalist narratives that emphasize victimhood, grievance, and national oppression. The history textbooks for grades 10 and 12 sought to depict the hardships and injustices faced by the people of the South under northern settlers, known as the *Neftegna*. They also present a lopsided view that overlooks the complexities of state formation, negotiation, and collaboration, as documented by serious historical accounts, and disregard the broader global experience of modern state formation. Scholars advocating a Pan-Ethiopian perspective call for a more balanced approach that recognizes both shared achievements and hardships, thereby fostering national cohesion. Ultimately, the teaching of Ethiopian history should aim to cultivate informed, inclusive, and responsible citizens who can learn from the past without being

[68] Shumet Sishagne, "Interview on Amhara Media Corporation," YouTube video, March 15, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f1RaZilKUco&list=PPSV.

imprisoned by it, promoting collective development and accord rather than perpetuating resentment and discord.

6.3 The Inclusion of Women's History: A Preliminary Attempt

Women's history was one of the most neglected subjects in Ethiopia's earlier history curricula. During the imperial period, issues of gender were entirely absent in the teaching materials, and even the country's history was neglected, as the curricula were heavily dominated by Western history. Indeed, gender history itself was a relatively recent development in global historical scholarship. For a long time, women had little or no place in the historical record. As John Tosh notes, the systematic study of women's history dates only to the 1970s and gained momentum alongside the rise of feminism as a social movement.[69] Similarly, Tosh observes that a fundamental deficiency of Marxist historical analysis is its neglect of gender issues and individual contributions, focusing mainly on the collective rather than on men or women as individuals.[70]

The Derg, as a Marxist government, also followed a similar principle regarding gender issues and individual contributions. In fact, the Revolutionary Ethiopian Women's Association (REWA) was one of the mass organizations established during the Derg regime, with the duty of cooperating with the Marxist state.[71] In both rhetoric and policy, the Derg promoted the necessity of women's participation for the fulfillment of revolutionary national goals. Yet, its policies did not align with its educational objectives. The history curriculum showed no recognition of gender within its narratives. As discussed in the previous chapter, major historical events and

[69] Tosh, *The Pursuit of History*…., p. 238.
[70] Ibid.
[71] Andargachew Tiruneh, *The Ethiopian Revolution, 1974–1987: A Transformation from an Aristocratic to a Totalitarian Autocracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 355.

victories, such as the Battle of Adwa and the anti-fascist resistance of the 1930s, were interpreted in terms of the collective heroism of the Ethiopian peasant masses, with little or no attention paid to individual patriots or leaders, let alone women.

Despite this, one notable development and a great leap forward in post-1991 history education was the introduction of gender history into the secondary school curriculum. It was only during this period that women's history began to receive recognition, albeit modestly, for the first time in the country's educational history.[72] This curricular shift was closely linked to broader constitutional and policy reforms, particularly the 1995 Constitution, which established the legal foundation for gender-sensitive reforms. Article 35 of the Constitution specifically addresses the rights of women, with Article 35(3) acknowledging the *"historical legacy of inequality and discrimination suffered by women in Ethiopia*" and guaranteeing affirmative measures to remedy this legacy.[73] The provision further stipulates that such measures are intended to provide women with special support to enable them to compete and participate on equal terms with men in political, social, and economic life. The Constitution thus provided the legal basis for integrating gender perspectives into school curricula.[74]

This constitutional commitment was followed by the inclusion of women history in the secondary school history curriculum. In line with the 1994 Education and Training Policy and the 1995 FDRE Constitution, the government incorporated women's history into the 1998 secondary school syllabus. The syllabus explicitly emphasized the importance of gender and set out the following guiding principle:

[72] Bahru, "A Century of Ethiopian Historiography….", p. 2.
[73] FDRE, *The 1995 Constitution…*, p. 11.
[74] Ibid.

> Balanced treatment of political, economic, social, and cultural history and the role of the masses and the individual, and of the role of women in history, is the guiding principle in dealing with the various subjects of study. [75]

Consequently, the history textbooks began to give attention to prominent women who made significant contributions to Ethiopian history. For instance, the grade 9 and 11 textbooks discuss Bati Del Wombera, the wife of Ahmad *Gragn*, who accompanied her husband during his entire campaigns (1529-43) and mobilized a large Muslim force against the Christian highland kingdom following her husband's death at the Battle of *Woina Dega* in 1543.[76] Similarly, the texts present Empress Mentewab, a politically and militarily influential figure of the Gondarine period, who exercised effective authority after the death of her husband, Emperor Bakaffa (r. 1721–1730), and served as regent during the reign of her son, Iyasu II (1730–1755). [77]

Likewise, the grade 10 and 12 textbooks devoted considerable attention to women's contributions in resisting foreign aggression, particularly during the Battle of Adwa (1896) and the Second Italo-Ethiopian War (1936–41). The texts gave significant recognition to Empress Taytu's leadership at Adwa, portraying her as pivotal to the Ethiopian victory. The grade 12 textbook, for example, describes her contributions as follows:

> Empress Taytu had started preparing for war long ago. She had gathered women in the palace to prepare food, drink, utensils, traditional medicines, bandages, etc. She had already sent messages to her vassals of northern Ethiopia to supply food to the army while passing through their respective regions. She also mobilized an army of 5,000 troops under her command and followed her husband to the campaign. The total number of Ethiopian women who went to Adwa is not

[75] MoE, *History for Ethiopian Secondary Schools: Syllabus for Grades 9-12*, July 1998, p. 1.
[76] MoE, *History Student Text for Grade 11*, 2006, pp. 180-83; *History Student Text for Grade 9*, 2005, pp. 103-104.
[77] Ibid., pp. 114-117; pp. 119-120.

> exactly known. But one French writer reported that there were about 1,200 women. These women not only gave moral support to the combatants, but also gave service as fighters, nursing the wounded, supplying food and drinks to fighters, clearing roads, guarding camps, etc. [78]

The textbooks also gave due attention to women patriots during the five-year resistance movement against the fascist Italian forces. Women served as *Yewust-Arbegnoch* (inner patriots) during this period, and their roles were discussed in the grade 10 and 12 history textbooks. Prominent figures such as Shewarged Gedle were mentioned for their crucial contributions in organizing and facilitating the patriots' attacks on enemy forces. In doing so, the texts situate women's actions within the broader context of the resistance movement, illustrating how they actively participated in strategic planning, the supply of logistics and provisions, intelligence gathering, and support for armed operations. By emphasizing these contributions, the textbooks demonstrated the indispensable role of women in defending national sovereignty and preserving Ethiopia's independence.[79]

Figure 13: A Portrait of *Woizero* Shewareged Gedle, a Prominent Patriot during the Five-Year Resistance Movement- Portrayed in the Grade 12 History Textbook

[78] MoE, *History Student Text for Grade 12*, 2006, p. 82.
[79] Ibid., pp. 164-65.



Source: Ministry of Education, *History Student Text for Grade 12*, (2006) p. 165.

The inclusion of gender history in secondary school education marked a significant historiographical shift. For the first time, Ethiopian school history systematically recognized women as active historical agents, challenging earlier male-centered narratives. The post-1991 curriculum, therefore, reflected the feminization of history education, aligning constitutional and policy commitments with curricular practice and integrating women into Ethiopian historical discourse.

6.4 Reflections of Anti-Derg Propaganda in Grade 10 and 12 History Texts

It had long been common practice to use history as a tool of propaganda and political activism, a pattern evident since the introduction of the 1979 curriculum. As discussed in Chapter Five, the Derg's history curriculum, particularly the final chapters of Grade Ten, was used to disseminate anti-feudal propaganda. In a similar way, the last chapters of the Grade Ten and Grade Twelve history textbooks of the EPRDF period were heavily shaped by anti-Derg narratives. The Grade Ten last chapter, "From Military Dictatorship to a Federal Arrangement" (pp. 224–234), and the

Grade Twelve last chapter, "The Military Dictatorship (1974–91)" (pp. 280–293), present highly politicized accounts, marked by repeated accusations and criticisms of the Derg regime.

For example, the Grade 12 history textbook's treatment of the Red Terror is historically inaccurate. It presents a simplified and politicized narrative that is not supported by established academic scholarship. The section explaining the Red Terror contains factual inaccuracies and advances an interpretation that serious historians do not ratify. In particular, the textbook attributes the initiation of urban guerrilla violence in 1976 to the Derg, which reflects the violence carried out by the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Party (EPRP) as merely reactive. The textbook writers blatantly state that:

> When all political organizations in the capital collaborated with the Derg, only the EPRP continued in its opposition to military rule, thus becoming its target. In cooperation with the All-Ethiopian Socialist Movement (*Meison*), *the Derg began what it called the "Red Terror" against the EPRP* [emphasis added], whose counter-attacks were designated "White Terror".[80]

This claim is not supported by academic scholarship. Historical studies indicate that it was the EPRP that first initiated the White Terror through a campaign of targeted assassinations and urban guerrilla actions directed against officials and supporters of the Derg. The Derg, in turn, responded with its own campaign, known as the Red Terror, which involved mass arrests, executions, and systematic repression of suspected EPRP members. Bahru's *A History of Modern Ethiopia*, for instance, provides clear evidence that urban terrorism was first invoked by the EPRP rather than initiated unilaterally by the Derg. He identifies Dr. Feqre Mar'ed, a senior *Meison* official, as the first major victim of the EPRP offensive, assassinated in September 1976.

[80] MoE, *Grade 12 History Text* (2006), pp. 281-82.

This action preceded the Derg's official declaration of vengeance against the EPRP, indicating that the White Terror antedated the full-scale Red Terror launched by the state.[81]

True, this topic is politically sensitive, and recriminations over responsibility are often shaped by ideological considerations and political interests. From a moral perspective, debates over "who fired the first shot" may be of limited significance. What is beyond dispute is that the political turbulence and summary executions claimed the lives of tens of thousands of Ethiopians, particularly educated and politically active youth, and severely undermined the country's political and intellectual development. This topic therefore requires further critical research and discussion. History education should reflect the complexity of this period by presenting multiple scholarly interpretations rather than reproducing a single and lopsided political narrative. Moreover, instead of disseminating simplified or distorted accounts, history textbooks should present this subject as an open field for inquiry, debate, and student-centered research.

At the same time, the textbooks present romanticized explanations of the political and military achievements of the EPRDF. They demonstrate how, in early 1990, the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) underwent a key organizational transformation by establishing the broader Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF), portraying both its military successes and the democratization process it claimed to initiate.[82]

According to the textbooks, in 1990, the EPRDF launched military campaigns across northern and central Ethiopia, decisively defeating the Derg army in various regions with the support it drew from diverse nations and nationalities, and steadily advancing toward Addis Ababa. On 21

[81] Bahru, *A History of.....,* pp. 246-48.

[82] MoE, *History Student Text for Grade Ten*, 2005, pp. 224-234; *History Student Text for Grade Twelve*, 2006, pp. 280-293.

May 1991, Mengistu Haile Mariam fled to Harare, Zimbabwe, marking the collapse of the Derg regime. At the same time, the Eritrean People's Liberation Front (EPLF) captured Asmara and established the Provisional Government of Eritrea. The textbooks portrayed the downfall of the Derg and the rise of the EPRDF as a new beginning, symbolizing hope for democracy, equity, and national development. As the Grade Twelve text states:

> The downfall of the military dictatorship marked the beginning of a new chapter in the history of Ethiopia. The process of building a democratic system in the country was soon undertaken. [83]

The textbooks also describe the establishment of the Transitional Government of Ethiopia (TGE) and the adoption of its Charter. Restoring law and order, ending repression, and fostering mutual confidence among Ethiopia's diverse peoples were presented as urgent priorities during the EPRDF's early years. The Charter was portrayed as a framework for a peaceful transition, granting nations and nationalities the right to use their own languages in education and administration and to develop their cultures. A five-day political conference in Addis Ababa brought together various parties and political actors to establish both the TGE and the Charter. In its first two years, the TGE concentrated on restoring peace and security, rehabilitating demobilized soldiers, and setting up local government structures, which were fully established by 1993. The textbooks further note that Eritrea gained independence through a referendum, formally achieving sovereignty in May 1993.[84]

The textbooks narrate the extraordinary military and political achievements of the EPLF and TPLF, emphasizing their victories over the Derg in various battles. According to the narrative,

[83] MoE, *History Student Text for Grade Twelve*, 2005, p. 287.
[84] MoE, *History for Grade 12* (2006), p. 70.

the EPLF was rescued from near destruction by the TPLF, which carried out a remarkable march through difficult terrain to the Sahel in Eritrea, enabling a counteroffensive against Derg forces. Other liberation fronts are described as aligning with the TPLF in pursuit of the same objective and collaborating in the struggle against the military dictatorship. The principle of self-determination, central to the TPLF's ideology, is presented as a national agenda embraced by all Ethiopian nations and nationalities. The Grade Twelve textbook stresses that self-determination was not only a concern of the TPLF but a demand shared by all Ethiopian peoples. The text states:

> The EPRDF and the EPLF intensified their military operations. The fronts of military operations widened. Various liberation fronts, such as the Oromo Liberation Front (OLF), the Oromo Islamic Front, the Afar Liberation Front, the Benishangul Liberation Front, and the Gambella Liberation Front, also *fought for self-determination* [emphasis added]. [85]

Indeed, the ideology of self-determination had been circulating in Ethiopian political discourse since the 1960s, particularly with the rise of the student movement in higher education institutions. Within this context, the idea gained momentum among a small circle of elites, especially within the EPLF, TPLF, and OLF. It remained, however, largely an elite-driven project rather than a demand expressed by the broader population. For most Ethiopians, the very concept of self-determination was unfamiliar and abstract, disconnected from their immediate socio-economic and political needs. From an educational perspective, therefore, it is inappropriate to present this highly politicized ideology in the school history curriculum as though it reflected a popular and widely shared national agenda. Such narratives risk

[85] MoE, *History Student Textbook for Grade 10* (2005), p. 231.

misrepresenting Ethiopian history by implying that an elite and minority political program represented the will of the entire population.

In short, the final chapters of the Grade 10 and 12 history textbooks focus more on contemporary political developments than on history itself. The government intended to use these sections to instill in students' minds a view of the tyrannies of pre-1991 rule. The textbook authors sought to show how the demise of the Derg and the rise of the EPRDF offered hope for democracy, prosperity, justice, and equality for all nations and nationalities in Ethiopia. At the same time, they demonized Derg policies and institutions while romanticizing EPRDF initiatives, portraying them as a roadmap to political liberalization.[86] The study of contemporary history is not uncommon in many curricular systems, but it requires careful scrutiny by professional historians. In the case of the Derg, the history syllabus was written in 1998, seven years after the regime's fall. Although archival documents were available, with few exceptions, such as Bahru's *A History of Modern Ethiopia* (1991), the period had not been thoroughly studied by professional historians. As a result, the textbooks presented narratives that resemble propaganda and political activism rather than objective historical accounts.

In sum, the rise of ethno-linguistic nationalism since the 1960s, and its dominance in post-1991 historiography, marked a decisive break from earlier integrative narratives that emphasized shared values and collective historical experiences. Ethno-nationalist critiques eroded traditional unifying symbols and cultural bonds in Ethiopian history. As a result, post-1991 secondary school history education was heavily shaped by the EPRDF's ethno-linguistic nationalist ideology. The curriculum reflected the imposition of identity politics, a historiographical shift

[86] Ibid.

from unity to multiplicity, the politics of victimhood, and persistent, often defamatory, criticism of past leaders and institutions. Disregarding the academic integrity of history and its central purpose in fostering national cohesion, the 1998 history syllabus placed disproportionate emphasis on multiple identities, ethnicity, language, culture, and religion. While the study of such identities is valuable and necessary when based on sound historical evidence, their politicized presentation in the syllabus undermined history education's role in cultivating collective consciousness and national identity.

This politicization of identity was most evident in the textbooks, which asserted that Ethiopia's diverse ethnic groups had enjoyed complete autonomy before being forcibly incorporated into the Ethiopian empire in the second half of the twentieth century. By "autonomy," the writers implied not only political and administrative independence but also the historically unfounded claim that these groups possessed distinct historical identities entirely separate from the broader historical landscape of the Ethiopian state. Such interpretations are not supported by serious historical research findings. Professional historians advocate for a balanced and objective approach, one that gives due attention to the long-standing political relations between Ethiopia's central monarchs and peripheral states, as well as the inter-ethnic interactions, exchanges, and integrations that have been expressed through political, economic, and socio-cultural ways. Only such a perspective can restore history education's role as a unifying force that fosters a shared national consciousness while acknowledging the country's diversity.

CONCLUSION

This dissertation has examined the relationship between state ideology and history education in Ethiopian secondary schools from the imperial period through the Derg regime and into the post-1991 federal order. Drawing on a wide range of sources, including educational policy documents, curricula, syllabi, and history textbooks, the study has demonstrated that history education in Ethiopia has consistently been subordinated to state ideology rather than guided by principles of disciplinary historiography. Across at least six major curriculum reforms (1949, 1957, 1963, 1967, 1976, and 1999), history curricula were repeatedly redesigned to reflect the political philosophies and ideological priorities of successive regimes.

A central insight of this study is that, despite significant ideological shifts over time, the use of history education to fulfill the political objectives of successive regimes has remained a structural feature of Ethiopia's modern education system. History has been treated less as a scholarly discipline aimed at cultivating critical inquiry and historical consciousness, and more as a vehicle for legitimizing political authority and reproducing dominant ideologies. As a result, the disciplinary foundations of history such as critical engagement with sources, methodological rigor, and openness to multiple interpretations have been given very little attention.

In the post-liberation imperial period, history education was mobilized to promote a centralized national narrative rooted in the glorification of the Solomonic dynasty and the ideology of monarchical rule. Although this period witnessed the expansion of secondary education and the introduction of the first written history curriculum, the dominance of Western educational models and foreign advisors significantly undermined the teaching of Ethiopian history. Indigenous perspectives were banished, and Western cultural and epistemological values were

introduced through the history curricula. While national unity was emphasized rhetorically, the historical content taught in secondary schools often reflected Westernization ideas rather than Ethiopia's own historical and cultural realities.

The 1967 history curriculum marked a notable, though short-lived, departure from this pattern. Developed with the active participation of prominent Ethiopian historians, it represented the first serious attempt to indigenize history education and align it with the cultural and historical context of Ethiopian students. By integrating Ethiopian, African, and world history in a more balanced and coherent manner, the curriculum demonstrated the possibility of a more academically grounded approach. However, this reform was abruptly reversed following the 1974 revolution, vividly illustrating the vulnerability of history education to political upheavals.

Under the socialist Derg regime (1974–1991), history education underwent a radical ideological shift. Marxist-Leninist ideology reshaped the curriculum, replacing imperial narratives with class-based revolutionary interpretations of the past. Historical developments were framed almost exclusively as struggles between antagonistic social classes, and Marxist historiography dominated both curricula and textbooks. In this context, history education became a tool of political indoctrination rather than a means of critical thinking and inquiry. Textbooks produced during this period frequently neglected established standards of historical scholarship, employed contemptuous and polarized language, and selectively included or excluded historical facts to serve ideological ends.

A striking absurdity characterized the Derg's education policy in general and history education in particular. The official rhetoric emphasized *Etiopiya Tikdem* (Ethiopia First). But, Ethiopian history occupied a marginal place in the secondary school history curriculum. Moreover, crucial

events of national significance, including moments of collective achievement and resistance that could have fostered social cohesion, were either distorted or given minimal attention due to ideological bias. As one of the few African countries with a long, continuous, and well-documented history, Ethiopia has an exceptional historical heritage that fosters national unity and social integration. Unlike many postcolonial states that rely on constructed national myths, Ethiopia has genuine historical experiences that could serve this purpose. Yet successive regimes failed to use this opportunity. This approach not only weakened the academic purpose of history education but also undermined its potential to promote a shared sense of national unity.

The post-1991 period introduced yet another ideological reorientation with the rise of ethnic federalism under the EPRDF. History education shifted from the class-oppression thesis of the Derg to the national-oppression thesis advanced by ethno-nationalist narratives. The new curriculum provided emphasis on the histories of nations and nationalities and sought to address popular agonies and historical grievances. However, this shift resulted in fragmented historical narratives that prioritized themes of victimhood and marginalization over shared national experiences. In fact, cultural diversity is an undeniable feature of Ethiopia's past. Yet, Ethiopians also share a common historical experience with significant integrative elements. Maintaining a balance between acknowledging diversity and multiplicity on the one hand, and fostering national unity, historical change and continuity, and collective memory on the other, remains a critical challenge to the post-1991 order.

Across all three political periods, the imperial, Derg, and EPRDF eras, history curricula primarily functioned as mechanisms of ideological imposition rather than as tools for developing students' analytical skills, historical literacy, and critical thinking. This reflects a broader pattern

in which education systems tend to mimic dominant power relations instead of encouraging independent intellectual engagement. Foreign ideological influence played a decisive role in shaping history education during both the imperial and Derg periods, relegating Ethiopia's historical traditions and reinforcing intellectual dependency. In all cases, Ethiopia's rich historical legacy was underutilized, limiting students' engagement with their own past and weakening the development of historical consciousness.

The consequences of this prolonged politicization have been profound. Generations of students have been educated through curricula insufficiently grounded in Ethiopia's socio-cultural realities, leaving many disconnected from their historical roots. The repeated imposition of foreign ideologies, whether Western or Soviet, created significant gaps in historical understanding and weakened students' sense of national identity. When history education lacks a solid cultural and historical foundation, its capacity to foster resilience, critical awareness, and social cohesion is severely diminished.

The findings of this study, therefore, point to the need for a decisive shift in Ethiopian history education. Such a shift requires a firm commitment to objectivity, scientificity, inclusivity, and critical inquiry. History curricula and textbooks must be developed by qualified professionals, insulated from political bias and interference, and guided by clearly defined learning outcomes grounded in disciplinary historiography. Greater emphasis should be placed on evidence-based reasoning, critical source analysis, and the presentation of multiple perspectives. Equally important is the need to balance recognition of Ethiopia's cultural diversity with narratives that emphasize shared historical experiences and collective achievements. History education should neither homogenize difference nor institutionalize division and discord; rather, it should equip

students with the necessary skills to understand historical complexity, engage constructively with disputed pasts, and appreciate shared heritages.

Ultimately, the purpose of history education extends beyond the transmission of factual knowledge. When anchored in academic integrity and pedagogical rigor, history education cultivates analytical thinking, civic responsibility, and reasoned judgment. Reinstating history to its rightful place as a scholarly and educational discipline is, therefore, essential not only for intellectual development but also for nation-building and community cohesion. Through principled and comprehensive reform, history education in Ethiopia can fulfill its transformative potential by preparing students to critically engage with the past, navigate the present, and contribute meaningfully to the future of their society.

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LIST OF INFORMANTS

No.	Name of Informants	Date of Interview	Place of Interview	Remark
1.	Abebe Hunegnaw (*Ato*)	June 2025	Finote Selam	He taught history at Lumame Secondary School for over ten years and is currently a history lecturer at Finote Selam College of Teacher Education.
2.	Ayenew Mamo (PhD)	June 2023	Debre Markos	He is an Associate Professor of History at Debre Markos University. He provided information about the education systems during both the Imperial and military eras.
3.	Azaje Alemu (*Ato*)	Oct 2023	F/Selam	He is a former history teacher at Damot High School and is now retired. He provided valuable information regarding the secondary school history curriculum during the Derg regime.
4.	Birhanu Adugna (*Ato*)	June 2025	Finote Selam	He has worked as a history teacher and school director at Abbay-Minch Secondary School in Sekella, Gojjam since the 1990s.
5.	Demelash Gizachew (*Ato*)	July 2025	Bure	He completed his secondary education during the Derg regime and has taught history at Bure Shekudad Secondary School for over twenty years.

6.	Doctor Telila (*Ato*)	August 2024	Addis Ababa	He has taught history at various high schools and is currently working as a history curriculum expert at the Ministry of Education in Addis Ababa.
7.	Gashaw Abate (*Ato*)	June 2023	F/Selam	He formerly taught history at Damot High School and is now retired.
8.	Gebeyaw Teshager (PhD)	May 2025	Injibara	A lecturer in Curriculum and Instruction at Injibara University, he was interviewed by phone and provided invaluable insight into Ethiopia's curricular history
9.	Gemeda Akuma (*Ato*)	June 2025	Phone interview/ Addis Ababa	He has taught history and civics in East Wollega since the early 1990s. His insights on history education during the military period and the EPRDF era were valuable.
10.	Haile Muluken (PhD)	Dec 2023	Dangila	He has served as a senior researcher and history lecturer at Mekelle University since 2003. He provided the researcher with valuable oral information regarding the influence of political ideologies on history teaching in a global context.
11.	Henok Ahmed (*Ato*)	Oct 2023	Bahir Dar	He taught history for about twenty years at various high schools in Wollo and at Dessie College of Teacher Education. He is currently pursuing a doctoral study in History Education at Bahir Dar

				University.
12.	Jemal Adem (*Ato*)	April 2025	Debre Birhan	He has taught history at various secondary schools since 1976 E.C., having studied under the Imperial government's curriculum and taught during the Derg regime. He currently teaches history at a private school in Debre Birhan. He is an excellent informant on the changes in history curricula across the three successive regimes.
13.	Kassahun Simeneh (*Ato*)	April 2023	Finote Selam	He taught history at Damot Secondary School for more than three decades until his retirement a few years ago.
14.	Mekonen Zewdu (*Ato*)	July 2025	Phone interview/ Dessie	He served as a history teacher at Dessie College of Teacher Education until his retirement four years ago. His knowledge of the history curricula under the three regimes is invaluable.
15.	Minale Geremew (*Ato*)	June 2025	Finote Selam	He has taught history at Damot Secondary School since the early 1990s. His insights on the content organization of secondary school history textbooks were highly valuable for the dissertation.
16.	Minichel Belay (*Ato*)	August 2025	Bahir Dar	He has taught history at Aykel and Tana-Haik Secondary Schools, located in Chilga and Bahir Dar respectively, for

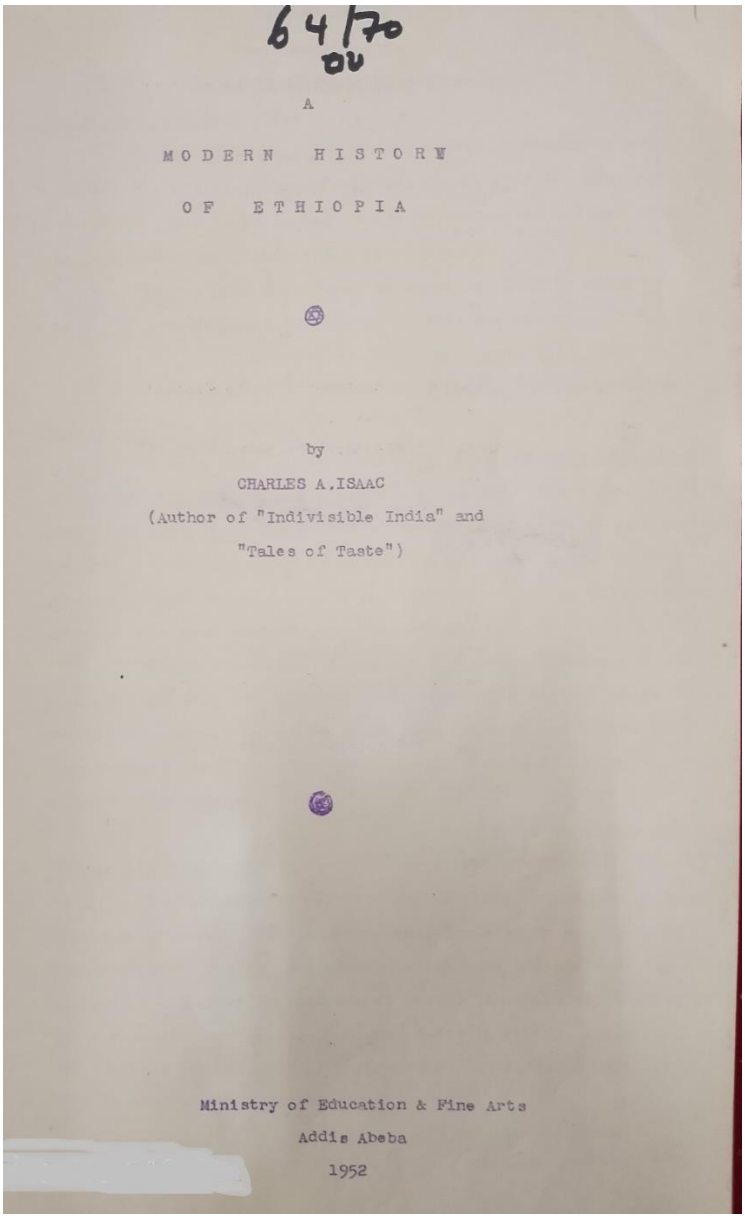
				the past two decades.
17.	Mustefa Seid (*Ato*)	Oct. 2023	F/Selam	He is currently a history teacher at Damot Secondary School. He provided the researcher with insights into the ideological influences on the history textbooks used during the Derg and EPRDF regimes.
18.	Negus Ali (*Ato*)	April 2025	Bahir Dar	He has extensive experience teaching history and civics in various secondary schools and at Finote Selam College of Teacher Education. Although his educational background is in history, he later shifted from teaching history to civics. He is a valuable informant on history education during the post-1991 period.
19.	Seid Kemal (*Ato*)	July 2025	Dessie	He formerly taught history at Dessie College of Teacher Education and is now retired.
20.	Shimelis Lawoy (*Ato*)	April 2025	Bahir Dar	He taught history in various high schools in Gojjam before joining Woldya University as a history teacher and researcher in 2018. He is an excellent informant on history education and state ideology, particularly for the period after 1991.
21.	Shumet Sishagne			Prof. Shumet is a seasoned historian and professor emeritus with decades of

	(Prof.)			experience in historical research and in teaching at both secondary and higher education institutions in Ethiopia and abroad since the early 1970s. Since 2015, he has served as a senior lecturer and Ph.D. advisor in the History Department at Bahir Dar University as a U.S. Fulbright Scholar. Although no formal interview was conducted, the researcher gathered valuable information from his lectures, classroom discussions, and responses to questions posed during class, which significantly contributed to enriching this study.
22.	Solomon Tsehay (PhD)		F/Selam	He previously taught civics and geography at Damot Secondary School and Woldya College of Teacher Education. He shared with the researcher his personal experiences as a student at Damot Secondary School during the 1980s.
23.	Tekeste Birhan (*Ato*)	July 2025	Debre-Birhan	He served as a librarian at Haile-Maryam Mamo Secondary School in Debre Birhan. His recollections of the history curriculum during the military regime are highly valuable. He provided the researcher with relevant information, both oral and material.

24.	Teshale Aklilou (D.Ed.)	July 2025	Phone interview/ Woldiya	He taught history at various high schools and colleges in the Amhara Regional State. He completed his doctorate in History Education in 2023 at Bahir Dar University. He is currently teaching history at Woldiya College of Teacher Education

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Selections from the 1952 Ethiopian History Textbook for Secondary Schools



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OU

A

MODERN HISTORY

OF ETHIOPIA

by

CHARLES A.ISAAC

(Author of "Indivisible India" and

"Tales of Taste")

Ministry of Education & Fine Arts

Addis Abeba

1952

PREFACE

Having had several years' experience in this country as a teacher of English, history and geography, I feel that the students in the higher elementary classes are badly in need of textbooks in the above-mentioned subjects. It is very much to be regretted that, at this stage, they have to depend on textbooks imported from foreign countries.

I have had the chance of contacting the students of various schools in Ethiopia. All of them welcome the idea of having textbooks specially written for them. As regards the school curriculum, both foreign and native teachers find it almost impossible to teach Ethiopian history in the absence of adequate textbooks. Most of them go in search of reference books and often find themselves lost in the mazes of travellers' accounts and propaganda material.

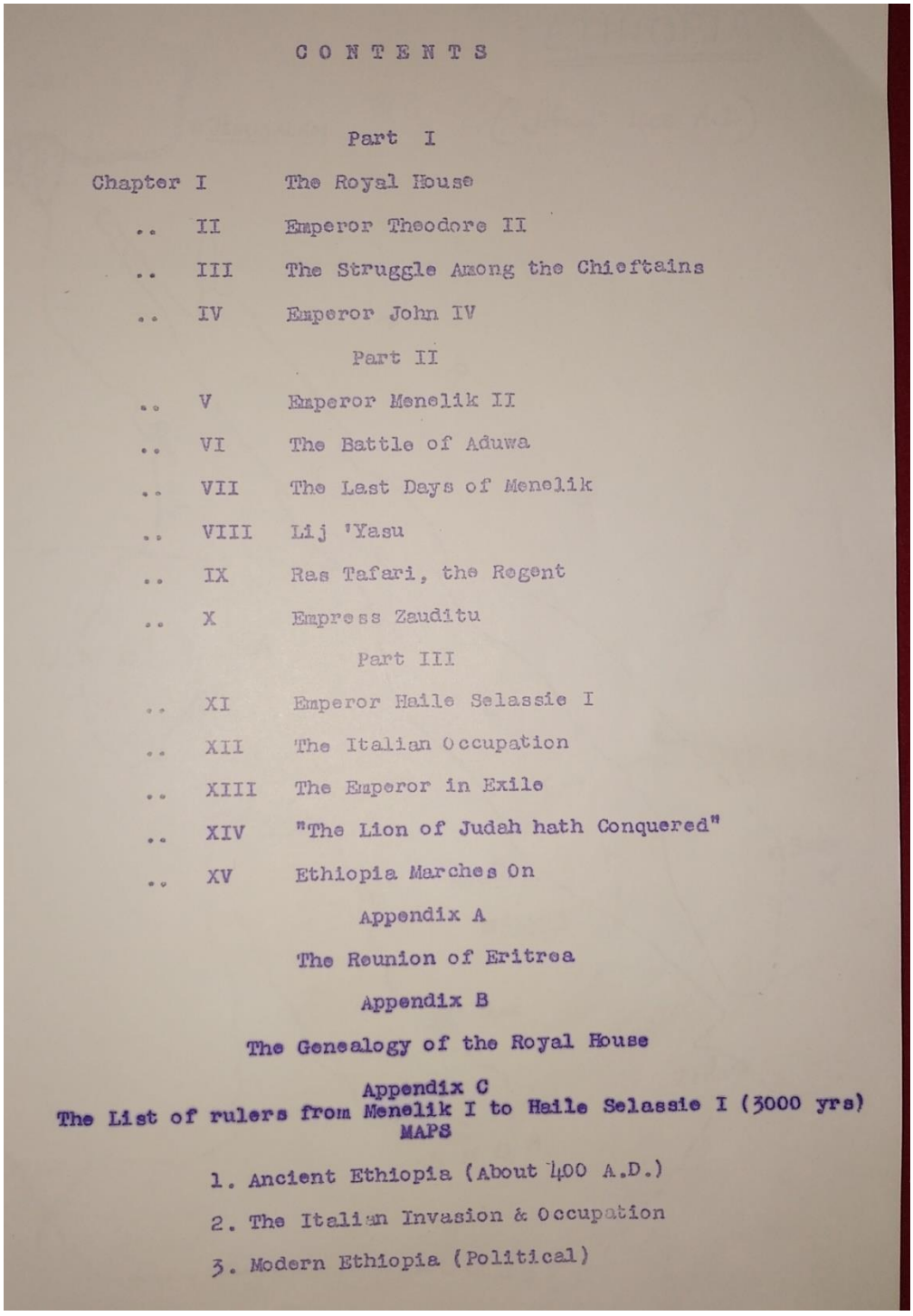
In the pamphlet, "Planning an Educational Program for Ethiopia", Mr.Perry A.Fellows wrote as follows: "Amharic textbooks are not adequate to enable the Ethiopians to teach the facts and theories on which modern science and technology are based." In the same pamphlet he says: "Education for Ethiopia should be Ethiopian to whatever degree possible, and Ethiopian personnel should participate in the planning and operation of the program, although at the outset, some personnel will be needed from outside."

Therefore I have made a humble start by writing this textbook on the modern history of Ethiopia, based on the curriculum for the higher elementary classes. At the same time I have attempted here to give a few glimpses of the past glory of Ethiopia beginning with the first century A.D., and to make this work as up-to-date as possible, so that it may also be useful to those foreigners who are eager to learn something about the past and the present of this ancient Christian kingdom in Africa.

C.A.I

Addis Abeba:
April 1951.

Ethiopian History Content Taught in Secondary Schools during the 1950s



C O N T E N T S

Part I

Chapter I The Royal House

.. II Emperor Theodore II

.. III The Struggle Among the Chieftains

.. IV Emperor John IV

Part II

.. V Emperor Menelik II

.. VI The Battle of Aduwa

.. VII The Last Days of Menelik

.. VIII Lij 'Yasu

.. IX Ras Tafari, the Regent

.. X Empress Zauditu

Part III

.. XI Emperor Haile Selassie I

.. XII The Italian Occupation

.. XIII The Emperor in Exile

.. XIV "The Lion of Judah hath Conquered"

.. XV Ethiopia Marches On

Appendix A

The Reunion of Eritrea

Appendix B

The Genealogy of the Royal House

Appendix C

The List of rulers from Menelik I to Haile Selassie I (3000 yrs)

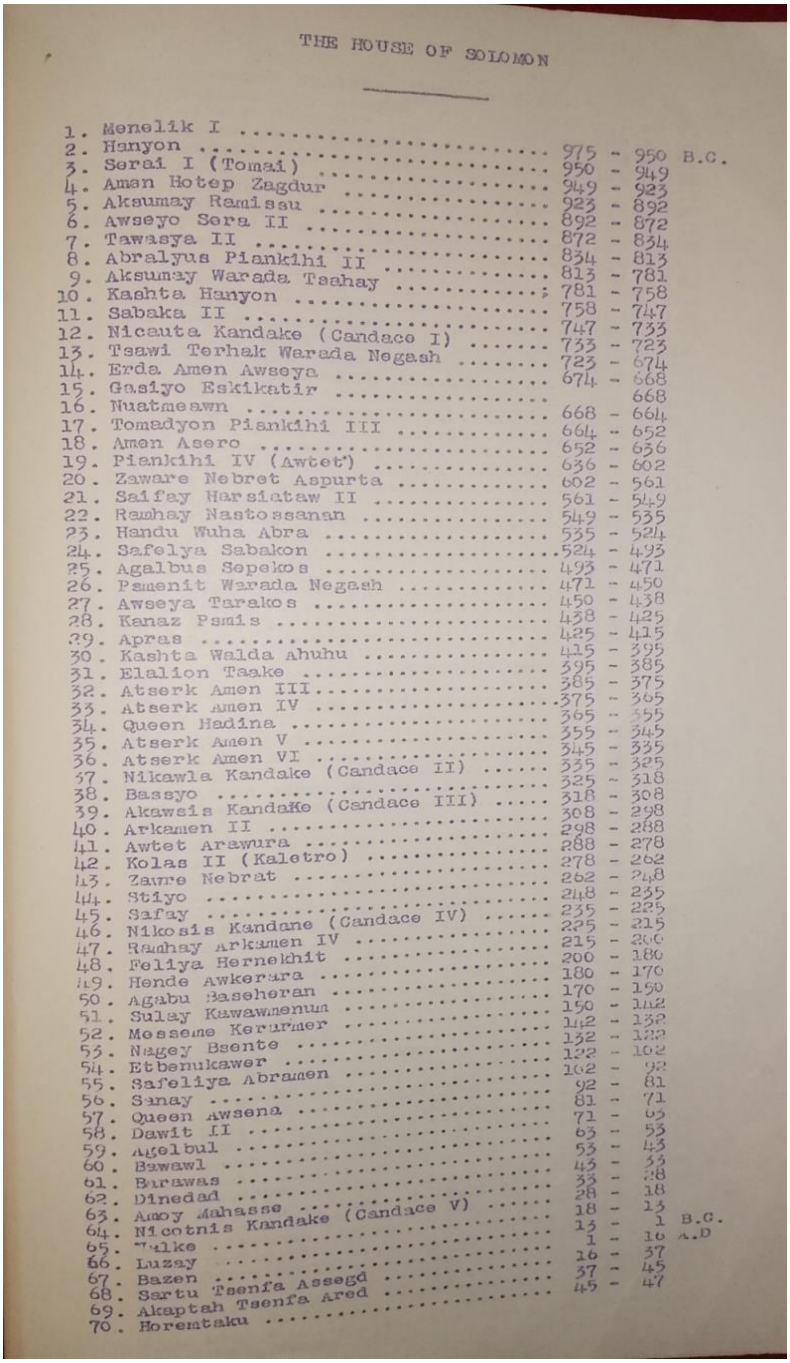
MAPS

1. Ancient Ethiopia (About 400 A.D.)

2. The Italian Invasion & Occupation

3. Modern Ethiopia (Political)

The Dynastic Line of the Lion of Judah as Represented in Ethiopian History Texts



THE HOUSE OF SOLOMON

1. Menelik I			
2. Hanyon	975	- 950	B.C.
3. Serai I (Tomai)	950	- 949	
4. Aman Hotep Zagdur	949	- 923	
5. Aksumay Ramissu	923	- 892	
6. Awseyo Sera II	892	- 872	
7. Tawasya II	872	- 834	
8. Abralyus Piankihi II	834	- 813	
9. Aksumay Warada Tsahay	813	- 781	
10. Kashta Hanyon	781	- 758	
11. Sabaka II	758	- 747	
12. Nicauta Kandake (Candace I)	747	- 733	
13. Tsawi Terhak Warada Negash	733	- 723	
14. Erda Amen Awseya	723	- 674	
15. Gasiyo Eskikatir	674	- 668	
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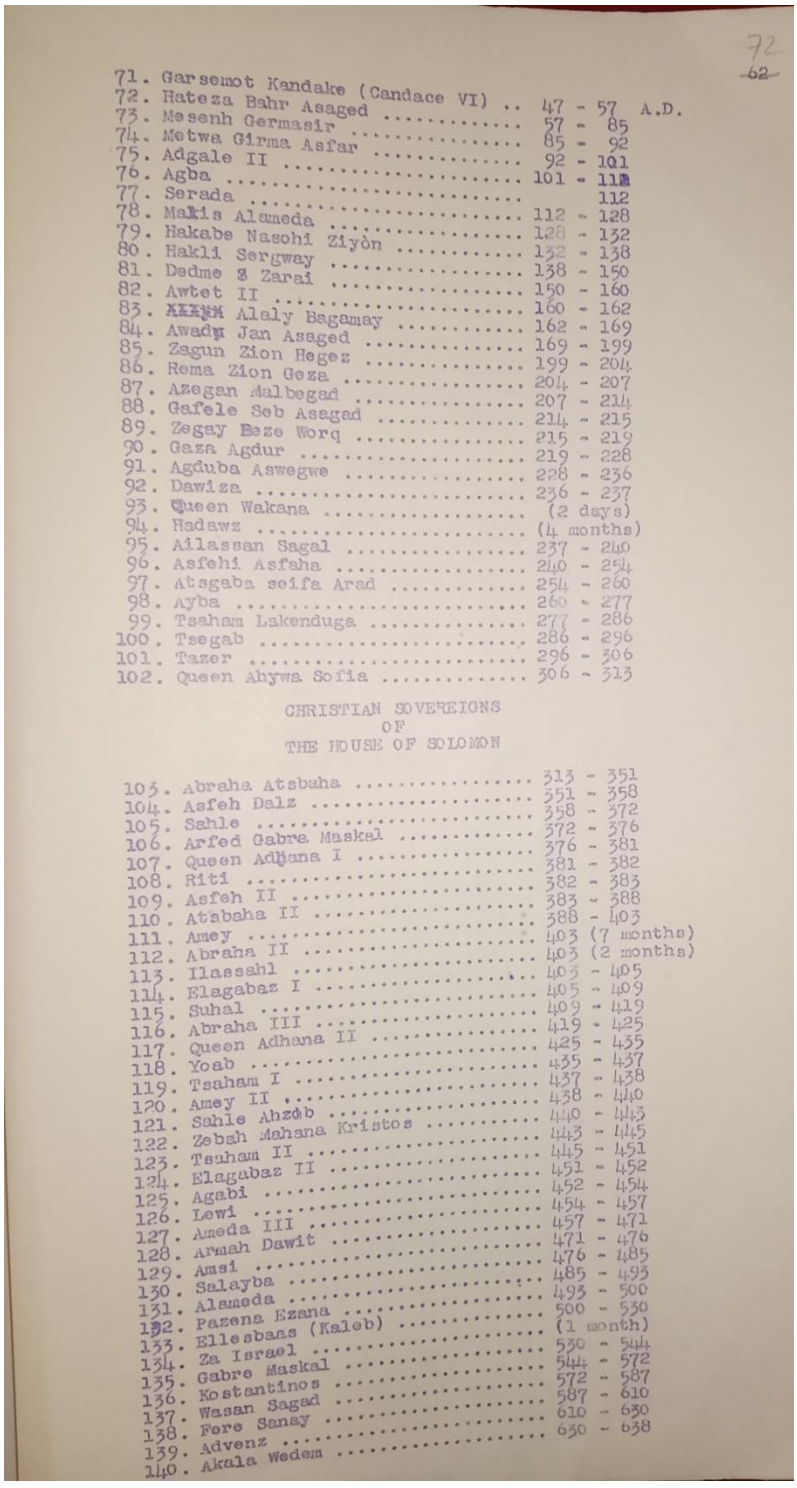
17. Tomadyon Piankihi III	668	- 664	
18. Amen Asero	664	- 652	
19. Piankihi IV (Awtet')	652	- 636	
20. Zaware Nebret Aspurta	636	- 602	
21. Saifay Harsiataw II	602	- 561	
22. Ramhay Nastosanan	561	- 549	
23. Handu Wuha Abra	549	- 535	
24. Safelya Sabakon	535	- 524	
25. Agalbus Sepekos	524	- 493	
26. Psmenit Warada Negash	493	- 471	
27. Awseya Tarakos	471	- 450	
28. Kanaz Psmis	450	- 438	
29. Apras	438	- 425	
30. Kashta Walda Ahuhu	425	- 415	
31. Elalion Taake	415	- 395	
32. Atserk Amen III	395	- 385	
33. Atserk Amen IV	385	- 375	
34. Queen Hadina	375	- 365	
35. Atserk Amen V	365	- 355	
36. Atserk Amen VI	355	- 345	
37. Nikawla Kandake (Candace II)	345	- 335	
38. Bassyo	335	- 325	
39. Akawsis Kandake (Candace III)	325	- 318	
40. Arkamen II	318	- 308	
41. Awtet Arawura	308	- 298	
42. Kolas II (Kaletro)	298	- 288	
43. Zaure Nebrat	288	- 278	
44. Stiyo	278	- 262	
45. Safay	262	- 248	
46. Nikosis Kandane (Candace IV)	248	- 235	
47. Ramhay Arkamen IV	235	- 225	
48. Feliya Hernekhit	225	- 215	
49. Hende Awkerara	215	- 200	
50. Agabu Baseheran	200	- 180	
51. Sulay Kawawmenun	180	- 170	
52. Messeme Kerurmer	170	- 150	
53. Nagey Bsente	150	- 142	
54. Etbenukawer	142	- 132	
55. Safeliya Abramen	132	- 122	
56. Sanay	122	- 102	
57. Queen Awsena	102	- 92	
58. Dawit II	92	- 81	
59. Agelbul	81	- 71	
60. Bawawl	71	- 63	
61. Barawas	63	- 53	
62. Dinedad	53	- 43	
63. Amoy Mahasse	43	- 33	
64. Nicotnis Kandake (Candace V)	33	- 28	
65. Tulke	28	- 18	
66. Luzay	18	- 13	
67. Bazen	13	- 1	B.C.
68. Sartu Tsenfa Assegd	1	- 16	A.D
69. Akaptah Tsenfa Ared	16	- 37	
70. Horemtaku	37	- 45	
	45	- 47	



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71. Garsemot Kandake (Candace VI)	47 - 57	A.D.
72. Hateza Bahr Asaged	57 - 85	
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74. Metwa Girma Asfar	92 - 101	
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82. Awtet II	160 - 162	
83. Alaly Bagamay	162 - 169	
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86. Rema Zion Geza	204 - 207	
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88. Gafele Seb Asagad	214 - 215	
89. Zegay Beze Worq	215 - 219	
90. Gaza Agdur	219 - 228	
91. Agduba Aswegwe	228 - 236	
92. Dawiza	236 - 237	
93. Queen Wakana	(2 days)	
94. Hadawz	(4 months)	
95. Ailassan Sagal	237 - 240	
96. Asfehi Asfaha	240 - 254	
97. Atsgaba seifa Arad	254 - 260	
98. Ayba	260 - 277	
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100. Tsegab	286 - 296	
101. Tazer	296 - 306	
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CHRISTIAN SOVEREIGNS
OF
THE HOUSE OF SOLOMON

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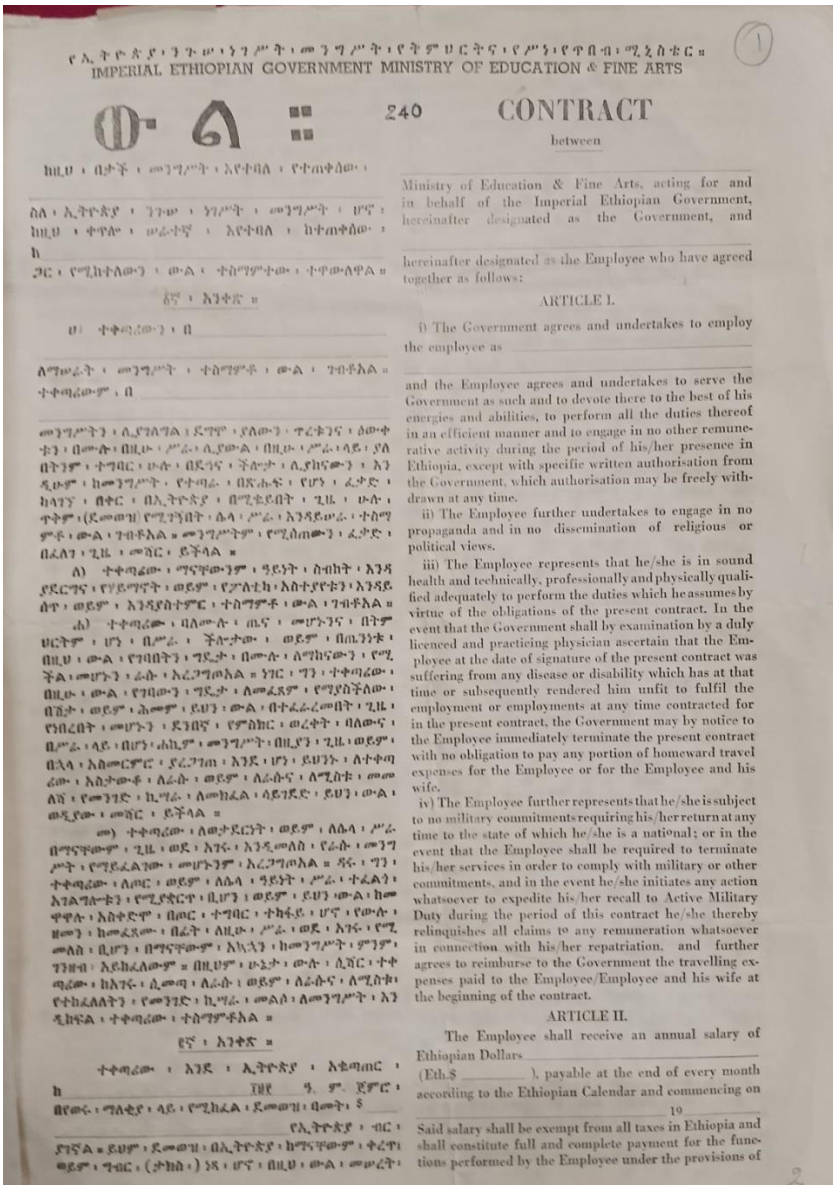
104. Asfeh Dalz	351 - 358	
105. Sahle	358 - 372	
106. Arfed Gabre Maskal	372 - 376	
107. Queen Adhana I	376 - 381	
108. Riti	381 - 382	
109. Asfeh II	382 - 383	
110. Atabaha II	383 - 388	
111. Amey	388 - 403	
112. Abraha II	403 (7 months)	
113. Ilassahl	403 (2 months)	
114. Elagabaz I	403 - 405	
115. Suhal	405 - 409	
116. Abraha III	409 - 419	
117. Queen Adhana II	419 - 425	
118. Yoab	425 - 435	
119. Tsaham I	435 - 437	
120. Amey II	437 - 438	
121. Sahle Ahzob	438 - 440	
122. Zebah Mahana Kristos	440 - 443	
123. Tsaham II	443 - 445	
124. Elagabaz II	445 - 451	
125. Agabi	451 - 452	
126. Lewi	452 - 454	
127. Ameda III	454 - 457	
128. Armah Dawit	457 - 471	
129. Amsi	471 - 476	
130. Salayba	476 - 485	
131. Alameda	485 - 493	
132. Pazena Ezana	493 - 500	
133. Ellesbaas (Kaleb)	500 - 530	
134. Za Israel	(1 month)	
135. Gabre Maskal	530 - 544	
136. Kostantinos	544 - 572	
137. Wasan Sagad	572 - 587	
138. Fere Sanay	587 - 610	
139. Advenz	610 - 630	
140. Akala Wedem	630 - 638	

Source: NALA, 64/70ጦ, Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, *A Modern History of Ethiopia*, Compiled by Charles A. Isaac, Addis Ababa: Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, 1952.

Appendix 2: Excerpt from the Contract between the Ethiopian Ministry of Education and Foreign Teachers



የኢትዮጵያ ንጉሠ ነገሥት መንግሥት የትምህርትና የሥነ የጥበብ ሚኒስቴር
IMPERIAL ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & FINE ARTS

ውል ... ፭40

CONTRACT

between

ከዚህ በታች መንግሥት እየተባለ የተጠቀሰው፣

ስለ ኢትዮጵያ ንጉሠ ነገሥት መንግሥት ሆኖ፣ ከዚህ ቀጥሎ ሠራተኛ እየተባለ ከተጠቀሰው፣ ከ ጋር፣ የሚከተለውን ሁሉ ተስማምተው ተዋውለዋል።

Ministry of Education & Fine Arts, acting for and in behalf of the Imperial Ethiopian Government, hereinafter designated as the Government, and

hereinafter designated as the Employee who have agreed together as follows:

አንቀጽ ፩ እንቀጽ ፩

ARTICLE I.

ሀ፡ ተቀጣሪው፣ በ ለማሠራት መንግሥት ተስማምቶ ሙል ገብቶአል። ተቀጣሪውም፣ በ መንግሥትን ሊያገለግል ደግሞ ያለውን ጥረቱንና ልውቀቱን በሙሉ በዚሁ ሥራ ሊያውል በዚሁ ሥራ ላይ ያለ በትንም ተግባር ሁሉ በደኅና ችሎታ ሊያከናውን እንዲሁም ከመንግሥት የተጣራ በጽሑፍ የሆነ ፈቃድ ከላገኘ በቀር በኢትዮጵያ በሚቲዩበት ጊዜ ሁሉ ጥቅም (ደመወዝ) የሚገኝበት ሱላ ሥራ እንዳይሠራ ተስማምቶ ሙል ገብቶአል። መንግሥትም የሚሰጠውን ፈቃድ በፈለገ ጊዜ መሽር ይችላል።

i) The Government agrees and undertakes to employ the employee as and the Employee agrees and undertakes to serve the Government as such and to devote there to the best of his energies and abilities, to perform all the duties thereof in an efficient manner and to engage in no other remunerative activity during the period of his/her presence in Ethiopia, except with specific written authorisation from the Government, which authorisation may be freely withdrawn at any time.

ii) The Employee further undertakes to engage in no propaganda and in no dissemination of religious or political views.

ለ) ተቀጣሪው ማናቸውንም ዓይነት ስብከት እንዳ ያደርግና የሃይማኖት ወይም የፖለቲካ አስተያየቱን እንዳይ ሰዋ ወይም እንዳያስተምር ተስማምቶ ሙል ገብቶአል።

iii) The Employee represents that he/she is in sound health and technically, professionally and physically qualified adequately to perform the duties which he assumes by virtue of the obligations of the present contract. In the event that the Government shall by examination by a duly licenced and practicing physician ascertain that the Employee at the date of signature of the present contract was suffering from any disease or disability which has at that time or subsequently rendered him unfit to fulfil the employment or employments at any time contracted for in the present contract, the Government may by notice to the Employee immediately terminate the present contract with no obligation to pay any portion of homeward travel expenses for the Employee or for the Employee and his wife.

ሐ) ተቀጣሪው ባለሙሉ ጤና መሆኑንና በትም ህርትም ሆነ በሥራ ችሎታው ወይም በጤንነቱ በዚህ ውል የገባበትን ግዴታ በሙሉ ለማከናወን የሚ ችል መሆኑን ራሱ አረጋግጦአል። ነገር ግን ተቀጣሪው፣ በዚሁ ውል የገባውን ግዴታ ለመፈጸም የማያስችለው በሽታ ወይም ሕመም ይህን ውል በተፈራረመበት ጊዜ የነበረበት መሆኑን ደንበኛ የምስክር ወረቀት ባለሙና በሥራ ላይ በሆነ ሐኪም መንግሥት በዚያን ጊዜ ወይም በኋላ አስመርምሮ ያረጋገጠ እንደ ሆነ ይህንኑ ለተቀጣ ሪው አስታውቆ ለራሱ ወይም ለራሱና ለሚስቱ መመ ለሻ የመንገድ ኪሣራ ለመክፈል ሳይገደድ ይህን ውል ወዲያው መሽር ይችላል።

iv) The Employee further represents that he/she is subject to no military commitments requiring his/her return at any time to the state of which he/she is a national; or in the event that the Employee shall be required to terminate his/her services in order to comply with military or other commitments, and in the event he/she initiates any action whatsoever to expedite his/her recall to Active Military Duty during the period of this contract he/she thereby relinquishes all claims to any remuneration whatsoever in connection with his/her repatriation, and further agrees to reimburse to the Government the travelling expenses paid to the Employee/Employee and his wife at the beginning of the contract.

ሠ) ተቀጣሪው ለወታደርነት ወይም ለሌላ ሥራ በማናቸውም ጊዜ ወደ አገሩ እንዲመለስ የራሱ መንግ ሥት የሚይፈልገው መሆኑንም አረጋግጦአል። ዳሩ ግን ተቀጣሪው ለጦር ወይም ለሌላ ዓይነት ሥራ ተፈልጎ እንልግሎቱን የሚያቋርጥ ቢሆን ወይም ይህን ውል ከመ ዋዋሉ አስቀድሞ በጦር ተግባር ተከፋይ ሆኖ የሙሉ ዘመን ከመፈጸሙ በፊት ለዚሁ ሥራ ወይ አገሩ የሚ መለስ ቢሆን በማናቸውም አኳኋን ከመንግሥት ምንም ገንዘብ እይከፈለውም። በዚህም ሁኔታ ሙሉ ሲሻር ተቀ ጣሪው ከአገሩ ሲመጣ ለራሱ ወይም ለራሱና ለሚስቱ የተከፈለለትን የመንገድ ኪሣራ መልሶ ለመንግሥት እን ዲከፍል ተቀጣሪው ተስማምቶአል።

ARTICLE II.

The Employee shall receive an annual salary of Ethiopian Dollars (Eth.$), payable at the end of every month according to the Ethiopian Calendar and commencing on 19 Said salary shall be exempt from all taxes in Ethiopia and shall constitute full and complete payment for the functions performed by the Employee under the provisions of

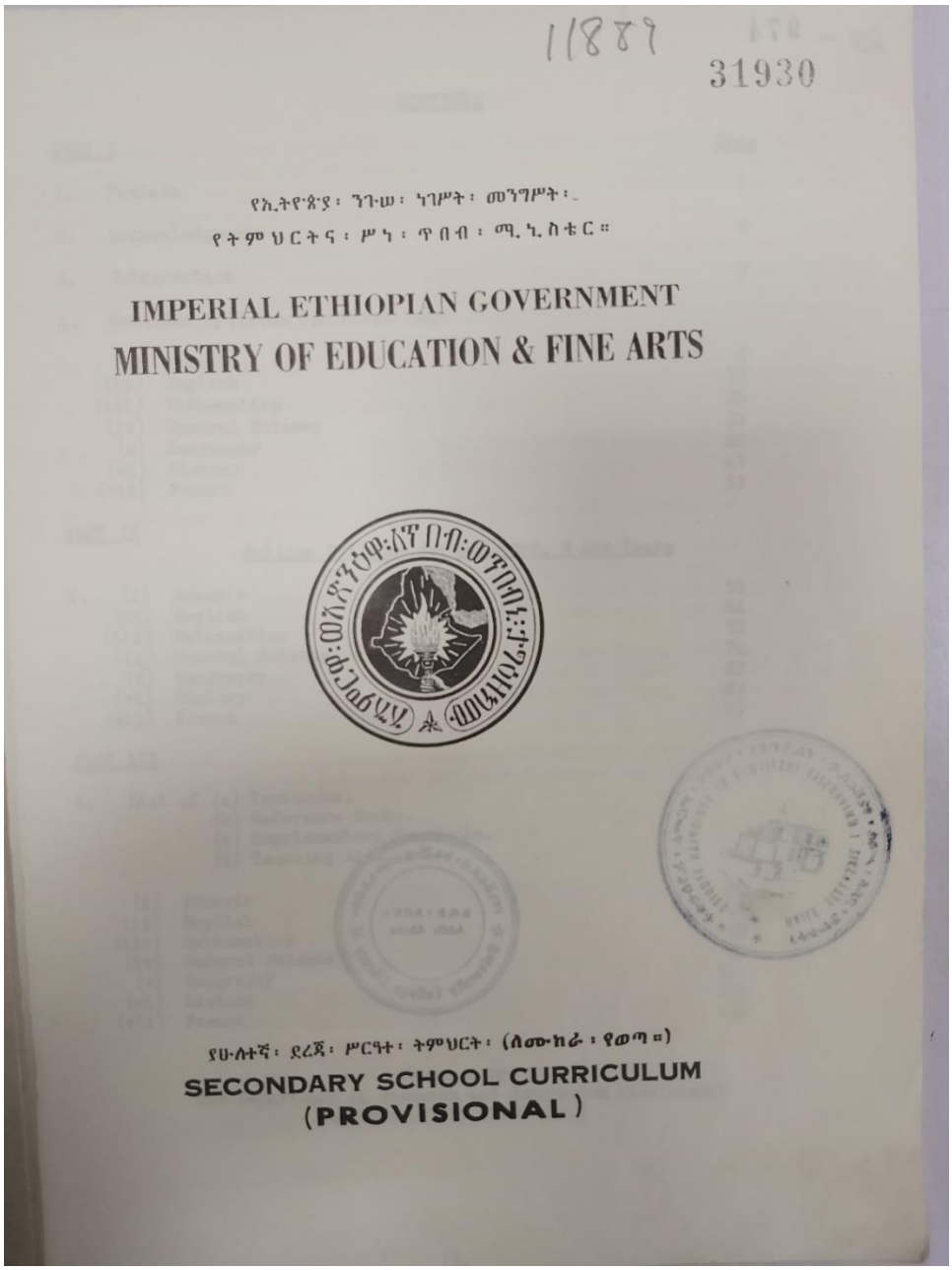
አንቀጽ ፪ እንቀጽ ፪

ተቀጣሪው እንደ ኢትዮጵያ አቆጣጠር ከ ፲፱፻ ዓ. ም. ጀምሮ በየወሩ ግሸቂያ ላይ የሚከፈል ደመወዝ በሙት $ የኢትዮጵያ ብር ያገኛል። ይህም ደመወዝ በኢትዮጵያ ከማናቸውም ቀረጥ ወይም ግብር (ታክስ) ነጻ ሆኖ በዚህ ውል መሠረት

Source: NALA-ሙ.1.ወ.ቁ63.1.15.06, *የትምህርት ሚኒስቴር ከውጭ አገር መምህራን ጋር ያደርግ ስለነበረው ውል* (The Contract Formerly Made by the Ministry of Education with Foreign Teachers), Addis Ababa, 1963.

Appendix 3: Extracts from the 1957 Secondary School Curriculum

The Cover Page



Suggested Reading Materials for Secondary School History

B. In the syllabus as a whole, West Africa weighs heavier than other parts of Africa. Some time could be taken away from strongly stressed topics like discovery and exploration and given to the study of Egypt, North and East Africa.

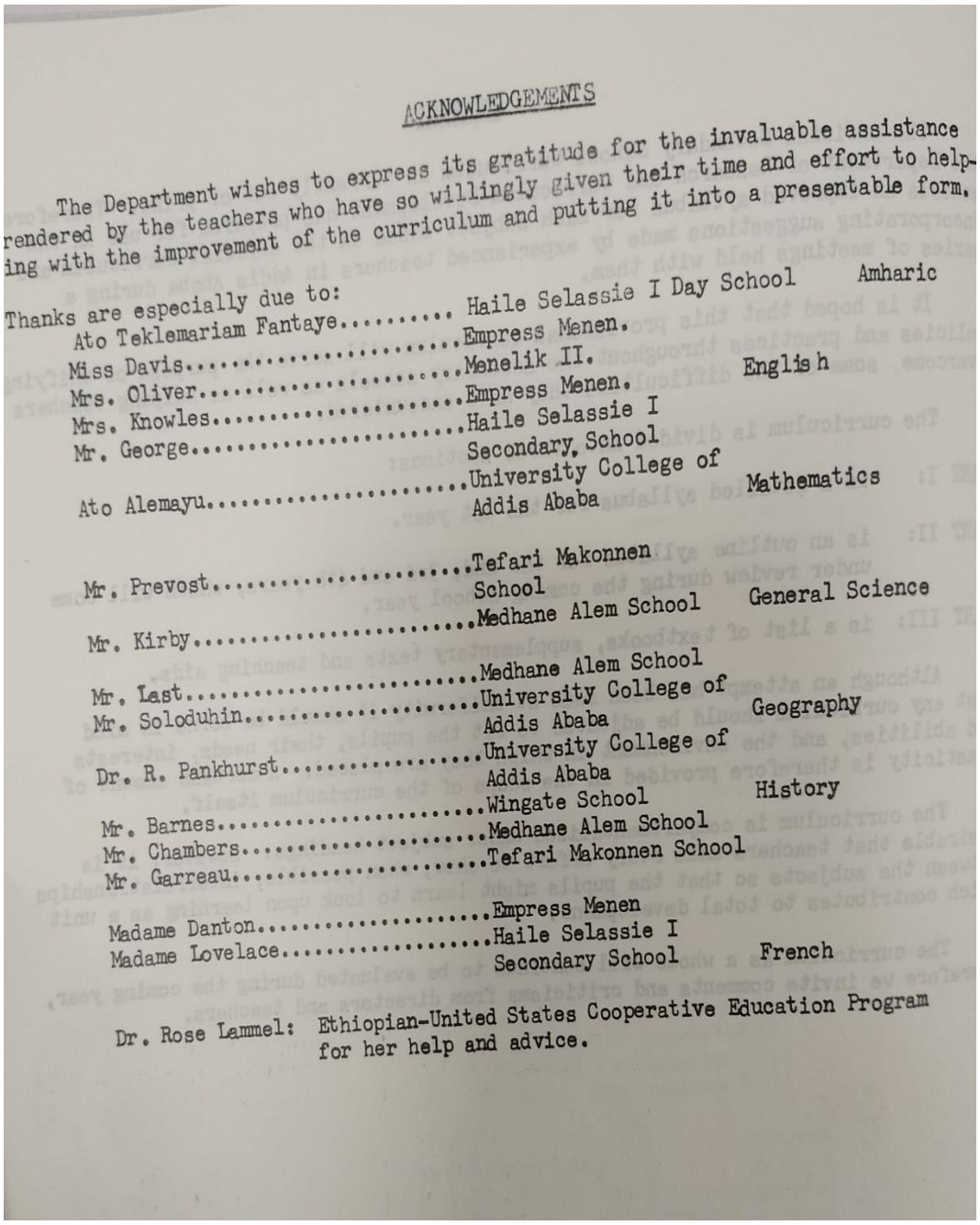
C. Additional reference books that should be supplied to each secondary school:

1. Conton, W. F. West Africa in History, 2 vols., George Allen and Union, Ltd., 1961.
2. Davidson, B. A Thousand Years of West African History.
3. Ajayi, J. F. and Espie, I. (ed.). A Thousand Years of West African History. Ibadan University Press and Nelson, 1965.
4. Anene, J. C. and Brown, G. N. (ed.). Africa in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. Ibadan University Press and Nelson, 1966.
5. Latham, Norah. A Sketch - Map History of West Africa. Hulton Educational Publication, 1959.
6. Perham, M. and Simmons, J. ((ed.). African Discovery, An Anthology of Exploration. Oxford paperback edition.
7. Latham, Norah. The Heritage of West Africa. Hulton Educational Publication, 1964.
8. Marsh, Z. and Kingsworth, G. W. An Introduction to the History of East Africa. Cambridge University Press, 1957.
9. Marsh, Z. A History of East Africa.

Subject III: Evaluation of the syllabus as a whole

A. The syllabus as it is should be supplemented by classes on civics so as to prepare future Ethiopians to cope with the urgent demands that may be made upon them. The syllabus as it is does not engender awareness of the responsibility of the future citizen to his community, then to the nation, and finally to the country. Classes in civics may help students to understand rights and duties they have within their society. By means of such classes students may have a better understanding of the workings of the Ethiopian administration, government and constitution. The ideal would be to teach civics in all the secondary school classes. Considering the obstacles to this, civics can for the time being, be taught in 7th and 8th grades.

List of Curriculum Makers



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

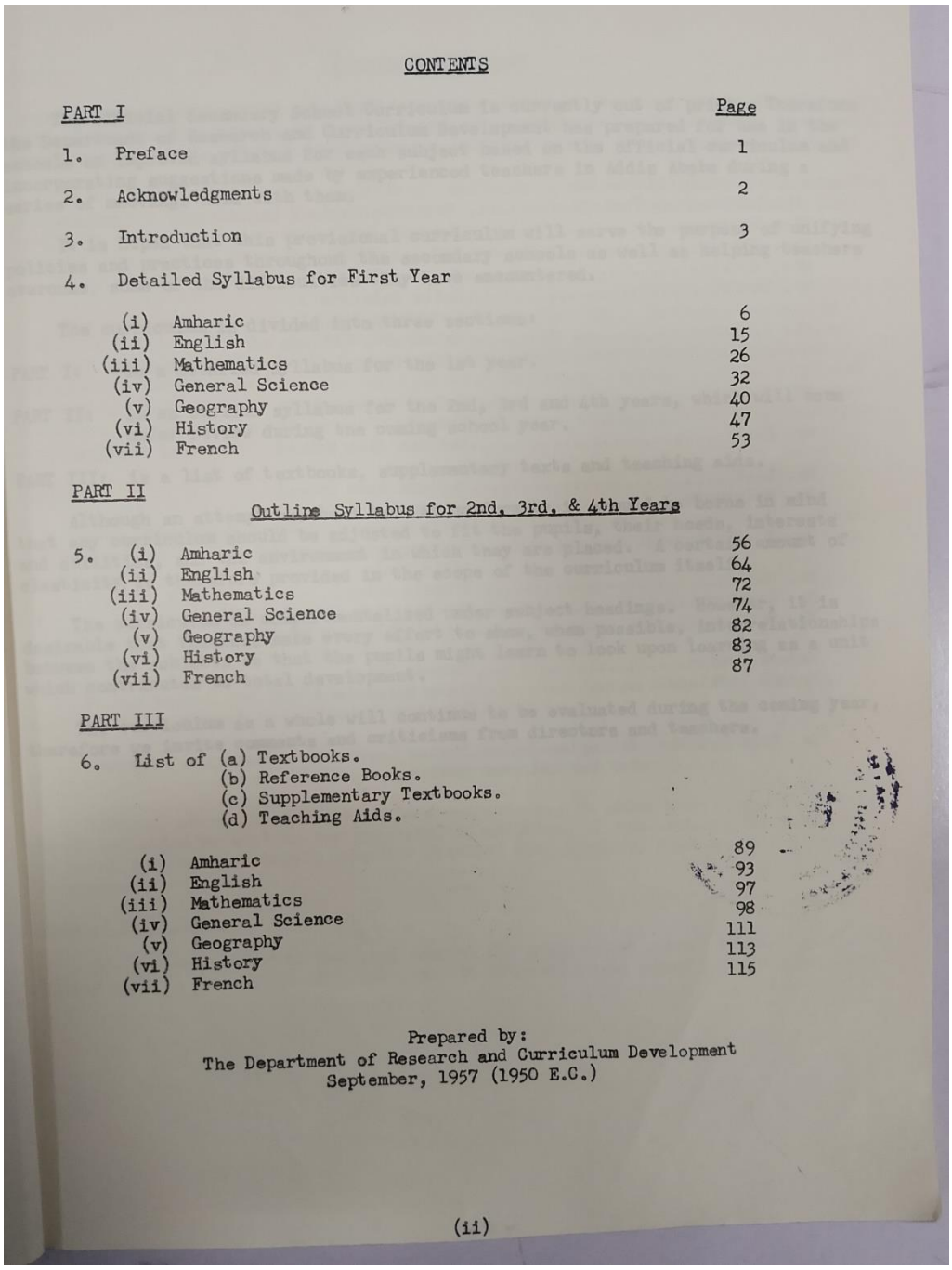
The Department wishes to express its gratitude for the invaluable assistance rendered by the teachers who have so willingly given their time and effort to helping with the improvement of the curriculum and putting it into a presentable form.

Thanks are especially due to:

Ato Teklemariam Fantaye.....	Haile Selassie I Day School	Amharic
Miss Davis.....	Empress Menen.	
Mrs. Oliver.....	Menelik II.	English
Mrs. Knowles.....	Empress Menen.	
Mr. George.....	Haile Selassie I Secondary School	
Ato Alemayu.....	University College of Addis Ababa	Mathematics
Mr. Prevost.....	Tefari Makonnen School	
Mr. Kirby.....	Medhane Alem School	General Science
Mr. Last.....	Medhane Alem School	
Mr. Soloduhin.....	University College of Addis Ababa	Geography
Dr. R. Pankhurst.....	University College of Addis Ababa	
Mr. Barnes.....	Wingate School	History
Mr. Chambers.....	Medhane Alem School	
Mr. Garreau.....	Tefari Makonnen School	
Madame Danton.....	Empress Menen	
Madame Lovelace.....	Haile Selassie I Secondary School	French

Dr. Rose Lammel: Ethiopian-United States Cooperative Education Program for her help and advice.

Subjects Taught in the Secondary Schools



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	(v) Geography	111
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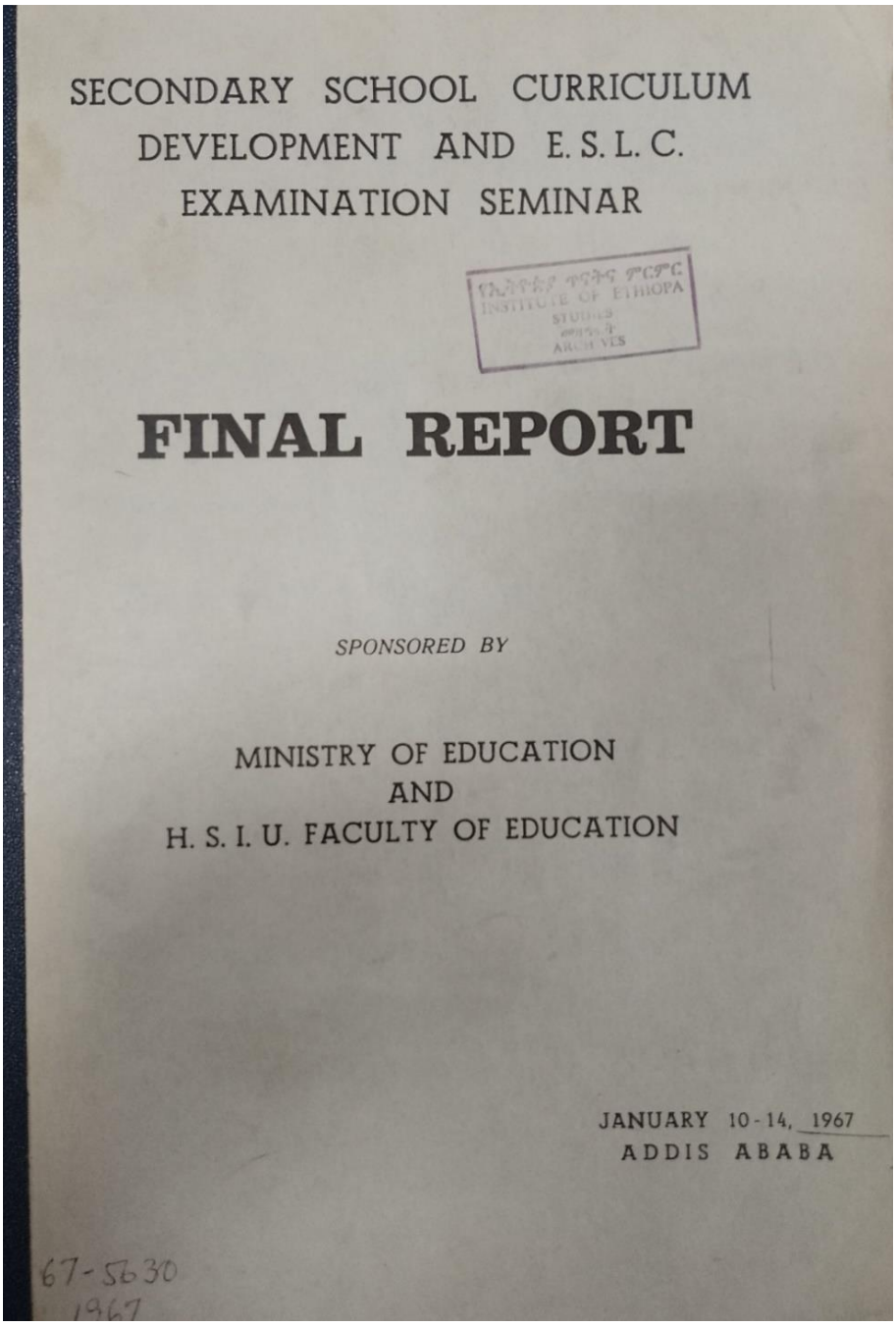
Prepared by:
The Department of Research and Curriculum Development
September, 1957 (1950 E.C.)

(ii)

Source: Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, *Secondary School Curriculum (Provisional)*, IES/377-EDU. Addis Ababa, September 1957.

Appendix 4: 1967 Curriculum Development Committee Report

The Cover Page



SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM
DEVELOPMENT AND E. S. L. C.
EXAMINATION SEMINAR

INSTITUTE OF ETHIOPA STUDIES ARCHIVES

FINAL REPORT

SPONSORED BY

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION
AND
H. S. I. U. FACULTY OF EDUCATION

JANUARY 10-14, 1967
ADDIS ABABA

67-5630
1967

History Curriculum Development Team

CHEMISTRY COMMISSION

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Mr. Thomas	Menelik II, Addis Ababa
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Mr. Schneider	Assela
Mr. Anthony Hareey	Gondar
Mr. R. T. Thomas	Dire Dawa
Mr. Rajan	Keren
Mr. Theodor	Decamare

HISTORY COMMISSION

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Ato Kiros Gebre Selassie, Co-Chairman	Curriculum Department, Ministry of Education
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John Castelino	Prince Makonnen, Asmara
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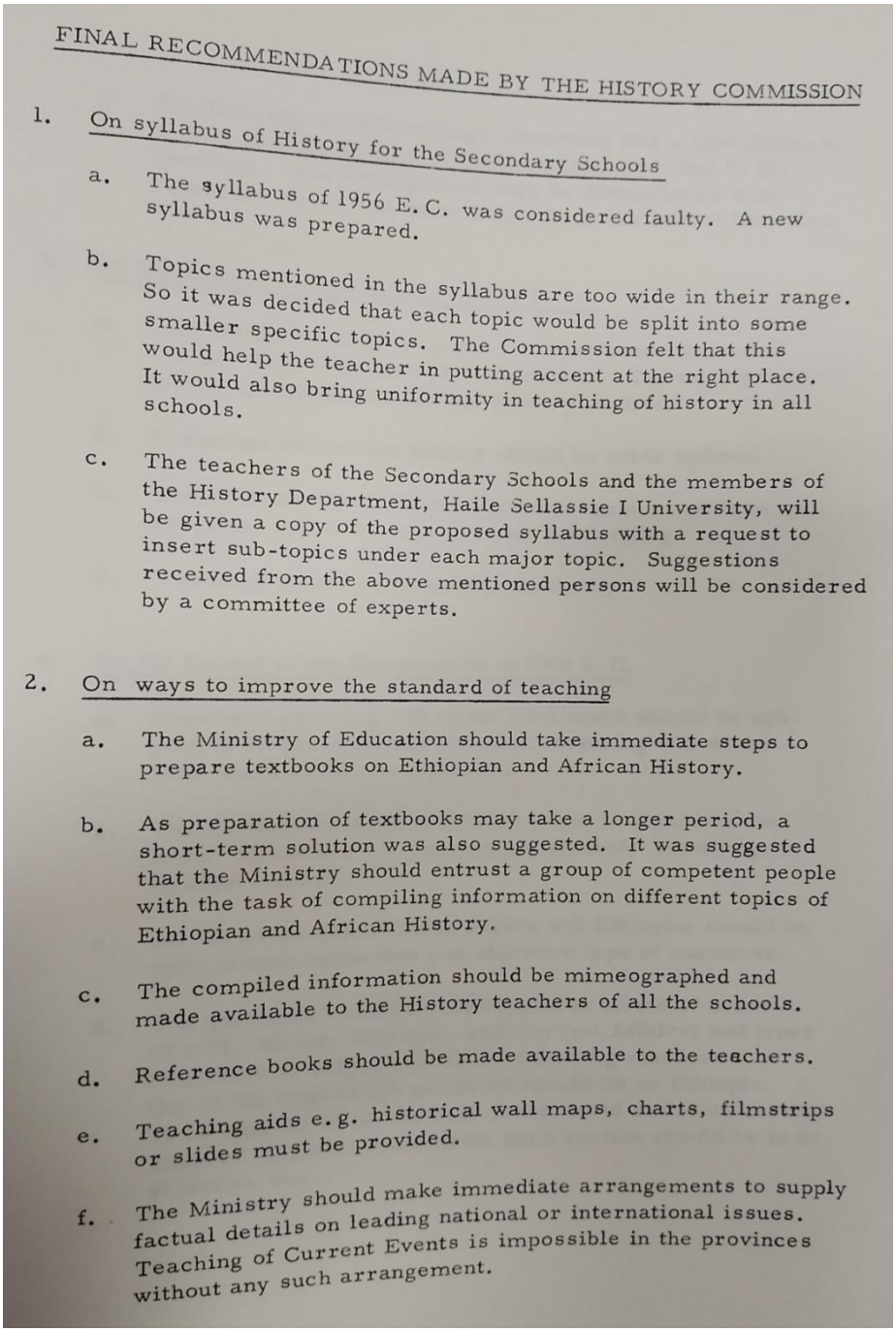
Mr. V. K. Sharma	Lekempt
Mr. Sakena	Debre Marcos
Ato Asgedom Mengistu	Faculty of Education, HSIU
Mr. C. Borsanyi	Senior Lecturer in History (UNESCO)

Recommendations Made by the History Commission



FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS MADE BY THE HISTORY COMMISSION

1. On syllabus of History for the Secondary Schools

   a. The syllabus of 1956 E.C. was considered faulty. A new syllabus was prepared.

   b. Topics mentioned in the syllabus are too wide in their range. So it was decided that each topic would be split into some smaller specific topics. The Commission felt that this would help the teacher in putting accent at the right place. It would also bring uniformity in teaching of history in all schools.

   c. The teachers of the Secondary Schools and the members of the History Department, Haile Sellassie I University, will be given a copy of the proposed syllabus with a request to insert sub-topics under each major topic. Suggestions received from the above mentioned persons will be considered by a committee of experts.

2. On ways to improve the standard of teaching

   a. The Ministry of Education should take immediate steps to prepare textbooks on Ethiopian and African History.

   b. As preparation of textbooks may take a longer period, a short-term solution was also suggested. It was suggested that the Ministry should entrust a group of competent people with the task of compiling information on different topics of Ethiopian and African History.

   c. The compiled information should be mimeographed and made available to the History teachers of all the schools.

   d. Reference books should be made available to the teachers.

   e. Teaching aids e.g. historical wall maps, charts, filmstrips or slides must be provided.

   f. The Ministry should make immediate arrangements to supply factual details on leading national or international issues. Teaching of Current Events is impossible in the provinces without any such arrangement.

The History Syllabus for Secondary Education

APPENDIX 1

HISTORY SYLLABUS

A group of history experts met on December 10, 1966, to consider the urgend demand for history materials especially on African and Ethiopian history. The general consensus of the group was that a committee should be formed to review and suggest changes for the Secondary School Syllabus (1956 E.C.). A Committee was then formed consisting of Ato Merid, Ato Asgbedon, Prof. Borsariji, Mr. Gilkes, Mr. Choudhury and Ato Kiros which met on December 12, 19, 26 and January 2, 1967, and prepared a new history syllabus to be considered by the History Commission.

The History Commission considered the suggested syllabus in detail and accepted it with little changes.

The Syllabus as it stands now.

Grade VII

Christianity
Islam
Crusades - Conflict between Christians and Moslems
Medieval African Empires
The Rise of the Modern World
Renaissance and Reformation (less emphasis on Reformation)
Discoveries
Industrialization
Exploration & Modern Colonial Empires (Africa)
National Rivalry & World War I

Grade VIII

League of Nations
Rise of Modern Dictatorship & World War II
The United Nations and How It Functions
Declaration of Human Rights
African Nationalism

CIVICS

The Duties & Obligations of Citizens
Ethiopian Government & Administration
Ethiopian Constitution

Grade IX

What Is History
The Origin of Man
Important Developments in Prehistoric and Early Historic Times, Tools, Weapons, Pottery, Agriculture, Architecture, Writing, and Government

River Valley Civilisations In Africa & Asia

Stress Religion, Government, Social Life & Structure
- Ancient Egypt
- The Fertile Crescent
- The Civilization of India & China

Ethiopia (to 600 A.D.)

Stress Religion, Trade, Architecture, Writing
- The People of Ethiopia
- The Indian Ocean and the Red Sea in Early Times.
- The Origin of Axumite Civilization
- The Axumite Empire in Pre-Christian Times
- King Ezana and the Conversion to Christianity of Axumites
- The Spread of Christianity, King Kaleb in S. Arabia

The Mediterranean World (to 600 A.D.)

The Aegean Civilization a Link Between East and West
Crete Civilization
Mycean Civilization
Phoenician and Greek Rivalry in the Mediterranean World
Government, Life, Learning, Art & Education in Ancient Greece - Sparta & Athens
Rivalry of Sparta and Athens and the Emergence of Macedonia
The Rise of Alexander and the Spread of Hellenism

The Rise and Expansion of Rome
Roman Government from Republic to the Empire
The Christianization of the Roman Empire
Barbarian Invasions and the Rise of Byzzantine Empire

Grade X

The Mediterranean World & Europe (600 - 1648)

The Rise and Spread of Islam and its Conflicts in the Mediterranean World - Emphasis on Crusades (with emphasis on its results on Africa)
Feudalism and its Break Down
Renaissance and Reformation
Rise of National States and the Expansion of the Ottoman Empire
Exploration & Discoveries in Asia, Africa and the Americas (the Fate of the Ancient American Civilization)

Ethiopian History (600 - 1632)

The Rise of Islam and the Decline of the Axumite Kingdom
The Zague Dynasty, Lalibela and the Architecture of Roha
The Restoration of the Solomonid Line and the Growth of the First Shoa Kingdom and its Administration
Culture and Religion
Geez and the Development of the Modern Ethiopian Languages
Alvarez Account of Ethiopia at the Rise of Lebna Dengel
The Conflict Between Ahmed Gran and Lebna Dengel
The Galla Migration to Ethiopia
The Jesuit Mission of the 16th and 17th Centuries and its Impact
The Religious War and the Expulsion of the Jesuits at the Abdication of Suseneyes

Africa (642 A.D. - 1640)

Egypt and Berber States in the Middle Ages
The Rise of Early Islamic States in the Western Sudan, Ghana, Mali, Shangai, Hausa City States, Kanaem or Bornuo
The Christian State in Nubia
Expansion of the Bantu Speaking Peoples and Zambabwe
The East Coast and Trade in the Indian Ocean (Arab, Persian and Chinese)

Exploration of Africa
Coastal Trading Settlements of the Portuguese and Dutch
The Portuguese and the Kingdom of Mani Congo

Grade XI

Ethiopia (1632 - 1855)

The Establishment of Gondar and Reign of Fasiledes
Iyasu the Great
The Architecture of Gondar and the Accounts Left by the Foreign Visitors
The Disintegration of the Gondar Empire and the Zemenemesafit
The Regional Kingdoms (Kaffa, Wollamo, Sidamo, etc.)

The World (1648 - 1848)

The Age of Revolution
The Period of Enlightenment
The Revolt Against Autocratic Government - England
The American Revolution
The French Revolution
Napoleon and the Napoleonic Empire
Reaction in Europe: Revolt in Latin America
Political Forment in Europe, 1830 - 1848
The Industrial Revolution
Europe and Asia, Special Emphasis on British Colonialism in India

Africa (1640 - 1850)

The Rise and Decline of the African Forest States - Yoruba, Oyo, Benin, Ashanti and Dahomi
Slavery and the Slave Trade
European Settlement in Africa until the Middle of the 19th Century
European Exploration of the Interior of Africa

Grade XII

The World (1848 - 1950)

The Problem of National Unity (Germany and the U.S.A.)
The Decline of the Ottoman Empire and the Eastern Question
The Causes of the First World War

The 1917 Revolution in Russia and the Rise of the Soviet State up to 1924
Internal History of the U.S.A. (1919 - 1939)
The Modern Dictatorship of Germany, Italy and the U.S.S.R.
International Relations 1919-1939 and the Causes of the Second World War
International Organizations (a) The League of Nations
(b) The U.N.O.
The Second World War and the Post-War World
The Emergence of Independent India and Communist China

Africa (1850 - present)

The Partition of Africa and Growth of Colonial Empires
The Rise of Nationalist Movements in Africa
The Spread of Independence
First African Summit Conference, Addis Ababa, May 1963

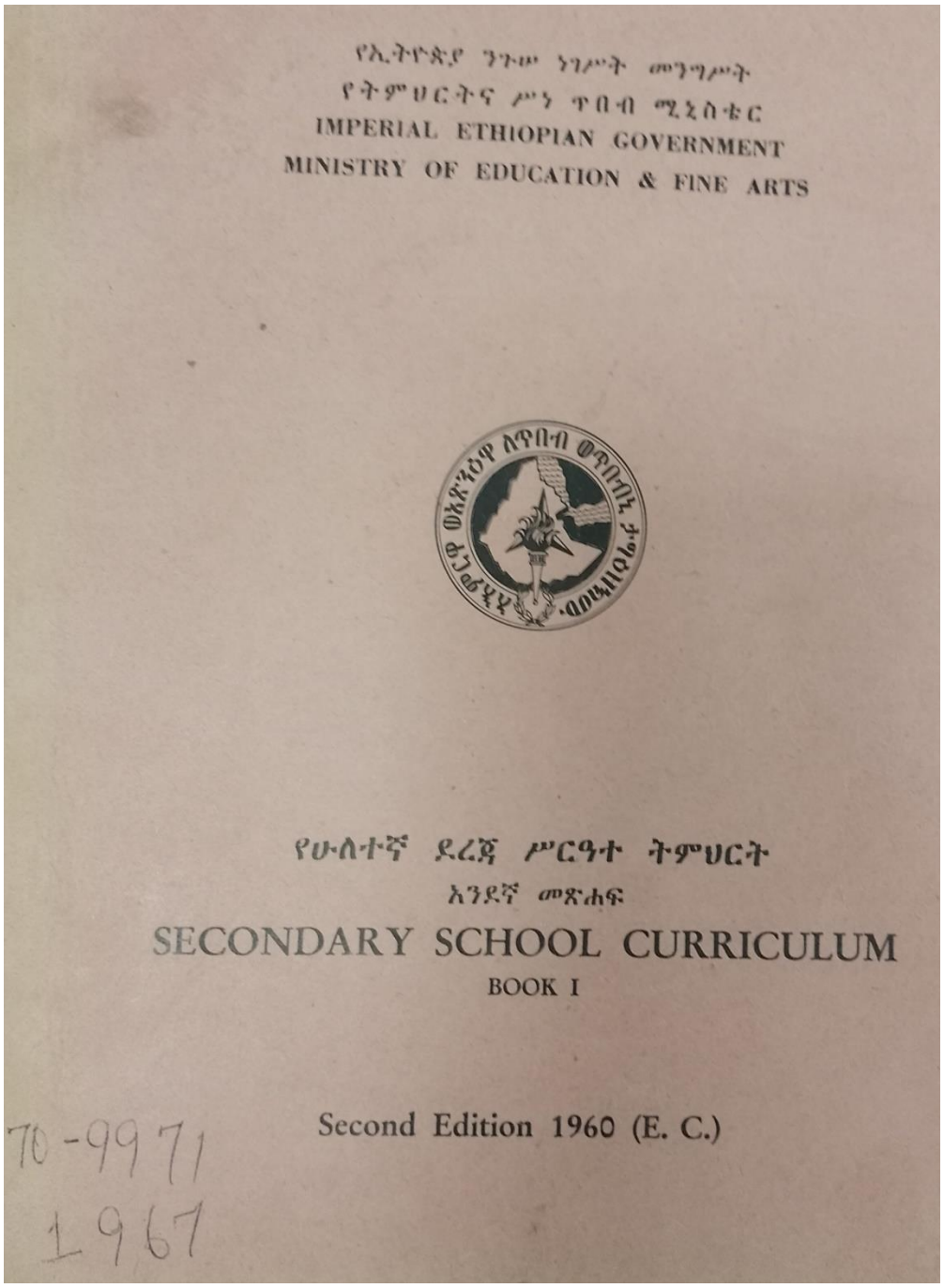
Ethiopia (1855 - present)

Background to the Rise of Tewodros
Tewodros (1855 - 1868)
Yohannes IV
Menelik II
The Reign of Lij Yasu, Empress Zauditu and the Regency of Ras Taferi
Haile Sellassie I

Source: Ministry of Education and H.S.I.U. Faculty of Education, *Secondary School Curriculum and E.S.L.C. Examination Seminar Final Report*, IES-67-5630/1967, Addis Ababa, January 10-14, 1967, pp. 121–25.

Appendix 5: Selected Extracts from the 1967 Secondary School Curriculum

The Cover Page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IMPERIAL ETHIOPIAN GOVERNMENT
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION & FINE ARTS

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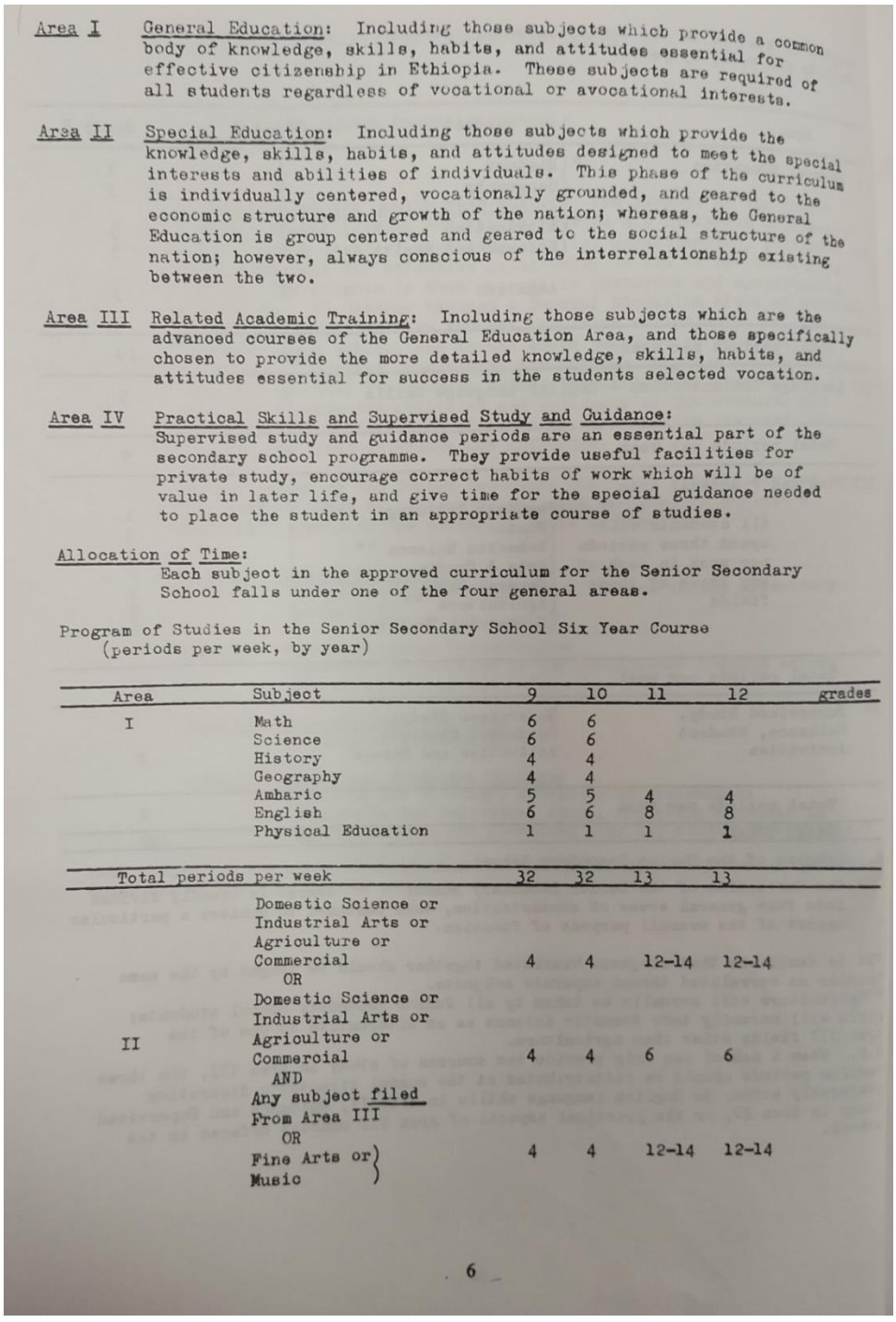
SECONDARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM
BOOK I

Second Edition 1960 (E. C.)

70-9971
1967

Subjects Taught in Secondary Education and Period Allotments



Area I — General Education: Including those subjects which provide a common body of knowledge, skills, habits, and attitudes essential for effective citizenship in Ethiopia. These subjects are required of all students regardless of vocational or avocational interests.

Area II — Special Education: Including those subjects which provide the knowledge, skills, habits, and attitudes designed to meet the special interests and abilities of individuals. This phase of the curriculum is individually centered, vocationally grounded, and geared to the economic structure and growth of the nation; whereas, the General Education is group centered and geared to the social structure of the nation; however, always conscious of the interrelationship existing between the two.

Area III — Related Academic Training: Including those subjects which are the advanced courses of the General Education Area, and those specifically chosen to provide the more detailed knowledge, skills, habits, and attitudes essential for success in the students selected vocation.

Area IV — Practical Skills and Supervised Study and Guidance: Supervised study and guidance periods are an essential part of the secondary school programme. They provide useful facilities for private study, encourage correct habits of work which will be of value in later life, and give time for the special guidance needed to place the student in an appropriate course of studies.

Allocation of Time:
Each subject in the approved curriculum for the Senior Secondary School falls under one of the four general areas.

Program of Studies in the Senior Secondary School Six Year Course
(periods per week, by year)

Area	Subject	9	10	11	12	grades
I	Math	6	6			
	Science	6	6			
	History	4	4			
	Geography	4	4			
	Amharic	5	5	4	4	
	English	6	6	8	8	
	Physical Education	1	1	1	1	
Total periods per week		32	32	13	13	
II	Domestic Science or Industrial Arts or Agriculture or Commercial OR Domestic Science or Industrial Arts or Agriculture or Commercial AND Any subject filed From Area III	4	4	6	6	
	OR Fine Arts or Music	4	4	12-14	12-14	

6

Suggested History Textbooks for Secondary Schools

9	Teachers' Hand Book for Secondary C One Algebra and Geometry - E.D.C.	
10	First Intermediate Comprehensive Maths.	Hodson, MacMillan
11	Second Intermediate Comprehensive Maths.	
12	Comprehensive Maths.	
9 - 12	Four Figure Log. Tables	
Geography		
7 & 8	Beginning Secondary School Geography - G.C. Last, Ministry of Education.	
7 & 8	Bilingual Macmillan Atlas - G.C. Last (Ed), MacMillan Co. Ltd.	
9	Duplicated Notes - Turenne, Last and Wilkes.	
10	Geography for Today Book III - Stamp and Suggate, Longmans.	
11	Regional Survey of Africa - G.C. Last, Ministry of Education.	
12	A Geography of Ethiopia for Senior Secondary Schools - G.C. Last, Ministry of Education.	
9 - 12	Phillips School Atlas - Phillips.	
9 - 12	Map-Reading for Secondary Schools - MacMillan Co. Ltd.	
3 - 12	Bilingual Wall Map of Ethiopia - Ministry of Education.	
History		
7	The Story of Man, Book II, Chaps. 5, 6 and 9	
	The Story of Man, Book III, Chaps. 2, 3 and 10	
	Tropical Africa, Book I, Chaps. 10, 13, 15 and 16	
	Tropical Africa, Book II, Chaps. 1-10	
8	The Story of Man, Book III Chaps. 8-12	
	Tropical Africa, Book IV, Chaps. 1-6, 9-12	
9	Tropical Africa, Book I, Chaps. 1-4	
	The Story of Man, Book I, Most of the materials are relevant to this grade.	
10	Tropical Africa, Book I Chaps. 11-16	
	Tropical Africa, Book II, Chaps. 3, 5 and 6	
	Tropical Africa, Book III, Chaps. 1-6	

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11	Tropical Africa, Book III, Chaps. 7-9
	Tropical Africa, Book II, Chaps. 14, 15, 16, 9, 10
11	Tropical Africa, Book IV, Chap. 7
	The Story of Man, Book III, has materials on the Enlightment, the French Revolution and Napoleon.
12	Tropical Africa, Book III, Chaps. 7-12
	Tropical Africa, Book IV, Chaps. 9-13
9	Unstead looking at Ancient Times
10 - 12	Hayes, Moon and Weyland, World History.
11 - 12	R. Pankhurts, Travellersy in Ethiopia, O.U.P.
11 - 12	Richards, Some Historical journeys in East Africa, O.U.P.
11 - 12	Jean Doresse, Ancient Cities and Temples, Ethiopia.
11 - 12	Ullendorff, the Ethiopians, O.U.P.

For Teachers' Reference

Jean Doresse, Ancient Cities and Temples, Ethiopia.

Ajayi, J.F. and Espie, I.A. Thousand Years of West African History.

Ibadan University Press and Nelson, 1965.

Marder, Z. A History of East Africa.

J. Spencer Trimingham, Islam in Ethiopia.

1. The Story of Man, Book 1, 2, 3 - J.B. Neilson, Longmans.
2. Tropical Africa in World History, Book 1, 2, 3, 4 - T.R. Batten, O.U.P.
3. Looking at ancient Times - R.J. Unstead, A & C Black Ltd., 4, 5 & 6, Soho Square, London, W.1.
4. Some Historical journeys in East Africa - Charles Richard, O.U.P.
5. The Ethiopians - Ullendorff, O.U.P.
6. Travellers in Ethiopia - R. Pankhurts, O.U.P.

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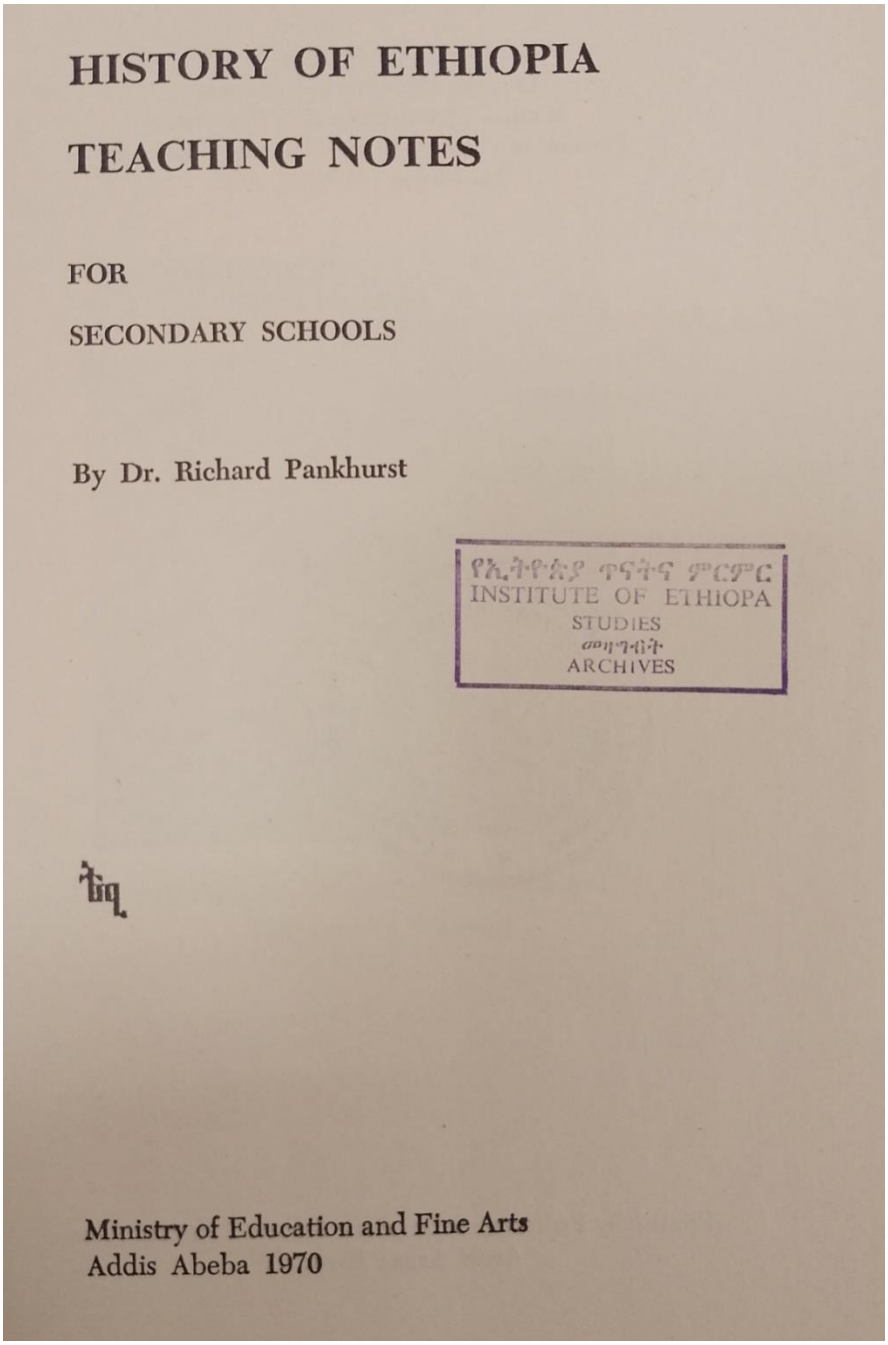
Source: Ministry of Education and Fine Arts. *Secondary School Curriculum: Book I (Second Edition)*, IES-70-9971-1967, Addis Ababa, 1960 E.C. (1967).

Appendix 6: Selected Pages from the 1970 Ethiopian History Teaching Note for Secondary Schools



HISTORY OF ETHIOPIA

TEACHING NOTES

FOR

SECONDARY SCHOOLS

By Dr. Richard Pankhurst

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INSTITUTE OF ETHIOPA
STUDIES
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ARCHIVES

Ministry of Education and Fine Arts
Addis Abeba 1970

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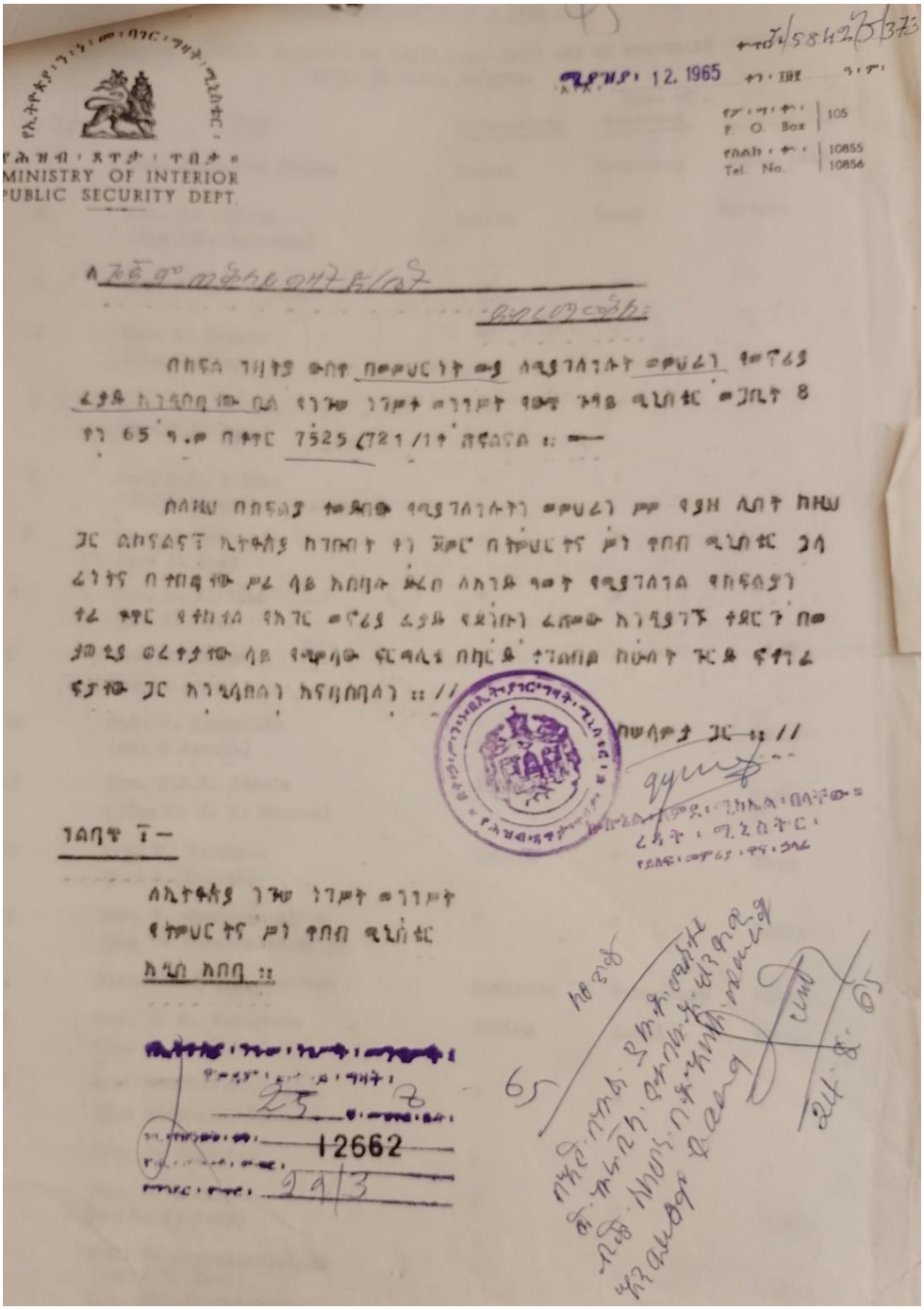
Source: Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, *History of Ethiopia: Teaching Notes for Secondary Schools (*Compiled by Richard Pankhurst), Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Haile Selassie I Printing Press, 1970.

Appendix 7: Selected Archival Reproductions from the Debre-Markos University Archive Center



NEW FOREIGN TEACHERS EMPLOYED ON LOCAL (ONE-YEAR) AND ON TEMPORARY CONTRACT UNTIL 30 SENE, 19/65EC.

S.No.	Name	Nationality	Type of Contract	Posting Place
1	Mrs. Christian Shaume	French	Temporary	Addis Abab
2	Mrs. R.K. Singh (Nee R.K. Rathrose)	Indian	Local	Eritrea
3	Mrs. S. Das	"	"	"
4	Mrs. L. Thomas (Nee L. Alex)	"	"	"
5	Mrs. K.L. Shende (Nee K.L. Dass)	"	"	"
6	Mrs. H.K. Bilkhu (Nee H. Kaur)	"	"	"
7	Mrs. S. Deb (Nee S. Roy)	"	"	"
8	Mrs. D. K. Vyas (Nee K. Vyas	"	"	"
9	Mrs. N. Monga (nee N. Devi)	"	"	"
10	MrS. J. Kuruvilla (Nee N Joseph)	"	"	Gojjam
11	Mrs. M.B.R. Steele (Nee M. B. R. Messon)	British	"	Kaffa
12	Mrs. M. Varghese (Nee M. Samuel)	Indian	"	Shoa
13	Mrs. V. Shanmuganathan (Nee P. Varathaladerumy)	"	"	Kaffa
14	Miss Charian A. Justice	Amerioan	Temporary	G/Gofa
15	Mrs. E. K. Varughese (Nee A. T. Elizabeth)	Indian	local	Harar
16	Mrs. Marykutty Stephen (Nee Marykutty Mathew)	"	"	"
17	Mrs. S. Chaerian	"	"	"
18	Mrs. R. Kurian (nee M. J. Rosy)	"	"	Sidamo
19	MrS. C. Goppalakrishnan (nee R.C. Devi)	"	"	Wollo
20	Mrs. Elizabeth abraham (nee E. Varghese)	"	"	"
21	Mrs. Saramma Mathew (nee S. V. Thomas)	"	"	"

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MINISTRY OF INTERIOR
PUBLIC SECURITY DEPT.

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ጨጦሬ ፡ ማርቆስ ::

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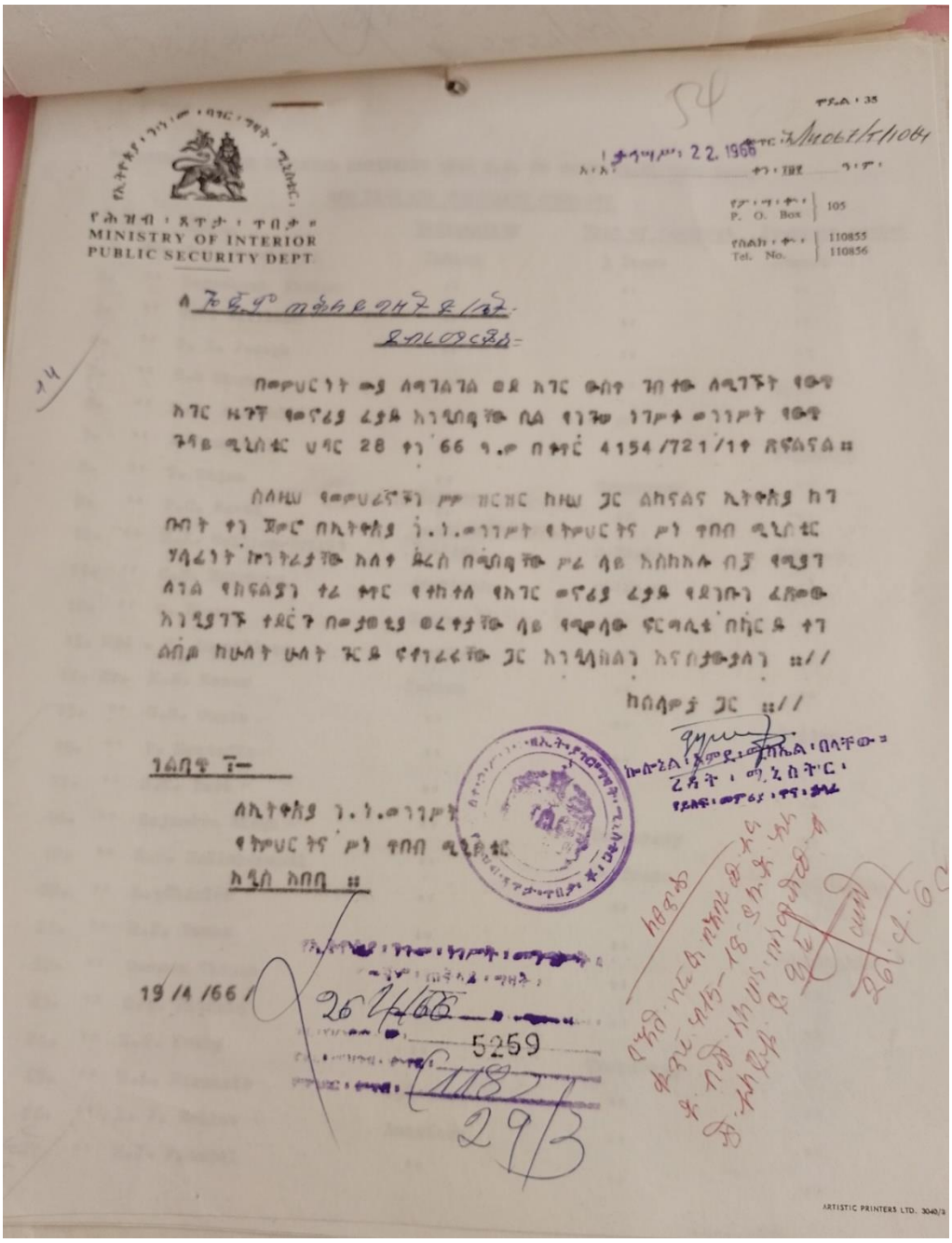
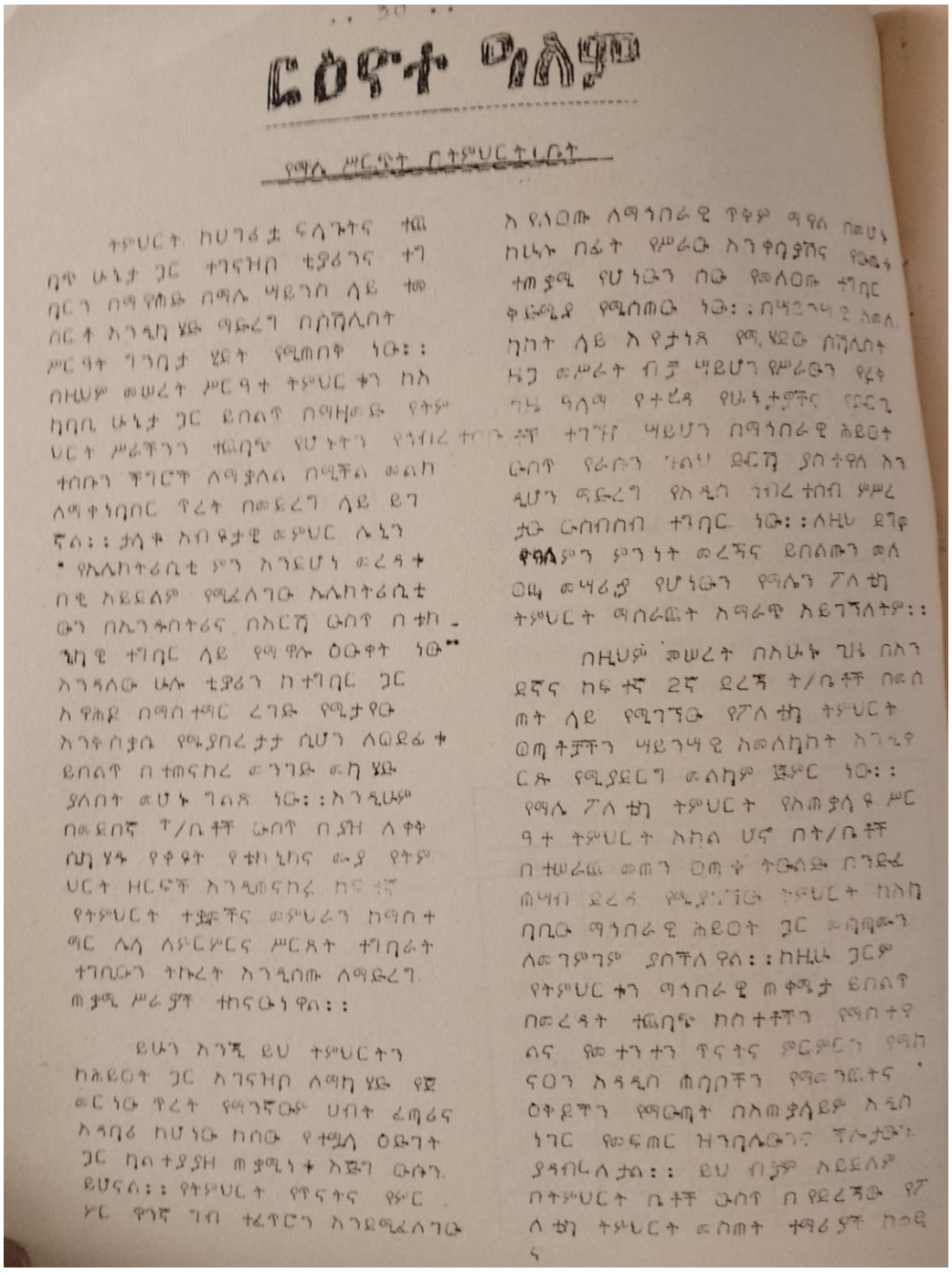


Source: DMU Archive Center, *ስለ ውጭ መምህራን (About Foreign Teachers)*. Folder No. 208, File No. ሙ/ተ-6. 1962–1974.



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Source: DMU Archive Center, Folder No. 22, File No. ማ/ተ-6, *Serto Ader*, vol. 4, no. 165, 1979 E.C.

Appendix 8: Selected Pages from the 9th Grade History Textbook (1980)

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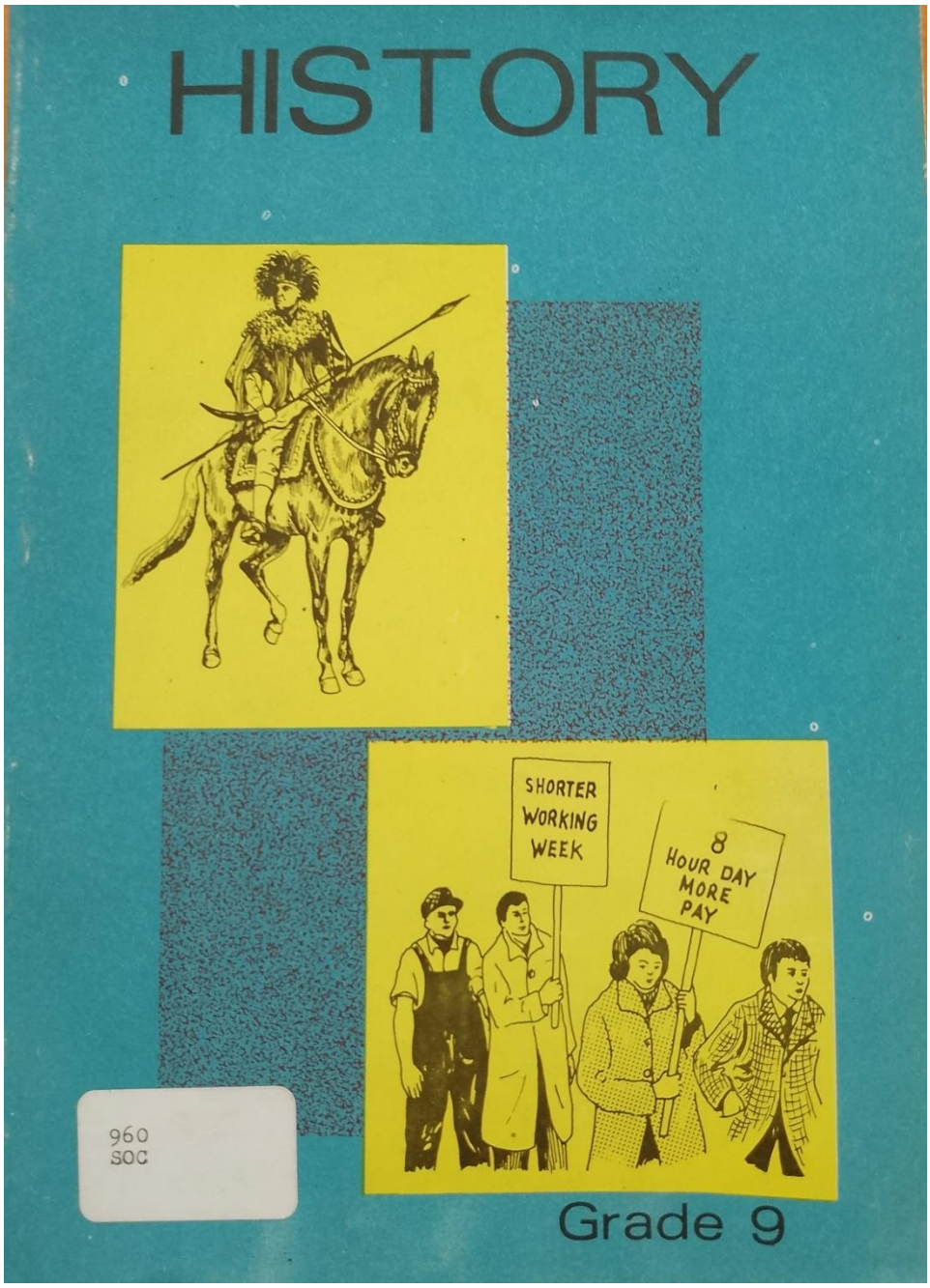

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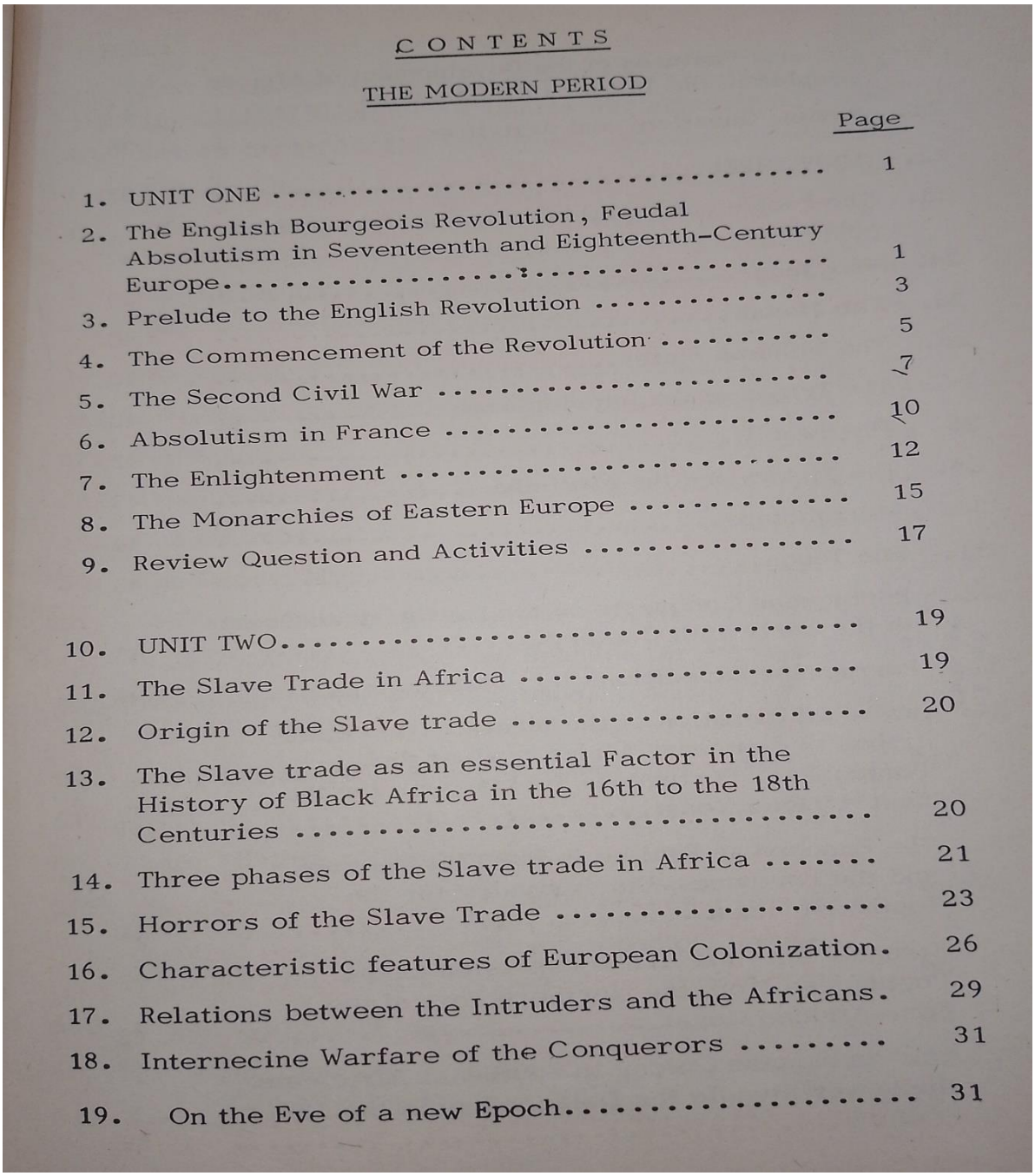

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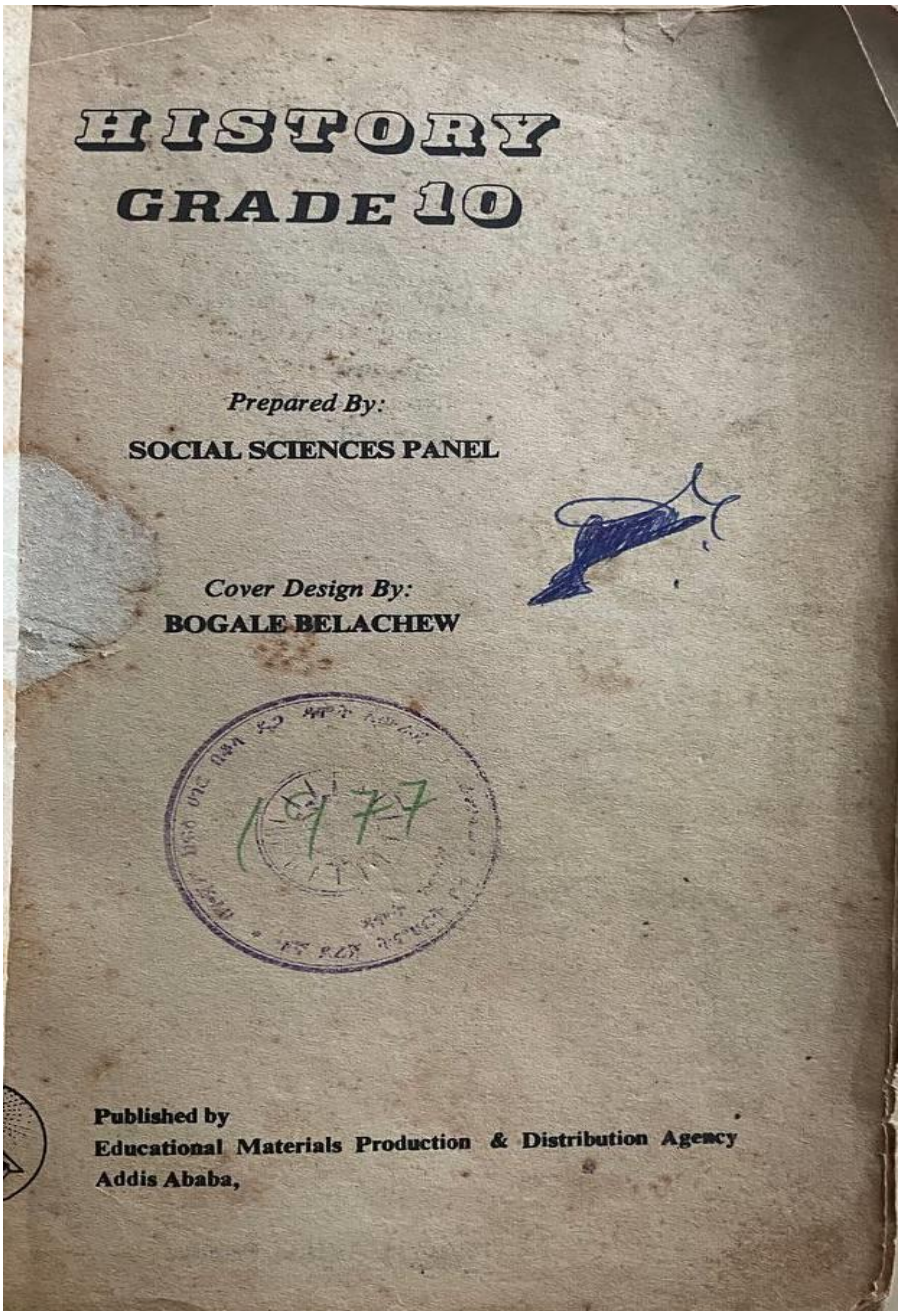
Source: Ministry of Education. *History Student Textbook for Grade 9*. Addis Ababa: Berhanena Selam Printing Press, 1980.

Appendix 9: Reproduction of pages from History for Grade 10 (1980)

The Cover Page



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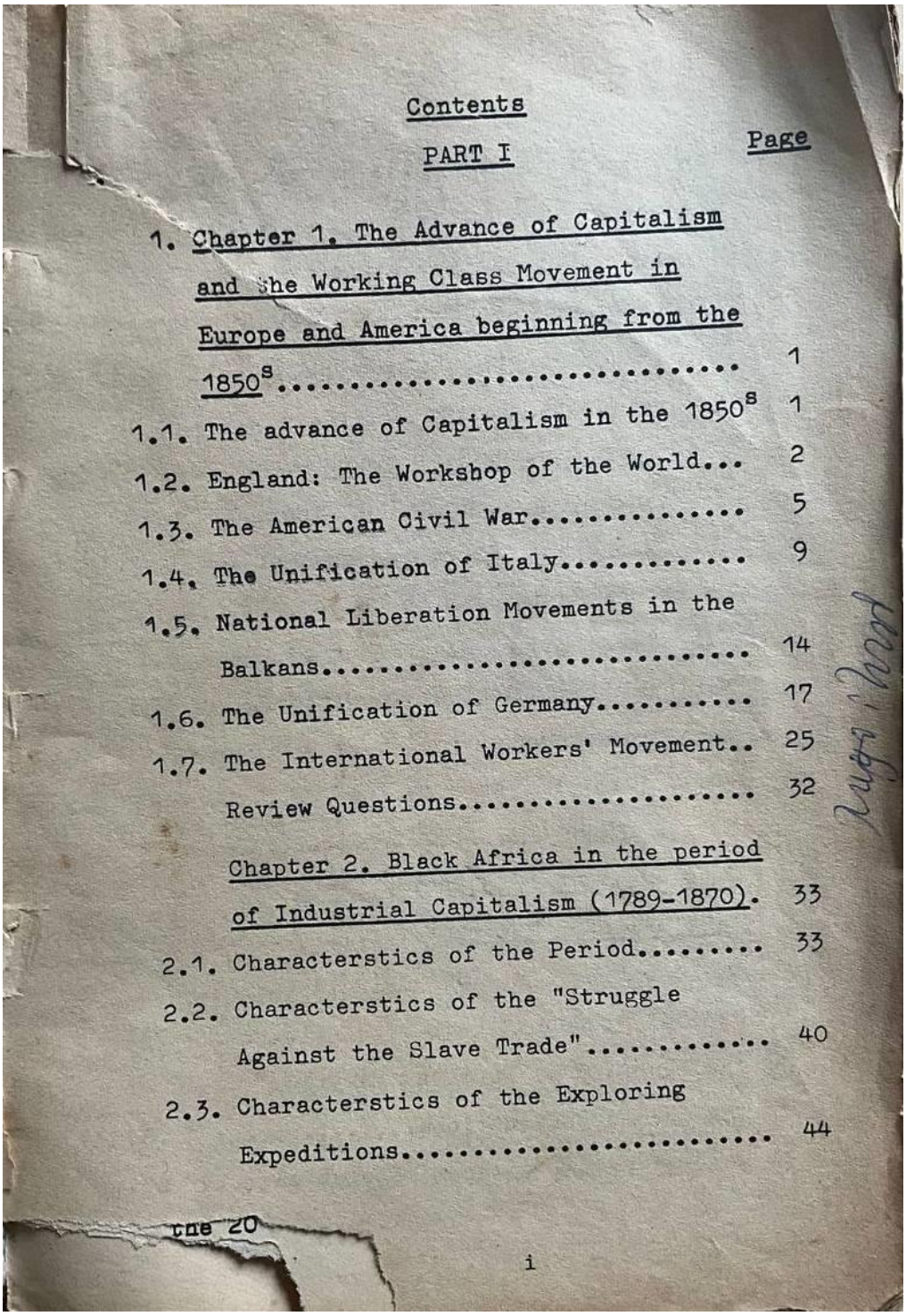

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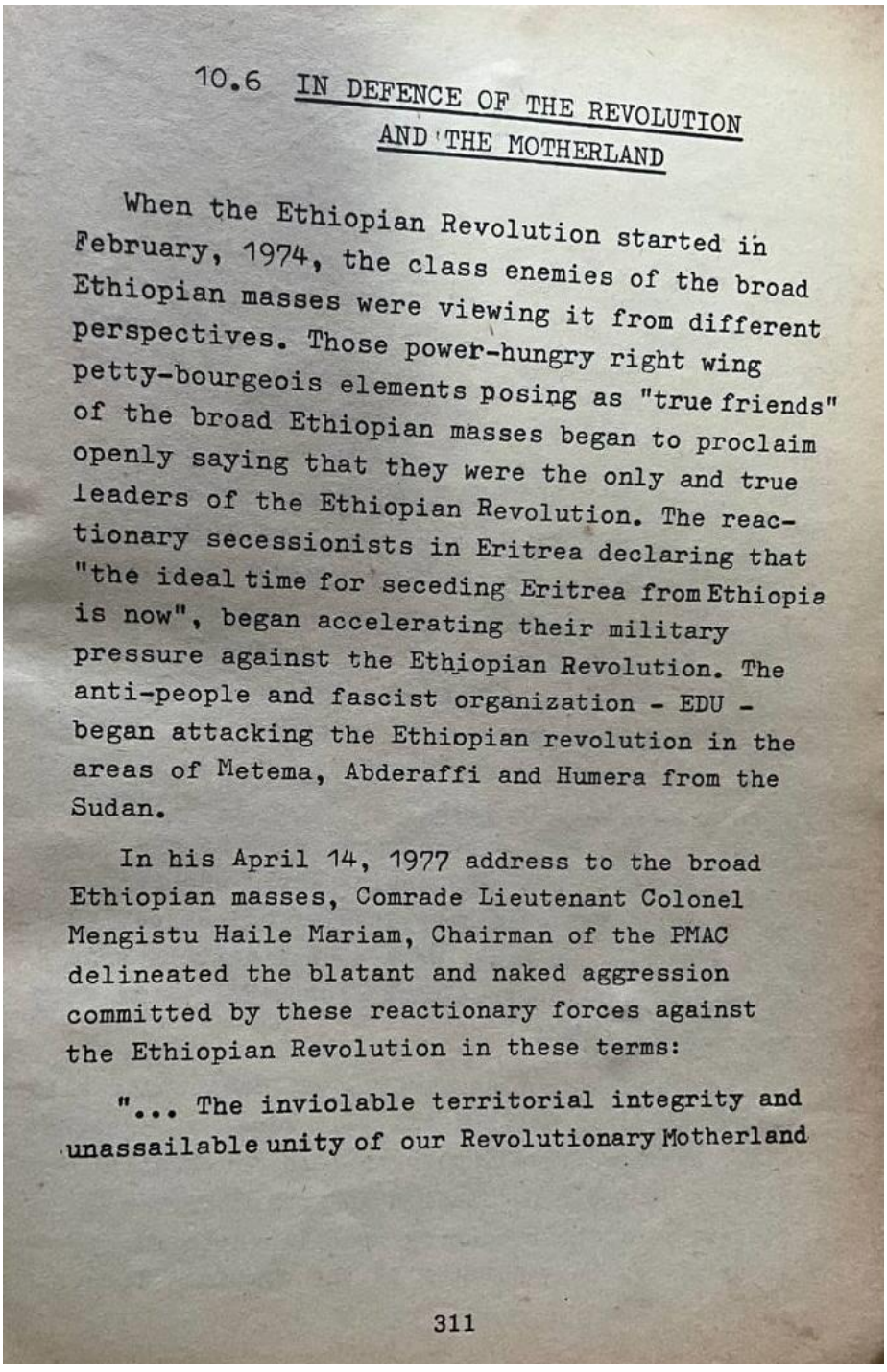
Colonel Mengistu's speech delivered on April 14, 1977, on the eve of the Somali invasion of Ethiopia, as presented in the 10th grade history textbook



10.6 IN DEFENCE OF THE REVOLUTION AND THE MOTHERLAND

When the Ethiopian Revolution started in February, 1974, the class enemies of the broad Ethiopian masses were viewing it from different perspectives. Those power-hungry right wing petty-bourgeois elements posing as "true friends" of the broad Ethiopian masses began to proclaim openly saying that they were the only and true leaders of the Ethiopian Revolution. The reactionary secessionists in Eritrea declaring that "the ideal time for seceding Eritrea from Ethiopia is now", began accelerating their military pressure against the Ethiopian Revolution. The anti-people and fascist organization - EDU - began attacking the Ethiopian revolution in the areas of Metema, Abderaffi and Humera from the Sudan.

In his April 14, 1977 address to the broad Ethiopian masses, Comrade Lieutenant Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam, Chairman of the PMAC delineated the blatant and naked aggression committed by these reactionary forces against the Ethiopian Revolution in these terms:

"... The inviolable territorial integrity and unassailable unity of our Revolutionary Motherland

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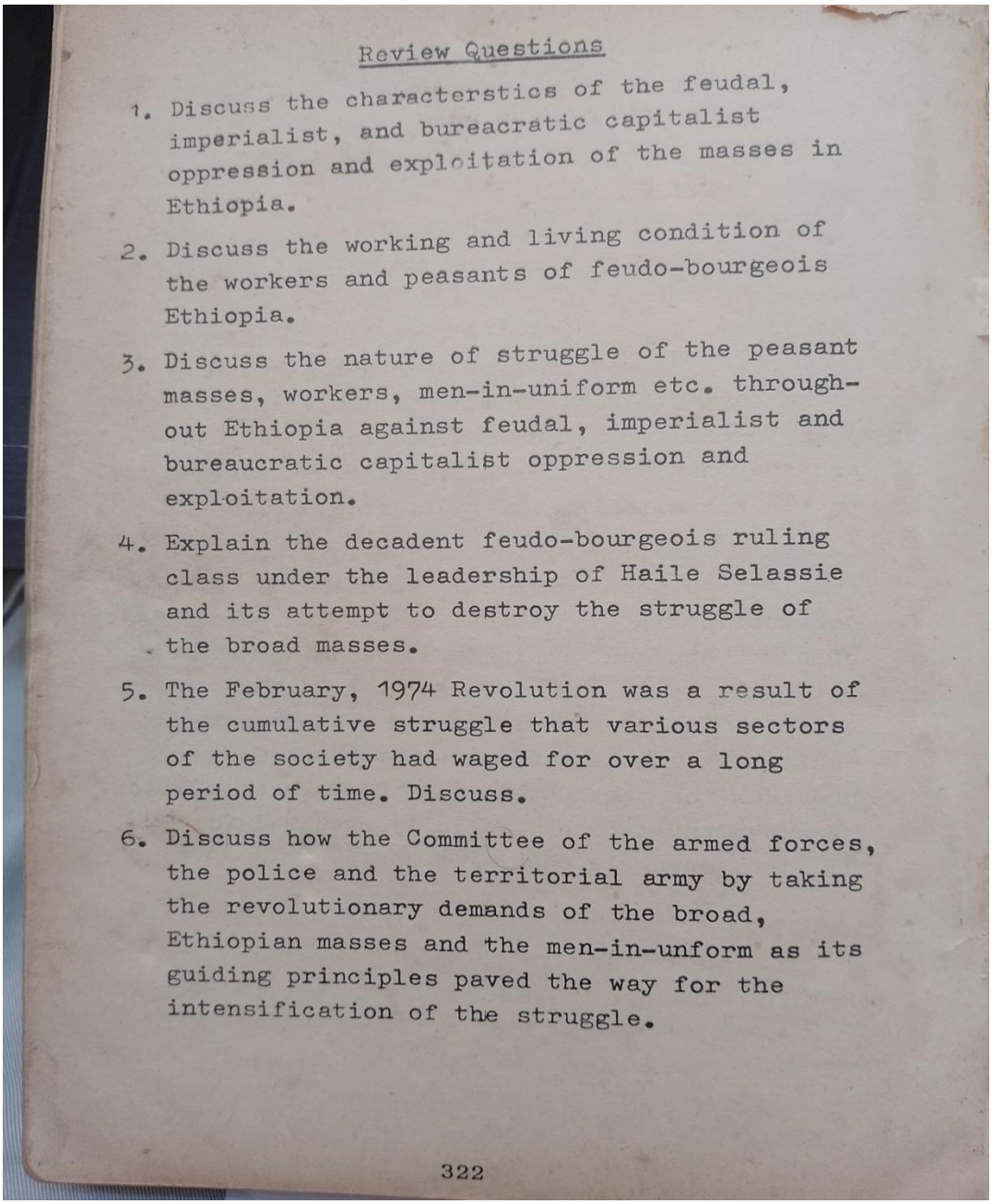

Review Questions

1. Discuss the characterstics of the feudal, imperialist, and bureacratic capitalist oppression and exploitation of the masses in Ethiopia.
2. Discuss the working and living condition of the workers and peasants of feudo-bourgeois Ethiopia.
3. Discuss the nature of struggle of the peasant masses, workers, men-in-uniform etc. throughout Ethiopia against feudal, imperialist and bureaucratic capitalist oppression and exploitation.
4. Explain the decadent feudo-bourgeois ruling class under the leadership of Haile Selassie and its attempt to destroy the struggle of the broad masses.
5. The February, 1974 Revolution was a result of the cumulative struggle that various sectors of the society had waged for over a long period of time. Discuss.
6. Discuss how the Committee of the armed forces, the police and the territorial army by taking the revolutionary demands of the broad, Ethiopian masses and the men-in-unform as its guiding principles paved the way for the intensification of the struggle.

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Source: Ministry of Education. *History Student Textbook for Grade 10*. Addis Ababa: Artistic Printers, 1980.

Appendix 10: History for Grade 11 (1979)

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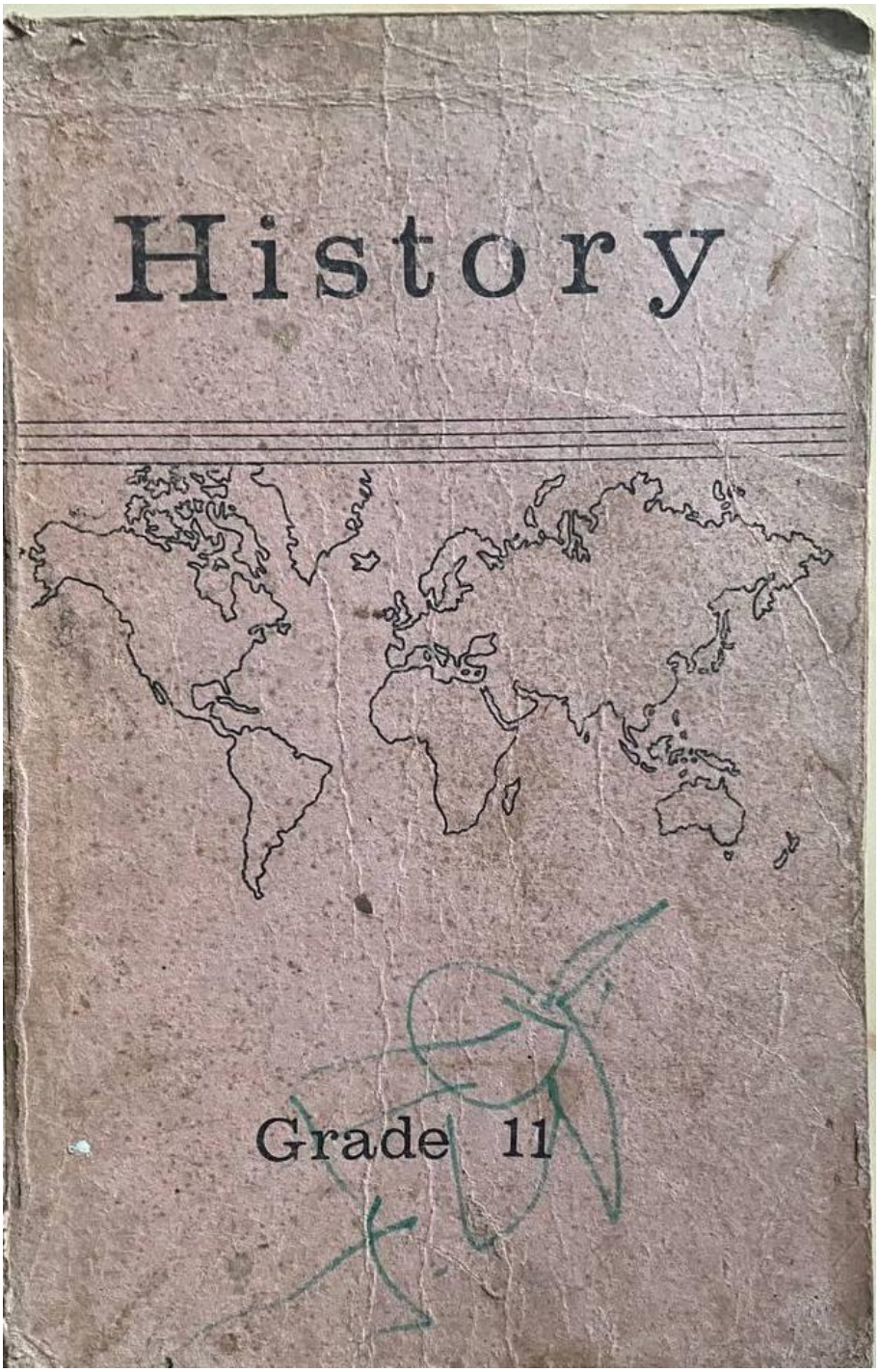

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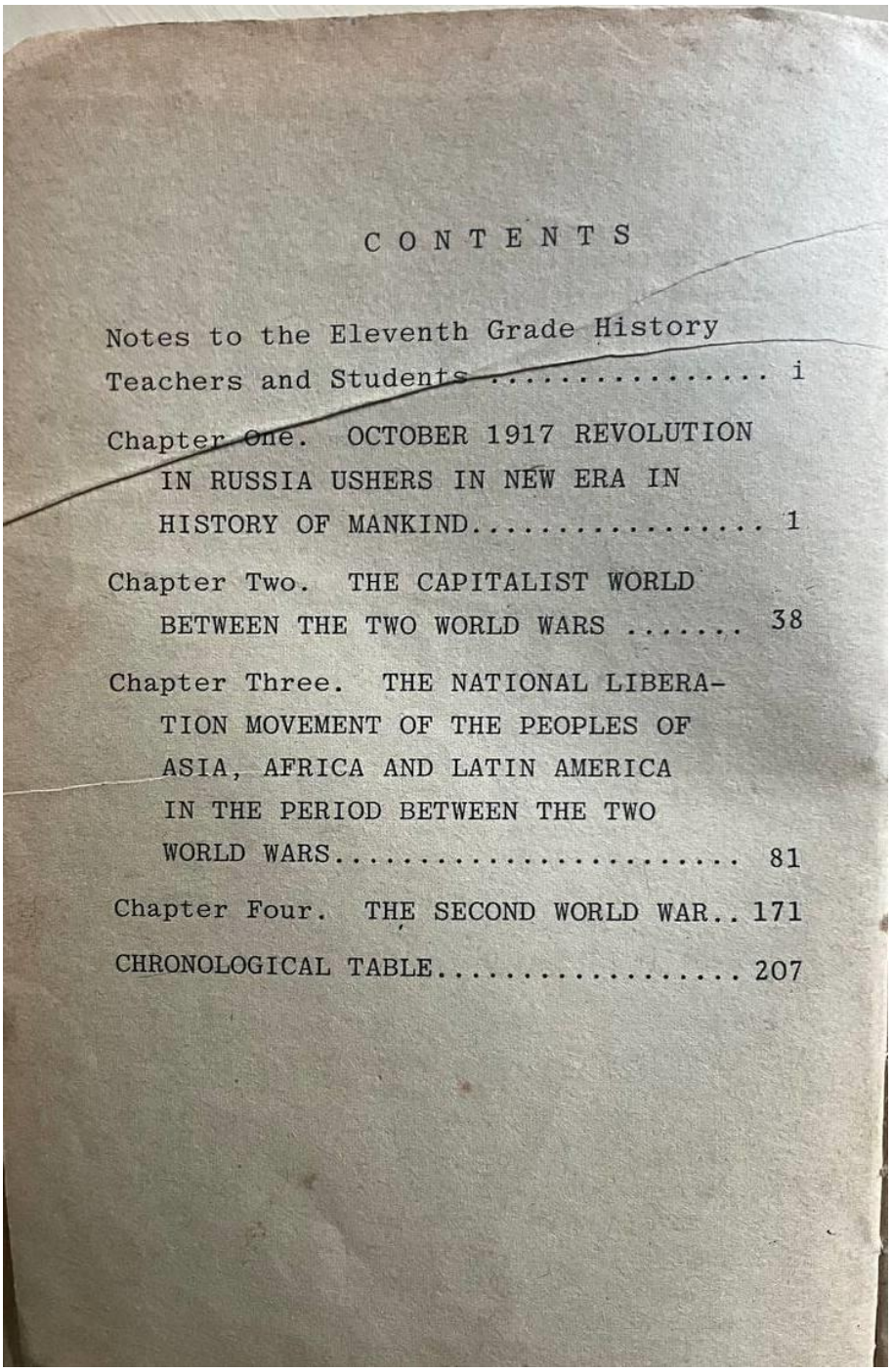

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Source: Ministry of Education, *History Student Textbook for Grade 11*, Addis Ababa: Commercial Printing Press, 1979.

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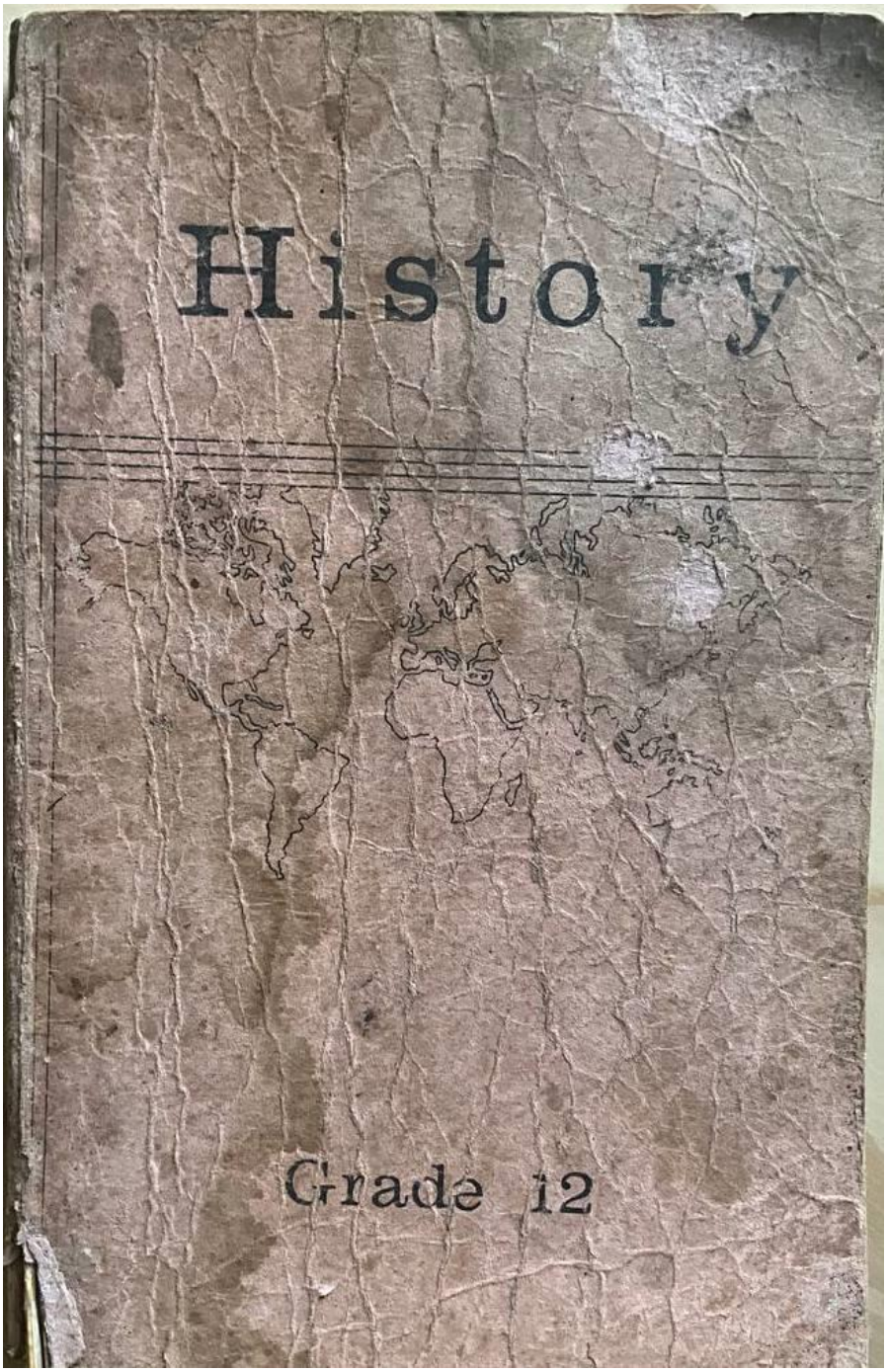

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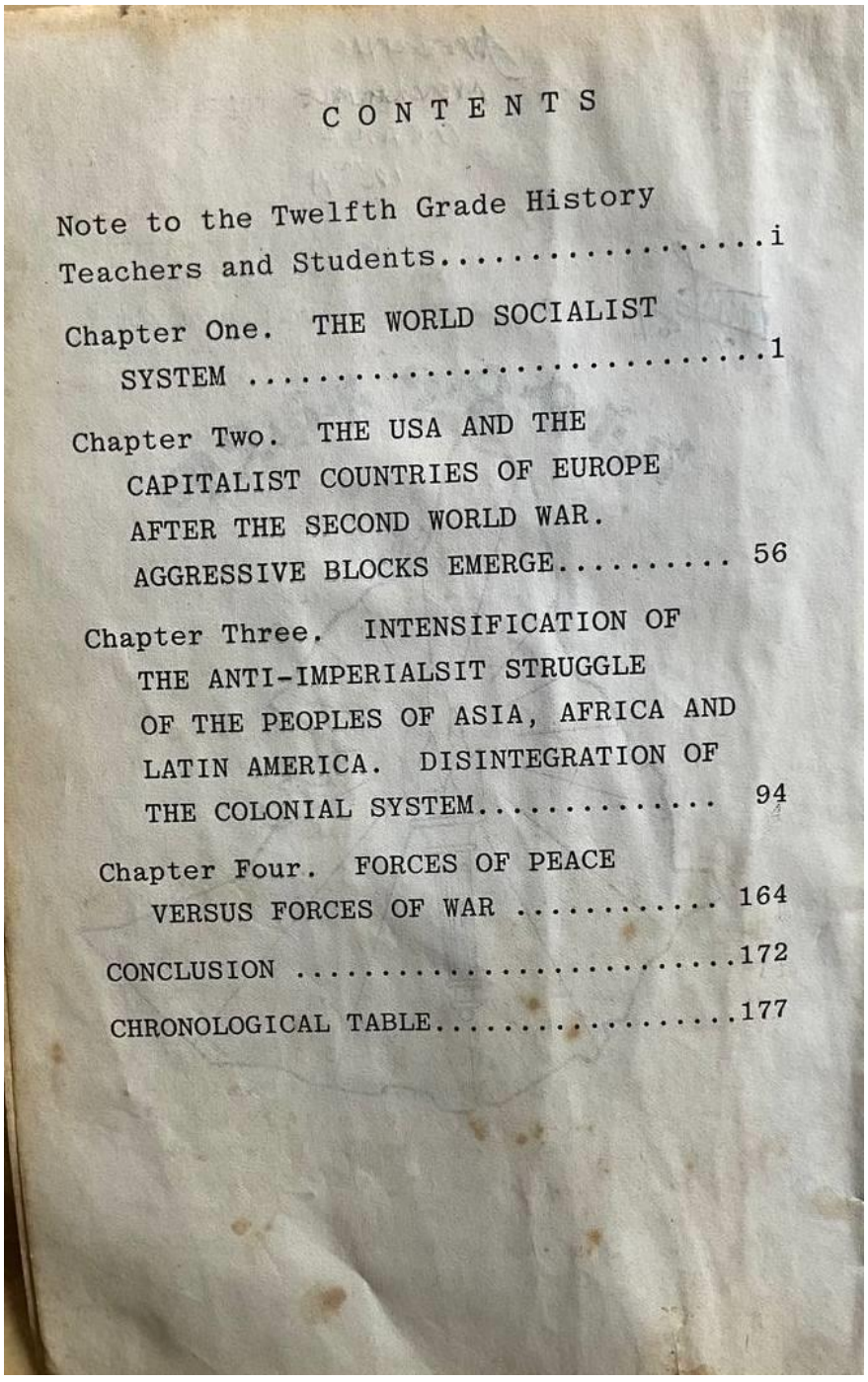

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Source: Ministry of Education, *History Student Textbook for Grade 12*, Addis Ababa: Central Printing Press, 1979.

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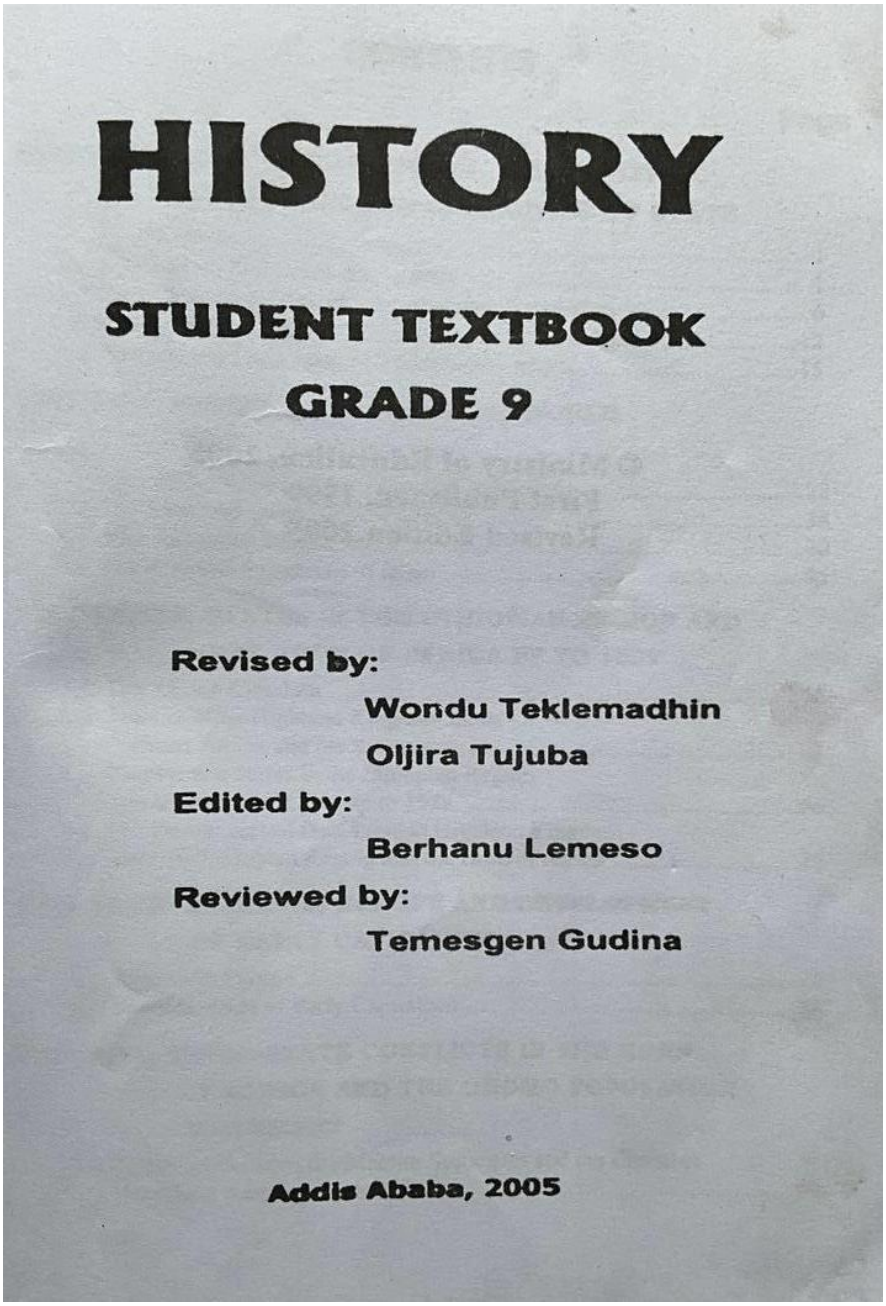

HISTORY

STUDENT TEXTBOOK

GRADE 9

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Addis Ababa, 2005

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Source: Ministry of Education, *History Grade 9 Student's Textbook,* Addis Ababa: Bole Printing Enterprise, 2005.

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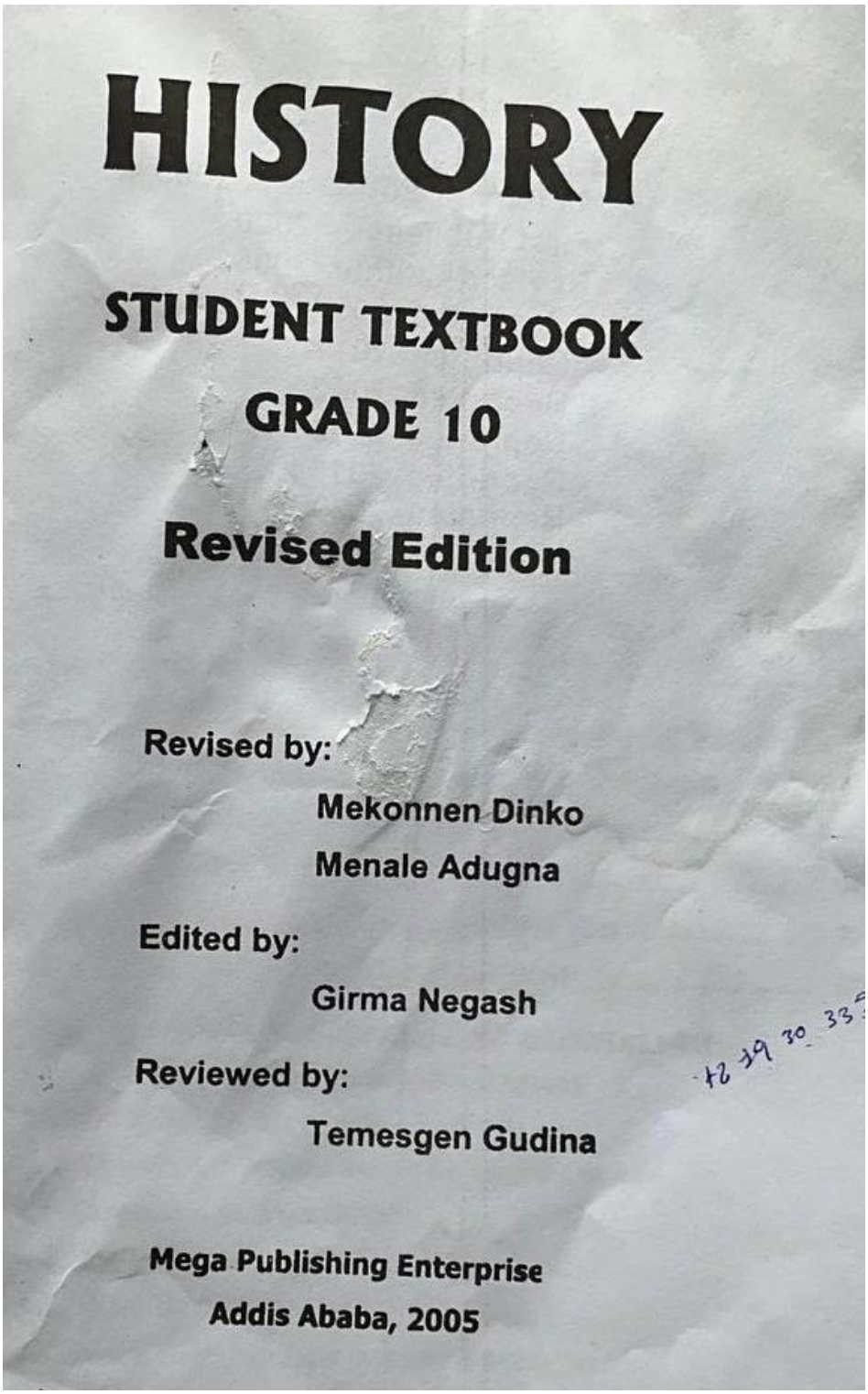

HISTORY

STUDENT TEXTBOOK

GRADE 10

Revised Edition

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Mega Publishing Enterprise

Addis Ababa, 2005

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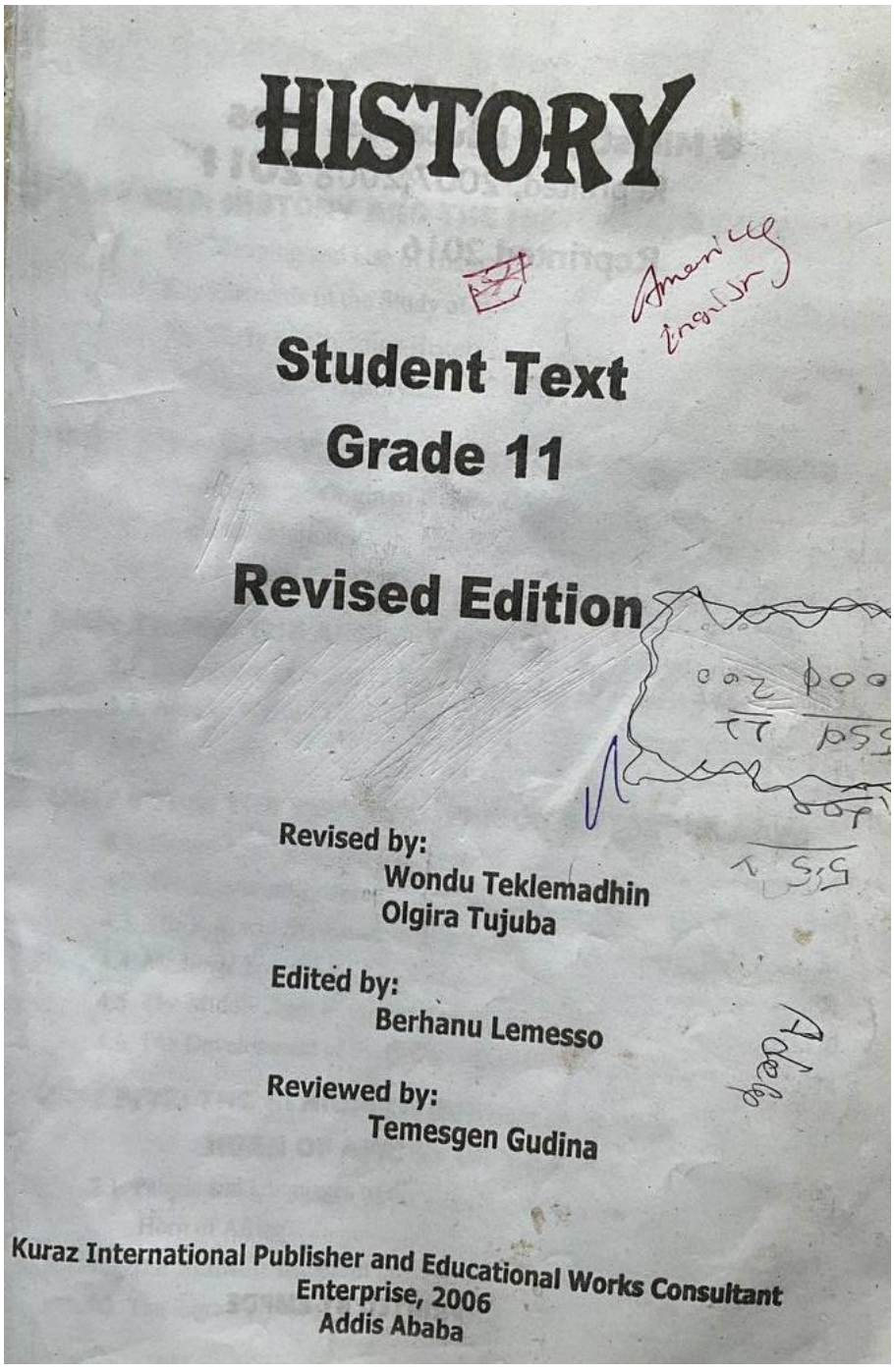

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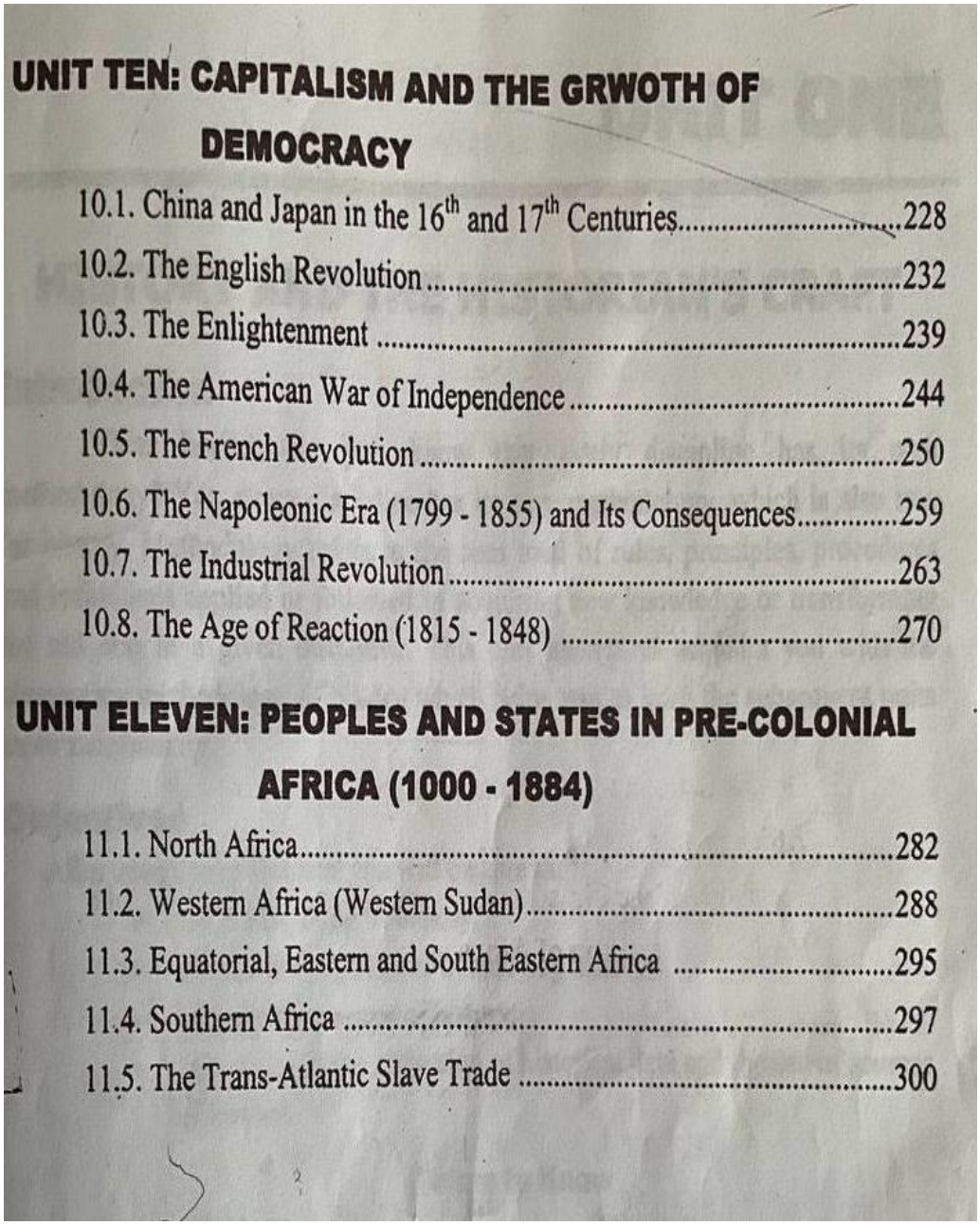

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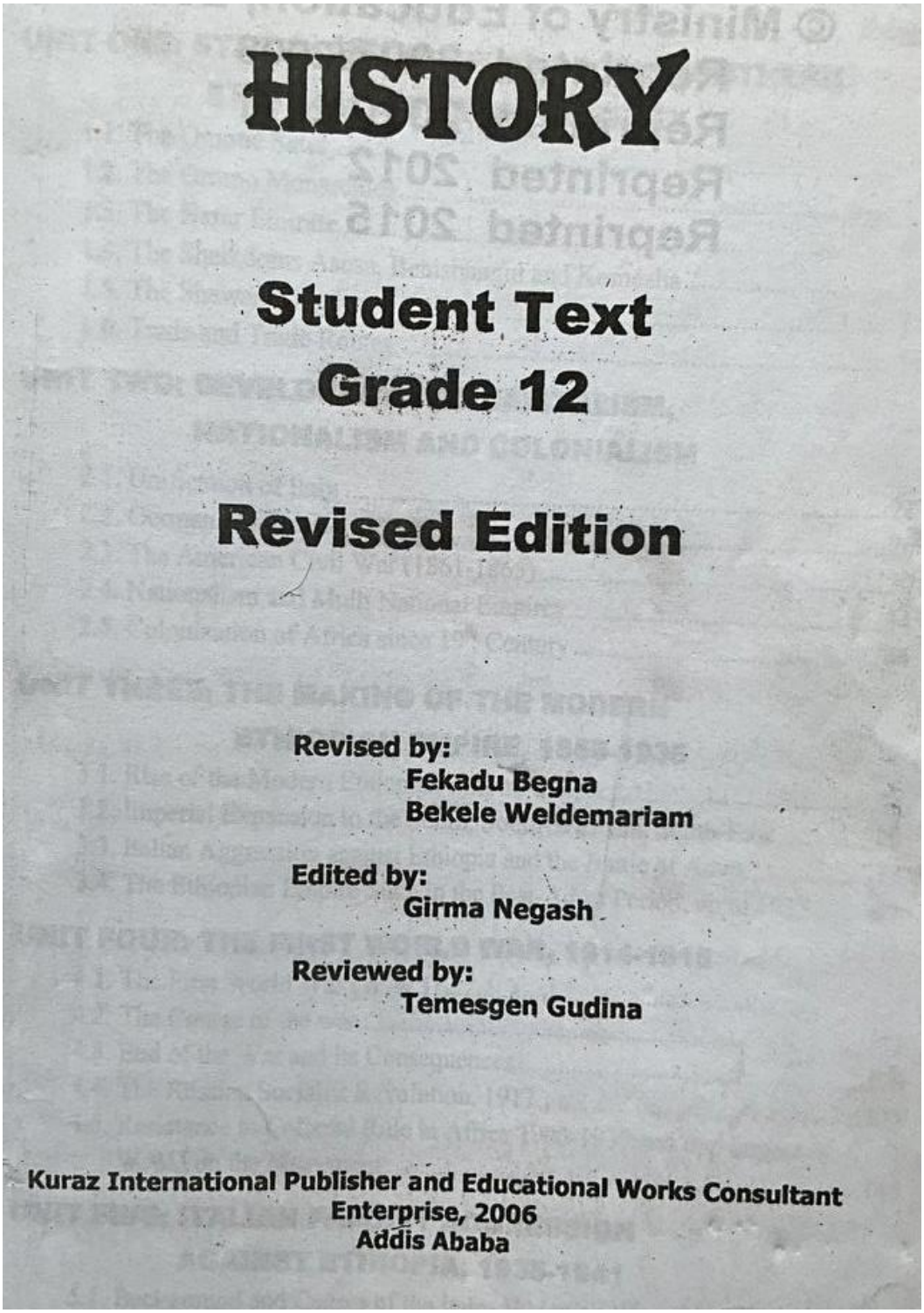

HISTORY

Student Text
Grade 12

Revised Edition

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Kuraz International Publisher and Educational Works Consultant Enterprise, 2006
Addis Ababa

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