The Museum as Prison and Other Protective Measures in Socialist Ethiopia

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Biography

Kate Cowcher is Lecturer in Art History at the University of St Andrews. She is a historian of art from Africa with a specific interest in Ethiopia, and in modern and contemporary practices. She holds a PhD from Stanford University, an MA from the Courtauld Institute of Art and an MA from the University of Edinburgh. Her current book project examines art, film and politics during Ethiopia's socialist revolution. Her broader research interests include art and cultural exchange in Africa during the Cold War, intersections of revolution, socialism and heritage on the continent, and histories of African modernist art. Her writing has been published in *African Arts*, *Critical Interventions: Journal of African Art History and Visual Culture*, *Art History* and *Art Bulletin*.

Abstract

In 1974 Emperor Haile Selassie was overthrown in a revolution that ended Ethiopia's long

Imperial history and ushered in a military Marxist dictatorship. The challenge of what to do with

Ethiopia's vast royal and religious cultural heritage–of symbolic national and Pan-African

significance–immediately presented itself. This article considers the treatment of the Ethiopia's

historic heritages in the wake of the Emperor's fall, examining both acts of iconoclasm and the

proliferation of a cultural heritage bureaucracy in keeping with a putatively socialist political

agenda. Focusing specifically on a UNESCO report about the proposed new National Museum,

this study explores efforts to recast Ethiopia's national narrative within a 'progressive'

framework, and the influence of Leninist attitudes towards 'imperial' heritage in the wake of

revolution. The latter evidences the impact of Soviet heritage concepts, known in Addis through

the circulation of Progress Publisher books from the later 1970s onwards, and through educational sojourns by Ethiopian intellectuals to Soviet cities. Though the revolution was a destructive, iconoclastic process in which many (including the Emperor) lost their lives, it left a curious legacy regarding national cultural heritage, the very definition of which was dramatically expanded to include much more than royal crowns and Orthodox treasures.

Keywords: Socialism; Internationalism; Ethiopia; Soviet Union; UNESCO

Introduction: Socialism, Heritage and Ethiopia's position in Africa

The attraction of socialism for the leaders of the decolonizing nations of Africa is well known. From Leopold Sedar Senghor's vision of Negritude as a new humanism to the social consciousness at the heart of Kwame Nkrumah's 'African Personality', leaders in the 1960s forged distinctly African versions of socialist philosophy that emphasized a pre-colonial 'communalism' and figured the independent citizens of newly enshrined nations as African prototypes of the 'new man' (see, for example, Collier, 2013). Across the continent, the first decades of independence were marked by a notable range of socialist political configurations and programmes, from Sekou Toure's pursuit of a Leninist vanguard party in Guinea to Julius Nyerere's concept of *Ujaama* ('brotherhood' in Swahili) and its justification of a programme of collective agriculture and villagisation in Tanzania. Given the emphasis within African versions of socialism on the recovery of historic, indigenous social and political practices, it is unsurprising that Africa's traditional arts and tangible heritage played a central role in the civic art and pageantry of the new nations: Nkrumah famously adopted the *kente* cloth, historically connected with the Asante kingdom, as the attire of a statesman, and the artists of Senghor's

'Ecole de Dakar' were encouraged to mine Africa's historic arts in the creation of a celebratory, Negritude-inspired modernism.

In the 1960s, in the heady, aspirational days of burgeoning pan-Africanism, Ethiopia was a major focus for continental pride. It had been the only nation to defeat would-be European colonisers on African soil (the Italians at the Battle of Adwa in 1896), and to avoid fully institutionalised colonisation. It boasted a royal lineage dating back thousands of years, and an ancient Christian religious and material heritage. It was the red, green and gold of Ethiopia's flag that inspired the design of that of the first independent African nation, Ghana in 1957. At the Premier Festival Mondial des Arts Nègres in Dakar in 1966, Ethiopia's Emperor Haile Selassie was afforded an open-carriage parade through the city (Harney 2007, 74). At this same festival Senghor inaugurated the Musée Dynamique, an institution that sought to invert European colonialist museums that treated art from Africa as ethnographic 'model objects' (Njami 2007, 241) and which featured a selection of ancient Ethiopian Orthodox manuscripts in its inaugural exhibition. In Senghor's vision, the latter provided a cornerstone, alongside Nigeria's historic royal arts, for the continent's rich, shared history of artistic heritage.

Ethiopia's lineage, so inspiring to the early proponents of an 'African socialism' prefaced on cultural recuperation and continental pride, was irreparably ruptured in 1974, when Haile Selassie was overthrown in a military-led revolution amidst a groundswell of popular dissent in Addis Ababa. The leaders of this revolution would quickly proclaim allegiance to a different mode of socialism (and later to Marxist-Leninism), one far less concerned with the recovery of a lost communalism, and much more occupied with the exposing of indigenous 'feudalism'. Ethiopia's royal and Orthodox cultural heritages, so recently celebrated as proud African heritage, presented an immediate problem for the leaders of the revolution: should they be

destroyed as manifestations of a long oppressive regime, or could they be coopted and preserved in a manner that supported a new revolutionary national narrative? This essay explores these questions, within the specific context of plans to reconfigure the new National Museum in Addis in the late 1970s. For the latter project consultation was provided by UNESCO, which had been actively involved in a full range of heritage and cultural projects across the decolonizing continent through the 1960s. UNESCO had provided the funding for the construction of Senghor's Musée Dynamique, and, as will be discussed, had been highly supportive of Haile Selassie's international promotion of Ethiopia's cultural heritage as objects soon to be enshrined as 'World Heritage'. The 1981 UNESCO report on the proposals for the new National Museum, authored by consultant J.M. Bosserdet (1981), is highly revealing of the ways in which UNESCO's universalist agenda both meshed with and rubbed up against the new cultural priorities of socialist Ethiopia, themselves increasingly influenced by Soviet philosophies on heritage management.

The 1981 report provides an important insight into the intellectual engagement of the concept of heritage in the wake of a revolution that claimed to be socialist. It is clear, as is discussed, that the influx of literature from the Soviet Union from the later 1970s, along with the increase in opportunities for Ethiopians to study in Moscow, Leningrad and other Soviet cities, provided exposure to debates around the handling of problematic 'imperial' heritage that resonated with Ethiopia's socialist-oriented intellectuals. Indeed, it is important to underscore that whilst the importation of texts and establishment of scholarships lay bare the soft power apparatus of the Soviet Union's influence in Africa, we should not overlook the genuine appeal of so-called 'progressive' heritage policies amongst those who felt that Haile Selassie's Ethiopia had been elitist and exclusionary. Soviet approaches were not imported wholesale, but

considered and configured for the specific, increasingly authoritarian needs of the new regime in Addis.

Whilst literature addressing socialist politics and heritage policies in Africa is not extensive, there are a number of important studies. In her research on the shifting significance and 'remediation' of Chokwe art in colonial and post-colonial Angola, Delinda Collier (2016, 140-144) has revealed the importance of museums as tools for national unity and for socialist education during the rule of the Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA) in the later 1970s. Examinations of Sekou Toure's socialist 'Demystification Programme' in Guinea in the 1960s that attacked the 'superstitious' arts and ritual objects of Baga masquerade as part of an attempt to subvert ethnic identity to a modern, national one has been undertaken by both Ramon Sarró (2007) and Mike McGovern (2013). Both Sarró and McGovern have explored the ways in which destruction was followed by a recuperation of certain practices as national cultural heritage, through their re-performance as national dance or theatre, a process that Sarró (2007, 225) describes as 'folklorisation'. In a related vein, Alexander Bortolot (2013, 252-273) has examined the adaptation of traditional Makonde blackwood carving in Mozambique to the needs of the Mozambican Liberation Front (FRELIMO) in the 1970s. Bortolot identifies the development of a local form of 'socialist realism' that resulted in the production of Makonde masks and sculptures, produced by 'artisans of the nation', with ethnic markers removed and facial features 'idealised'. All of these studies have contributed to a more nuanced story of the impact of socialist-inspired policies that involved acts of both destruction and protection in the name of a new nationalism. The story in Ethiopia bears relation to all of these, but differs notably in that it reflects a state already steeped in a historic national identity that did not need making so much as *re*-making in the wake of revolution.

This essay builds upon the pioneering work of Donald Donham (1999, 13-35) in examining the efforts of Ethiopia's post-revolution military governing committee, the *Derg*, to narrate the revolution as a socialist popular uprising. Where Donham's examination excavates, in particular, the performance of the revolution through the 1984 tenth anniversary celebration, I consider, in particular, how the consultations around the new National Museum importantly preceded (and likely informed) the events of that year. By focusing specifically upon the report that was produced after those consultations, I demonstrate how, even after the fall of Haile Selassie who had overseen the establishment of strong relations with UNESCO, Ethiopia remained intensely engaged with the international body,whilst also engaging new networks of cultural exchange, particularly with the 'Second World' of the Cold War. Indeed, as Marie Huber (2016) has shown, there was, despite political upheaval, clear continuity regarding relations between Ethiopia and UNESCO through the 1970s, with a long established ties between the country and the organization reaffirmed, for example through Ethiopia's applications for recognition on the newly constituted World Heritage List in the later 1970s. However, acknowledgement of such continuity should not detract from a careful consideration of the clear shift in ideological emphasis regarding the definition and significance of national cultural heritage that accompanied the overtly revolutionary, socialist politics of the new military regime. As I discuss below, the very continuity of relations, which clearly sought to extend national and supranational protections over Ethiopia's rich heritage, require further explanation against the backdrop of such significant regime change. This study is not a comprehensive survey of the developments in the field of cultural heritage policy during Ethiopia's revolutionary years; rather it uses the proposals for the National Museum to offer a focused exploration of the significant shifts in politics and priorities that accompanied the period and to explore the complexities of

Ethiopia's continued relations with UNESCO, even after Haile Selassie's demise. Questions of simultaneous rupture and continuity remain pertinent throughout; ultimately, though the *Derg* era was one rife with violence and oppression, the debates around the democratization of culture unleashed by the revolution, and shaped by both UNESCO consultations and Soviet heritage theories, have had a lasting impact on attitudes to cultural heritage management in Ethiopia.

Heritage, Iconoclasm and Protection after 1974

The 1974 revolution profoundly changed the political, social and economic structure of Ethiopia. In dramatically bringing to an end thousands of years of imperial government, it also had immediate, lasting implications for the country's rich cultural heritage, the very existence of which historically evidenced and legitimized the lineage of the former. In February of that year widespread social unrest over a range of issues broke out on the streets of Addis Ababa, and in September Ethiopia's octogenarian emperor, Haile Selassie (Figure 1), was deposed in a military-led *coup d'etat* amidst public outrage over an unfolding famine that he was accused of concealing (see Cowcher 2018).

[FIGURE 1 TO GO NEAR HERE]

Crowned in 1930, Haile Selassie spent five years in exile during the fascist Italian occupation of Ethiopia. He returned to Addis in 1941, and was keen to prioritise broad modernisation projects, from education to infrastructure to heritage protections. The last decade of Haile Selassie's rule, however, was dogged by growing dissent amongst those who accused him of presiding over an enduringly 'feudal' society (Hiwet 1975, 93-109; Zewde 2014, 130-139). From his elaborate crowns, gold-threaded robes and his gilded throne to his title–'King of Kings'3–Haile Selassie was the living embodiment of a divinely ordained imperial heritage said

to date back three thousand years to the first Ethiopian emperor, Menelik I, son of King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba. His Imperial Majesty was the apex of a historic, ethnically hierarchical system that prized 'Habesha' culture, referring largely to that of highland Ethiopia, particularly of the Amhara and Tigrayans, but also of the Agaw; this was dramatically upturned in 1974. '[T]he major victory,' proclaimed the *Programme of the National Democratic Revolution of Ethiopia*,

> is not only the removal of the emperor from power, but also the dealing of death blows to feudal lackeys, and thereby the heralding of the complete abolition of the archaic autocratic monarchical rule which has remained the mainstay of feudal Ethiopia. This has also resulted in the awakening of the masses (*Basic Documents*, 10).

The rhetoric was one of removal and destruction as the pathway to political enlightenment. 'Socialism,' the *Programme* continued, had 'been declared as the guiding principle of the revolution'.

The putatively 'socialist' regime that took over from Haile Selassie, the *Derg*, was initially headed by Lieutenant General Aman Andom but after a power struggle (and a fatal shoot-out), soon helmed by the ruthless Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam. Despite celebration of Haile Selassie's arrest in September 1974 as a 'popular' and bloodless revolution, within three years of the emperor's fall anyone suspected of being a 'counter-revolutionary' became the target of the murderous 'Red Terror' campaign, most especially activist students, youth and intellectuals who were demanding a transition from a military to a civilian government. By the late 1970s Ethiopia was an established military dictatorship, professing a commitment to Marxist-Leninism and soon supported by the Soviet Union, who after some initial misgivings about Ethiopia's ideological position, signed up as a major sponsor in 1977 (Westad 2007, 268). Ethiopia, it was hoped, had the potential to lead a 'Marxist-Leninist confederation' in the Horn

of Africa, and it was soon lavished not only with Soviet military hardware, but with cultural supplies–books, films, educational scholarships and creative expertise (Patman 1990, 150)

As Peter Weibel (2002, 588) has argued, since the French Revolution, the 'progressive' thrust of revolutionary change has gone hand in hand with the implication of iconoclasm, with the need to break and, thus, disempower former idols in the name of political progress (or in order to erect new ones). Alongside the rhetoric of dismantling the old order, the *Derg* took immediate steps in the name of the initially vague ideology of *hebratasabāwinat* (understood as 'Ethiopian socialism') to shake up systems of ownership. In April 1975 they nationalized all rural lands, and then, the following August, introduced a proclamation reclaiming urban private property for the government (*Basic Documents* 1977, 18-29; 48-67). These proclamations had implications for personal ownership, of course, but also for the Church and their 'ownership' of manuscripts and others sacred objects. Against a backdrop of creeping state violence and overt 'public propagation of the socialist world-outlook', as the *Derg*'s founding *Programme* declared, it may be assumed that Ethiopia's cultural heritage, steeped in the imperial past and the authority of the Orthodox Church, found itself in a potentially perilous position in the mid-1970s. Certainly there were reports of early efforts to destroy some of the emperor's personal effects; American paleontologist Jon Kalb, who was working at the National Museum in Addis in 1975 reported seeing discarded 'stone, plaster and bronze busts of the former emperor', and cited anthropologist Russell Ciochon's account of seeing carcasses of slaughtered lions (the emperor's symbolic pets) piled up at a local taxidermist shortly after the revolution (Kalb 2001, 189-190).

Further implications of early destruction wrought by the revolution are evidenced in correspondence between the curator of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) museum at Haile Selassie I University, Stanisław Chojnacki, and American diplomat Paul Henze in the later

1970s. Chojnacki initially remained in Addis, attempting to continue curatorial work, including mounting an exhibition of Orthodox crosses in 1975. He soon escaped, however, and, in 1977, wrote to Henze again expressing that his letters from the immediate post-revolution days may not have fully reflected the realities of the situation. Writing from the peaceful seclusion of Sudbury in Canada, Chojnacki described how

> …due to the nationalization of the Church land, a flow of pictures appeared on Addis Ababa markets and, of course, delightful crosses. I bought one 17th century icon and several wooden crosses – all museum pieces. It was a pity that I was already "out of business" and nothing could be done to save them for Ethiopia (Chojnacki to Henze, 8 March 1977).

A later letter further underscored Chojnacki's anxiety about the unfolding situation. The 'present regime', he wrote to Henze later in 1977, '…has brought to Ethiopia's cultural heritage…irreparable damage' (Chojnacki to Henze, undated letter, 1977).

A recent 'Themed Section' of the *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, reflecting on the centenary of the Bolshevik revolution, explored the inherent contradictions of the terms revolution and heritage, the former essentially prefaced on a decisive break (legitimising a certain iconoclasm), yet equally concerned with the construction of a new historical paradigms that require reconfiguring the symbolic repertoires of the past (Alonso Gonzalez et al 2019). Julie Deschepper's contribution on Soviet conceptions of heritage, tracing the evolution of attitudes from early Bolshevik iconoclasm (justified by Anatoly Lunacharsky as 'the masses…[transferring] their hate to [the] homes and property [of the Tsar and the lords]) to the 'heritage revolution' of the 1960s that witnessed a considerable expansion of protective and catergorising bureaucracy offers a particularly relevant comparison to the Ethiopian context (2016, 494). As Deschepper elucidates, there was a 'paradoxical dynamic' in the Bolshevik case whereby 'preservation and destruction took place concomitantly' (2016, 493). The Ethiopian

revolution bore striking (and consciously adopted) similarities to the Bolshevik one (see Cowcher 2017a) and it is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, that similar contradictions regarding the shifting status of historic heritage recurred. Indeed, the downfall of Haile Selassie was accompanied not only by the iconoclastic rhetoric and incidents of destruction that Chojnacki bore witness to but also by the emergence of new, politically charged discussions about the very notion of 'heritage', what it symbolised and to whom it belonged.

In her article about cultural heritage custodianship in Ethiopia Belle Asante Tarsitani stated that immediately after the revolution Mengistu Haile Mariam allegedly made an inscription in the 'golden guestbook' of the IES museum, 'declaring that the contents of the museum were for the people' (Tarsitani 2011 307). Whether or not this anecdote is entirely accurate (Mengistu did not, for example, become Chairman until three years after Haile Selassie was overthrown, and he was known for spreading self-aggrandizing stories of himself) is not necessarily important. The very existence of such an anecdote speaks to a central claim of the revolution: that it liberated not just people, but their shared heritage from the historical grip of the elite. In November 1974 the slogan *Ethiopia Tikdem* (literally translated as 'Let Ethiopia Progress', more commonly understood as 'Ethiopia First'), an early rallying cry amongst the military, was expanded into a guiding philosophy, one that explicated the principles of 'Ethiopian socialism.' In a list of definitions of the term *Ethiopia Tikdem* was said to mean that the many now took precedence over the few, ethnic pluralism replaced ethnic hierarchy, land and property were to be for common usage and, importantly, that 'developing awareness of the values of our cultural heritage, [lining] them up, [protecting] and [preserving] them for posterity' was of tantamount importance (Selassie 1997, 135-136). Haile Selassie was no longer the gatekeeper of Ethiopian history, and Habesha culture was no longer a superior, but rather a

constituent part of a greater, more diverse history of both the Ethiopian people, and of mankind. It was in the 'lining up' of a 'popular', revolutionary history that Ethiopia's cultural heritage, broadly conceived, had a seminal role to play.

The rhetoric of public reclamation was, indeed, a driving force behind the prioritizing of cultural heritage as a field of revolutionary transformation. The Ethiopian Antiquities Administration had been founded in 1966, but in 1974 it became an important part of the new Ministry of Culture, a body that, in the wake of the revolution, was tasked with responsibility for all arts and traditional culture. Within two years of the revolution the Center for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (CRCCH) was founded, covering a range of fields, from archeology and paleontology, to museums and object preservation. Within it was housed a Division for Research into Cultural Heritage (Aarlund 1985, 24). The paradox of the Ethiopian revolution, like its Bolshevik predecessor was, therefore, that it was premised on acts of symbolic iconoclasm and its early nationalization efforts caused an uncontrolled 'flow' of movable heritage, but that it also ushered in an unprecedented era of cultural heritage-related bureaucracy.

[FIGURE 2 TO GO NEAR HERE, EITHER BEFORE OR AFTER THE PARAGRAPH OF THIS SECTION; REPRODUCED AS LARGE AS POSSIBLE SO TEXT ON SIGNBOARDS IS LEGIBLE.]

The museum as prison

In the late 1970s a poster circulated that encapsulated the synergy of destruction and preservation that pervaded early Derg-era cultural heritage discourse (Figure 2). In the center was a hastily rendered drawing. Two unchained men carried a stretcher piled with royal insignia, from the gold and jewel-encrusted crown familiar from the 1930 coronation through to more provocative objects such a stars and stripes-bedecked top hat, as seen in contemporaneous posters that

accused the former emperor of pro-American sentiments. The stretcher also included a paper 'constitution' ('ḥaga mangest'), referring to the 1955 revised Constitution which had sought to assuage demands for democracy by permitting, amongst other things, the establishment of a parliament (Clapham 2015, 198-199). Outlawed in 1974 and relegated to history, the 1955 Constitution, along with the other accoutrements was not being heaped on the pyre, but carried into the National Museum, as indicated by the inscription on the ornate door frame. The audience was a signboard-waving crowd; below the unshackled men were the proliferating slogans of the revolution from 'Land to the Tiller' to 'Ethiopia First' to 'Red Terror Against Reactionary Bureaucracy.' In a nod to later 1970s internationalist agendas, one sign also proclaimed 'The Ethiopian Revolution is a Part of the Struggle of the Oppressed People of the World.' The museum was, therefore, positioned as prison. Representing this act of object transference in the presence of anti-imperial demonstrations was intended as a decisive insult; Haile Selassie's symbolic repertoire was being subjected not simply to preservation but to a humiliating, iconoclastic imprisonment.

The story of this poster, as is typical with so many from the revolution, extends beyond its printed manifestation. The central drawing was originally produced by Tibebe Terffa, a young artist and teacher who had been critical of Haile Selassie's autocracy (participating, for example, in the late 1960s demonstrations under the banner 'Land to the Tiller'), yet remained consciously distant from the zealous politics of more radical students.[1] As was often the case with poster production in the early years of the revolution, Tibebe had produced a drawing without knowing exactly what it would be used for. He did not add the signboards, and asserts that he had originally intended for his drawing to make a simple statement about the need to preserve the

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[1] Tibebe Terffa identified himself as the artist of the central design in an interview with the author in July 2015.

remnants of the imperial era for posterity. The inclusion of provocative, anti-imperial objects such as the broken shackles raises questions about Tibebe's claim that his image was motivated by a mournful respect for the late emperor, although the 'corrective' adjustments of the designer who later added the signboards should not be discounted. Having himself suffered torture and imprisonment during the revolution years. Tibebe never consented to his work appearing alongside slogans that celebrated the Red Terror. The final product was an unequivocal insult. It inverted, in fact, one of the many accusations leveled at Haile Selassie: that he had used the original National Museum only to showcase 'feudal collections and relics' ensuring, as Ethiopian playwright Ayalneh Mulatu later asserted his a doctoral dissertation for Moscow State University, that 'visitors had the opportunity only to admire the rich materials of luxurious lifestyles' (Mulatu 1990, 37), and were offered little insight into the 'general features of the Ethiopian people nor the histories and cultures of all Ethiopian nationalities'. In the Derg poster the remnants of once 'luxurious lifestyles' were not to be celebrated in, but rather incarcerated by the museum.

The propagation of the museum-as-prison concept pointed to the influence of Soviet cultural heritage philosophies that put emphasis on the need to contain and control the remnants of outdated regimes and to identify artifacts there were either 'useful' for or a hindrance to national progress. These approaches were explicated specifically in a seminal text by Eleazar Aleksandrovich Baller, originally published as *Socialism and Cultural Heritage* (1966), and later re-printed as *Communism and Cultural Heritage* (1984; see also Alonso Gonzalez 2016; Deschepper 2018). The latter was published by Progress Publishers, and distributed internationally; copies of it, along with thousands of other texts, circulated in Addis as a result of

the 1978 accord (see Sherr 1986, 137-8; Cowcher 2017b, 154-5).[2] Baller's text (1984, 57-8) makes clear that cultural heritage is 'one of the most vital categories of the Marxist-Leninist theory of culture', encompassing the products of human creativity that contain the 'spiritual values' of an epoch. In the handling of such in the wake of Marxist revolution decisions needed to be made about 'inheritance' vis-à-vis 'continuity' because of the risk represented by 'the survivals of the old system, which pose as undesirable manifestations of historical continuity' (Baller 1984, 59). In other words museum preservation with clear delineations was critical, or as Baller wrote, invoking Lenin's reasoning in his 1898 essay 'The Heritage We Renounce', 'to inherit does not mean to merely accept all the inherited values' (Baller 1984, 59). Cultural heritage, if not handled correctly, was, a potentially dangerous social contaminant. It must be, Baller wrote,

> *critically mastered, developed and utilized in the context of the concrete historical objectives of the particular age, and in compliance with the objective criteria of social progress* [Baller's emphasis] (Baller 1984, 66).

Lenin insisted that bourgeois culture could never be simply 'removed from history', remnants of it would always linger. It must, therefore, be subjugated and put to educational ends (see also *Museums in the USSR*, 14). The museum as prison, therefore, functioned not only as symbolic punishment, but also as a means of safeguarding the 'progressive' development of the revolution. Step one in the process of mastering, developing and utilizing was to bring all 'movable' heritage, particularly that deemed otherwise obsolete, into the museum's controlled, captive environment, where it could be appropriately (re)categorized.

The National Museum of Ethiopia was, therefore, an unsurprising target for 'reconstruction' in the early Derg years. The museum's origins lay in Haile Selassie's efforts to

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[2] The author's copy of this text was purchased on a second hand bookstall in Piassa, Addis Ababa in 2014.

both instigate comprehensive cultural heritage protections and to establish institutions for the preservation and exhibition of such. This institutionalization in the 1940s-60s included the inauguration of the National Library and Archives followed by the Institute of Archeology, the Institute of Ethiopian Studies at Haile Selassie I University (complete with a museum of Orthodox artifacts) and the Antiquities Administration (Tarsitani 2011, 304-6). The earliest iteration of the National Museum was contemporaneous with the latter, and predominantly housed imperial collections including the ceremonial accoutrements of previous emperors, such as those of Menelik II, and Orthodox treasures owned by the royal households. Indeed, Tibebe's poster, therefore, depicted a relatively familiar scene of royal items arriving at their natural home, but the unshackled soldiers made clear that this was an act not of accession but of imprisonment. The function, if not the content, of the depicted institution, therefore, had radically shifted. If the National Museum was primarily intended as a repository for heritage that evidenced imperial hierarchy, other Christian antiquities (found through archeological excavations, for example) and ethnographic collections of 'everyday objects'–both of which, as discussed below, would take on a new and different significance under the *Derg*–were more comprehensively housed and exhibited at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, overseen by Chojnacki (Guindeiul 2016, 13-14). The differing concerns of these two institutions in the pre-revolution period ensured that what Ayalneh Mulatu would later call 'feudal collections and relics' were typically exhibited separately from objects that offered insights into Ethiopia's rich ethnic diversity; such a separation would be redressed in the proposal for the new National Museum. Along with the reclamation of cultural heritage went the reclamation of the very institutions that had imbued Ethiopia's historic heritage with its authority. In the late 1970s the plans for the new purpose-built structure for the National Museum collection were undertaken,

and the organization of its galleries would play a prominent role in reordering extant (and in introducing newly recognized) heritage within a new progressive, 'popular' narrative.

In 1979, with the Red Terror's brutal subjugations over, and cultural relations with the Soviet Union formalized, the *Derg* turned in earnest to the task of 'utilizing' the art and objects which had been stretchered into the museum's collection. Rather than rely solely on advisors from Moscow, however, the Ministry of Culture again sought advice from UNESCO for the planning of the new galleries. In July 1980 Jean Bosserdet spent two months working with government officials and with a committee from the museum, which included curator Taye Wolde Medhin and collections keeper Mammo Tessema. His 1981 report documents both his recommendations, and the negotiations he undertook with officials seeking to remake the National Museum's displays in the wake of radical change, but also in-keeping with UNESCO's longer investment in Ethiopia.

Ethiopian heritage as World Heritage

By the time of the revolution, however, Ethiopia's national history as manifested in its heritage was not simply a matter of domestic interest. Under Haile Selassie Ethiopia had developed an important relationship with UNESCO, who had agreed in 1968 to provide assistance for the 'preservation and restoration of sites and monuments along the 'Historical Route'' (Abbebe 1977, 16). The 'Historical Route' referred to the major sites of Ethiopian cultural heritage north of Addis: the monasteries of Lake Tana in Bahir Dar, the twelfth-century rock hewn churches of Lalibela, the seventeenth-century castles and churches of Gondar and the monumental third-century stelae at Aksum. The route was an essential travel itinerary, developed by the Imperial Government and promoted by Ethiopian Airlines, the driving force behind the

international marketing of Ethiopia as emergent tourist destination in the 1950s and 1960s. To UNESCO Ethiopia was a critical partner in Africa; Addis Ababa had played host to significant conferences on developing education in the early 1960s during which the Director-General Vittorino Veronese had praised the 'benevolent concern and profound wisdom' of Haile Selassie (*Conference of African States* 1961, 22). To Veronese Ethiopia's historic arts were a critical anchor for continental pride; he spoke glowingly of an album of religious scroll paintings that had been included in UNESCO's 'World Art Series', saying it constituted a 'tribute to the richness of the cultural heritage of an entire continent'. In the decade in which other nations were emerging from colonialism and pursuing varying programmes of cultural (re)construction and national self-definition, Ethiopia represented historic Africa, as embodied by its rich, royal lineage. By the time of the revolution in 1974 Ethiopia's historic sites and their related antiquities were not only being celebrated as national treasures and jewels of a burgeoning tourist economy, but were on the cusp of being formally recognized as 'World Heritage' and, thus, worthy of supranational protections.

Although, as demonstrated by Veronese's veneration of Haile Selassie, UNESCO imagined this to be an ideal partnership between an African nation-state and its own international body, certain Ethiopian intellectuals found some of the inevitable by-products of the relationship to be challenging. The partnership with UNESCO, for example, led to a major influx of foreign expertise and, subsequently, a lessening of the roles played by Ethiopian professionals in restoration, archeological projects and their contingent processes (Beyene, 2010, 80). This became a particular bugbear in the 1970s and 80s amongst pro-revolution intellectuals, such as Ayalneh Mulatu (1990, 11), who argued that a priority of the revolution should be to ensure that

Ethiopian expertise (in line with a process of progressive 'cultural reconstruction') was cultivated in the field of heritage research.

Although the Soviet Union became a major sponsor and provider of expertise after the signing of a diplomatic accord in 1978 which saw an influx of both military hardware and financial support for education, film production and the establishment of a new publishing house in the earliest years of the revolution, it was clear that the Derg wished to maintain a close relationship with UNESCO. Certainly, as inferred above, this continuity was conspicuous, though it is worth noting, firstly, that the Soviet Union had been a member of UNESCO since the 1950s (see Geering in this issue), and that, whilst there were tensions between the leading Second World power and the international body, taking advice from the former as well as the latter was not entirely contradictory. Furthermore, UNESCO's involvement in Ethiopia, and promotion of its heritage riches, had been a critical factor in the country's emergence as a major tourist destination on the African continent. Though on something of a hiatus in the later 1970s, during the bloodiest years of the *Derg*'s consolidation of power, Ethiopia's tourism sector remained somewhat ring-fenced throughout the revolutionary period; Ethiopian Airlines, for example, continued to operate, expand and advertise internationally. In the 1980s, in fact, the international promotion of Addis as a key destination concertedly resumed with Ethiopian Tourism Commission-published books such as Graham Hancock's *Discovering Ethiopia* (1983) extolling, once again, the opportunities for adventure and discovery that had first been promoted under Haile Selassie.

It is clear, however, that the *Derg* continued to request UNESCO's consultations in the development of major plans for cultural heritage. In 1976 they explicitly requested assistance for the development of a new 'Plan of Action' for the 'preservation and presentation' of national

cultural heritage. Ethiopia's proposal was made at the nineteenth session of the UNESCO

General Conference in Nairobi in 1976, and adopted as Resolution 19 c/4.126 (Aarlund 1985, 9).

In the 1980s several major consultations were produced by UNESCO including Eugeniusz

Gasiorowski's *Legislation for the safeguarding of the cultural heritage of Ethiopia* (1981) and

Flemming Aarlund's lengthy *Masterplan for the Preservation and Presentation of Cultural*

Heritage (1985), which underscored the importance of an international campaign on the grounds

that 'historical monuments and sites of Ethiopia rank among the most outstanding in Africa and

are an important part of the cultural heritage of mankind'. These reports rarely discussed

explicitly the political situation in Ethiopia, beyond vague references to the so-called 'self-

reliance' of *Ethiopia Tikdem* and the desire for domestic expertise, but they did, on occasion,

wrestle with certain ideologically motivated policies. Gasiorowski, for example, decried

nationalization, which had, in fact, been first mooted under Haile Selassie, but became a major

Derg priority with the emphasis on total public ownership. 'The consequence of nationalizing all

cultural property,' Gasiorowski wrote,

> is that the State takes over <u>all</u> duties and responsibilities in safeguarding and protecting it, including <u>all financial ones</u>. Even the richest countries cannot afford to do this. Nationalization of all 'antiquities'…does not therefore automatically solve the difficult problem of effectively protecting the national cultural property (Gasiorowski 1981, 4)

Gasiorowski's concerns pointed a tension between UNESCO's priority of 'protecting' heritage

in accordance with international guidelines, and the *Derg*'s commitment to circumscribing the

significance of such heritage within the new confines of an Ethiopian version of socialism. In

this instance, the immediately symbolic act of nationalizing (publicly reclaiming) property once

deemed the preserve of the elite took precedence over the longer-term practicalities of

preservation. In 1980 Bosserdet arrived in Addis to advise on the configuration of new exhibition

galleries for the National Museum. More so than the reports written before him, his 1981 publication laid bare both the points of clear connection and the tensions between UNESCO's priorities and those of the new socialist government.

Tabula rasas and new myths of origin

One of the repeated concerns in Bosserdet's report (1981), apropos standard UNESCO recommendations, was the need to get the new National Museum in line with 'universal' museum standards. Fourteen years before he consulted for Ethiopia, Bosserdet authored a report for the Nigerian government regarding the modernisation of the Ife Museum (Bosserdet 1966). Side-by-side, these reports underscore his long-term commitment to 'universal' standards, and the ways in which such standard might be met. Whilst he protested at the beginning of his Ethiopia report that the exhibition infrastructure proposed had been 'designed and selected for the specific conditions of this museum', in both 1966 and 1981 reports there is consistent emphasis on minimal, uncluttered display cases, clinical spotlight fittings and plain walls, the epitome of the 'white cube' aesthetic popular in western museums from the 1960s. For the galleries of Ethiopia's new National Museum the majority of the walls were to be white for various innocuous-seeming reasons: to 'enlarge the space,' to 'provide a neutral yet complementary colour', to 'diffuse...beautiful soft light' (Bosserdet 1981, 5-8).

Right around the time of Bosserdet's consultations in Addis, Brian O'Doherty (1976, 1986) was taking aim at the concept of the 'white cube' as preeminent contemporary art space in the West. In *ArtForum* and a later extended publication he infamously revealed that any seeming neutrality in such a space was an 'illusion'. 'The wall,' O'Doherty wrote, 'becomes a membrane

through which esthetic and commercial values osmotically exchange' (O'Doherty 1986, 79) and the space that such a wall envelopes soon aestheticizes everything within its bounds, such that a fire hose can become as 'esthetic conundrum' (O'Doherty 1976, 25). As Ruth Phillips has argued more recently, the use of the 'neutral' white cube for displays of non-western or indigenous arts in the West often impedes appreciation of the work. Writing about displays of Canada's First Nations' art, Phillips (2011, 265) argues that the 'white cube' had often served as a 'more radical mode of decontextualization' than the infamous, early twentieth century displays of 'Primitive art'. That Bosserdet's recommendations for display space aesthetics were so similar for both Nigeria and Ethiopia would suggests that UNESCO promoted a 'white cube'-like model, opening his report to broader accusations leveled at the international body about attempts to instill globally standardized museum practices, with little regard for local display traditions or contexts. In his analysis of UNESCO's 'global scripts' of 'World Heritage' and 'Intangible Heritage', for example, Yudhishthir Raj Isar argues that in the early 1970s, when the very concept of 'World Heritage' was being defined, Euro-American experts dominated the discourse. The result was that 'supposedly universal' concepts were really an expression of 'Western particularism still powerful enough to universalize itself' (Isar 2011, 39-52). In post-revolution Ethiopia, however, the imposition of a Western, modernist, 'white cube' gallery aesthetic perfectly suited the desire to radically de-/re-contextualize cultural heritage within a new ideological framework.

It is worth speculating why the expanded version of the post-revolution National Museum was not established within an already existing institution, such as the museum within the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, with its large ethnographic collections. The latter, however, was located on the university campus, likely restricting broad public access, but it was also housed

within the former Guenete Leul Palace, which Haile Selassie had gifted for the establishment of his university in 1950. The former palace was (and remains) a grand structure, with gilded columns, coffered ceilings and crystal chandeliers providing a backdrop to its exhibitions. Whilst the appropriation of imperial trimmings was not uncommon–particularly by Mengistu who began to appear at *Derg* rallies sitting on one of Haile Selssie's gold, lacquered chairs from the later 1970s–Bosserdet's white-walled proposal offered a more radical *tabula rasa*. The concrete edifice of the new National Museum, shown in his report via hazy photographs of a scaffold-clad structure, eschewed the grand, classicized touches of its predecessors for simpler, boxier exhibition spaces. The 'white cube' was, thus mutually beneficial to the 'universal standards' of UNESCO and the post-revolution desire to radically represent national history, and its material heritage.

Another feature common to Bosserdet's Nigerian and Ethiopian reports was the importance of establishing a striking initial impression on the visitor, foreign or local. At Ife this was to be achieved with a 'central partition' on which was mounted fourteen of the famous bronze heads from ancient Ife, each dramatically spotlighted. In Ethiopia's National Museum the skeletal remains of the earliest known hominid, *australopithicus afarensis*, known internationally as 'Lucy' or, to Ethiopians, as '*Denqunash'* ('You are fantastic / marvellous'), were to be placed in a showcase slightly below ground level. Lucy's presentation was to suggest her moment of discovery by a team of American paleontologists led by David Johansen, a discovery that, remarkably, had occurred in the same year as the revolution.[3] 'The skeletal remains,' wrote Bosserdet (1981, 4), 'should be presented…so as to create the impression that the museum visitor is at the edge of the site itself'. If at Ife Bosserdet spotlighted the beauty and skill of the Ife heads to stir up a sense of revelation, in Addis he simulated the drama of

paleoanthropological discovery. In both instances Bosserdet sought to inculcate a hushed awe. Whether local or foreign, the visitor could experience 'discovery' either of Africa's historical artistic genius (at Ife) or of the origins of humanity (in Ethiopia). Bosserdet conceded that the revelatory experience involved contrivance; 'even though…the bones may have been found many yards apart', he wrote, '…Lucy's remains should be presented as the remains of one person, exposed on earth and pebbles, half covered by dust, an incredible find, just recently discovered' (Bosserdet 1981, 7).

As Donald Donham (1999) has shown, Lucy's discovery was a major boon for the post-revolution rewriting of Ethiopia's long history beyond the divinely anchored mythology of imperial lineage. Referencing an *Ethiopian Herald* report of a special exhibition erected for the tenth anniversary celebrations, Donham demonstrates how she became the perfect historical tool. The exhibit, which relied upon photography rather than actual objects, proceeded in a linear fashion along a wall, with red carpet laid out for foreign dignitaries. It told the story of Ethiopia's progress, beginning with the earliest human origins and culminating in the glorious liberation of the 1974 revolution, which was saved by the military from both domestic insurgents and foreign aggression. Ultimately the exhibit showed the revolution being 'embraced by the progressive world' and 'the visitor', the journalist wrote, 'feels like dancing' (Donham 1999, 15). Ethiopia's 'progressive' history was, therefore, far longer than the cherished 'three thousand years' of imperial rule. Lucy, Donham argues, allowed the regime to put royal history into parenthesis as one stage in a much longer narrative for the country (and mankind), one that culminated in the great revolution of 1974. Could it be, however, that the origins of this 'special exhibit' and its remarkable appropriation of history lay in Bosserdet's recommendations which unequivocally foregrounded Lucy as point of origin? Bosserdet's motivations, of course, were much more

aligned to UNESCO's universalist desire to celebrate Ethiopia as preeminent African civilization and as *ur*-World Heritage site than they were to creating a Marxist teleology, but his recommendations appeared to prove most useful to the reconfiguration of Ethiopia's national narrative.

Old objects, new myths

Bosserdet's report not only contributed to the visualization of Ethiopia's new 'progressive' historical trajectory, it also assisted with the critical re-categorization of its historic cultural heritages and the diversification of 'heritage' to include the crafts and livelihoods of ethnic groups beyond those of highland Ethiopia. Lucy was to welcome visitors to the Ground Floor on which 'Prehistory and paleontology' would be laid out; paleontological research had taken off in the later 1960s, with teams of academics, particularly from Europe and North America leading a number of expeditions. Johansen's 1974 finding was, without doubt, the most spectacular, and ensured this field was a critical component of any new, comprehensive survey of Ethiopia's heritage. After having established Ethiopia as the cradle of humanity, the First and Second floors, respectively, would house 'Archeology' and 'Ethnography'. Tellingly, the archeological section would open with a painting from Lalibela and proceed to displays of other 'paintings, triptychs, illuminated manuscripts, large processional crosses, etc. [sic].' These would be exhibited alongside ancient artifacts such as 'Pre-Axumite pottery, bronzes, votive animal statuettes and other religious objects.' The artistic traditions of Orthodox Ethiopia were 'archeological artifacts,' offered in equivalence with pre-Christian religious and non-religious remnants; they were unequivocally cast as 'historic' (and were notably not included in the ethnographic survey of living traditions, discussed below). As Baller had made clear, in socialist

societies museums were to primarily house 'defunct traditions' (1984, 152). This sentiment was also expressed in Derg publications, including a 1981 edition of the political quarterly, *Meskerem*, which stated, that 'culture that has no direct relevance, or is an obstacle to our development, should be placed in historical museums' (cited in Persson 2007, 105). In the new galleries Orthodox Christian icons and manuscripts were envisaged as anachronistic relics. Although preserved in UNESCO-approved cases and illuminated by the clinical strip lights, within the wider context of revolutionary rhetoric the mechanics of such a display seemed to align with attempts to demystify and disempower objects now deemed remnants of regressive superstition.

This mode of specimen presentation (secure, yet demystified) pointed back to the Leninist insistence on safely incarcerated heritage, but it also inferred that whilst there was a desire to wrest the power that religious institutions and their contingent sacred objects held over their congregations, this power was not to be entirely destroyed. It is worth noting, of course, that beyond the museum, Orthodox iconographies proved useful to the visual propaganda of a regime shifting its allegiance from one holy trinity to that of Marx, Engels and Lenin: in certain poster design one image of three bearded men was almost too easily replaced with another, secular, socialist one (see Clapham 1989, 79). Comparison, nonetheless, can be made to the efforts of the Soviet state, as observed by MoMA Director, Alfred J. Barr during his visit to Moscow and Leningrad in the later 1920s, to preserve and repurpose Orthodox religious icons as secular cultural heritage. Here, through an elaborate process of confiscation, restoration and, in the cases of the finest works, duplication, the Soviet Central State Restoration Workshops under Igor Grabar' succeeded in reclassifying religious objects as secular, aesthetic ones, which could then be exported in a large traveling exhibition, showcased across Europe and in America between

1929 and 1932 (Meyer 2013, 118-127). As Barr observed in a 1931 essay, this process of restoration that relieved orthodox objects of their ritual functions coexisted with the transference of religious iconography from icons to secular propaganda or images that honored 'St. Marx' (Meyer 2013, 125-7).

Richard Meyer (2013, 127) has shown that Barr's interest in Russian icons and their process of recuperation under the Soviets was motivated not by an attempt to create a genealogy between them and modernist practices, but rather, in conjunction with his art historical preoccupation with contemporary engagements of historic works, to reveal how icon painting was not an artifact of the distant past, but rather a distinctly 'living force'. There are, of course, notable similarities with regard to the categorizing and repurposing of cultural heritage between the USSR in the 1920s and 1930s and revolutionary Ethiopia in the late 1970s, yet in the National Museum in Addis Orthodox treasures were not polished up and restored in the manner undertaken in Moscow. Rather, in the exhibit's linear history they served, complete with their time-ravaged surfaces, as archeological remnants of specific moments. Their authenticity as archeological remnants would be reinforced, the report suggested, by their presentation alongside photographic documentation of UNESCO restorations of specific sites, such as the seventeenth century castles in Gondar or the rock churches at Lalibela. These photographs documented the archeological spaces from which these treasures had been 'dug,' locating them in specific moments from the past. Where in Moscow Grabar' created 'a new type of archeological facsimile', a useful simulation of a historical object that could broadly propagate Russian cultural genius, in Ethiopia's National Museum religious objects needed to be locatable in specific historical moments, and in doing so they plotted historically and spatially the march towards socialist liberation.

If the ground and first floors of the museum were to exhibit the ancient, the old and, in many cases, the now defunct relics of pre-revolution Ethiopia, it was the basement, Bosserdet wrote, where 'modern Ethiopian must be able to express itself'. Here, in galleries dedicated to 'modern art' there would be exhibitions of contemporary painting, group shows around a theme and revolutionary graphic art. This, Bosserdet (1981, 5) declared, seemingly in contrast to other galleries, 'must be a living area', one that would 'stimulate public interest'. The basement would house a cinema and a lecture hall, the multi-functionality of the space ensuring that it would receive a wide range of visitors; indeed, though Bosserdet's report did not go into the specifics of how the museum might be made accessible to the broader public, who were now said to be Ethiopia's cultural custodians, the plans for this basement area underscored the desire to ensure that the museum would have popular appeal; the inclusion of the cinema is particularly telling since the Derg heavily promoted the use of film and television from outset of the revolution (see Cowcher 2018) The basement area would also serve as an exhibition forum for state-sanctioned artistic practice, primarily propagandist poster designs and grand realist painting. Bosserdet (1981, 5) even suggested that one temporary exhibition held here could be a 'comparative show of painting in Ethiopia before and after the revolution', an idea that he apparently took from artist Daniel Touafe, who had some curatorial responsibilities. The implication was that the museum might facilitate a visualization of the simplified, distorted critique that writers such as Aleme Eshete would level at Ethiopia's artists of the pre-revolution era as abstract, indulgent and 'bourgeois', and of the post-revolution as realist, 'accessible' and socially engaged (Eshete 1981, 29-30). Whilst Bosserdet may not have appreciated it, within the context of such rhetoric, any comparative exhibition would function in a not dissimilar way to that of the Nazi's 1937 'Degenerate' art show, only in Addis the condemnatory ridicule of *avant-garde* practices would

be immediately contrasted by the 'progressive' efforts of those in evidence since 1974.

Finally, it was on the second floor that the revolution's expanded definition of national heritage, informed by the new emphasis on peasant culture and on ethnic pluralism, would be displayed. Here, Bosserdet reported, visitors would be able to explore crafts and cultural materials from across the nation's fourteen provinces. The ethnographic collection, he conceded, was limited and would, largely, need to be created from scratch. Certain artifacts from rural life, such as the ox-drawn plough had been elevated after 1974 not just to the level of treasured heritage, but to that of political icon; the plough appeared in the earliest renditions of the Derg's logo, designed by artist Tadesse Mesfin, as if standing in as a local replacement for the sickle. After the Soviet-Ethiopia accord of 1978, the *Derg* logo shifted to a more orthodox one with a hammer and sickle, but the use of the plough in early designs in Ethiopia recalls the deployment of the local hoe as revolutionary socialist icon, alongside a five-point red star, by FRELIMO in the Mozambican War of Independence (1964-7; see Sahlström 1990)..

Bosserdet pushed back against the museum committee's proposal of doing a full fourteen-province survey exhibition, and suggested, instead, that a more practical series of exhibits on 'general themes', such as coffee production or pottery craft across several different regions, might be more 'interesting' (Bosserdet 1981, 10). Although Bosserdet queried it, the apparent desire for an all-encompassing ethnographic display was expressed in the wake of the 1977-8 Ogaden conflict with Somalia over contested territory on the east on Ethiopia. These were the days of the patriotic, threatening slogan 'Revolutionary Motherland or Death!' when the rhetoric of the singular, unified nation, with fixed, impenetrable borders, had gone into overdrive. The holistic fourteen-province display can, thus, be understood as part of a major effort not just to elevate rural culture, but to propagate the myth of geographic unity and

integrity, which although seemingly resolved with regard to the Somali border by 1978, was perpetually under attack from forces in the north of the country, specifically from Eritrea.

Despite his reservations about its initial ambitions, Bosserdet conceded that, if properly researched and presented as an 'accurate ethnographic document', this gallery would serve as an important 'didactic section' (Bosserdet 1981, 10). The importance of the 'educational role of cultural heritage' had been stressed UNESCO's 1980 General Conference, with emphasis falling on the need for both 'wide participation' in the preservation of cultural heritage and the building up of museum collections to support public education (*Report of Director General* 1980, 40-42). Rural traditions in developing nations were to be celebrated as sources of national strength. The painful irony was, however, that very shortly after Bosserdet's report was published parts of rural Ethiopia found themselves once again in significant crisis, with the threat of drought and of famine. As Christopher Clapham (2002, 9-33) has explored, a number of *Derg* initiatives, such as resettlement and villagisation, were, in fact, deeply destructive of rural life in regions where agricultural cycles depended on the ability to remain nomadic. Certain misunderstandings of local systems of land management forced rural populations to conform to a nationalised system of land usage. The pursuit of an 'accurate ethnographic document', therefore, seemed a futile endeavor in the midst of growing rural turmoil. A broad celebration of rural cultures in Addis might have made evident the ideological interest in diversifying national heritage, but it would also obscure the complex contemporaneous questions of disrupted rural livelihoods. Just as they were set to enter the contrived, stabilized environment of the renewed National Museum, some of Ethiopia's rural traditions were at distinct risk of disappearing in the annals of history.

Conclusion: The Legacies of Revolution

The National Museum collection was not, in fact, moved to the new gallery spaces in Addis until the later 1990s, several years after Mengistu Haile Mariam had fled Ethiopia and the *Derg* was ousted from power. Given that the *Derg* faced both catastrophic famine in 1983/4 and armed rebellions, particularly from Eritrea and the Tigrayan front, from the early 1980s to their eventual fall at the hands of the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) in 1991, it is unsurprising that grand projects such as the reconstitution of the National Museum collection remained little more than proposals. Nonetheless Bosserdet's report is an important testament to UNESCO's enduring commitment to assist Ethiopia in a range of areas of cultural development, including in the development of a museum of 'international standards.' It also, however evidenced the curious ways in which this agenda meshed with the ideological priorities of Ethiopia's Marxist-Leninist military government. Tellingly Bosserdet's report ended with three lists of items that were needed to fulfill the project, two of which consisted of items 'not available' in Addis. Bosserdet hoped that these could be ordered from overseas and be available when he returned in 1981. No follow-up report was produced, however. The National Museum's propagandist potential remained limited to Tibebe Terffa's hand-sketched image of the heritage prison in the late-1970s poster. However, as Donham's observations of the tenth anniversary celebrations suggest, some of the ideas mooted by Bosserdet appeared to prove useful for other, albeit temporary, exhibitions that sought to recast Ethiopia's national teleology as originating not in the three thousand years of imperial rule, but in the very origins of humankind. For intellectuals such as Ayalneh Mulatu (1990), the ideas that underpinned the desire to remake the museum as both reflective of a progressive history and of a much diversified narrative about Ethiopian culture remained relevant well into the latter years of the *Derg*'s rule. In 1990, even as Mengistu's regime struggled to maintain control, Ayalneh completed his doctoral dissertation,

Survey of Ethiopia Culture, for Moscow State University and it extolled the revolution's

potential to democratise a traditionally profoundly hierarchical national culture.

Though the proposals for the galleries of the National Museum did not come to full

fruition, it is clear that the *Derg* era witnessed a notable proliferation of domestic heritage

bureaucracy as well as a distinct effort to maintain and develop the country's reputation for

'World Heritage'. The revolution precipitated the founding of new bodies such as the Center for

Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (CRCCH) and concerted efforts to develop

Ethiopian expertise in heritage management and protection. For all of the rhetoric of tearing

down old idols that accompanied the overthrow of Haile Selassie, the revolution ushered in

renewed debates about protection for, access to and the very definitions of national cultural

heritage. Some of these debates, of course, were influenced from the later 1970s onwards by

Soviet, notably Leninist, ideas of how to correctly 'handle' outdated, bourgeois or imperial

culture. *Derg*-era intellectuals were, nonetheless, ambitious about democratizing access to

culture. A *Meskerem* article by Belayneh Asegu from the very end of the revolutionary years

provided some insight as to how such access might be achieved, including the use of television

and media to broadcast cultural heritage histories (Asegu 1989, 45).

In this same article, despite drawing heavily on UNESCO-issued publications, Belayneh

expressed criticism of the international body, stating that some of the international regulations

put in place to protect heritage were exploitative of developing nations (Asegu 1989, 20).

Belayneh did not elaborate, but his accusation was part of a longer section that denounced

colonialism (particularly European colonial-era looting, as Ethiopia had been subjected to at the

Battle of Magdala in 1868) and American imperialism as immensely detrimental to the historic

heritage of poorer nations. His accusation, in fact, echoed much earlier Soviet criticisms of

UNESCO as serving primarily a Western, capitalist agenda, and testified to the lingering influence of Soviet philosophies right into the later years of the Cold War (see, for example, Armstrong 1954).

This criticism notwithstanding, Belayneh's article strongly reiterated the need for heritage legislation that extended protections over natural as well as human heritage, and which emphasized both the State's and the people's responsibility for its protection. His call to action coincided with the signing of the Proclamation on the Study and Protection of Cultural Heritage in January 1989 (Nair, 105). This was to be the culmination of revolution-era efforts on cultural heritage; a little over two years after its signing, Mengistu fled for exile in Zimbabwe and the military regime was overthrown. Whilst the EPRDF, upon assuming power, disavowed the *Derg* and adopted a new federal system of governance, many *Derg*-era calls for a broader definition of cultural heritage and for public responsibility for its protection were notably reiterated in both the 1994 Constitution and the subsequent Cultural Policy (Nair 2016, 106). Much about the *Derg* era was destructive of both human life and of Ethiopia's historic cultures, yet a movement that began as an iconoclastic call to incarcerate imperial remnants would culminate in an emphasis on plurality and greater inclusivity that would impact Ethiopia's heritage sector long after the collapse of Marxist-Leninism.

Acknowledgements

Note on Transliteration and Ethiopian names

The transliteration of Amharic remains a source of some discussion. For clarity and consistency, I have opted to use to the Library of Congress Romanization table, available at

https://www.loc.gov/catdir/cpso/romanization/amharic.pdf. In Ethiopia, people are typically referred to by their first name only (the second name being that of one's father), with polite designations and / or titles if necessary. To this end, artists and writers who I interviewed as part of my research are referred to by their full name first, and then first name only subsequently. When citing the work of Ethiopian scholars, however, I have referenced them in the same manner as I reference other scholars, by last name after the first citation.

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Figures

Figure 1. Haile Selassie, Emperor of Ethiopia in his palace, c.1942. Collection of the Library of Congress, Prints & Photographs Division, FSA/OWI Collection, Reproduction Number: LC-USW33-019078-C. Photograph in the Public Domain

Figure 2. Tibebe Terffa and Unknown Typesetter, Untitled Poster, c. 1978/9. Collection of the National Archives and Library of Ethiopia, Addis Ababa. Reproduced with permission from National Library and Archives of Ethiopia.