

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor  
of Area Studies

**Community Engagement in Cultural Heritage  
Management: Case Studies of Museums in Harar and  
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia**

地域住民による文化遺産管理の取り組み  
—エチオピアのハラールとアジスアベバにおける博物館活動の事例—

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# **Chapter 1. Introduction**

## **1.0 Background of study**

This dissertation attempts to contextualize the management and conservation of vernacular arts<sup>1</sup> (the arts of daily life, along with rarer artistic traditions) in Ethiopia from a historical socio-political perspective, while introducing the cultural vibrancy of artistic heritage and custodianship of cultural objects in the museums of Harar, Ethiopia.

When studying the opportunities for community interaction with objects in museum settings, there is a chance to investigate the motivations behind the individual and community's appraisal of the works via their own perceptions of the historical significance and future aspirations of the group. That is to say, investigating how an individual or community uses objects to "tell a story" of the past, as well as contextualize the self (or group) in present, can contribute significantly to comparative anthropological studies which deal with notions of communal and national cultural identity. For this reason, this study attempts to understand heritage objects within the framework of cultural institutions, community organizations, and administrative organs of the state – all of which are influential actors in material heritage preservation in Ethiopia.

In the course of this paper, the author gives due recognition to socio-political history because oscillating hegemonic tendencies of Ethiopia's ruling parties have

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<sup>1</sup> In general vernacular arts refers to arts or crafts of daily use that are usually made with hand tools, by persons who do not consider themselves artists in the classical western sense. Art historians have continually challenged the long-standing compartmentalization between "fine arts", on the one hand, and "crafts" on the other, of late. With ever study that presents African art in its reality (dynamic, intellectual, and intended forms which are culturally appreciated) another step is taken towards abolishing the differentiation between "high" and "low" arts. The author takes liberty and intentionally uses the terms vernacular arts, arts, crafts, folk crafts interchangeably. When "fine" arts are contrasted to "folk" arts in the present study, it is done so only to standardize my own inventory records with those previously recorded in national statistics.



contributed to the nature of heritage conservation, and the politics of cultural expression cannot be denied in the Ethiopian context. Despite historical infringements on cultural expression, the present research will show that the recent successful efforts of local-level conservation of material heritage have emerged and are currently thriving. Certainly, “local”, and “community-based” are keywords in this study; nonetheless, comparisons with Ethiopia’s national-level museums in Addis Ababa will be explored especially because the museum development that is transpiring in Harar and other communities outside of the capital is often informally compared to museum activities in Addis Ababa. The present study affords the opportunity to quantify some important aspects of museum practices in both locales. Moreover, the federal cultural heritage policy, the federal budgetary expenditures for cultural programming, as well as international assistance programs are all effecting the consideration given to museums collection in Harar and will likewise be explored in the present study.

The present research suggests that vernacular arts that are predominant in Harar’s museum collections have values other than that of a assortment of antiquated objects - institutionally maintained because of their rarity. In fact, the present study suggests that there are alternative values which local actors place on the objects. These alternative values, or meanings, are derived from two sources.

First, meaning is derived from the object’s symbolic reflection of the communal and individual’s inherent right to celebrate, preserve and cultivate their oral and material heritages. Especially in light of historical political activities, which infringed upon cultural rights in Ethiopia, there is a renewed interest by community members to gather all those items of precious heritage, which were not confiscated by previous governments, and to present those items in such a way that subsequent

generations of local people have access to their cultural history. Therefore, the community's appraisal of the "worth" of these items, as defined by themselves and *not* by "the State" (i.e., national mandates on what constitutes significance in cultural objects of Ethiopia), guides their own intention to preserve them within the local community. Secondly, the perceived value of the art objects is heightened by what I call *community-cultivating* activities (see section 1.2) that attempt to bridge the gap between living culture of the city and the historically significant objects found in the museum.

The case studies of museums presented herein will show that various actors have been involved in heritage conservation and management in Harar: women's groups, regional administrators, artists, donors, and local curators have worked cooperatively in order to develop a museum experience where the outstanding historical experiences, and contemporary practices meet. Indeed, The dynamics amongst these actors, and between museums (objects and personnel) and visitors is central to this study, which aims to approach cultural heritage conservation as a necessarily social practice.

Although a history of museums and vernacular arts will be generally considered in both the wider African continent, and the Ethiopian capital of Addis Ababa, the author makes no claim of overarching scope in this work. The intent is less for comprehensive analysis, but rather an introductory survey of the understudied, mostly secular arts and community involvement in local-level heritage preservation; a study that goes beyond the typical surveys of Ethiopian art, which have focused almost exclusively on the religious art of the Christian highlands, monumental architecture of the former northern capital cities, and formally trained internationally recognized Ethiopian artists.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the case studies of four local museums in the multi-ethnic

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<sup>2</sup> Raymond A. Silverman (ed.) (1999) provides an important exception to Christian highlands - dominated surveys of Ethiopian art.

urban city of Harar, Ethiopia – one of East Africa’s oldest Muslim cities, located some 525 km east of the capital Addis Ababa – represents the first major study of Ethiopian museums to date; a timely investigation of community museums (and similar cultural centers) that are beginning to materialize around the continent, and which may represent the emergence of a new paradigm for the African museum.

Despite the numerous constraints to the conservation of cultural objects in Harar, the overall outlook of this study is one of cautious optimism. Likewise, the present research aims to show that the recent efforts of local-level conservation of heritage have resulted from indigenous initiatives and subsequent joint management of tangible heritage by a multi-ethnic community working in consort with indigenous organizations, government administrators and foreign interests. It is hoped that the findings of this research can contribute to the further evolution of Ethiopia’s cultural heritage policy and arts management practices, so that local actors are more fully integrated into, and are the primary beneficiaries of cultural heritage conservation and development programs.

### **1.1 Objective of study**

This study grew from an interest in the conservation of handicrafts by local artisans in Ethiopia. In previous research (Asante 2004), I explored recent trends in the revival of traditional basketry production by women’s craft association in Harar. Having conducted two years of research on that subject, I choose to expand the scope of my research into other vernacular arts of the city of Harar. I subsequently realized that any analysis of the varied, but fast disappearing vernacular arts of Harar would be incomplete without strong considerations of the unique concentration of community-



based effort towards conservation of material heritage. Thus, issues related to community-based management and conservation of objects (especially of vernacular arts) in local museums has become the focus of the present research.

While this dissertation logically begins by looking at museums in Africa from a historical perspective, I shall further the historical discussion by offering an example of a contemporary African community's efforts at a local level, thereby presenting the first focused study of Ethiopian museums. Specifically, this research considers the following questions: 1) How has the political environment of Ethiopia influenced the nature of multicultural expressions of heritage in the last century? 2) In what ways do the museums of Harar differ from museums in the national capital? 3) What motivates the local community, and regional administrators to support the conservation of cultural objects in the museum context in Harar? 4) Why are vernacular arts predominant in the collections of Harar's museums? And finally, 5) by which means can local actors effectively maintain agency as they continue the conservation and revived production of traditional arts in the forum of local museums?

The questions posed above will be answered in the course of this paper which has four main objectives: to contextualize contemporary cultural programming in museums by reviewing influences of Ethiopia's recent socio-political history; to illustrate the ways in which community actors are taking part in museum activities and heritage management in Ethiopia; to discover community response to museums and art collection; and to assess potential conflicts between local heritage management and national and international development programmes.

In sum, this thesis aims to focus on what the small community groups and private individuals are doing in terms of heritage management. I hope to show how the

creative efforts of the local community in Harar made sustainable and noteworthy efforts at folk-art revival and heritage conservation in recent years. There is also an attempt to determine the motivations behind current cultural preservation initiatives, through a historical review of the cultural situation in 20<sup>th</sup> century Ethiopia. I will also reflect on the consideration given to the culture sector in terms of resource allocation and interests at the national level, in order to place the importance of *culture* in Ethiopia's national policy and practices.

Finally, in assessing degrees of community engagement in heritage management and development in Ethiopia, I hope to illustrate where Ethiopia fits with the trends of cultural conservation and management initiatives in Africa. By linking the community initiatives in Harar's museums to wider issues of national cultural/economic development that have recently arisen, I will consider the potential conflicts between local-level heritage management, and international and national-level cultural development programs – conflicts which are of imminent concern in a rapidly globalizing world.

## **1.2 Theoretical considerations**

This multidisciplinary research involves the fields of socio-cultural anthropology, material culture studies, and museology, and employs a multifarious conceptual framework in viewing the nature of transactions between people and the objects in their environment. Rochberg-Halton's (1979, 1980) concept of *cultivation*, concerned with the modes of meaning that engage people with objects, is a central idea in this study, where subject-matter disciplines (art history, material culture, anthropology), museum

practices, and social organizations are all equally considered. As succinctly explained in Rochberg-Halton's collaborative work with Csikszentmihalyi,

Cultivation involves both senses of the verb "to tend": to take care of or watch over... in other words, "to attend to"; and also to proceed or be directed on some course or inclination... that is "to intend" some aim.

Indeed, cultivation – the improvement, development, refinement, or resultant expression of some object or habit of life due to care, training, or inquiry – comes closest to the original meaning of the term culture, although most contemporary theories of culture exclude this aspect in favor of a rather static "symbol system" approach...(Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981:173)

The concept of *cultivation* is pertinent to this study of a urban African community because, contrary to popular misconceptions, conservation and management of cultural objects in museums need not be latent storehouse practices without intended goals at both the individual and communal levels; neither have all African museum collections been initiated or maintained with Western models in mind.

On the contrary, I shall argue that the educational programming, craft activity, and community<sup>3</sup> activities that have been indigenously initiated and integrated into custodianship at local museums in Harar, exemplify contemporary adaptations to management (cultivating) practices that are built upon indigenous systems of alliances and organizations. Similarly, it is important to acknowledge that the collections themselves were gathered according to local aesthetic preferences, and traditional methods of arrangement and maintenance were employed in these well-established facilities – long before the intervention of international groups, which have recently

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<sup>3</sup> The present study uses the term community to refer to a group with geographical proximity who do not necessarily share ethnic religious or historical commonalities. We may therefore think of the 'community' of Harar or Addis Ababa as inhabitants of the respective cities.



influenced the management of the collections. Moreover, the present study suggests that the sustainability of local participation in Harar's museums has been facilitated by the high degree of *community-cultivating* activities, i.e., the purposeful accumulation, presentation, and engagement with cultural objects by collective effort.

In Harar, *community cultivation* of heritage is facilitated by the inclusion of established networks of indigenous alliances which support individual and community initiatives at heritage management, and local ingenuity in creating opportunities for the integration and presentation of contemporary customs in publicly accessible contexts (see Chapter 4). *Community cultivation* is central to the concept of “engagement” with which this study is especially concerned. Following Fawcett et al.'s (1995) empowerment model, community engagement is seen as a process of collaboration between institution(s) and local residents whereby resource (intellectual and physical) mobilization is used in order to influence the system/condition. In this model, community engagement serves as a catalyst for problem solving and changes in policy and praxis.

Moreover, community engagement is herein distinguished from “community participation”. While “participation” can be a single act of involvement or sharing in an event, the act doesn't necessarily involve resource mobilization or bilateral resource exchange. The concept of “engagement” on the other hand, implies the sense of making a pledge or agreement (formal or informal) which necessitates the allocation of greater temporal investments in order to facilitate a reciprocal exchange of resources in for the duration of the activity.

In conclusion, the present study will show that the collections of cultural objects in Harar's museums reflect aspects of a dynamic and significant urban setting, and that

that the relevance of these museums in the view of their patrons, curators, and visitors is especially pronounced because of the various ways in which the community engages itself with the tangible artifacts and the museum milieu. Moreover, the perceived connection of the heritage collections with the contemporary culture of the city will be shown to be a factor which positively influences Harar's community interactions with objects exhibited in local museums. For example, Harar's museum collections may be seen as miniature encapsulated spheres of objects that are valued among residents who are themselves an interconnected aggregation of ethnic groups densely gathered within the border's of Ethiopia's smallest geographical region. Certainly, the importance of accommodating both the traditional and modern, cultural peculiarities and multi-ethnic similarities into heritage displays has not been lost to community actors who have successfully collaborated in order to mobilized resources and influence heritage management in their city museums.

Perhaps it is no coincidence that regional officials often promote Harar as "the living museum"; the notion being that the city offers a cultural mosaic, which merges past traditions with modern practices in an aesthetically pleasing site. In Harar, one finds a multi-ethnic community, which holds in high regard both the traditional artifacts of the city, and the innovative creations of contemporary artisans. Indeed, material heritages are typically reflective of wider socio-cultural characteristics of its intended audience; Likewise, the esteem granted to a variety of traditional arts in Harar (be they antiques maintained in a local museum, or decorative and functional household objects in the city) reflects the community's desire to maintain the object and, to various degrees, the valuations associated with them.

At the same time, the willingness of local artisans, curators and administrators to adapt agendas, which approach modernization and promote current cultural trends, also reflects the community's impetus to draw alongside competitors in the global arena where the "economics of culture" remain ever enticing. In essence, the museums of Harar have served, in part, as community sanctioned forums of public memory and venues to express contemporary aspirations; a convenient forum for old and new to merge.

In the course of this paper, the reader will be introduced to the various ways in which *community cultivation* and engagement of local actors has shaped heritage management in the case study museums. As the case of Harar will show, a community can work cooperatively and with limited resources, in order to effectively manage tradition and modernity in the museum context.

### **1.3 Methodology**

Several methods were employed in the collection of data concerning the vernacular arts of Harar. For data on cultural artifacts, expert informants were found among the skilled artisans of the city who were most qualified to the methods of production, the historical use of different styles, special ceremonial contexts, and the nuances behind object names, as well as influences on innovative styles. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with individuals and small groups of professional artisans, including jewelers, basket weavers, cloth weavers, embroiders, and wood workers in Harar. Elder groups of women belonging to local neighborhood associations (*afōča*) were frequently consulted for their precious knowledge on disappearing traditions involving folk crafts. Also, data

concerning the creative processes, functions and aesthetic preferences of renowned Harari basketry was collected with participant observation.

Information about local museums – their history, recent developments and organizational structure – was obtained through interviews with personnel from the Harari Regional Bureau of Culture, the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES), the Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH), as well as museum owners and tour guides. These interviews were open-ended, but followed a general script. Further information on community participation in museums was obtained from direct observation whereby the researcher observed patterns of visitors to local museums, and public programming in the museums of Harar over fourteen months<sup>4</sup> between 2003 and 2007. Informal interviews with community members, ranging from age sixteen to age ninety, provided supplemental information on public interaction with local museums, as well as community response support for museum activities.

The informants of this study were not chosen by random sample. Instead, interviews were made in situationally appropriate contexts: curators, museum guides, and other administrators served as informants concerning museum functions, object collections, and visitor statistics; neighbors and the extended families of craftspeople served as my preliminary pool of informants, and over the years, informants naturally extended to other acquaintances; national and international employees of cultural heritage institutions were interviewed concerning cultural policy and craft development programs in Ethiopia. In addition, in an attempt have a diverse sampling of informants, my data is sourced from men and women, school children and elders, bureaucrats and

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<sup>4</sup> A total of eighteen months of fieldwork was conducted in Harar and Addis Ababa between 2002 and 2007.



artisans, as well as ethnic Harari, Oromo, Amhara, Gurage, and other groups residing in the town. Moreover, foreign visitors and ex-patriots were interviewed concerning preferences for vernacular arts and opinions about local museum. In essence, the researcher purposely chose not to circumscribe this study to preconceptions of what role vernacular arts plays in the community and in museums in Harar. Thus, the researcher allowed all receptive interviewees to participate in this study.

Finally, to obtain quantitative and qualitative data about the objects in the Harari museums, the author gathered digital photographs and detailed measurements of several hundred items in the collections of the museums in the city of Harar. This work represents the first systematic documentation of the collections of the Harari National Museum and the Sherif Private Museum, and is an first important step in the archiving of these collections. Participant-observation was also achieved in museum settings as curators and staff of local museums labored alongside me as I cataloged local collections.

Audio, video, and photographic documentation and recordings were also used throughout the five years of research in Harar. In the cases of informal interviews during participant observation, and interviews with museum curators and administrators in Harar and Addis Ababa, I conducted interviews without the aid of an interpreter. Most interviews with the general community were conducted with the assistance of local university graduates.

## **1.4 Contents of Chapters**

This thesis will proceed in Chapter 2 by introducing a historical perspective of the relationships between museums, vernacular arts and communities in Africa. The chapter

begins by presenting some long-standing global debates on the roles of museums. After introducing the colonial legacy on the formation of museums in the continent, and colonial perceptions of African art, the study will explore some recent initiatives by African museologists to effect a “coming of age” in material heritage management throughout the continent. In discussing current trends in the continent, the recent concern with increasing indigenous accessibility to museum collections will be brought to light. In this section, the role between the community and the vernacular arts (those within and outside the milieu of museums) will be considered.

In Chapter 3 we will explore the relationship between politics and culture in Ethiopia, especially in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. From there, some current federal initiatives, and constraints in the management of cultural heritage will be revealed. In order to consider the relationship between management of museums and vernacular arts at the national level, two federally administered museums in Addis Ababa will be introduced: the Museum of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, and the National Museum. The statistics from these national museums will be useful in comparing the local museums of Chapter 4.

Chapter 4 presents local-level conservation of vernacular arts in the context of museums in Harar. The chapter begins with an introduction to the historical and contemporary variety of crafts in the city. Evidence of the community’s interest in cultural continuity and simultaneous cultural dynamism will be explored by investigating the motivations behind the establishment and maintenance of the city’s four museums. Details of the collections of each museum, visitor statistics and visitor feedback, as well as the successes and constraints of the museum administrators in Harar will be presented in the format of case studies. The local community’s ability to

work effectively with regional officials and international actors will be shown to be potentially beneficial prototype for local-level heritage conservation activities in other underdeveloped nations.

Finally, the concluding Chapter 5 will consider a number of potential obstacles to the future of conservation and management at the local level in Ethiopia, including large-scale economic development plans in culture, which may inadvertently displace successful local initiatives. Recent developments in Harar will serve as cautionary addendum in this respect. Moreover, it will be suggested that the cultural policy of Ethiopia be amended to provide allowances for greater protection for the rights of individual and make concessions for communal possession of artifacts in certain exceptional cases. In addition, earnest recommendations will be made for increased financial, infrastructural, and technical support of local initiatives in heritage revival and conservation in Ethiopia.

## **1.5 Conclusion**

This dissertation offers a multi-faceted view of cultural heritage management by an African community outside of their nation's capital city. Discussions of museum initiatives by private individuals, and community organizations will be related to initiatives by regional government officials, activities of various international interests, and visitor reactions to the museum experience. Insofar as the policy and practices of Ethiopia's federal government relate to the preservation and promotion of culture, the national level trends will be considered early on in this work, including trends in the large national museums of Ethiopia.

Based on the examples from Harar, this study shall argue that national/foreign proposals for development of vernacular arts and museum expansion (or modification) should take a cautious approach to introducing tourist market-driven schemes: new schemes should not deter uncommon artisans specializing in renowned crafts activities from the practice of their limited trade in the museum forum; neither should new schemes prioritize tourist preferences in creating new models of museums which mimic Western archetypes. Moreover, this work asserts that imperative considerations be given in future proposals so that sustainable programs are created which *do not* undermine the indigenous systems of alliances which have, to date, been outstanding examples for grass-roots conservation of material heritage in Africa.

## Chapter 2. Museums, vernacular arts, and communities in Africa

### 2.0 Conceptualizing the museum

Private collections of artwork, manuscripts, and *cabinet of curiosities* have been the age-old privilege of elite classes the world over. Often, only exceptional persons were granted access to these collections. Such was the case around the third century B.C., when a large collection of artifacts and specimens were amassed from the known world and housed in the Mouseion, connected with the Library of Alexandria, Egypt. In the Mouseion, or “temple of the Muses”<sup>5</sup>, artifacts were systematically kept and regularly accessed by a privileged group of scholars.

The legacy of that early massive Library and Mouseion of Alexandria, has remained impressive as is attested by the fact that the modern English term “museum”, whose popular use can be traced back to the mid-17<sup>th</sup> century, is derived from this source, via the Latin term, *Museum* (Merriam-Webster 2002). While the term itself has remained in common English usage for centuries, the popular meanings associated with it have varied. For example over the last one hundred or so years, English dictionaries have defined museums as:

“A collection of natural, scientific, or other curiosities, or works of art.” (Findlater 1884:331)

“A place where men of learning meet, not in the sense of a repository.” (Merchant and Charles 1904:780)

“Library, academy, study, museum.” (Klein 1967:1017)

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<sup>5</sup> In Greek mythology, Mousa (in Latin, *Musa*) was any of the nine sister goddesses of the arts.

More recent definitions have attempted to combine the meanings that have been prevalent over the last century:

“An institution devoted to the procurement, care, study, and display of objects of lasting interest or value; also: a place where objects are exhibited.” (Merriam-Webster 2002:1205)

Over the last few centuries, the general idea has remained that a museum is a place containing artifacts, which are the source of inspiration (as were the Muses), however, a *public access dimension* began to be associated to the idea of museum. We find therefore, that between the mid 17<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> centuries private collections were being made available for more public – yet mostly upper class – audiences at museums in Europe, Asia, and Africa.

Then in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, various international organizations of museums and museum professionals began forming. These organizations have, without fail, chosen to expand the definition by considering the *functions* of a museum. Today the most widely referenced definition is that of the International Council of Museums (ICOM), an NGO established in 1946. ICOM continues to adopt occasional modifications (sub-descriptions of what can qualify as a museum).<sup>6</sup> However, for all practical purposes, the following definition offers a condensed version:

A museum is a non-profit making, permanent institution in the service of society and of its development, and open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits, for purposes of study, education and enjoyment, material evidence of people and their environment (ICOM Statutes 2001: Article II Definitions).

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<sup>6</sup> ICOM made periodic revisions of this definition in 2001, 1995, 1989, 1974, 1961, and 1956. Despite the 2001 revision, debates on the need for further modification continues, cf. Donahue, Paul F. Collection=Museum? *ICOM News*, Vol. 57, No. 2, 2004.



How are primarily non-Western associations of museums choosing to define museum? The answer: in a similar, if not exact fashion as ICOM. The International Council of African Museums (AFRICOM), an ICOM affiliate and the largest pan-African coalition of museum associates, states in its constitution that it endorses the ICOM definition (AFRICOM, 1999). A few other non-western associations have slightly different definitions: the South African Museums Association (SAMA) – representing members in Botswana, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, Swaziland and Zimbabwe – defines museum in the following manner:

Museums are dynamic and accountable public institutions which both shape and manifest the consciousness, identities and understanding of communities and individuals in relation to their natural, historical and cultural environments, through collection, documentation, conservation, research and education programmes that are responsive to the needs of society. (SAMA 2001: Preamble)

The Pacific Islands Museum Association (PIMA) has opted for a brief and extremely general definition:

[Museum] means and shall also include any cultural centre, cultural institution, cultural organisation, cultural association and interpretative centres. (PIMA 1997)

As the discussion above shows, the debate over what qualifies as a museum is not new.

As Ginsburgh and Mairesse note:

Controversies on what should be called museum had started already during the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, if not earlier, and the meaning of the word kept changing over the years. And indeed, how should one characterize a fluid concept, which can be used simultaneously to mean temple, forum, school or church? The easiest solution is to produce a strict definition that describes some obvious characteristics: Collecting, conserving, researching, exhibiting. However, such an approach freezes

the essence of many museums and limits their evolution...” (Ginsburgh and Mairesse 1997: 28)

Certainly, the current definitions of “museum” by various international associations serve to circumscribe the concept within the rather conservative historical framework of institutions holding this label, and thereby fail to include the plethora of creative non-traditional institutions, which could claim validity<sup>7</sup>, in part, based on this label. While the debate of the label “museum” continues, the focus is shifting from how museums were previously defined, towards an attempt to *understand* the roles and functions of museums today. Instead of seeing how institutions do or do not meet the standard of the label, the focus now is on how the label does or does not meet the needs of the institutions.

This important shift in thought is brought to the fore in Ginsburgh and Mairesse’s (1997) “Defining a Museum: Suggestions for an Alternative Approach”, which asks: Should the institutions objectives or activities (i.e., missions) be taken into account when defining a museum? This study of nearly 200 museums in the French-speaking region of Belgium found that the surveyed mission statements are likely the consequence of very different museum models prevailing in continental Europe and Anglo-Saxon countries. Well, if the curators of such relatively geographically adjacent areas rate their missions<sup>8</sup> differently, then certainly regions of the world that are more distant may also prioritize missions quite differently from the dominant Anglo-Saxon and Western (American) models. We may thus expect that having a single definition of museum, especially among national and international museum associations, becomes

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<sup>7</sup> Here, validation and efficacy are considered in terms of infrastructural and financial support and encouragement, especially as by sanctions from the proper governmental authorities, international associations.

<sup>8</sup> Example missions include: education, permanence, tourism, conservation and management, economic entity.

problematic in addressing the objectives of all of potential constituents. Moreover, pertinacious definitions, which deal with technical and functional aspects of the institutions while overlooking the motives for their existence, can only serve to widen the rift between large well-subsidized museums and the smaller under-funded operations.

In truth, it should be expected that the local, regional, and global debates over *what museums should be* would only expand in the post-colonial era with the heightened concern for the nature of representations of “self” and “other”. And it is likely that this debate will continue; although, in the third millennium, debates will probably expand as to not only the nature of the venue (What is a museum? Why have museums?), but also the nature of collections (What can be labeled “art”? Should the content of exhibitions be negotiated or censored? ), and concerns about entitlement rights (Who can claim ownership rights of art and artifacts? Who should benefits from museums and arts?). The present research hopes to contribute to the discussion of these questions for which answers are difficult to come by.

## **2.1 An introduction to museums in Africa**

Africa, with all of her ecological and cultural diversity, cannot be rigidly interpreted as having either singular or unified artisanal or conservation practices. However, when approaching vernacular arts and their conservation on the continent, some widespread trends emerge. Among these trends which will be discussed in this section are: the colonial legacy of museums, the place of vernacular arts in contemporary collections, and recent indigenous initiatives to re-conceptualize the missions and contents of

African museums in order to increase community involvement and awareness of both historical traditions and contemporary cultural practices, simultaneously.

This brief introduction to museums in Africa will begin with a summary of the historical legacy of Western colonial influence on perceptions of African art and on the development of museums in the continent. Then, contemporary efforts of African museums, which are more focused on heritage management and increasing accessibility to a wider and very much indigenous audience, will be explored. In discussing recent trends, alliances among African museums and motivations behind the rise in these multi-national associations and the underling concerns expressed among them will be considered.

#### *2.1.1 Western influences on perceptions of African art*

Early Western impressions of African art were based on trade with and the writings of early explorers to the continent from the 16<sup>th</sup> through the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. At that time, it was common to sing the praises of art and architecture taken mainly from the coastal regions where trade flourished in major port cities. However, the high praise of African arts changed to scorn and belittlement from the late 19<sup>th</sup> century when “Western desire for greater control over Africa’s trade partners, religious beliefs, and political engagements led to an era of widespread colonial expansion” (Visonà et al. 2001:20). During colonialism, museums in Europe voraciously complemented their collections of “primitive” or “tribal” African art bequeathed by earlier European travelers to the continent with newly found, purchased, and looted works from Africa. As an example of a colonial approach to displaying African art and artifacts, Western museums’ began the tradition of displaying African collections without detailing the origins, functions, or

other ethnographic information about the object. Moreover, the artisan's name was not seen as an import detail for collectors. As Visonà et al. point out:

The myth of anonymity was constructed and reinforced by many early Western researchers who believed that, although the artifacts and the traditional thought systems (their *raison d'être*) belong to Africans, the interpretation of such works and the theorization of African art would always be a Western prerogative (Visonà et al. 2001:11).

Certainly, Western collectors of “primitive” art may value the inherent mystery of uncredited works, but when presenting works in an indigenous context and with the aim of educational outreach – so prevalent in the recent missions of African and Western museums – it would be invaluable to shift away from anonymity. Including the name of the artisan with the work (when available) need not be considered a way of suggesting “ownership” of the work, but rather another opportunity for reflective associations of the artwork by the viewer: the artisans name or moniker in itself can lend telling clues about his/her ethnic group, position in society, regional origin, or family lineage – all of which offer the viewer further, or alternative contexts of understanding the work.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, on a continent where artisans are often continuing a hereditary-designated trade, acknowledging the name of the artists can help identify trends in transfer of skill within kin groups.

### 2.1.2 *Emergence of museums in Africa*

The early establishments of museums in places like America, India, and Africa followed colonial visions of what constituted a museum, and were based on the precedents set in

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<sup>9</sup> An example of why an African group may prefer anonymity of association with specific art forms can be found in Yoruba examples complex naming systems. See Visonà et al. (2001: 11-12).

the early museums of western and northern Europe. As such, their collections tended to reflect conventional Western art-historical assumptions.<sup>10</sup> In fact, the historical role of museums in African context is tied to issues of “collecting the other” for a selected, often elite audience. Indeed, tropical Africa’s early public museums were formed during the colonial period and were very much reflective of a colonial mentality which objectified the exotic (or fantastic) otherness of peoples of the locale, while serving as forums for justifying colonial prerogative (Visonà et al. 2001, Gaugue 2001).

For instance, early in the 19<sup>th</sup> century influential European settlers began establishing museums in Africa whose collections were first based on biological and botanical specimens. For example, the South African Museum in Cape Town was established by the Governor Lord Charles Somerset who in 1825 published a proclamation announcing the foundation of “The South African Museum” – intended to keep animal, vegetable, and mineral objects and afford colonists the chance to acquaint themselves with the resources of the colony, trusting, of course that locals would contribute in the collection and promotion of the institution (Naudé and Brown 1977). Likewise, in Kenya, the present Nairobi National Museum was built upon a museum naturalist specimens, established in 1910 by mostly colonial settlers belonging to the then East Africa and Uganda Natural History Society (presently, the East African Natural History Society). Later, the South African Museum, the Nairobi National Museum, and other African museums originally built upon “specimen collections” added social history components to their collections with the inclusion of cultural and art objects.

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<sup>10</sup> Even in the later half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century museums that were created outside of colonial influences, were often still modeled upon American or European standards.

The early curators of these and other museums in Africa were European peoples, with occasional rudimentary museum work assigned to indigenous persons, a situation that persisted until independence. Then with the independence of African states in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the museums were transferred to indigenous management who lacked administrative and curatorial experience in museums. As a result, even decades after independence, visitors to African museums continued to be elite persons; and the style of exhibitions, as well as captions on displayed objects retained references to the “tribalism” of the material heritage. Would African museums have to settle with inheriting western habits of institutional presentation of artifacts and also colonial constructs of which items were appropriate for the museum context? Fortunately, as we will see in the next section, post-colonial trends have seen many of these colonial era museums transformed into centers that promote research into national customs and cultures, and venues for community education that are making efforts to address the issue of elitism in access to cultural heritage. Moreover, entirely new African museums have arisen, which are likewise embracing the diversity of cultural expressions – especially showcasing the importance of vernacular arts.

## **2.2 Recent trends in museum collections in Africa**

The tradition of symbolic representations in objects has existed throughout modern human history and among peoples the world over. Yet, not only has research shown human migration originating in Africa, but the earliest use of what can be called vernacular arts has been sourced in Africa too. A recent report by Christopher Henshilwood et al. has dated perforated beads made from the shells of snails (*Nassarius kraussianus*) – found in Blombos Cave, South Africa – at about 75,000 years ago



(Henshilwood et al. 2004). These beads are nearly 30,000 years older than previously dated personal adornments and suggest that symbolic use of objects were known in Africa “long before the ‘creative explosion’ of painting and jewelry began 40,000 years ago in Europe”(Holden 2004:369).

All through history, objects have been tangible manifestations of human beliefs and cultures, as well of functional and symbolic elements, which have changed over time. Comparative studies of cultures, and even chronological studies within the same culture have informed researchers to the complex cultural interactions which have yielded creations that express, on the one hand, permanence of skill in vernacular arts and, on the other hand, the dynamism and re-interpretive ability of artisans who – over generations – have adapted/adopted craft techniques and forms to match their socio-cultural realities. Indeed, this idea of durability of skill and creative variety in forms and meaning in Africa can be found in comparisons of archaeological finds and contemporary traditions around the continent. Visonà et al. aptly suggest:

The impressive diversity of art traditions across Africa offers evidence of a larger continent-wide concern with artistic innovation and creativity. This can be seen not only in the variety of forms within a relatively small area (a single culture, a city or town, an individual artist) but also through history (Visonà et al. 2001:15).

Thus, in isolated as well as well-connected communities in Africa, we find a seemingly unlimited variety of crafts of ivory, bone, horn, clay, fiber, metal, wood, hide, stone and others, fashioned into personal adornments, buildings, weaponry, and icons. The variety of these arts has been used for millennia – not only as decorative objects for ceremonial occasions, but also for daily functions. With the modernization of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, influences on artistic innovation and creativity brought from Western nations and Asia

have inspired new models and meanings in African vernacular arts. The incorporation of foreign elements and concept in traditional forms of indigenous African artisans is a widespread extension of globalization; Just as Western craftspersons have been increasingly inspired by the abstract forms, textures, and organic dyeing techniques of the Indian sub-continent, Africa and Asia, so have African artisans found inspiration extraterritorially.

### *2.2.1 Relation between museums and vernacular arts in Africa.*

With the long history of multifaceted association between vernacular arts and communities in Africa, it is no wonder that contemporary African museums often have collections, which are endowed with rich emphasis on such cultural objects. While many of the collections themselves are built upon the early colonially influenced compilation of artifacts, the post-colonial trend has increasingly favored alternative indigenous presentations of the arts, heralding a definitive break away from the earlier *cabinet of curiosities*. Gaugue explains that recently,

The exhibitions on the ancient history of the continent are aimed at displaying the historic roots of the nation concerned, and providing to visitors that Africa had a history worthy of the name long before the coming of the Europeans. Two preferred themes are the birth of humanity in Africa and the growth of prestigious civilizations. Sudan celebrates Nubia, Ethiopia celebrates the Aksum Empire, and Mauritania the Empire of Gana (or Wagadu) and the medieval towns (Gaugue 2001:26).

That is not to say that African museums are all forthright in justly representing the variety ethnic diversity, or of historical realities. In actuality, there is always some degree of negotiated selection of exhibits, and many collections convey the “officially sanctioned” version of events, while conveniently omitting disfavored events, or groups.

For example, relics of the trans-oceanic, continental and domestic slave trade are given minimal consideration. In fact, as of 2001, out of all the museums in Africa, only

Some fifteen museums deal with the history of slavery in tropical Africa. The emphasis is placed on European slavery in the Atlantic trade, but very little is said about the roles played by African intermediaries and the Arab and inter-African trades, in order not to undermine a national unity which is both delicate and complex. (Gaugue 2001:30)

So it seems that African museums had/have to not only redress the colonial legacy of *how* to institutionally present artifacts, but also some colonial constructs of which items were appropriate for the museum context. Without a doubt, African museum specialists remain challenged in many respects to overcome the colonial legacy on museums. But generally speaking, there have been significant modifications in exhibition practices: displays of trophy specimens and regalia that may be of interest to elite audiences still have their spaces in African museums, but the visual focal points of collections are shifting towards varieties of vernacular arts with which a wider community find affinity.

### **2.3 Conclusion**

Despite many noteworthy advances in the African museology discourse, there remain persistent misconceptions and mistaken valuations about the current nature, missions, and concerns of museums in Africa, especially among social scientists. But in fact, as Irvine aptly notes: “The worldwide museum community is relatively small. The common concerns and issues are often widespread while the conditions in which they exist may be very different (Irvine 1999:54).” Likewise, many debates in the worldwide museum community are simultaneously being debated among African museologists; African museum specialists are actively contributing to these debates in conferences

(AFRICOM, SAMA, WAMP and others), and in publications (ICOM 1992; Kaplan 1994; Ravenhill 1994; Ardouin & Arinze 1995; Ardouin 1997; Adande & Arinze 2002; Coombes 2003).

Not only are African museums are shunning colonial models and have recently expanded towards educational programs (see museums of Harar in Chapter 4; Irvine 1999; Ginsburg & Mairesse 1997), they are aiming for community relevant displays. Constructive attempts are being made within Africa, and from the international community of museums to help facilitate situations whereby African curators, educators, and community members can work towards developing indigenous expression which are inclusive of living traditions in a dynamic museum context that reflects the outstanding, but also the everyday experiences of the community. In short, African museums, like their counterparts around the world are questioning the social relevance of museums and museology as an academic discipline in the local and global context. They are asking: what *is* the role of the museum in the community? And, what *should* be the role of the museum in the community?

As the above discussion has shown, without a doubt, today's African museum specialists are indeed endeavoring to purge themselves of the colonial imprint on museums. It should be expected then, that the local, regional, and global debates over *what museums should be* would only expand in the post-colonial era with the heightened concern for the nature of representations of "self" and "other". And it is likely that this debate will persist in the third millennium. But it is important to acknowledge the strides by African museum specialists (in the continent, and around the world), which began in the last two decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and which have helped expand the question of how to re-create African collections in order to redress past

shortcomings (see Appendix A).<sup>11</sup> Moreover, in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, great initiatives continue by African museum specialist to authenticate the intellectual complexity of African forms, recognizing what Csiksentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) have suggested: cultural objects, especially those that are intentionally displayed, are affective (emotive) and important aspects of social behaviour. “The things with which people interact are not simply tools for survival, or for making survival easier and more comfortable. Things embody goals, make skills manifest, and shape the identities of their users” (Csiksentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981:1).

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<sup>11</sup> See Appendix A: Selected bibliography and list of resources relating to African museums and collections of African art.

## **Chapter 3. Linking centralized politics to cultural expression in Ethiopia**

### **3.0 Introduction to 20<sup>th</sup> century political influences on cultural expressions in Ethiopia**

As the previous section made clear, institutional presentation of culture in Africa is very much related to political affairs (affairs of the state). Ethiopia, likewise, has a history of complex cultural dynamics, which have been reflected in, and manipulated by the changing political powers. Although never colonized by western powers, the prejudiced (and even strong-arm) tactics of the nation's rulers had similarly profound effects on the support of privileged cultural expressions (linguistic, artistic, etc.), which were meant to advance the centralized political agenda. So while the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century Ethiopian history contained notable exceptions<sup>12</sup> to the African rule, the following section shows how her history does share some similarity of proscriptions concerning cultural heritage.

This chapter will begin by presenting an outline of the political situations, especially of the last century, which influenced the government's generalized support of cultural programming in Ethiopia. Considering the circumstances of political activity in Ethiopia may help us understand the historical biases in cultural policy and practice. Later in the chapter we will focus in on the activities of two federally funded museums in Ethiopia, as introductory case studies of museum activities at the national level. By taking into detailed consideration the organization and support of the current administration as regards cultural programming in museums, we may attribute advances in cultural pluralism, as well as identify areas which could benefit from future revision;

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<sup>12</sup> Ethiopia not only managed to maintain its independence in a colonized continent, she also (with good intentions) promoted the widespread use of an indigenous African script. Also, Ethiopia is the only African country where one of the dominant religions is an indigenous form of Christianity (Bloor and Tamrat 1996: 322).

To see how far Ethiopia has come, and how far she still has to go. This will also afford the chance for comparison between national level museums and the local museums of the next chapter.

### 3.0.1 *Precursors to the modern Ethiopian state*

Looking back on Ethiopia's long history, ethnic conflict seems to have always existed, though with oscillating in intensity and locale. For thousands of years, Ethiopia has been multilingual and multi-ethnic – a trend which continues to this day, with current estimates showing that in a population of 74 million people (CSA 1994), there are nearly 80 ethnic groups who speak 70-80 languages most of which are Afro-Asiatic or Nilo-Saharan (Bender *et al.* 1976; Bloor and Tamrat 1996). In such a pluralistic society with a long history, it is not surprising that the various cultures have been in fluctuating states of cultural harmony and discord, incorporation and dissimilation.<sup>13</sup> Nevertheless, despite the ethnic and linguistic pluralism, during the last 2000 year history of Ethiopia, the Christian Amhara and Tigray ethnic groups have managed to dominate in politics – both administrative and cultural – even with occasional and temporary domination from other groups: Muslims, Egyptians, and Italians.

From the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, ethnic Amhara from the Shewan region headed a feudal aristocracy and their elite, along with Amhara assimilationists, were the dominating group in terms of education, language, economics and politics. At that time,

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<sup>13</sup> Modern Ethiopia's political situation was preceded by the Christian Abyssinian state, heirs of the ancient Solomonic Dynasty and Auxumite civilization, which was based in the central highlands of the country, and flourished from the late 13<sup>th</sup> century. Then briefly from 1531-1543, the Muslim General Ahmad ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi (commonly Ahmad Gragn, c.1507-1543) based from the Emirate of Harar, brought much of the Ethiopian empire under the control of the Muslim kingdom of Adal Sultanate. However, the intervention of Portuguese forces led to the defeat of Gragn's forces in 1543, and the return of control to the Christian empire. General surveys of Ethiopia's political history can be found in Cerulli (1971), Henze (2000), Levine (1974), Marcus (2002), R. Pankhurst (1971, 1982, 1984, 2000), Tamrat (1972), Trimmingham (1952), and Zewde (2002).

foreign colonizers were rushing to acquire African lands and the Tigrayan-dominated rule of Emperor Yohannes IV (1831-1889) was challenged to repel invading Egyptians who managed to occupy Harar from 1875-1885. Harar, a hitherto rebel republic to the likes of Ethiopia's emperors, was then brought under the umbrella of the Ethiopian Empire. Although Italian forces were concurrently vying for land, Ethiopia managed to maintain her independence as the forces of the Shewan King Menelik (1844-1913) repelled the Italians in the Tigray region at the Battle of Adwa in 1896. It was this Shewan king Menelik, who became Emperor Menelik II, and consolidated the Ethiopian empire within its present day topography (excepting Eritrea), establishing his new capital in the city of Addis Ababa.

Shortly after the death of Menelik II, one of his favored descendants, whose father was the former Governor of Harar, was crowned Emperor Haile Selassie I (1892-1975) in 1930. Upon his ascension in 1930, Haile Selassie began modernizing his empire, but maintained the Christian Amhara dominance of his progenitor.

### *3.0.2 The reign of Haile Selassie I*

As early as 1931, Haile Selassie set about modernizing the empire by establishing Ethiopia's first written constitution, and consolidating power within his own hereditary line – establishing a central bureaucracy. The imperial regime was characterized by Amhara dominance: Amharic was the language of government and education; ethnic-Amhara representation dominated central government posts; Orthodox Christian identity was favored for upper administrative and military positions; and ethnic Amhara became powerful landholders. The imperial regime attempted to validate Amhara dominance by emphasizing the linguistic and historical superiority of their group.



Abbay (2004) has labeled such ethnic dominance as “the use and abuse of history”. This use and abuse of history prevailed in the 20<sup>th</sup> century Ethiopian context, and has contributed to the series of rebellions, some of which have resulted in massacres and coups. More specifically:

In its quest for hegemonic power through which the people would be ruled consensually, the state vied with centrifugal elites for history by producing, privileging and maintaining particular versions of bygone events as collective representations of the Ethiopian past. Subordinated ethno-regional elites reacted by seeking their own history, with their heroes and villains. (Abbay 2004:596)

Then, disputes with Italians over the boundaries with Somalia that led to the Italian occupation of Ethiopia and the exile of Haile Selassie from 1936. After five years of Italian rule, the Allied forces liberate Ethiopia from Italy, and the British reinstated Haile Selassie to control of Ethiopia in 1941. Again, an era of Christian and Amhara dominance continued. As his reign continued, Haile Selassie expanded his modernization initiatives with the creation of Ethiopia’s first national library (*Wemezekir*) in 1944, the first institute of post-secondary education (University College of Addis Ababa, or UCAA) in 1950; the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) in 1963; and the Ethiopian Antiquities Administration in 1966,<sup>14</sup> each of which would play a role in the centralized support of cultural heritage.

However, the advances in educational and cultural arenas were not of immediate benefit to the wider public. For instance, one of the objectives of the Antiquities Administration was to stimulate popular interest in Ethiopian antiquities (Negarit Gazeta, 1966b, Order 45: item 3.6), however, ownership, administration and position of

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<sup>14</sup> For details of the role of the Antiquities Administration see “An Order to Provide for the Creation of an Ethiopian Antiquities Administration”, Order No.45/1966, published in Negarit Gazeta No. 17, 22 June 1966.

and possession of all antiquities belonged to (and should be surrendered to) the State (Negarit Gazeta, 1966a, Proclamation No. 229: articles 3, 5, 7).

In addition, a common ironic feature of these early institutions was that, while they aimed to promote Ethiopian culture, their highest administrators were often foreigners<sup>15</sup>. Qualified as they may have been for their tasks, and highly knowledgeable as they were in Ethiopian studies, in the absence of systematically organized Ethiopian scholarship, these foreign scholars still (perhaps unconsciously) imposed their foreign aesthetics on the presentation of Ethiopian culture at the institutions of the highest level in the country. Still, in their capacities as affiliates and employees of the State, we must remember that their chosen interests relating to the heritage of Ethiopia were often in common with the expressed interest of the government; interests that were laid out under the, then, Ministry of Education and Fine Arts. Thus, antiquities,<sup>16</sup> Christian art, manuscripts, contemporary Ethiopian painters to whom the Emperor was patron and whom had studied academic art abroad,<sup>17</sup> as well as Christian history were frequently preferred interests of the State's foreign counterparts, especially since an early aim of all parties was to curtail the increasing illegal export of ancient and religious art. An example of the merging of State and foreign interest its early cultural institutions was

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<sup>15</sup> Among the foreigners heading the newly established educational and cultural institutes in Ethiopia were Lucien Matte, a Canadian Jesuit, was first rector of UCAA and later president of Haile Selassie University; In 1962, the Englishman Richard Pankhurst became the founding director of IES, with Stanislaw Chojnacki as curator; and French archaeologists of the French Institute of Archaeology (which would later become a part of the Ministry of Culture) headed early missions approved by the State.

<sup>16</sup> The UCAA Ethnological Society established by Chojnacki had membership composed of the college's student who were instrumental in amassing and researching an ethnographic collection of objects, which would later be the bases upon which the IES museum would be built. This represents an early case of a wider public (if not still educated elite) of Ethiopians group having direct participation in the establishment of early national collections of cultural heritage (See R. Pankhurst 2000 and Chojnacki 1996).

<sup>17</sup> Foreign educated professional artists of the time included Skunder Boghossian, Gebre Kristos Desta, Agegnehu Engida, Abebe Wolde Giorgis, Ale Felege Selam Heruy, and Afewerk Tekle,. Upon their return to Ethiopia foreign educated artists received commissions from Haile Selassie, which often depicted Christian history, Ethiopian military campaigns, or the imperial dynasty of Selassie's progenitors. Moreover, upon their return to Ethiopia many foreign educated artists were associated with the Addis Ababa Fine Arts School that was established in 1957.

seen in 1959 when – at Ethiopia’s first post-secondary institution at University College of Addis Ababa (UCAA) – the country’s first exhibition of Amharic books was organized by Stanislaw Chojnacki, the institution’s Librarian. The various Amharic books had, according to R. Pankhurst (2000), been collected with passion by Chojnacki for several years and the exhibition itself “was important in that it helped to demonstrate particularly in the mind of the U.C.A.A. teaching staff that Amharic was not an irrelevant vernacular, but a national language through which a viable and progressive state could be built”.

The institutionalization of cultural custodianship under Haile Selassie outlined above set precedents that would continue long past his own reign. By the mid-70s, discontent with policies that privileged the elite grew among the masses, and in time, Haile Selassie’s unwillingness to accommodate rural peasantry interests within the feudal system, combined with his incompetence in dealing with prolonged drought and famine, led to the revolution of 1974.

### 3.0.3 *The Derg regime*

In 1974, the control was won by the Provisional Military Administrative Council (PMAC, or Derg regime), led by Mengistu Haile Mariam, which established a socialist state. The new revolutionary force aimed to establish political reforms following Marxist ideology. In order to pave the way for a classless society then, reforms were initiated immediately, which would affect nearly every aspect of political and social affairs in the country, including cultural representation. In the years immediately following the Revolution of 1974, the collective representations of Ethiopian history sanctioned by the Derg were the polar opposite of those purported during Haile Selassie’s rule. As a case in point, under the Ethiopian Empire, Orthodox Christianity

was favored as the State religion, while other religions were relegated to the periphery, but the Derg's official stance was that all religions were equal. Moreover, while Haile Selassie commissioned works of art by a limited number of trained artists and while favored depictions of the culture and history of the Orthodox Church and his own genealogical line, the Derg demanded that artists, especially those who were well known and/or instructors of art, to create art which was *about* and *for* the masses. Thus scenes of rural life and communal solidarity were expected of painters<sup>18</sup>, while community theater and dance<sup>19</sup> groups were scripted to spread socialist ideals to public audiences.

Of the Derg's initial reforms that particularly affected cultural heritage were changes in bureaucratic organization of cultural institutions; In 1974, the Ethiopian Antiquities Administration (established during Haile Selassie's reign, and charged with research, and preservation of monuments and antiquities, along with museum management) became a department of the Ministry of Culture and Sports Affairs; and in 1976 the Center for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (CRCCH) was created within the same ministry<sup>20</sup>. As we will see later, both the Ministry and CRCCH would have lasting organizational arrangement and responsibilities, which would outlast the Derg's power.

In a relatively brief time, the revolutionary move from imperial to military rule was followed by fighting among the new government and opposition forces vying for

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<sup>18</sup> Many of the foreign-trained painters that were commissioned by the emperor now found the subjects and styles of their art were no longer in line with the ruling party. In fact, artistic license was so limited that many of these painters (often faculty members at the Fine Arts School in the 70s) and others went into exile abroad.

<sup>19</sup> The modern stylization of regional/ethnic dances can be traced back to the Derg era.

<sup>20</sup> Another critical bureaucratic change related to linguistic scholarship in Ethiopia: Under Selassie's rule, the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts established the National Academy of the Amharic Language in 1972. With the emergence of the Derg, this academy was reorganized as the Academy of Ethiopian Languages, promoting the equal status given to all of the nation's languages. Since 1997, this institute has been known as the Ethiopian Languages Research Center and is a part of Addis Ababa University.

control of power from February 1977 until late 1978. In the violent conflicts tens of thousands of intellectuals, students, and others suspected of political opposition were detained, and tortured, if not executed. An era of fear prevailed in urban and rural areas alike, while policies of resettlement and displacement led to continued resentment and uprisings protesting ill-treatment, “disappearances”, and the strain on resources that were exacerbated famine. Not surprising then, many Ethiopians went into exile at this time in order to escape the brutal and repressive rule.<sup>21</sup>

Civil strife and discontent would continue for another decade, but the Derg did manage, though quite overdue, to establish some important provisions for cultural heritage management. On 31 August 1989 *A Proclamation to Provide for the Study and Protection of Antiquities* came into effect that included provisions for Ethiopia’s artistic heritage ranging from manuscripts to sculptures to ethnographic implements and ornaments, and otherwise covering the whole gamut of cultural objects, both organic and manmade (Negarit Gazeta 1989). This represented an important shift from the old Antiquities Administration that, in Proclamation No. 229/1966, pertained only to objects dating before mid-19<sup>th</sup> century (1850 Ethiopian calendar) and was particularly concerned with religious art. Nonetheless, despite these and other efforts to celebrate the plurality of the state – at least in policy – during the Derg era, Amhara dominance remained and cultural oppression was rampant. Showing pride in the cultural legacies of various ethnic groups apparently went against the socialist ideals which promoted an Ethiopian community, thus treasured cultural objects were often confiscated and destroyed by the Derg (including precious manuscripts), and people were afraid to gather for group cultural practices which the administration might misinterpret as a

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<sup>21</sup> At the same time of internal strife, the Ethiopian-Somali conflict of 1977-1978 taxed the situation for the government, as well as residents of the Ogaden region.

political assembly.<sup>22</sup> Yet again, the government failed to adequately accommodate the variety of ethnic groups, and furthermore, anger over displacement and resettlement programs, and severe famine throughout the 1980s led to civil revolts and iron-fisted suppression tactics by the Derg.

### 3.0.4 *Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia*

The Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF) coalition force, led by members of the Tigrayan ethnic group, ousted the Derg on 28 May 1991. In the subsequent Transitional Government, Meles Zenawi became the interim President, and later Prime Minister of the (often called, Tigrean dominated) EPRDF. The EPRDF remains the dominant party of the present government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia (FDRE), a government constitutionally adopted in December 1994 and installed the following year. Under the present federal republic system, some positive moves to disavow the atrocities of the former Derg were approached, such as the multiparty elections (held for the first time in 1995) and the establishment of ethnic federalism. However, the *silencing by intimidation*, and detention of opponents of the EPRDF was common practice from the beginning.<sup>23</sup>

In terms of cultural policy and practices, the current government has, as noted by Abbay (2004: 604ff), attempted to practice "cultural accommodation" for the variety of Ethiopia's ethnic groups. For example, religious accommodation has been exhibited by the current administration. Since 1991, the official favoritism for Orthodox Christianity

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<sup>22</sup> For example, the Society of Friends of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, an organization dedicated to the promotion and support of cultural heritage, could not adequately function from the mid 1970s, but was "re-activated" in 1991 with the coming of political change (R. Pankhurst 2000).

<sup>23</sup> In spring of 1995 Amnesty International reported: "Some of the political prisoners now held in Ethiopia appear to be prisoners of conscience: men, women and children imprisoned because of their political, religious or other conscientiously held beliefs or because of their ethnic origin, sex, colour or language, who have not used or advocated violence" (Ethiopia: Accountability past and present: human rights in transition. *Amnesty International USA Report* Apr 18, 1995. NY, NY).

was replaced with constitutionally sanctioned freedom of religion. Moreover, the State officially recognizes Christian and Islamic holidays, namely: Christmas, Epiphany, Good Friday, Easter, Meskel, Eid al-Adha (Arefa), and Eid al-Fitr (Ramadan).

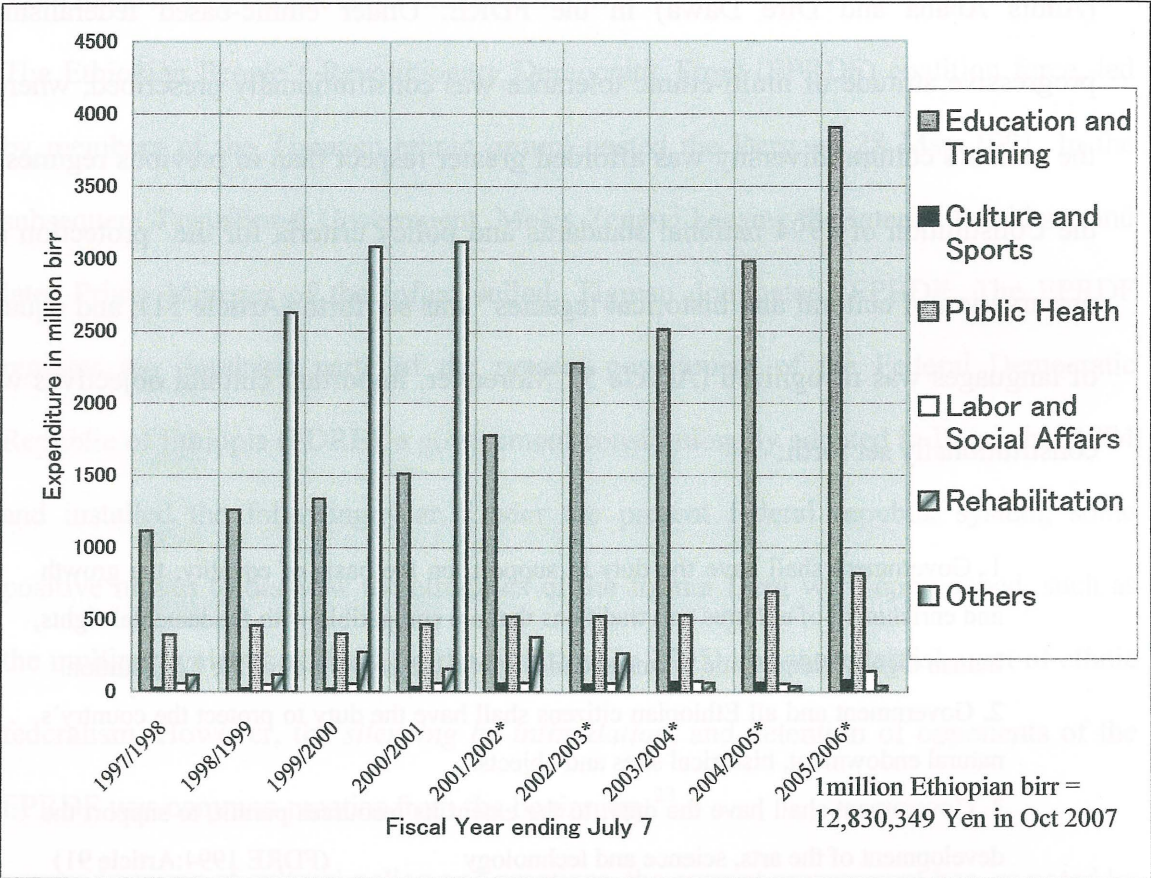
In 1994, the country was divided into ethnically-based regions. Currently, there are nine of these member (regional) states, and 2 autonomous administrative zones (Addis Ababa and Dire Dawa) in the FDRE. Under ethnic-based federalism, a progressive attitude of multi-ethnic tolerance was constitutionally prescribed, whereby the nation's cultural diversity was afforded greater respect than in previous regimes. In the Constitution of 1994 national standards and policy criteria for the "protection and preservation of cultural and historical legacies" was set forth (Article 51); and equality of languages was recognized (Article 5). Moreover, important cultural objectives were constitutionally set forth:

1. Government shall have the duty to support, on the basis of equality, the growth and enrichment of cultures and traditions that are compatible with fundamental rights, human dignity, democratic norms and ideals, and the provisions of the Constitution.
2. Government and all Ethiopian citizens shall have the duty to protect the country's natural endowment, historical sites and objects.
3. Government shall have the duty, to the extent its resources permit, to support the development of the arts, science and technology (FDRE 1994:Article 91)

By constitutional mandate then, the current government seems to have not only supported the rights of cultural expression by all ethnic groups, but to have also recognized it's own obligation to support the arts. Still, the key phrase in terms of implementation of Article 91, above, is "to the extent its resources permit"; in practice, monetary and expertise resource shortages have inhibited the full development of the proposed cultural objectives. For example, if we reflect on where culture fits into



national government expenditures for social services, we find that financial interests do not grant culture a status of great consideration. If we look at the amount the government has spent towards culture since 1997, the category of “culture and sports” received only 1 to 2 percent of the annual government expenditures for social services (Fig. 1).<sup>24</sup>



**Figure 1. Federal Budget for Ministry of Social Affairs 1997/1998 - 2005/2006<sup>25</sup>**

\*Preliminary Actual

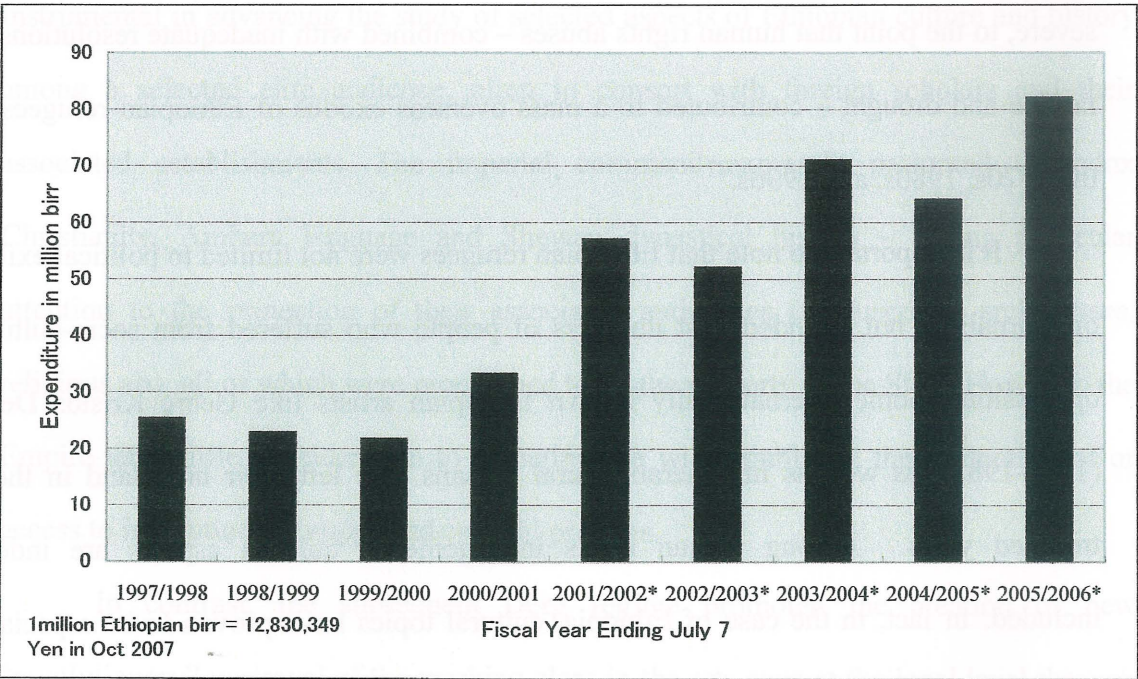
Adapted from CSA (2003, 2004, 2006), from Tables K.4. “Current Government Expenditure”, sourced from the Ministry of Finance, Central Accounting Department.

<sup>24</sup> Curiously, the federal budget for culture and sports have been linked by the federal government for more decades. The cultural affairs sector has undergone several shifts in ministerial alliances over the last fifty years, being connected with the Ministry of Education and Fine Arts, the Ministry of Culture and Information, the Ministry of Culture and Sports Affairs, the Ministry of Youth, Sports and Culture, and the current Ministry of Culture and Tourism (Negarit Gazeta No. 4/1995; No.2/2001; No.471/2005). From the funds actually allocated to culture, federal budget expenditures have generally prioritizes monumental and archaeological heritages. However, the World Bank’s Ethiopian Cultural Heritage Project – a US \$5 million loan – was approved in 2000 and represents the first major funding project to include the handicraft culture in Ethiopia. This of course is in line with the projects aim to include wider participation and civic engagement in cultural projects.

<sup>25</sup> Dates on charts are Gregorian calendar and correspond to Ethiopia’s fiscal year beginning 8 July and ending 7 July the following year.



We may say then, that in terms of federal support under FDRE, culture and sports is not heavily funded when compared with other social service sectors, even if the government has constitutionally recognized the importance of multifarious expressions of culture.<sup>26</sup> That said, despite the general economic constraints of the government, the federal administration has still managed to consistently increased its recurrent expenditures in the category of “culture and sports” over the last ten years (Fig. 2).



**Figure 2. Federal Budget for Culture and Sports 1997/1998 - 2005/2006**

\*Preliminary Actual

Adapted from CSA (2003, 2004, 2006), from Tables K.4. “Current Government Expenditure”, sourced from the Ministry of Finance, Central Accounting Department.

### 3.0.5 Summary

What can be assessed from reviewing the recent history is that Ethiopia has witnessed a perpetual cycle of political upheavals, cultural suppressions, attempted

<sup>26</sup> A notable exception of extravagant budgetary allocation for culture made for the yearlong Ethiopian Millennium celebration, which began September 2007. The budget for the Secretariat of the Ethiopian Millennium Festival National Council was given by the Council of Ministers Regulation No. 117/2005 (24 May 2005).

accommodations, followed by more political upheavals. This cyclical pattern has been detrimental to the state and the populous in economical and socio-cultural terms. And in the last thirty-odd years, the world has become increasingly concerned with the situation in the country, especially in terms of human rights, as a significant number of Ethiopians have sought shelter abroad. Since the 1930s, those provisions that have been made in the constitution concerning human rights have often been restricted in practice by the government. Frequently, infractions on constitutional rights were widespread and severe, to the point that human rights abuses – combined with inadequate resolutions of famine and drought – contributed to a mass overseas exodus of Ethiopian refugees in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s.<sup>27</sup>

It is important to note that Ethiopian refugees were not limited to political exiles, or journalists, but included vast numbers of people who suffered from socio-cultural oppressions. Some internationally known Ethiopian artists like Gebre Kristos Desta (1932-1981), as well as innumerable rural artisans also left their homeland in those troubled years. Among human rights infringements, cultural aspects are indeed included. In fact, in the case of Ethiopia, cultural topics have proven to be especially volatile, and sensitive issues that have led to civil strife, coup d'état, wars, and even mass exodus of civilians. In this pluralistic society, the nature of implementation of various ideologies (whether by rewarding assimilation, allowing for accommodation, or

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<sup>27</sup> Over the last three decades, Ethiopian refugees mainly sought refuge in other African nations. A UN report placed 976,362 asylum seekers of Ethiopian origin in other African countries in 1991 (World Population Monitoring 1993 cited in UN Economic and Social Council 1994: 7). Also, a series of airlifts by the Israeli government in beginning in the mid 1970s has brought the Ethiopian Jewish community in Israel to number 56,000 people (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2002). Moreover, Ethiopia was among the top ten countries of applicants approved for refugee status in the United States from 1981-1996, with 34,138 persons (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services 2005). Moreover, from 1991 until 2001, a total of 7,105 Ethiopians were granted settlement in the UK, with 5,445 Ethiopians submitting applications for asylum from 1993 to 2004 (Home Office 2002: Table 4.2 and Table 6.5; Great Britain Office of National Statistics 2005: Table 5.11). In 1991, Ethiopia was hosting 772,764 refugees from other African nations (most from Somalia and Sudan), (World Population Monitoring 1993 cited in UN Economic and Social Council 1994: 7).

promoting conciliation by the government administrations) has affected the degree to which the majority of Ethiopians have been appeased with the cultural situation in the country over time.

Historically then, we may say that the successive governing bodies of Ethiopia used selective representations of linguistic and material history to promote their own agenda. Haile Selassie created national cultural institutions during his reign, which worked in his interest of promoting modernization. These premier institutions were also instrumental in advancing the study of selected aspects of Ethiopian culture and history among a selected elite audience, often in consort with foreign scholars and their associated establishments. The imperial command expressly promoted Orthodox Christianity, Amhara language and Shewan dynastical history – giving particular attention to the protection of their associated antiquities (manuscripts, architecture, religious art), all of which were proclaimed to be the property of the State. However, the Empire gave little consideration to engaging the wider public in the promotion of or access to institutionally supported cultural projects.

In contrast, the subsequent Derg regime promoted the creation of new “revolutionary” portrayal of the working class in the arts even at the local level through propaganda activities disseminated through *kebeles* (urban dweller’s associations). However, the Derg surpassed representations that they thought glorified the imperial legacy or went against socialist ideals. To this end, the former imperial regalia and material referents were rounded up, stored and effectively demystified in government buildings of the new regime. The Derg era also witnessed important reorganization of national institutions responsible for cultural heritage. For example, the Derg command granted constitutional equality among Ethiopia’s languages, likewise launching the

Academy of Ethiopian Languages from the former National Academy of the Amharic Language. Similarly, the Ethiopian Antiquities Administration (under which the National Museum functioned) that was previously managed by an executive board chaired by the emperor himself was transferred to the Ministry of Culture and Sports in 1974. This perhaps symbolically represented a transfer from an exclusive dominion to an authority with proclaimed public interest. Then, in 1976, CRCCH was created in the aforementioned ministry and was given powers to protect, supervise, preserve, discover, advise, and study Ethiopia's cultural heritage. CRCCH would prove to be an enduring organ of cultural management, outlasting the Derg regime even; for even inclusive cultural policies meant little when socio-cultural/political practices were, in fact, terrorizing.

Finally, on paper and to a degree in practice, the subsequent ruling party EPRDF, in attempting to support its ethnic federalism, has sought to accommodate the variety of cultural and linguistic practices of most ethnic groups. The ethnic pluralism of the nation has become a tool, which the EPRDF sees as an asset, especially in terms of international investment in heritage conservation and for the future course of the nation's economic development. For instance, Proclamation No 209/2000 granted CRCCH the status of an authority as the renamed Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCCH). ARCCCH has recently been instrumental in providing training in heritage management to a wider public audience, especially through workshops offered to administrators of the regional bureaus of culture. The federal provisions for a relative decentralization of regional bureaus of culture has allowed for some local autonomy (financial and ideological) in cultural heritage management; autonomy not previously known in regional or zonal levels under previous

governments. Moreover, the emergence of federal support for cultural programming like the Ethiopian Cultural Heritage Project (enabled by a loan from the World Bank) marks an innovative attempt to sustain and promote, on an unprecedented scale, vernacular arts of Ethiopia. Essentially, as regards cultural programming as a wellspring of economic development, the government seems to be moving towards the support of more local, multiethnic cultural initiatives to which an unparalleled public audience may participate. Although the sustainability of many of these initiatives is still uncertain, their long awaited arrival is certainly in line with the aims of ethnic federalism.

In conclusion, while the various governments of Ethiopia have tended to mold linguistic and material history to further their own missions, each government has been careful to see that the representations of citizens do not strongly deviate from that prescribed mission. Abbay rightly acknowledges that which hegemonic powers understand well enough to try to deter: “In times of political crisis and communal fear of the future, culture, an emotion-laden and powerful symbol of identity, can be a vital tool of ethnic mobilization” (Abbay 2004:611). Likewise, in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Ethiopian governments have used first repressive, then oppressively-reformist, and finally progressive tactics as regards in multi-ethnic cultural expression. We have seen in the brief political history outlined above, that for millennia Ethiopia was a vortex which captured the various cultures within the boundaries of its whirling mass, resulting in a mosaic of languages, groups and traditions. We may say then, that the idea of “Ethiopian culture” is a fairly recent construct based on geo-political events at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Certainly, the extensive trade routes with neighboring lands, trans-migratory waves, longstanding merchant activity with the Arab Peninsula and the Indian sub-continent also contributed to the diversification of linguistic and material

expressions in Ethiopia. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Ethiopian Empire privileged the feudal elite, and rewarded Christian Amhara assimilation. Then in the mid 1970s, a program of accommodation for all religious and ethnic groups was mouthed by the Derg, but with limited, sanctioned application. Finally, the current EPRDF-led government has taken a stance of *progressive conciliation* towards the administration of cultural programming that, considering the former eras, has been relatively favorably inclined towards celebrating plurality. Currently, the government's policy of regional autonomy has worked to quell the incidents of major cultural conflicts among some of the most powerful<sup>28</sup> ethnic groups of the country.

### **3.1 Federal custodianship of cultural heritage in national-level museums**

The previous section considered the relationship between socio-political circumstances and cultural expressions in the recent history of Ethiopia. Now we will consider some present-day federal management of cultural heritage and the presentation of these objects in public domains. In this section we shall try to understand the current links between national-level administration and institutionalized presentations of cultural objects: to see who keeps which things, where, and why. Our investigation begins with a brief background to the appreciation of material heritage in Ethiopia. There will be a subsequent review of the emergence of presenting “artwork” (material heritage) within “institutions” (i.e., museums) in Ethiopia. Then we will return to consider the organization of national custodianship under the existing FDRE government. Finally, a review of the museum of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies and the National Museum,

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<sup>28</sup> The ethnic-based regions' dominant groups include some economically and/or multitudinously powerful groups. These include the regions of Oromia, Amhara, Tigray, and Harari.

both in Addis Ababa, will serve as case studies of collections and museum visitors at the national level.

### 3.1.1 *Introduction to material heritage in Ethiopia*

When it comes to tangible aspects of Ethiopian's cultural heritage, the international community is familiar with some of the more famous aspects of tangible heritage like the World Heritage list's monumental obelisks of Axum, the rock-hewn churches of Lalibela, and famous paleontological finds like Lucy (*Australopithecus afarensis*). It goes without saying that the ancient monumental architecture and archaeological relics have been appropriately recognized as important to not only Ethiopia's, but also humankind's, cultural heritage. But, the international community is less familiar with the variety of other aspects of Ethiopian culture, especially vernacular arts that are either created by some of Ethiopia's numerical ethnic minorities, or which are created outside the north and central regions of the country (regions where scholarship on religious arts and contemporary arts has generally focused). Nonetheless, there is a wealth of significance to be found in the more common expressions of cultural objects, like vernacular arts, which remain a vital part of the living heritage of communities throughout Ethiopia.

As material artifacts, vernacular arts remain integral to Ethiopia's *tangible* heritage that is, of course, deeply connected to *intangible* aspects of cultural heritage. If we look at some of Ethiopia's historically renowned crafts like illuminated manuscripts, it is obvious that the manuscript as 'object' is a way of perpetuating, for example, rare languages like Ge'ez or Harari. Other prominent Ethiopian craft traditions like metalwork on crosses are used in important procession rituals where knowledge of

religious traditions are maintained. Textile production, especially cotton items, remains an important craft in the country. In textile designs we can sometimes see values of imagery expression, or recognize the meaning of cultural symbols in for instance, the Star of David on a gown worn by an Ethiopian Jew; in this case the symbol may represent a philosophy of a way of life wherein God rules over six directions – represented by the six points of the stars. Ethiopian craftsmanship in musical instruments made from leather and wood is also well known: an instrument enlivens traditional music and the oral legacies that they contain. Indeed, a closer inspection of the abundance of quality craftwork in the country cannot help but reveal the ways in which the preservation of tangible heritages can be linked to intangible heritages.

Traditionally in Ethiopian society, icon painters and scribes held elevated status because of the religious nature of their labor and the long apprenticeships in the church that were required for skillful execution of their work. However, the makers of secular art in Ethiopian, especially leatherworkers and potters, are often disadvantaged outside of their group of skilled workers, despite having comparably intense apprenticeships before perfecting their craft. The social barriers<sup>29</sup> imposed on some of Ethiopia's craftspeople make it difficult for out-group members to have the chance to fully appreciate the artistry involved; although, certainly in terms of merchant activity, their utility and aesthetic value is appreciated by the wider community. Notwithstanding the social politics which have historically influenced the privileged or constrained positions of the artisans, aesthetic appreciation of artistic creations by Ethiopians is not a new phenomenon; and this appreciation can be linked to a combination of functionality (everyday utility, as well as ceremonial purpose), form (shape and pattern), and

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<sup>29</sup> For a historical review of marginalized occupational minorities in Ethiopian, see A. Pankhurst, 1999. An earlier work on marginalized Ethiopian Jewish artisans was written by Quirin (1979).



symbolism (formalized embodiment of communal values). In sum, the degree of indigenous admiration of material heritage can be said to flow from the combination of form with context – i.e., the tangible and the intangible aspects of culture.<sup>30</sup>

Undoubtedly, the material diversity of Ethiopia is as varied as the numerous ethnic groups of the land. Over the centuries, men and women have transformed their available resources into creative substances; using the technologies on hand they fashioned useful and aesthetically-pleasing objects in the mediums of metal, clay, hide, wood, fiber, pigment, etc.<sup>31</sup> Despite the long-standing tradition of artistic expressions, it is important to mention here that tangible heritages reflect dynamic expressions of ideas and are constantly transforming in Ethiopia, as in the rest of the world, and few if any traditions have remained unaltered in time. Likewise, we find that the recent increase in modernization, for example, is contributing to quite rapid changes in the production of cultural objects. In any case, what the varieties of handicraft traditions in Ethiopia have in common in the present day – whether in urban or rural areas – is that most historically prominent artisan activities have declined. What's more, the decline one craft tradition like carved wooden bowls, does not seem to be dependant on the rise of a different craft activity, say an increase in production of pottery bowls. Instead, declining activities seem strongly related to the availability of mostly imported alternatives. In this present circumstance of stagnation in craft industries, increased homogenization of artistic expression, and modernizing artist techniques, discussing the presentation of

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<sup>30</sup> Recognizing the importance of vernacular arts in Ethiopian society, the Cultural Policy of the FDRE (1997) gives due attention provisioning that traditional and modern arts as well as handicrafts be inventoried and collected.

<sup>31</sup> General introductions to the variety of crafts and artisanal activities in Ethiopia is beyond the scope of this study, but may be found in several examples elsewhere (Pankhurst, R; 1964, 1968, 1992; Henze 2000; Karsten 1972; Silverman 1999; Silverman & Sobania [n.d.]). For the purpose of the current research, I will not repeat these former introductory surveys of Ethiopian artisanship.

quality examples that reflect the rich diversity of craftsmanship in public arenas (like museums) becomes even more pertinent.

Having outlined the nature of material expressions in Ethiopia, we shall now consider the emergence of the presentation of cultural objects within institutions (museums) in the nation's capital. Later, a review of federally supported museum collections in Addis Ababa will bring this discussion full circle by revealing that vernacular arts are fundamental components of the country's main ethnographic museum collection (IES), and are complementary and indispensable components of the archaeological museum (National Museum).

### *3.1.2 Custodians of cultural heritage at the national level*

We have seen that the diversity of arts in Ethiopia are creative materializations of culture which are formal expressions of ideas held by individuals and communities. Moreover, these artistic expressions are closely linked with intangible expressions of heritage. For centuries, and with dynamism, these arts have been crafted by men and women who apply skills – learned via formal and informal apprenticeships – to provide functional and symbolic objects to their community. Various informed communities have appraised the handicrafts and afforded higher and lower statuses to both objects and their makers. Thus, the artisans as “producer” and the community as “consumer” have traditionally been joint custodians of material heritage. As customary custodians, the artisans and community chose to “store” vernacular arts within the private settings of homes or religious buildings when not in use for routine or ceremonial activities.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> In Ethiopia, precious icons and manuscripts were not items for display in public spaces, but private items, which were created by commission, and rarely accessible to the lay community. The limited number of scribes trained in the conventions of the church required the commissioning of works of religious art; a trend that continues to this day. Currently, with the declining production of many of

The display of both historical and rare, and contemporary and more abundant arts in publicly accessible institutions is a 20<sup>th</sup> century development in Ethiopia which began with Haile Selassie's initiatives: the establishment of IES, the Antiquities Administration, and the Institute of Archaeology. As Silverman makes clear, even

The concept of "art" is a recent introduction to Ethiopia even though objects of exceptional aesthetic quality have been produced in all Ethiopian societies for a long time. The reason that "art" has appeared in Ethiopia only recently is because prior to the present century there were no traditions that isolated specific things to serve primarily as objects of aesthetic contemplation. (Silverman 1999:5)

We may understand then that the institutionalization of Ethiopia's material heritage (contemporary paintings, manuscripts, regalia, antiquities) began with the modernization efforts of Haile Selassie, but as the case studies of this research will show, museums in the country have developed considerably since that time due, in no small part, to some recent federal policy changes. For example, in 1997, the (then) Ministry of Information and Culture issued a *Cultural Policy*, commenting in its introduction on the efforts of Ethiopia's previous governing bodies and announcing the mission of FDRE towards the culture sector:

Nowadays it has become a global conviction that any development program that does not pay due attention to culture cannot bear fruit. However, neither the past regimes nor the members of the ruling class were able to accept this reality, and there was not a time when a development policy that considered the culture of the people has been put into effect. On the contrary, they were engaged in promoting policies designed to consolidate political systems that insured the continuation of their personal powers and welfare. To this effect, they followed a discriminatory policy by seeding enmity

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Ethiopia's traditional crafts, commissioning has become a necessity even with some secular arts such as the basketry, embroidery, and bookbinding found in the collections of Harar's museums (See Chapter 4).

among peoples and regarding the culture of a certain nation or nationality as superior and looking down upon the cultures of others.

Even though some governmental measures have recently been taken to promote the cultural sector, they fell short of creating a proper understanding of the concept of culture. Instead, these measures were limited to organizing few narrowly envisaged cultural establishments. In relation to the modern political, economic and social establishments and enterprises created in the country, these cultural establishments came very late and this indicates the low consideration that was given to the sector. This low consideration hindered the sector to contribute its part in the development program of the country. (FDRE 1997)

Moreover the Cultural Policy document of 1997 proclaims that it is a popular cultural policy, which gives attention to the rights of participation in the sector to its multi-ethnic population, and which aims to create “culture conscious citizens” (FDRE 1997). In fact, there are many good intentions of the current cultural policy and its related proclamations, including, for instance the provision allowing the state *and* private citizens to maintain *de facto* custodianship of the material heritage of Ethiopia (Negarit Gazeta 2000: Part Two, 14.1). However, the legal mandate for decisions regarding custodianship obtained through exploration, discovery and study of cultural heritage does lie, in fact, with the federal government through ARCCCH (Negarit Gazeta 2000: Part Three). Essentially this means that citizens may possess cultural objects, but those objects deemed to be of exceptional national value, or historical items which can be found only through archaeological, paleontological, or anthropological inquiry are generally outside the public domain, unless prior permission is granted by ARCCCH; this permission, of course, being no easy feat for the average citizen.

So, as federal policy towards culture has evolved from its exclusionary incipience to its present form, there can be no denying of the positive and inclusive strides made in the last ten years especially. But in Ethiopia, policy and practice are not

always mirrored. Therefore, to judge the performance of the current cultural policy, the following section allows us a view of the current administrative division of federal bureaucracy and will serve illustrate the national level actors who are officially responsible for decisions regarding the implementation of the national cultural policy. In essence, the next section will show examples of us how cultural policy is practiced by the current administration.

Presently, there are several actors in heritage management at the national level in Ethiopia. The highest actor as of 2005 is the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.<sup>33</sup> Among other powers relating to the tourism industry, this ministry has supervisory power for heritage conservation and is charged with the powers and duties concerning, among other things, vernacular arts and the establishment and expansion of national museums, in accordance with Proclamation No. 4/1995 (Article 24 (2),(3),(8)). Moreover, the Ministry has been expressly charged with expanding “cultural institutions to institutionalize public participation in the field of culture” (Proclamation No. 471/2005, Article 30/1.d).

There are three other federal executive organs related to cultural heritage that are accountable to the Ministry: the Authority for Research and Conservation of Cultural Heritage (ARCCH)<sup>34</sup>, The National Archives and Library Agency, and the National Theater (Proclamation No. 471/2005, Article 33/16). Of the federal organs above, ARCCH is responsible for with the kind of material heritage of particular interest to this study of museums because it has official mandate for the management and protection of cultural heritage assets. The activities of ARCCH include research, expertise sharing,

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<sup>33</sup> This ministry was formerly, the Ministry of Youth, Culture and Sports; and was reorganized in 2006 into the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

<sup>34</sup> ARCCH, formerly CRCCH under the Derg regime, was granted status as an autonomous institution accountable to the Ministry in Proclamation No. 209/2000.

and allocation of financing for major projects in cultural heritage. There are six departments in ARCCCH, but the National Museum, which will be detailed later, is of particular interest to this study.<sup>35</sup>

Another important branch of national level government efforts in heritage conservation is the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES). IES is a research institute, library, and museum and is a major custodian in the actual housing of manmade artifacts in Ethiopia. As stated earlier, IES was established in 1963 at Haile Selassie I University (formerly UCAA and subsequently Addis Ababa University), and came to house a significant collection of books and an ethnographical collection of artifacts that had been collected with initiatives of Richard Pankhurst its first curator, and Professor Stanislaw Chojnacki, Librarian of UCAA and founder of the Ethnological Society. With its establishment, the institute became the first research department of the nation's premier university. Today, IES remains a part of the leading national university, Addis Ababa University, and although on 16 August 1995, the Senate of the University issued administrative autonomy to the Institute, and remains a federally funded organization, inextricably tied to the administration of both the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

Both the National Museum and the Museum of IES, both in Addis Ababa, will be outlined in the following sections. These museums serve as case studies for custodianship of cultural heritage at the national level.

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<sup>35</sup> The other five departments of ARCCCH are: Archaeology and Paleontology, Cultural Anthropology, Heritage Restoration and Conservation, Inventory and Inspection of Cultural Heritage and Heritage Research, & Central Documentation.

### 3.1.3 *The National Museum of Ethiopia*

In order to illustrate a first example of the presentation of material heritage by a federal organ in a public arena, and to understand who “benefits” from the public display of these items, we will begin with the collection of the National Museum of Ethiopia (alternatively, Ethiopian National Museum), in Addis Ababa.

The collection of the National Museum of Ethiopia began with donations by the royal family and their associates and was first kept as part of the National Library in the mid 1930s. Later, the collection was transferred to the premises of the National Bank, then to buildings belonging to the Ministry of Foreign affairs, until in 1999 a new structure was built for the museum after having been advised by UNESCO consultants beginning in 1980 (Bosserdet 1981).

Today, the National Museum is part research institute, part museum. The museum proper is located in a four-story building at Amst kilo campus in Addis Ababa. The entrance fee for 50 cents for Ethiopian students, 2 birr for adult Ethiopians, and 10 birr for foreigners. The collection ranges from the 3.5 million year old skeleton of Lucy, to modern painting and includes a variety of cultural objects, historical objects, archaeological findings and art objects (Table 1). Among the archaeological, historical and cultural objects are an abundance of items, which represent vernacular arts (See Appendix B: Photos 1-8). However, the collection of more than 45,000 items is 97% archaeological which is heavily comprised of paleontological finds, and at first impression the holdings appears to represents a collection of Ethiopia’s distant past.

**Table 1. Number of Collected Heritage Items at the National Museum of Ethiopia, by Object Type and Year Added to Museum Collection. \***

<b>Year</b> <b>Object</b>	<b>1998/ 1999</b>	<b>1999/ 2000</b>	<b>2000/ 2001</b>	<b>2001/ 2002</b>	<b>2002/ 2003</b>	<b>2003/ 2004</b>	<b>2004/ 2005</b>	<b>2005/ 2006</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Cultural</b>	863	60	13	0	0	2	0	15	938
<b>Historical</b>	0	255	0	30	2	20	10	54	307
<b>Archaeo- logical</b>	898	17,034	3,635	6,200	14,866	1,547	6,541	2,930	44,180
<b>Fine Art</b>	0	0	0	2	8	0	0	0	10
<b>Total</b>	<b>1,761</b>	<b>17,349</b>	<b>3,648</b>	<b>6,232</b>	<b>14,876</b>	<b>1,569</b>	<b>6,551</b>	<b>3,039</b>	<b>53,264</b>

\* Adapted from Table R.6, “Number of Collected Heritages at the National Museum by Type: 1998/99 – 2003/04” (CSA 2004) and from Table R.8, “Number of Collected Heritages at the National Museum by Type 1999/00-2005/06” (CSA 2006).

Despite the numbers tallied above, it must be recognized that the inventory methods of the National Museum of Ethiopia encourage a biased perception of the holdings of the museum, as the more than 44,000 items listed as “archeological findings” by the museum, actually included bone fragments, beads, and pottery shards which are individually counted as “objects” in the collection. A review of items actually exhibited in the museum space will help to clarify which heritage items are presented to visitors.

The lower two floors of the museum contain the largest display areas and focus on ancient history, and imperial relics most of which are accompanied by captions in Amharic, English, and sometimes French, which often give local name, approximate date, and historical background to the objects: the subterranean level holds fossils, and skeletons, while the first floor holds royal relics, archaeological finds from Axum and Tigray, ancient tools and vessels, and a multimedia presentation on the birth and development of humanity. The upper floors of the exhibition hall are dedicated to the more recent history of Ethiopians and modern-day culture. The second floor is holds



modern paintings, sculptures, and mixed media art, while the third floor displays handicrafts, costumes, religious artifacts, musical instruments, and weapons. Although the cultural expressions of many ethnic groups can be found in on these upper floors, the items are rarely labeled with classificatory names or functions, not to mention the ethnic groups with which the item is associated, or the location where the items where collected.<sup>36</sup> Instead, insufficiently wide categories of “Christian” or “Muslim” or “Musical Instruments”, and the like are all that appear on many of the displays of grouped objects.

One would expect that the combination of low entrance fees, central location, and large collection of historical and cultural items would lead to high patron statistics, but this is not the case. In terms of visitor statistics, there has been a increase in domestic and foreign visitors to the museum nearly every year between 1998 and 2004 (Table 2). More than 70% of the visitors were domestic and it would seem that locals (i.e., Ethiopians) are benefiting most from the collections of the National Museum of Ethiopia. However, the total number of visitors each day is actually disappointing considering the central location of museum in the capital city of nearly 3 million people. In fact, the web page of the museum laments that the museum can be compared to a well-kept secret, often having only so few visitors in a given day.

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<sup>36</sup> Paintings and sculptures by modern-day artists are the exception; they are usually labeled with the artist and year.

**Table 2. Number of Visitors to the National Museum of Ethiopia <sup>†</sup>**

	1998/99	1999/00	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03	2003/04	2004/05	2005/06	Total
Domestic visitors	15,752	21,998	19,233	27,508	46,067	45,170	40,336	40,107	256,171
Foreign visitors	6,103	7,733	8,712	11,929	14,984	17,707	21,340	23,492	112,000
Total each year	21,855	29,731	27,945	39,437	61,051	62,877	61,676	63,599	368,171

<sup>†</sup> Adapted from Table R.7, “Number of Visitors to the National Museum (Addis Ababa): 1998/99 – 2003/04” (CSA 2004) and from Table R.9, “Number of Collected Heritages at the National Museum by Type 1999/00-2005/06” (CSA 2006).

### 3.1.4 *Museum of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies*

Now we will consider our second case study of national level museums in Ethiopia: the Museum of the IES. Initially, the arrangement of IES was made with haste in only a few months in order to accommodate

[...] the first conference of the Heads of African States, [hosting] heads of a continent just emerging from a long period of colonial rule. In the great movement of political life, Ethiopia intended, with her acute sense of history, to show the best of her cultural heritage...the Institute and its collections were to play their role, this time on a grand scale. (Chojnacki, quoted in R. Pankhurst, 2000)

The early ethnographic and literary collection of IES – located in the former Imperial Geunete-Leul Palace, which is now a part of the Arat Kilo campus of Addis Ababa University – has since expanded to accommodate a broad range items with increasing numbers of objects and icons considered under threat of illicit expatriation. Today, the departments of IES have also increased to five sections<sup>37</sup>:

1. The anthropology section houses ethnographic objects of historical and cultural interest from many of Ethiopia’s ethnic groups.
2. The art gallery section holds religious objects, folk paintings, and photographs.

<sup>37</sup> Source: <http://www.aau.edu.et/research/ies/indexn.htm>, accessed on 10 March 2008

3. The ethno-musicological section collects, records and preserves folk music and instruments.
4. The philatelic section is a collection of Ethiopian postage stamps.
5. And the Culture African Network (CAN) Center is a center for research and exchange of artists.

The mission of IES has been distinguished by its emphasis on research and conservation of cultural heritage. The Institute's initial emphasis was on scholarly pursuits (to collect, research, exhibit, publish, and hold conferences), and made specific mention of working with scholars from abroad and presenting exhibits abroad. However, the interest in a public access dimension was missing from the mission of IES, a situation that remains to this day. The emphasis on scholarship can be clearly seen in the two objectives of IES, as proclaimed by the Addis Ababa University Senate in 1995:

1. to conduct, promote and coordinate research and publication on Ethiopian Studies with special emphasis on the humanities and cultural studies; and
2. to aid in the conservation of the Ethiopian cultural heritage by collecting, classifying, cataloguing, preserving and displaying in a museum objects reflecting the material and spiritual culture of the diverse nationalities of Ethiopia.  
(Statute of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies, issued 16 August 1995 by the AAU Senate, quoted in IES 2006)

Today, the IES Museum collection continues to develop with the help of the Society of Friends of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (SOFIES), which works to increase awareness and raise funds for the collections. Presently, in an area of over 500 square meters, the museum houses the most varied collection of quality artifacts, and fine art in the country, having “a representative sampling of object of almost all cultures in Ethiopia” (IES 2006) and consists largely of cultural and historical – that is, ethnographic material. It balances examples of Ethiopia's more recent past alongside

examples of handicrafts that are part of Ethiopia’s living heritage (See Appendix B: Photos 9-15).

Entrance fees charged by IES are significantly more than those of the National Museum: As of October 2007, non-Ethiopian adults pay 20 birr, non-Ethiopian students pay 10 birr, Ethiopian adults pay 3 birr, and Ethiopian students pay 1 birr. The number and type of visitors to IES’s Museum between September 2004 and August 2007 have been recorded by entrance ticket receipts and can be seen in Fig. 3, below. Over this three-year span about 30,000 people in total visited the IES Museum – about half the number that visited the National Museum in both 2004/05 and 2005/06. Even if the IES Museum collection is arguable much richer than that of the National Museum, access is definitely an issue. The Amst Kilo campus requires much less security clearance for entrance by the general public than does the Arat Kilo campus where IES is housed; just to enter the Arat Kilo campus a non-university affiliate must surrender photo ID, etc.

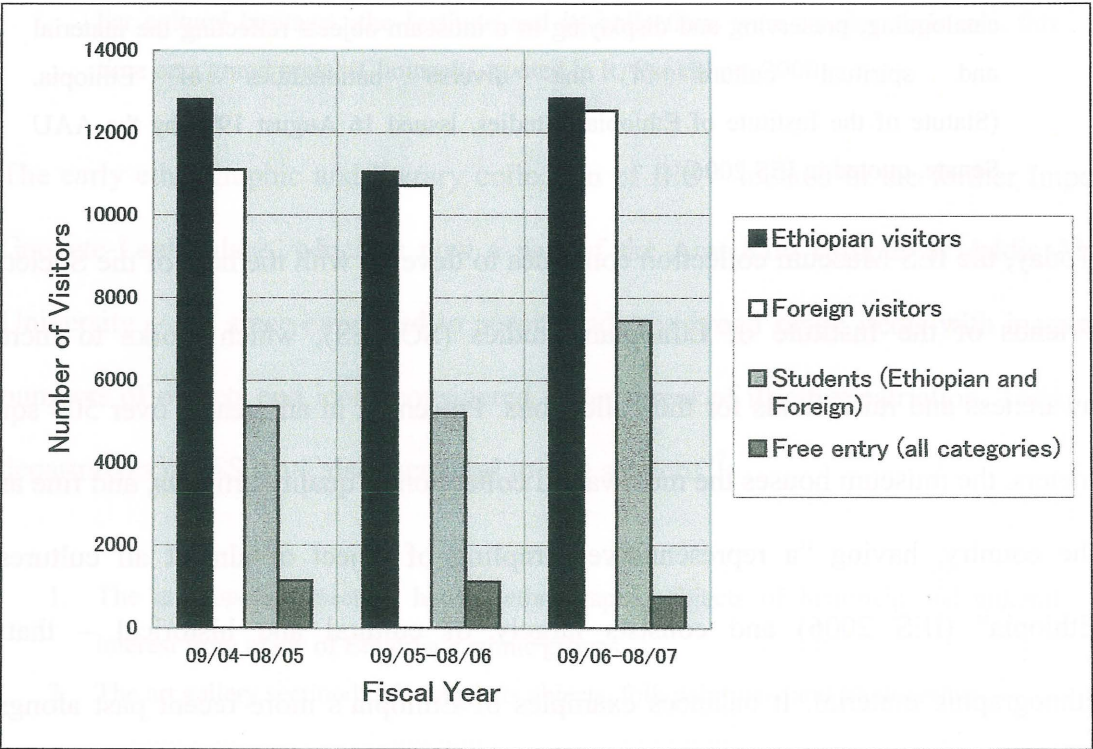


Figure 3. Number of Visitors to IES Museum from Ticket Receipts

Moreover, the guestbook entries from IES museum are a significant resource into visitor response to the museum experience, and generally there are positive responses from all categories of guests. Of course, only a small fraction of visitors take the time to leave comments in the guestbooks and most of them limit their comments to one sentence at the IES museum, but these comments could be helpful in developing future guest programming. Among the information often included in guestbooks are nationality of the visitor. In Table 3 we find that of the 31,424 visitors who included their nationality in the guestbooks, less than one-third were Ethiopian nationals. The reasons why less Ethiopians are commenting in guestbooks may be the subject of future research.

**Table 3. Nationality Attributed to Guestbook Entries at IES Museum between April 1999 and October 2007 <sup>38</sup>**

Range of dates in guestbook	Ethiopian nationals	Other nationalities	Total
13/04/1999-10/04/2003	5,147	14,627	19,774
23/12/2003-10/07/2007	3,077	8,573	11,650
Total	8,224	23,200	31,424

### 3.1.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the exhibitions of the two federally funded and administrated national level museum presented above represent the museums that have a long history of federally-sponsored alliances. There is a wealth of artifacts that celebrate the “birth of humanity” in the National Museum’s collection, while the collection of artifacts from the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) Museum is heavily celebratory of the Aksum

<sup>38</sup> When collating the data, visitors who put down multiple nationalities were counted as Ethiopian when Ethiopia was among the list of nationalities claimed. Even so, we find that Ethiopians are much less inclined to write in guestbooks than are visitors of other nationalities: only 25% of entries are by people claiming to be (at least partially) of Ethiopian descent. Entries with no nationality attribute were not counted.

Empire, Christian heritage, and Imperial legacy, although a growing and diversified collection of other ethnic and religious heritages is present. Despite the central location of these two museums in Addis Ababa, and their public accessibility (with entry fee), there are fewer yearly visitors to either museum than one would expect in a city with a population of nearly 3 million people (CSA 2006). Located only a few hundred meters apart, the National Museum of Ethiopia and the IES have similar emphasis on research, so the limited number of visitors to the museum tend to be affiliated with the university (educated elites), visiting expatriates, or foreigners. The research into the collections of these museums has been carried out by curators and researchers from Ethiopia and abroad, and continues to advance the understanding of Ethiopia's cultural heritage. Moreover, a newly organized Graduate Program in Ethiopian Studies has been integrated into IES (Addis Ababa University); since 2005, this programme includes specializations in museology, contemporary cultural studies and indigenous cultural studies and will certainly have positive effects on the future of Ethiopian scholarship into museum collections in Addis Ababa.<sup>39</sup> However, in the present there remain several constraints to the development of these federally run institutions.

First, the sometimes arbitrary and/or political postings of administrators in the culture sector can lead to problems in the management of bureaucracy and the biased implementation of cultural policy. This becomes even more problematic with the frequent re-organization of executive organs of the federal government, which leads to the constant reshuffling of limited staff, thereby diminishing the opportunities for the development of proficiency through familiarity with procedures.

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<sup>39</sup> Most of the classes for the Masters programme in Ethiopian Studies take place at IES. Between 2005 and 2007 class size ranged from four to nine students (a total of 23 students were registered in the programme in the 2005/2006 academic year. Courses included 1) Seminar on Ethiopian Oral Literature, 2) History and Theory of Museums, 3) Museum Management, 4) Development, Fundraising, and Grantmanship, 5) Themes in Ethiopian Studies, and 6) Art Theory.

Secondly, in the past, budgets shared with information, sports and youth or social affairs sectors left limited funding for culture – culture was not a priority. Furthermore, before the 2005 restructuring of the culture sector, budgetary and expertise expenditures for the culture sector was mostly reserved for the conservation of archaeological sites, and few resources were traditionally made available for conservation or promotion of other aspects of cultural heritage (such as vernacular arts, and performing arts); aspects which pertain to the lives and livelihoods of a wider section of the Ethiopian population. Thirdly, lack of information sharing and expertise sharing within sub-ministry branches has remained a problem. A lack of systematic standardized documentation, inventory and statistics gathering methodologies between departments, and even within an individual department is an unfortunately common circumstance.

Finally, the national level museums above do not have mission statements, which support programming or activities that engage non-academic community members. As such, only a limited elite group of persons are benefiting from the current activities of these institutes. Some have argued that the limited number of visitors is due to a lack of interest in the general community, and that the few museums in Ethiopia result from the limited amount of museum quality artifacts available in the nation. Getachew (2000) went as far as to claim that a compelling reason for the “remarkable dearth” of museums in Ethiopia is “the looting and forced removal of countless treasures by foreign armies resulting in magnificent items of Ethiopian origin that are today on display in European Museums” (Getachew 2000).<sup>40</sup> Yet, placing the guilt for

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<sup>40</sup> A large amount of plundered and stolen items of Ethiopian material heritage that remains in collections abroad, and the author agrees forthright with arguments for their immediate return to Ethiopia. Friction over these precious items can cause significant crisis in terms of both diplomacy (as in the case of the stolen Axumite Obelisk, which was finally repatriated in 2005) and of cultural rights.

underdeveloped museum settings on such distant culprit seems futile. Still, it would appear that, just as many African museums want to blame foreign influences (usually colonialism) for their own stagnation, Ethiopian museums are tempted to place blame on foreign sources in a similar fashion. However, it would be more constructive for national policy makers and museum specialists to address some of the situations which could be managed by internal restructuring: visitor statistics could be positively affected and new museums created by increasing public access with better community programming which takes into account recommendations made from the visitors themselves in the various guestbooks of museums. Perhaps even offering periodic free access for Ethiopian visitors would be a way to encourage more of the popular participation in cultural programming that the current administration professed in its own *Cultural Policy* document.

Although the institutional housing of arts in Ethiopia has been shown to be a mid-20<sup>th</sup> century innovation of the central government, this new form of display has recently taken root and is being mimicked throughout the country by community groups, individuals, and government bodies. Outside the capital of Addis Ababa, there are now attempts to integrate contemporary and historical aspects of material heritage in venues accessible to the average community member. Even if incomplete due to delays in data reporting from regional bureaus of culture, Table 4 (below) indicates the rising popularity of museums throughout the country in the last few years. From 2004 to 2006, the number of regionally administered museums more than doubled, foreshadowing perhaps the future in community management of cultural heritage in Ethiopia.



**Table 4. Number of Registered Museums, Visitors and Revenues in Ethiopia<sup>†</sup>**

Region	Number of Museums 2004/05; 2005/06	Number of visitors 2004/05;2005/06	Yearly revenue from entrance fee 2004/05;2005/06	Yearly revenue from other source 2004/05;2005/06
Tigray	- ; 2	- ; 26,108	- ; 475,519	- ; 0
Afar	0; 0	0; 0	0; 0	0; 0
Amhara	1; N.A.	3452; N.A.	1,990; N.A.	- ; N.A.
Oromia	- ; N.A.	- ; N.A.	- ; N.A.	- ; N.A.
Bensh.- Gumuz	0; 0	0; 0	0; 0	0; 0
S.N.N.P (2004/05 data)	- ; 6	- ; 0	- ; 0	- ; 0
Gambela	0; 0	0; 0	0; 0	0; 0
Harari	4; 3	8,245; 18,183	40,811; 98,134	- ; 19,500
Dire Dawa Admin. Council	- ; N.A.	- ; N.A.	- ; N.A.	- ; N.A.
Addis Ababa City Admin.	- ; N.A.	- ; N.A.	- ; N.A.	- ; N.A.
<b>Total</b>	<b>5; 11</b>	<b>11,697; 44,291</b>	<b>42,801; 573,653</b>	<b>0; 19,500</b>

<sup>†</sup>Adapted from Table R.12, “Number of Registered Cultural Heritages, Museums, Visitors and Revenue 2004/05” (CSA 2005) and Table R.12, “Number of Registered Cultural Heritages, Museums, Visitors and Revenue 2005/06” (CSA 2006). Data pertains only to museums administered by Regional Culture and Sports Bureaus. In this table, (-) means that no data was available; N.A. means not applicable.

In the city of Harar, the latest trend in local Ethiopian museums is thriving, and everyday arts found in the Harar region are the focus of many of the city’s collections, reflecting the interest of the local community, curators and museum visitors. Chapter 4 presents case studies of four of these federally managed museums in Harar, thereby expanding this research from the national policy and practice, to the regional praxis and community initiatives. In Chapter 4 we shall see how Ethiopia’s new breed of local museums are allowing regional communities to express their own agency in heritage management.

## **Chapter 4. Local level conservation of material heritage in the museums of Harar**

### **4.0 Introduction**

The present chapter begins with an introduction to the historical and contemporary sociopolitical background of the city of Harar: the setting for our case studies of local-level conservation of material heritage in museums. Then, the four museums found within the city will be detailed; the motivations behind their establishment and continued management, details of their successes and constraints, the particulars of the museum collections (specifically, the role of vernacular art objects), and the degree of community interaction with/ community response to the museums will be presented for each museum, in turn. Finally, the local museums herein will be compared with the national level museums of the preceding Chapter 3.

### **4.1 Historical background of the city of Harar**

Harar is located 525 km east of Addis Ababa, in Harari Peoples' National Regional State. The early history of the Harari people, their origin and migration routes are still debated. However it is widely agreed that the city had been part of the Sultanate of Adal, and a center of Islamic scholarship as early as the 13<sup>th</sup> century (Burton 1894; Cerulli 1936; Trimmingham 1965; Henze 2000). By the mid-1500s Ahmed ibn Ibrahim al-Ghazi led the greatest Muslim expansion into the Christian Empire of Ethiopia from his base in Harar. He was subsequently defeated and Harar's famous perimeter wall, *Jugal* (also *Jugol*), was built to protect the Harari from the threat of Oromo invasions (Aalund 1985). Following a brief occupation by Egyptian forces (1875-1885), Harari forces led by Amir Abdullahi were defeated in January 1887 at the Battle of Ch'elenqo

(Caulk 1971, Henze 2000). Melenik II then incorporated Harar into the control of the Ethiopian Empire.

Traditionally, Harar was an important mercantile city, serving as a passing point for goods traveling from the sea to the interior of Africa. However, the importance of Harar as a mercantile stronghold in eastern Ethiopia steadily declined in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Although a large portion of merchant traffic into Harar was drawn to Dire Dawa beginning with the completion of the Franco-Ethiopian Railway in 1917, the historical importance of Harar, especially its architectural treasures continues to be well noted. In fact, as early as 1989, UNESCO included Harar in its *International Campaign to Safeguard the Principal Monuments and Sites of Ethiopia*, and, in 2006, Harar was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site, based in large part on its architectural history. Among the distinguished architecture of the city are the former residences of Emperor Haile Selassie (1892-1975) and the French poet Arthur Rimbaud (1854-91), as well as the *Jugal* wall.

The ethnic composition of the city was most certainly dominated by Harari before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. And until 1975, it was mostly Oromo tenants who were in the employ of Harari absentee landlords who farmed the majority of the land around the city (Koehn and Waldron, 1978). According to Sidney R. Waldron, this situation was the basis of the old city's economy and secured the financial superiority of the Harari ethnic group within the city. Another major source of income amongst the Harari was commercial activity (Waldron, 1975b). Waldron acknowledged that the combination of these activities "placed the Harari on top of the local ethnic stratification system and enabled individual *ge usu* (Harari; lit. "city people") to devote considerable time and energy to *afõča* [either male or female voluntary neighborhood associations]

affairs and the other purely social activities which characterize the old city's traditional society" (1975a: 359 et seq.).

However, beginning with the city's incorporation into the Ethiopian Empire, and intensified during the Derg period (1974), the Harari experienced political and economic marginalization. The government's seizure of all secondary houses and the nationalization of lands in the mid-70s threatened to seriously undermine the power that the Harari had built over centuries in relation to other groups in the area. Certainly, the actions of the national governments of the previous century led to a strong resentment to centralized authority. Camilla Gibb has detailed ways in which the Harari opposed central governance by means of political action (like the organization of the Harari National League) and, to some degree, by inter-ethnic solidarity with other residents of the city. Notwithstanding the concessions which have since been made to Harari by the central government in recent years, Gibb wrote in the late 1990s that: "The relationship of the city to the Ethiopian center, is generally characterized in terms of hostile foreign invaders undermining local autonomy and seizing wealth and power from the hands of the [Harari]" (1997: 378). This general assessment echoed that made by Waldron (1975b) decades earlier. In contrast, the present study found that, especially in the culture sector, a much more symbiotic (or partisan) relationship has developed in the last decade between the state and community members, in the form of the regional government and civil groups. Moreover, inter-ethnic comity has become one of the hallmarks of the city's residents (Asante 2005).

Presently, the old walled city is quite multi-ethnic with daily interactions between ethnic groups especially in areas of commerce. According to the most recent published survey, the residents inside *Jugal* consists of 73% Muslim, 25.5% Ethiopian

Orthodox, with an ethnic composition of Harari (38.1%), Oromo (29.1%), Amhara (20.5%), Gurage (6.4%), and Somali (3.2%) (Muhamud et al. 2006: 2-3). However, some degree of boundary is still maintained in the social realm of activities. Harari, men and women tend to be at least tri-lingual and often quadrilingual (in Harari, Oromo, Amharic, and Arabic), reflecting the perceived importance of languages in maintaining elevated positions as landlords, merchants, literate religious practitioners, and influential lobbyists in the region. In fact, only 10.35% of Harari people were reported as not having a second language. This is twice as low as any other ethnic group in the region. Contrasted with the Oromo (the largest group in the region), and the Amhara who have 80.37% and 54.69% of persons with no second language ability respectively, the linguistic advantage of the Harari ethnic group becomes convincing (Central Statistical Authority [CSA] 1999: Table 2.16).

While ethnic Harari have the linguistic ability to enter into multi-ethnic social groups, persons of other ethnicities find it much harder to enter into Harari social circles. Likewise, it is no stretch of the imagination to see that ethnic Harari still maintain some advantages in the city, even if they are no longer its exclusive residents or primary landholders. For instance, according to the 1994 census, while there are just over 22,000 members of the Harari ethnic group in all of Ethiopia, Harari people comprise only 7% of the residents of the regional state of Hararge. Still, not only is the state named after this group, but also *ge sinan*<sup>41</sup> (Harari; lit.: “city language”), a distinct Ethiopian Semitic language, is the state’s official language (Waldron 1975b). Ninety-nine percent of Harari are Muslims (CSA 1999: Table 2.19), but Orthodox Christians also reside in the city.

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<sup>41</sup> According to Waldron, the Harari language’s “closest surviving cognate is Selti Gurage, probably implying a distinct historical connection with the Eastern Gurage cultures” (Waldron, 1984: 313).

Today, approximately 21,000 persons live within the 60 hectares of the old city that is encompassed by the wall (Bianchini & Mohamud 2002). The old city is conceptually divided into the five quarters of Assumbari, Argobbari, Suqutatbari, Bedrobari, and Asmaddinbari. Within these quarters are smaller neighborhoods called *toiach* that are often named after one of the “fathers of the city” or *awach* (Waldron 1975a). Although many Christian members of other ethnic groups reside within the boundary of the *Jugal* wall, the landscape of the city is dominated with mosques and Islamic saint’s shrines. As Emile Foucher explained, “Harari Islam, in its popular expression of venerating its saints and rendering a cult to their shrines, is...at the heart and an integral part of the culture and history of the walled city of Harar” (Foucher 1991: 78). Saint veneration influences many aspects of the city’s daily life, including Harari artistic expression, architectural and landscape design: Saints are honored in the Harari religious music repertoire of *zikri* (Tarsitani, 2006) and a local woman’s craft association is named after the female saint *Aye Abida*, whose holy grave is venerated in the city. It is within this walled city of Harar proper that this chapter is concerned. In this multi-ethnic city of comity, Islamic learning and spirituality, a regional capital and World Heritage site, we find the highest concentration of museums per hectare than anywhere other city in Ethiopia.

Before exploring the nature of the city’s museums, their management and collections, the next section will help us to first understand – as we did in Chapter 3 for the national level museums – who are the custodians of material heritage at the local level.

## 4.2 Local custodianship of cultural heritage in Harar

In the Harari Regional State as in the rest of Ethiopia, the practical management of cultural heritage rests with the populous, while official, regionally-funded cultural management (especially of those items deemed of exceptional cultural value for the region as a whole) tends to rest with the Bureau of Culture. The nature of individual, group, and governmental management of heritage in Harar is explored below.

### 4.2.1 *Traditional custodians*

In Harar custodianship of secular material heritage rests with the community-at-large, while custodianship of the city's religious material heritage is shared between the community-at-large and religious leaders. Everyday household objects like food vessels in basketry or wood, and items of personal adornments like jewelry and ceremonial clothing are kept in private homes. Whereas personal adornments are kept in cabinets or pottery bowls and are usually hidden from view, food vessels (whose sentimental and even monetary value can have a significant range) are commonly hung on the walls of local homes for display. Although the dense concentration of food vessels as wall decoration was a traditional hallmark of Harari interior decoration, the practice is now seen in nearly every dwelling of the city. The abundant display of food vessels as decorative objects compliments the woven floor coverings, displayed weaponry, carved cupboards, etc., that comprise the setting of local homes.

Objects of the city's religious heritage are usually maintained by the *imams* (prayer leaders, especially at Islamic mosques), Muslim *sheiks* (male, often elder religious leaders), *murid* (in Harar, a *sheik* who is also a caretakers of a shrine), certain

entrusted women, and other neighborhood residents.<sup>42</sup> Certainly, the larger “objects” like the architectural structure of Ansar Ahmad’s holy grave and its encircling tree are maintained by neighborhood groups. But smaller religious-affiliated items like illuminated manuscripts, incense burners, and special vessels for the serving of food and drink to religious persons, can be kept by *imams*, *sheiks*, *murid*, and members of the lay community as well.

Of course, one cannot but acknowledge the increased importation of modern cultural objects ranging from televisions to chinaware, that have been integrated into the material components of this urban landscape, especially as pertains to secular settings. These novel products are certainly gaining status and popularity in the city. Nevertheless, it may still be said that secular and religious objects which are almost universally esteemed within the city (and among informed persons in greater Ethiopia) are comprised of vernacular art objects from Harar.<sup>43</sup>

Chapter 3 contained a discussion of the importance of vernacular arts in Ethiopian, as well as the latter-day decline in their production. The community members in Harar have likewise discerned these trends in their own city, and local women’s groups have been fundamental in taking responsibility for the physical maintenance of traditional (or tradition-inspired) cultural objects and the intangible heritages associated with them. Without doubt, women’s *afōča* have been principal contributors to the maintenance of the city’s heritage. Women’s *afōča* groups, whose numbers can range from a few dozen to significantly more, have group activities during

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<sup>42</sup> The old city of Harar is dominated by Islamic culture, although a growing number of other religious practitioners are residing in the city. According to the latest survey by Mohamud et al (2006), there are 82 mosques, 100 Islamic holy graves (with their associated shrines), one Orthodox Christian church (Medhane Alem), and one Catholic Church within the confines of the *Jugal* wall.

<sup>43</sup> Photographs and descriptive examples of the variety of the region’s vernacular arts (secular and religious) can be found in Appendix B, which illustrates the museum collections of this study.



weddings and funerals of their members' families, as well as gatherings on holy days. It is common therefore for *afōča* to meet as a group several times a month. Women's *afōča* tend to be comprised of elder women<sup>44</sup>; the groups are not exclusively ethnic-Harari in composition, but have recently included members from other regional groups. *Afōča* meet regularly as both friendship groups and financial support groups and contribute to the ceremonial activities of its members or their extended families. *Afōča* are especially active for weddings, religious holiday celebrations, and funerary events where they provide, among other things, the cultural objects required for the event. These objects range from the drums (*karabu*) used to perform wedding songs, to the ceremonial baskets, which have specific ritual uses. Not only are women's *afōča* pivotal in providing the objects for ceremonies, but they are also the day-to-day managers of their homesteads and are therefore knowledgeable of the cultural objects of that environment. As mostly elder women, the *afōča* members are valued as experienced sources not only for the tangible objects themselves, but they are also reliquaries of associated intangible practices. Moreover, the collective monetary resources of *afōča*, and the undeniable influence of these elder mothers on community opinion, cannot be over emphasized: they represent a significant lobby coalition in Harar, able to influence political and cultural decisions.

Local custodianship of cultural heritage is also strongly linked to other women's groups, namely: women's craft guilds. Women's craft guilds constitute the most recent

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<sup>44</sup> The author rarely observed an instance of women under 40 belonging officially to an *afōča*. Several female informants insisted that it would not be necessary for a young (married or unmarried) woman to join such a group unless her mother or mother-in-law was deceased. As long a family has elder mother who is an *afōča* member, then the community alliances needed in times of weddings and funerals would be covered for that family. Young women are therefore unlikely to join an *afōča* if a redundancy of their mother's family contribution would result.

Harari voluntary women's associations.<sup>45</sup> These guilds arose in recent years, as Harari women noticed the sharp decline in the production of traditional *ge mot* (baskets of the city) and joined forces – first informally, then as an incorporated alliance – in order to maintain the tradition. In the walled city, there now exist three official associations of women weavers: *Enayasia*, *Aye Abida*, and Harari National Women's Association. The multi-ethnic members of these associations indicated that they shared common goals at the time of their official formation in the mid to late 1990s when basketry production in the city was extremely low, but the demand for everyday and ceremonial baskets remained high. According to the members of these groups, their initial concern was with the future of the city's most commonly prized craft tradition, basketry. Therefore, the women who were skilled at making traditional Harari baskets (especially members of *Enayasia*) took up the task of reviving the labor-intensive older styles, which are, to this day, still required for a woman's dowry. *Aye Abida* opted to create the less-intricate traditional styles of city baskets from Harari and Oromo ethnic groups; And Harari National Women's Association began crafting mostly quickly produced and contemporary Harari, Oromo, Amhara and Somali styles of basketry.

Members of the three guilds also sought a way for the guild members to earn extra income by combining resources and having a forum to market their baskets. By opening shops located in the city center, these women's groups have been instrumental in effecting a local revival in basketry which is owed, in no small part, to the new pronounced visibility of their shops that double as setting for production of both

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<sup>45</sup> Organizations of people with similar interests in artisanal production have a long history in Harar and continue, formally and informally among males and females. For example, in 2004, a ninety year-old informant reported that her and her mother's generation attended basket-weaving groups of young Harari friends (*gelač*), who would meet regularly at the *mooy gar* (lit. basket house) (Asante 2006). Today, *mooy gar* is no longer used to refer to groups of young female weavers, most probably because such gatherings are much more infrequent these days, although they do occur on unscheduled occasions. However the women's craft guilds described in the text refer to formally organized professional associations that have been officially incorporated and registered with the government.

contemporary and traditional crafts. In this way, these guilds represent the community's present interest in merging cultural continuity and cultural dynamism through folk crafts.

Having reviewed some of the most influential civilian associations regarding the current nature of cultural heritage management in Harar, the following section will briefly introduce the region's formal government administrators of culture in an effort to help us understand some of the reasons behind current heritage management activities in the city. Then we will go on to connect the motivations of both community and regional administrators by examining their levels of cooperation in the public presentation of heritage in local museums.

#### *4.2.2 Regional administration of cultural heritage*

The history of citizens of Harar has been filled with distrust and animosity<sup>46</sup> with non-native (non-Harari) authority. In terms of cultural expressions, we have seen that in the last century the national government often made provisions for multiculturalism in policy, however, in practice, the government often biased preferred groups which led to problems of credibility. In the 1970s and 1980s, cultural rights violations occurred alongside other human rights violations that worked to effectively subdue cultural expressions as the general populous feared attracting attention to themselves in such a politically-hostile environment. Such feelings of trepidation spread throughout the nation in rural and urban areas and were not lost on the Harari community either.

In the mid-1970s Peter H. Koehn and Waldron (Koehn & Waldron, 1978) researched the possibilities for social alliances between the government and traditional

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<sup>46</sup> Once occupied by foreign powers – from the Egyptian rulers and the Ethiopian Empire in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, to the Italian Occupation – residents of the city have effectively cooperated with limited confrontation (Carmichael 2001). This accommodating attitude has resulted in the Harari ability to maintain a high degree of self-administration in the last century.

voluntary associations (*afōča*). This was an extremely stressful period in the relations between the Harari and the central Ethiopian government. The researchers concluded that until there would be a foundation of mutual trust, it would be unlikely that the Harari *afōča* would be receptive to governmental urban development plans.

Then in the 1990s, with the creation of ethnic-based regional states under the FDRE's umbrella, the residents of Harar found themselves in a prominent position with the administration of local authority headquartered in their city – after which the entire region was named. Under this new system, and with the most prominent positions in regional government belonging to ethnic Harari (including culturally assimilated Harari), a new era of cultural activity began. Whereas a general sense of distrust of government had previously existed, today there are greater incentives for formal indigenous associations (*afōča*, craft guilds and the like) to work cooperatively with government administrators who are familiar with local modes of management. Certainly, some greater degree of “mutual trust” now exists, especially because so many of the regional administrators are actually related to members of local voluntary associations (if they are not members themselves) – groups that are so influential in areas such as cultural heritage management. Moreover, since Harar is the regional capital, the administrators are residents of the city and are therefore more proximate to concerns of their neighbors. Not only have regional administrators from this very tight-knit community have shown a high level of interest in projects that highlight the traditional heritage of the city, but also members of voluntary associations are now much more likely to accept alliances with the central government administration, once proposals have been filtered through the channel of the regional (i.e., local) administration.

It is important to clarify that while ethnic Harari do maintain a degree of economic and social prominence, and an unstated priority status for cultural projects in the walled portion of the city, it is undeniable that Harar is a multi-ethnic community today and that regional administrators still honor their constitutional responsibility to the variety of the city's residents. Thus, the mostly ethnic Harari regional administrators have indeed acknowledged the benefits of promoting the interests of the various ethnic groups of the city per its obligation under the rule of law (especially when ethnic-Harari are no longer the numerical majority in the city). At the same time, they have also seized the chance to promote the historical significance of cultural prominence of the city and her ancestral residents (their hereditary brethren).

Thus, at the dawn of the third millennium, a cultural revival has taken root based on initiatives of local associations who now work more trustingly with the current Harari regional government, a government that has demonstrated its role as sympathetic mediator between the federal government and local residents. In the next section we will see examples of alliances between local associations and regional administrators in the promotion and management of material heritage in local museums.

#### **4.3 Case studies of museums in Harar**

Recently, conservation of traditional heritage, programming aimed at cultural revival and economic development plans go hand-in-hand in Harar. This section will detail the four museums in the city which have merging these activities in the context of local museums. The motivations behind their establishment, the role of community and government actors, the collection of objects, the variety of on-site activities, and the

levels of community engagement will all be considered herein, as we examine the museums from oldest to newest.

#### 4.3.1 *Introducing alliances between community groups and regional administration*

The Ethiopian communities, especially as pertains to material heritage, have always acknowledged the potentially important role that local groups should play in cultural programming; a sentiment likewise urged by modern scholars. As early as 1985, a UNESCO plan had suggested that local citizens – who already belonged to informal groups – organize into small-scale cooperatives in order to reinvigorate established craft traditions (Aalund, 1985). A call for local cooperatives to help preserve tangible cultural heritage in Harar was later made 1990 by Jara Maryam who rightly suggested that efforts of conservationists would be best aided by working in concert with existing local social organizations. In cases where pre-established organizations were wanting, then conservationists should endeavor to encourage the formation of local cooperatives. More specifically,

Old Harar handicraft activity is one of the best-known traditions which could be encouraged and developed. This should be one of the activities which creates jobs for the inhabitants and economic prosperity for the Old Town. The mixture of activities through which the traditional economic and social types are conserved, should be accepted, and existing ones should be reinforced. It is necessary to establish an inventory of all existing activities, as well as those which have disappeared. A new strategy would be required to improve the conditions and for the presentation of these activities, while encouraging the redevelopment of those which are vanishing. (Maryam, 1990: 413)

The significance of including community participation in heritage management and decision-making at the local level in Africa, as in the world at-large, cannot be

underestimated. In government (and NGO) initiated development projects of all kinds – from infrastructure building to economic development of the culture sector – sustainability and the minimization of negative social, economic, and ecological impacts are conditioned by the integration of local actors at all levels of planning and implementation. But as we saw in Chapter 3, the Ethiopian federal government had not always been forthcoming in incorporating community groups, or non-elite private citizens into the management of cultural heritage.

Currently, although a long time in coming, recent developments by the Harari People's National Regional State (HPNRS) administrators have finally evinced an encouraging reversal of this trend. There are two primary motivating factors for the regional government's inclusion of local actors in cultural programming. First, attaining sustainable economic development through cultural promotion (developing tourism outlets, craft development especially for the export market, etc.) would be hard to achieve without the help of influential community groups in Harar. Economic development through cultural enterprise is not only the new plan of the federal government, it is a sentiment shared at the regional level. In fact, a recent *USA Today* article quoted the Harari regional president Murad Abdulhadi as saying: "The future of Harar is a tourist attraction" (Powell 2007), echoing the connection between economic development and culture.<sup>47</sup>

The second motivating factor for the regional administration to include community participation in cultural programming comes from the influence of community actors as significant lobbyists who can sway public opinion either for or against government initiatives. Moreover, as regards the culture sector community

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<sup>47</sup> Source: Powell, Anita. "Ancient Ethiopian city aims to be tourist hub", in *USA Today*, 20 September 2007. Copyright: 2007, The Associate Press.

members are effective at policing blatantly incongruous actions of local citizens. For example, there have been numerous cases in the last five years when precious cultural objects were put up for sale on the black market, or when homeowners have wanted to change the structure of historically important buildings, only to have their neighbors report their activities to officials who then intervened.

There are numerous ways in which cultural programming is currently approached by citizens and the government in the city of Harar, some more successfully than others of course. In the upcoming case studies of four museums in Harar, the alliances between private citizens and regional administrators will serve as illustrative examples of the positive cooperative practices in local level management of culture in the city, and may serve to forecast the future potential of effective blends of cultural policy and praxes in Ethiopia.

#### 4.3.2 *Ada Gar, the Harari Culture House*

In the late 1970s, the Derg regime initiated a series of “culture shows” as government sanctioned displays of the many ethnic groups of the nation. In Harar, local mosques charged charitable trusts (*wakf*, also *waqf*) with the task of arranging celebrations of Harari cultural activities. According to Ahmed Zekaria (1982), at first, a provisionally *wakf* committee solicited financial and material endowments from the community to contribute to an exhibition of Harari culture, music and dance, which was meant to travel between Harar, Dire Dawa and Jijiga and coincide with the anniversary of the deposition of Emperor Haile Selassie I on September 12, 1974. These traveling cultural tours were so successful that the organizing committee decided, by 1980, that a permanent display based on this traveling exhibit should be established within the town



itself, so that Harari culture might be publicly celebrated throughout the year. Thus, a permanent community-run cultural project was founded in the former home of a religious judge (*qadi*) of Harar whose office dates back to c. 1865-1899.<sup>48</sup>

Much of the research into traditional Harari architecture and cultural objects required for the establishment of this permanent collection fell to the responsibility of local historian and Harari scholar Abdulmuhaymin Abdulnasir,<sup>49</sup> who spent six months drawing up a plan for renovating the building, located just east of the *Jami Mosque* on the main road to the *Argo Beri* gate. Abdulmuhaymin consulted elder Harari people and *afōča* groups for ethnographic on the multitude of vernacular art objects that were donated by the city's *afōča* members. After thorough research and six months of renovation, the historic residence was transformed into *Ada Gar*<sup>50</sup> (lit.: culture house) dedicated to exhibiting the culture of the Harari ethnic group. Indeed, the house-cum-museum has been executed with such detail that the structure itself serves as "object" in the collection of the museum. The structure serves thus to epitomize an ideal home of an elite, ethnic Harari family.<sup>51</sup> The carving of wooden entrance doors and recessed cupboards inside several the homes in the city are magnified in opulence at *Ada Gar*.<sup>52</sup> Abdulmuhaymin's commitment to this project went beyond his interest as a historian

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<sup>48</sup> According to A. Zekaria (n.d.), the home was named after Faqih Abdullahi ibn Faqih Abdulrahman, owner the house after this *qadi* (whose office Zekaria assigns to c. 1870-1897).

<sup>49</sup> Historical data on *Ada Gar* is from personal communication with Abdulmuhaymin Abdulnasir in 2006.

<sup>50</sup> *Ada Gar* is alternatively referred to as Harari National Cultural Center.

<sup>51</sup> In his study of Harari domestic architecture, Richard Wilding (1976) draws analogies from similarities seen in northern Kenya, southern Somalia, Argobba villages (in the environs of Harar), as well as other examples. Interestingly, when researching the domestic architecture of the city in the mid 1970s, he noted that while carved cupboards were still quite common in the city, elaborately carved doors were limited to "perhaps no more than a few dozen houses and it may well be that even at the height of their popularity only a minority of the house-owners could afford the luxury of a carved door and window" (Wilding 1976:36). The architectural design of *Ada Gar* gives an uncommon example of an elaborate traditional Harari home.

<sup>52</sup> Further reading on the nature of structural and ornamental design in Harari domestic architecture can be found by Richard Wilding (1976) and Revault & Santelli (2004).

and scholar of Harari culture; for several years he served as dedicated curator to this – Harar’s first – community-run public museum.

By all accounts, although men and women, youth and elders were active in organizing and participating in these Harari cultural shows, it was the voluntary women’s *afōča* who were the largest contributors of material support to the collection. These *afōča* donated not only intricately designed antique items of textiles, basketry and jewelry belonging to Harari elite, but they also contributed to a stockpile of everyday items ranging from wooden bowls (*gabata*) to gourd containers and woodwork. The variety of objects currently in the collection are presented in Table 5, below (See also Appendix B: Photos 16-20).

**Table 5. Number of heritage objects on display in Harar’s museums, 2005/2006**

	Ada Gar	Harar National Museum	Sherif Private Museum	Rimbaud Culture Center
Folk craft	605	296	726	81
Historical object	55	258	4,104	36
	(includes 21 manuscripts)	(includes 71 manuscripts)	(includes 950 manuscripts)	
Farming instrument	0	14	7	0
Archaeological object	0	1	(unknown fraction of folk/historical objects )	0
(Fine) Art object	2	1	0	49
Photo	9	0	0	111
Total objects	671	570	4,837	277
Percentage of folk crafts	91%	53%	15%	29%

Upon visiting the *Ada Gar* museum soon after its completion, Zekaria (1982) took note of the function of the museum being educational and serving as a tourist center. One can certainly still observe these functions at work today: the grand hall in the *Ada Gar* compound has served as a periodic venue for lectures like that of Sheikh Abdullah al-Harari in 2003; for cultural presentation of Harari dances held during festive community celebrations; and for wedding promenades and photographic sessions of Harari brides.

Today, it is during occasional activities like those above that local community members are most likely to engage in touring of the museum collection itself.

Despite the early enthusiasm for community participation in the museum, over the years the “community-run” aspect of this museum faded, leading to the withdrawal of its long-time curator and organizer, Abdulmuhaymin. After the establishment of the Harari regional administration under ethnic federalism, *Ada Gar* was transferred to the administration of the Harari People’s National Regional State’s Office of the Bureau of Culture<sup>53</sup>, who continues to arrange contemporary activities including gatherings for public festivals (Shawwal Eid and Ashura) and community seminars, as well as landscape renovations in order to bolster interest in the museum milieu. Still, more could be done to engage the visitors. A case in point is that Ethiopian language speaking visitors can gain information from one of the two Harari women museum workers about the contents of the collection, but most foreign visitors must rely on the assistance of a hired local guide<sup>54</sup>, especially because many of the labels (which mainly consist of local names only, without further explanations) are written in the exclusive Harari language, using Ethiopic script, reflecting the choice of early curators. In addition, while community activities still *do* frequently take place upon the premises, the current administration is challenged to revive interest in what has become a stationary, though historically valuable collection. The Bureau of Culture should also find creative means in which to expand community interaction with the collection itself; to balance the interface between visitors, the architecture, and its material/ historical contents, perhaps through expanding explanatory labels, or creating multi-lingual pamphlets.

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<sup>53</sup> In post-election restructuring (2005), the Harar Bureau of Culture became a section of the People’s Mobilization, Culture and Social Affairs Bureau. Under this new arrangement, the Heritage Conservation Office (a sub-department of the culture sector office) covers the domain of tangible heritage.

<sup>54</sup> In 2004 the regional Tourism Commission and the Tourism Commission Institute in Addis Ababa, offered a 2-week training program for local tour guides at the Rimbaud Culture Center.

#### 4.3.3 Harar National Museum

In 1991, a second public museum, the Harar National Museum (HNM) was established by the local government administration – built upon a collection of property held by the former government in years following the 1974 revolution. The museum is located in the complex of the Harari Bureau of Culture – just east of *Feres Magala*, the central square of the city. The building’s dedication stone tells that it was established by Haile Selassie to replace the former Palace and to be a library, and place of recreation, but not as a museum.

Early documentation of the museum’s collection has been lost to posterity, that is, if it ever existed in written form. Today, the collection of the HNM consists of examples of vernacular arts from the diversity of ethnic groups in the region, with collections representing Harari, Oromo, Somali, Argobba, Afar and Amhara groups (See Table 5, above, and Appendix B: Photos 21-27). In the last few years, items have been inventoried by various museum staff, often according to subjective individual assessment of which “category” the items belong to. The consequential variations that result from a lack of standardized coding methods mean that a complete re-evaluation of all items needs to be done. For example, in four weeks of photographic and measurement inventories of the museum collection taken by the author in 2005, most of the elder and younger staff member, male and female concurred on the origin of most items in the collection.<sup>55</sup> However, there were clear cases of misidentification of labels, or items with missing labels. For example, some jewelry items were labeled with the code for farming instruments, and as the staff was unable to locate the files containing

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<sup>55</sup> The staff had previously labeled these items as follows: 01-Harari, 02-Oromo, 03-Afar, 04-Somali, 05-Amhara, 06-Argobba, and 07-farming instruments.

the original meaning of the extended numbering system the error was simply left uncorrected.

Furthermore, it is surely possible that the staff members were able to associate a given item with a given ethnic group, precisely because the item contained a label that effectively classified it as belonging to that group, and because of its location; items with the same code numbers are usually displayed together. This hypothesis was tested by the author while interviewing the most senior<sup>56</sup> museum staff member in two test environments. In the first situation, the author accompanied the staff member in the exhibition hall. In recorded interviews, the author inquired about the function, and material of each object. Then the author vocally identified the item by its extended inventory number for later reference of the recorded interview. The staff member was confident in his assessments and only rarely sought the opinion of other staff members. There were, however, instances where other staff members present in the room would contradict his opinion. In these rare circumstances, he differed to their expertise.

Several weeks after completing the oral inventory in the exhibition hall itself, the senior staff member was interviewed again. This time the author used edited photographs of the 50 items from the collection<sup>57</sup>. In 80% of cases, perhaps owing to long familiarity with the collection and decorative particularities of local ethnic groups, the staff member was able to give similar identification of materials and proper category number. However for items which were commonly found across ethnic lines like silver jewelry, and unembellished drinking vessels, the informant required a trip to the

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<sup>56</sup> Among the museum guides and staff, the most senior person had seniority in age and in number of years employed at the museum, while holding a mid-level title in the Bureau of culture.

<sup>57</sup> These 50 items were selected from photos where the code numbers were easily edited out and where the background was edited to a neutral color. These items included pottery, drinking vessels, daggers, jewelry, and musical instruments from the six ethnicity-based code categories used by the museum.

exhibition hall in order to locate the identify the associated group based on the location of the item on display.

HNM has been continuously under the administration of the regional bureau of culture since its founding as a public space, and the museum collection has grown with sporadic purchases from the local community. Importantly, in an attempt to stem the trafficking of precious heritage items in the tourist market, the regional bureau of culture has intervened with community members. For example, in cases where a third party, or someone in actual possession of rare cultural items makes known their intention to sell an item outside of the community, the bureau tries to negotiate the transfer of the object to the museum instead. As mentioned previously, it is the self-regulating (monitoring) activities of neighbors, and *afōča* groups that work cooperatively with the regional administration in order to help curb black market trade in cultural heritage. However, the budget of the bureau does not always allow for adequate compensation proposals in light of the tourist's offers, and as a result, individuals have been known to sell to the highest bidders; usually the tourist. As part of the effort deter the tourist trade in heritage the bureau of culture has also been working with the local postal officials and regional customs officials in order to curb the illicit export of "precious" cultural heritage of traditional basketry and manuscripts (Asante 2005: 1012).

Unlike at *Ada Gar*, the HNM employs its own guides who speak local and foreign languages. Moreover, simple labels accompany most of the items in the collection with the native names in Ethiopic script and English translations, facilitating general understanding of utilitarian and decorative functions. But a shortcoming of the museum is that fewer visitors have been observed at this museum, perhaps owing to the

fact that the museum is not advertised and is located in a building, which from street-level is only identifiable as a regional administrative complex.<sup>58</sup>

#### 4.3.4 Sherif Private Museum

Since the early 1990s, some of the most precious examples of Harari tangible and oral cultural heritage have been collected and preserved in the private home-cum-museum located in a private traditional house – southeast of *Gidir Magala* market on *Aw Merkeba Uga* Street. Fifty-three year old Abdulahi (Abdela)Ali Sherif is a self-taught conservator and is recognized locally as the person most responsible for the preservation and storage of the most varied collection of cultural artifacts in the town.

In 1991, at the age of 37, Sherif began collecting reel and cassette tapes of songs for the celebration of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Haywan Mugad, a musical association of young Harari men, gathered to sing together in leisure-time and especially during wedding celebrations. Early on, Sherif borrowed tapes from his friends and made recordings himself. Even after the Hayway Mugad celebration, he continued collecting and within a few years he succeeded gathering more than 600 recorded songs. After a while, with the encouragement of many Hararis, most notably Abdulmuhaymin of *Ada Gar*, Mr. Sherif started widening the borders of his interests. He began collecting all kinds of musical repertoires, old manuscripts, and other cultural artifacts. Over the years, Mr. Sherif's reputation for his collecting and preservation became well known and in May 1996 the regional government granted him official "permission for collecting".

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<sup>58</sup>April of 1999 saw the highest number of recorded visitors in a single month to the Harari National Museum with 523; while the lowest number of visitors came in August of 2000, when only 25 visitors were recorded. The average number of visitors per month was: 227 in fiscal year (FY) 1995, 158 in FY 1996, 117 in FY 1997, 164 in FY 1998, 71 in FY 1999, 47 in FY 2000, 62 in FY 2001, 64 in FY 2002, and 83 in FY 2003.

Two year later, in 1998 he was granted permission to have a museum and his residence became “Sherif Private Museum” (SPM), the first private citizens’ museum in Ethiopia. The motivation behind establishment of SPM may best be seen as a reaction to prior restrictions on freedom of cultural expression. In a 2005 interview, Mr. Sherif recalled his motivations in his own words:

When I was in my secondary school, [I asked myself]: What is our history? I asked this to our elders and they told me that we had [history], but for the time being, we haven’t [any]. [Later, after I began collecting songs] I asked [my elders]... Why didn’t you tell me when I asked you in the past [about our history]? They answered that at the time they were afraid...[they said] if we gave [it] to you, you would have been in prison or killed. This was true for all Ethiopians. Haile Selassie and the military [Derg] government didn’t allow any tribes, even the ruling class, to collect their history. They wanted to turn Ethiopia into one language, one religion and one tribe. For this reason, I had a crisis in my mind. To get mental satisfaction, I began my hobby, which is also my wife’s hobby.<sup>59</sup>

Sherif’s sense of cultural oppression under the former governments has been echoed by Abbay who suggests that, for decades, there was a deep-rooted level of communal fear of countering the system of rule: suggesting an alternative historical view or even expressing cultural solidarity among minority ethnic groups would have been interpreted by the ruling elite as non-conformist threats. For example, during the imperial regime,

[...] the differential access to goods and services, the exclusion from political processes and the disrespect shown to the cultures and languages of various communities continued to generate a sense of deprivation relative to the Amhara, open resistance was by and large considered risky and acquiescence was preferred because the state was too powerful. (Abbay 2004: 598).

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<sup>59</sup> Abdela Sherif, personal communication, August 2005.



And as we have seen in Chapter 2, fear of reprisals for non-conformity did not end with the coup. With the seizing of power by the Derg, expressions of cultural pride, whether individualistic or communal, could be misinterpreted by the government as either elitist or politically anti-revolutionary. Moreover, from the mid 1970s through recent years, the Ethiopian government has detained prisoners of conscience; a situation that has left most of the citizenry apprehensive to assume that their constitutional rights (be they freedom of expression, or rights of cultural expression) are guaranteed. So when Sherif, an ethnic Harari, who was a regional government employee in the early 1990s, became aware of the relative freedom of cultural expression allowed by the FDRE, he realized his chance to celebrate his city's heritage, past and present.

As the years passed and his collection grew, he also took it upon himself to revive a historically important tradition of manuscript binding. Having collected binding materials as part of his collection and studied the forms of the many manuscripts in his collection, Mr. Sherif taught himself through trial and error, how to bind books. His bookbinding skills became proficient and soon he was sought out by community members whose own manuscripts were falling apart. Today, Mr. Sherif estimates that a high percentage of the manuscripts in his collection are technically not "owned" by the museum. Instead, they are the property of community members to loan the manuscripts indefinitely to the museum, precisely because of the bookbinding and conservation work that Mr. Sherif has dedicated to their care.

On special occasions, Mr. Sherif has also been commissioned to bind and created decorative leather covers for locally produced calendars and appointment books. Since the private museum was located in his own home, Mr. Sherif integrated his craft activity within the museum space, with the lucky visitor being able to observe the city's

last master bookbinder practice his craft while surrounded by historically important literary collection. This is just one of many examples of how interactions between community donors, museum visitor and Mr. Sherif have been influenced by his artisanal activities that effectively merging traditional culture with contemporary.

While Sherif is often as being a one-man-savant in heritage preservation, Sherif himself is quick to point out that although his collection was individually initiated, it soon became a family-supported museum project as, in fact, invaluable assistance and patience has been garnered from his wife, children, relatives, and neighbors in the city. Undoubtedly, maintaining Harar's largest multi-cultural collection of vernacular arts, weapons, manuscripts, and coinage requires the constant dedication and physical labor of many local actors (See Table 5 and Appendix B: Photos 28-36). SPM has also been commendably innovative in its attempt to present not only the positive aspects of the region's history, but some regrettable episodes too. Gaugue mentioned that, in general, African exhibitions had failed to show the role of the slave trade on the creation of African political entities (Gaugue 2001:30). Perhaps then, the small but important collection of shackles of SPM which are prominently displayed, are a preliminary attempt by an local level African museum to acknowledge the role of local actors in the slave trade between the interior and the Red Sea coast.

By 2006 Mr. Sherif had amassed the most significant collection of artifacts from the Harari region in all of Ethiopia, and SPM had exemplified the high potential of indigenous resourcefulness in creating opportunities not only for preservation, but also for public presentation of folk customs in a locale that is easily accessible to and frequently accessed by the local community. His knowledge of the history of the region, religion, languages; and his unconventional but effective, need-based conservation

strategies have earned him much respect in his community and abroad. Sherif Private Museum has been much more than a collection of antiques because informal contemporary activities are integrated in the structure of venue itself: an occupied home. In fact contemporary traditions were brought to life in his home museum where on any given day a visitor might share tea over stimulating conversations about the history of the collection, and even observe Sherif working on museum objects as he (the last bookbinder in Harar) binds a book in a traditional manner. The informal, but invaluable exchanges between community members, local and foreign scholars have occurred daily in the context of this museum which, until 2007, was not only open to the public, but was the only museum in Harar with free entrance, although donations were welcome and often received; In 2007, Sheik Mohammed Hussein Al-Amoudi even donated one million birr (\$112,000 US) to Sherif for his private museum work.

Although each of the museums in Harar are commendable, each in their own respect, it would not be an exaggeration to say that as of 2006, Sherif's museum had reached the epitome of community engagement that the other museums seek.

#### 4.3.5 Rimbaud Culture Center

Finally we come to the most recent museum in the city. The regional Bureau of Culture administers Rimbaud Culture Center (RCC) and is responsible for its organization and financial management. This Center – housed in the c.1890 residence<sup>60</sup> located in the middle of the walled city, between *Makina Girgir* and *Amir Uga* streets – underwent restoration in 1999 and remains an excellent example of the influence of Indian craftsmanship on local architecture. Although the building itself was originally

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<sup>60</sup> According to Revault and Santelli (2004: 229), this late 19<sup>th</sup> century house is the most remarkable example of Indian type architecture in Ethiopia and was built by the Indian trader Jivagee Nazarela.

constructed a few years after the departure of French poet Arthur Rimbaud from the town in 1891, the residence, locally referred to as *Rimbaud Gar* (Rimbaud's house) in Harari, has been designated as a memorial to his person. In 2000 the "house" was transformed into more of a museum with the help of ARCCH and the regional government (Harar Culture & Sports Bureau: n.d.).

In the immediate post-renovation stage, the memorial-cum-museum contained photographs and photocopies of items related to Rimbaud himself, or life in the city during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. A limited library was also established on the premises. In the intervening years, the photographs, copies and bibliographical resources have been expanded through cooperation with the French Embassy and local and foreign scholars. In addition, temporary exhibitions of paintings and drawings of contemporary artists have been arranged in the building, which is now referred to as the Arthur Rimbaud Culture Center.

Very few cultural objects related to the life of the city are on display at the Rimbaud Culture Center (See Table 5 and Appendix B: Photos 37-42). Those few items of pottery and basketry that are on display in the documentation room are items on loan from the collection of Harar National Museum – an easy arrangement since there is a single curator who manages all three of the Bureau-administered museums in Harar. The dearth of a variety of older vernacular arts included in this museum is more than compensated for by the on-site presentation of contemporary cultural practices: the *Enayasia* women's weaving association gives daily demonstrations of traditional basketry (Asante 2004:61) in the annex to the museum, and their gift shop offers a variety of jewelry, textiles and basketry. The presence of the weaver's guild on-site not only entices tourists to the Rimbaud Culture Center, but their mercantile activity –

buying and selling baskets – does much to entice locals to occasionally pass through the property. Enayasia's activities show the potential of mutually beneficial alliance between the regional government and community groups; the *Enayasia* weaving group actually existed (informally as a group of friends and *afōča* members who met to make basketry) before the renovation of the Rimbaud house. Then, when the regional administrators called a meeting and requested a group to do on-site activities, *Enayasia*, took the chance work as an incorporated group that was to become an integral part of the project of the Rimbaud memorial center.

Because of its association with the celebrated French poet, this is the most highly publicized museum in Harar, if not in all of Ethiopia. Especially since 2000, regional administrators, with the cooperation and donations of international organizations (UNESCO, French Embassy in Addis Ababa, the city of Charleville-Mézières, etc.,) and scholars, have worked to diversify the activities of the Culture Center. Contemporary activities ranging from crafts production, craft workshops, community lectures, and government sponsored celebrations are all taking place on the premises. In addition, Harar's museum entered the new millennium I.T. advanced when the UNESCO sponsored telecommunication center was inaugurated on the first floor of this Center in August of 2005, offering access to five internet connected personal computers at highly competitive rates.

Certainly the management of the Culture Center has been commendable, having turned a dilapidated building into a memorial space with a thriving arena of activity. Also worthy of mention are the museum guides of this establishment, whom are well versed and articulate in the connecting the divergent activities found at the Center. Nevertheless, it is desirable that more effort be made to link the cultural resources in a

meaningful, interactive way. This could be achieved by combining the library resources, details of the arts, crafts, and architecture found in museum, as well as the history of the city (and Rimbaud himself) in digital format, which would then be readily accessible to locals, tourists and school groups in the computers are already available on-site.

#### **4.4 Vernacular arts in local museums**

The previous section explored the motivations behind of the establishment of Harar's museums, their subsequent developments in relation to communal and governmental initiatives, their successes and shortcomings. Now we will take a closer look at the types of the objects, around which the cultural heritage preservation in the city is focused, with the aim of linking the question of "what is collected" to "why it is collected". Connecting the cultural objects present in museums to the intentions of the local actors will pave the way for a model of the nature of local custodianship in Harar; a model reflecting the community's appreciation of cultural forms that approaches both conservation and innovation in the context of the modern museum.

##### **4.4.1 *The collections***

As foretold in the discussion of African arts in general (Chapter 2) and Ethiopian arts (Chapter 3) the tradition of symbolic representations in objects has existed throughout modern human history and among peoples the world over. Undoubtedly, objects have been tangible manifestations of human beliefs and cultures, as well as functional and symbolic elements which have changed over time. Comparative studies of cultures, and even chronological studies within the same culture have informed researchers of the complex cultural interactions yielding creations that express, on the one hand,

permanence of skill in craftsmanship and, on the other hand, the dynamism and re-interpretive ability of artisans who – over generations – have adapted/adopted techniques and forms to match their developing socio-cultural realities. Indeed, this idea of durability of skill and creative variety in forms and meaning in Africa can be found in comparisons of archaeological finds and contemporary traditions around the continent. Visonà et al. have aptly suggested that:

The impressive diversity of art traditions across Africa offers evidence of a larger continent-wide concern with artistic innovation and creativity. This can be seen not only in the variety of forms within a relatively small area (a single culture, a city or town, an individual artist) but also through history (Visonà 2001:15).

Likewise, a perusal of the collections in the museums of Harar reveal that regional artisans have excelled in fashioning materials in their environment into decorative and functional vernacular arts for everyday and ceremonial uses. Ancient techniques and forms found in antique objects of the region often reflect a mingling of aesthetic preferences between various regional ethnic groups, as well as similar methods of manipulating the natural and imported resources available in the Horn of Africa.

Because old basketry is one of the most visually and numerically prominent object-types in Harar's museums it will be used here to illustrate the nature of the overlapping handicraft traditions in the multiethnic city. As noted elsewhere, "the traditional crafting of basketry objects from simplest available resources serves as a testament to not only the creative impulses of humans from earliest times, but also to their ability to implement technologies which utilize whole-plant value in environments where resources are often lean (Asante 2006b: 649). In Harar, basketry has traditionally held an elevated status among the variety of folk crafts in the city. Harari women are the

makers of Harari baskets (*ge mot*), which are comprised of dowry baskets used for ceremonial and everyday activities (Asante 2004). Although Harari baskets have a reputation for excellence of form and pattern, as well as unparalleled economic value in the country, there is also a variety of baskets in the cultures of Amhara, Oromo and Somali groups in the region, which likewise demonstrate important examples of the complex relationship between tangible and intangible heritage. In Harar, the transference of cultural influences on basket types has been variable throughout time. One finds therefore that Harari basketry patterns have been mimicked (in simplified form) by Oromo weavers in the region. Similarly, Amhara appliqué methods for decorating a basket frame can occasionally be incorporated into the otherwise coiling techniques employed by Hararis. Moreover, modern professional weavers are increasingly skilled in making basket types that customarily belonged to other groups: ethnic Harari weavers make *masob*<sup>61</sup> tables to sell on the tourist market, and some Oromo weavers (almost always women who were domestic servants to ethnic Harari) craft traditional Harari baskets of exceptional quality.

While basketry was the medium chosen to show the transcultural influences on old handicraft techniques and forms, jewelry, pottery, woodwork and other mediums were also found to have similar influences. Certainly, there are a variety of other vernacular art objects on display in Harar's museums, as shown in Table 5, above, which is based on inventories carried out by the author from 2005 until 2007.<sup>62</sup> The

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<sup>61</sup> *Injera* (in Amharic), the traditional Ethiopian fermented flatbread made from teff (*Eragrostis tef* Zucc. Trotter. **Poaceae**) is served with a variety of sauces (*wot*) on such *masob* tables.

<sup>62</sup> Data reflects items on display in the museums in 2005/2007. Objects kept in storage were not counted but may account for a significant additional portion of the collections. Items are categorized as follows: Folk crafts are applied arts including textiles, basketry, art tools, etc.; Historical objects belong to what is famous in the past, and include items from famous persons, historic weapons, currency, and manuscripts of past times; Archaeological objects relate to buried items and buildings of past life; (Fine) Art objects relate to academic art, including painting, sculpture, printmaking. The distinction between folk arts and



collection numbers show a significant presence of vernacular arts: if the folk craft collections in Harar are totaled, we find that they represent 27% of all museum objects. However, these numbers in Table 5 are actually conservatively assigned. For example, the manuscripts, with their calligraphy, leather binding, stamping and parchments are actually the product of craftwork and they could alternatively be included in the folk craft category. Under this interpretation, the percentage of folk crafts would rise to 43% of all of Harar's museum collections. Furthermore, a perusal of the museum spaces shows that folk craft objects are not only present in large numbers, but they are also displayed prominently – becoming the visual focal point in all of the museums, save the Rimbaud Culture Center.

It is reasonable to assume that the prominence of these traditional folk crafts collections in publicly accessible museums of Harar does indeed reflect important valuations given to such objects within the community. The concentration of folk art also shows that the collectors and donors were concerned with preserving the functional traditional arts that reflected the everyday lifestyles of the region. Indeed, the ample presence of folk art exemplifies the community's resourcefulness and self-reliance in establishing cultural displays which they intend to represent themselves – both *to* themselves and *to* others.

Evidently, with the present circumstance of stagnation in craft industries, and increased homogenization of artistic expression, a discussion of the presentation of quality examples of the rich diversity of older traditions becomes even more pertinent. In fact, the importance of vernacular arts in this study of museum and conservation practices originates from the noted prominence of vernacular arts both in the collections

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fine arts, reflects not the author's preference, but serves as a tool with which to do comparative analysis of the collection of the National Museum in Addis Ababa whose categories are similarly divided

of museums highlighted in this paper and in the relationship to these objects in the “living culture” of the Ethiopia.

But the antique objects outlined above are not the only arts in the museum milieu of Harar; contemporary arts also play a significant role in the local museum experience. For example, on-site craft activities take place formally at Rimbaud Culture Center where twenty professional basket weavers from the *Enayasia* guild give daily demonstrations of how traditional Harari baskets are made. *Enayasia* also sells novel *touh-touh* (tourist market) baskets alongside traditional styled baskets in a shop in the museum compound (Asante 2004:61). The contemporary baskets made and sold at the shop are in high demand both locally, and among tourists to the museum.

Similarly, informal craft activities take place in Mr. Sherif’s museum. Sherif is the last bookbinder in the city and practices his self-taught craft at the museum, using embossing paraphernalia and antique book presses from his museum collection proper. The crafting of manuscript bindings using traditional technologies compliments his vast collection of ancient manuscripts and provides a skilled resource to aid other curators or the lay community in restoring their own manuscripts. Other informal craft activity can be found in the compound of Ada Gar where the female museum guides create Harari basketry in the museum annex between tours.

Finally, contemporary paintings and artistic photos are displayed, on a rotating basis, in the upper galleries of Rimbaud Culture Center. Recent exhibits have included the artwork of Ethiopian and foreign artist notably, Kerima Ahmed, Carlos Marine, and Mesfin Tadesse; and an exhibition of photos from around the world were present in August 2007.

When one considers that the inclusion of these traditional arts and contemporary artistic practices in Harar's museums results from the motivations of community members and administrators, then it becomes even more apparent that the arrangement of these cultural exhibits are facilitated by indigenous ingenuity in depicting both ancient ways of life alongside contemporary cultural expressions in the museum context. In essence, the combined presentations add dynamism to the museum venues and increase the likelihood that the modern audience may relate to the content of these cultural institutions, which of course relates to the future sustainability of the museums themselves.

#### **4.5. Linking past and present through community interactions with museum collections.**

Beyond studying the historical and contemporary objects in museum settings, there is also a chance to investigate the motivations behind the individual and community's appraisal of the works via their own perceptions of the historical significance and future aspirations of the group. That is to say, investigating how an individual or community uses objects to "tell a story" of the past, as well as contextualize the self (or group) in the present, can contribute significantly to comparative anthropological studies which deal with notions of communal and national cultural identity. For this reason, the present study attempts to understand material objects within the framework of cultural institutions, community organizations, and administrative organs of the state, all of which are influential actors in material heritage preservation in Ethiopia.

Certainly, by this point the concept upon which this study is premised should be clear: the objects of the museums in Harar have values other than that of a collection of

items which are institutionally maintained because of their rarity. In fact, the case studies of this research suggest that there are alternative values which the community places on the vernacular arts in Harar's museums. These alternative values derive meaning, in part, from their symbolic reflection of the communal ability to display, celebrate and cultivate material heritage, especially in light of historical and political activities which limited cultural expression. In the current era of relative liberalization towards cultural expressions, there is a renewed interest by the community to publicly present the objects of their cultural heritage. Therefore, the community's appraisal of the "worth" of these items, as defined by them and not by "the centralized state", has guided their intention to preserve and publicly display them within the local community.

Museums and their collection are granted further value in Harar because of the *community cultivating activities* of local people, i.e., the intended accumulation, presentation, and engagement with cultural objects by collective effort. In Harar, *community cultivating* of heritage is facilitated by 1) **social alliances** which respect the inclusion of established networks of indigenous alliances in support of local initiatives at heritage management; and 2) **commitment of resources** which, given the limited availability of material and monetary sources, requires collective ingenuity in order to create opportunities for the integration and presentation of contemporary customs in publicly accessible contexts. When these conditions are met and (importantly) sustained then *community cultivating activities* are able to directly (via formal organized cultural programming and on-site craft activities, for example) and indirectly (via informal intellectual exchanges, and the physical incorporation of museums venues into the residential fabric of the city) connect the living culture of the city with the historically significant objects found in the city's museums.

#### *4.5.1 Other levels of community interaction with museums: Visitor statistics and visitor response*

In the Harar museums outlined above, we saw the different levels on which community members have interacted with the foundation and management of local museums. We also saw examples of how the museums' collection reflect local admiration for historical objects, the nature of multicultural expressions in vernacular arts, as well as the development of museum environs which incorporate tradition and modernity into their forums. Moreover, it has been argued that community members, curators, and regional administrators have arranged museums contexts in such a way as to be representative of various cultures of the city, and to serve as forums for communal celebration wherein community interaction was of paramount importance. Now, let us examine if this fundamental aim has been achieved, by asking if the local community benefits from the museums in Harar. We will begin by examining who are the visitors to local museum exhibits, and exploring their reactions.

Figure 4 (Visitors to Harar National Museum), below, provides the most detailed statistics of museum visitors that were available in August 2006.<sup>63</sup> Unfortunately, the regional bureau of culture only kept extensive statistics for the Harar National Museum, while combined statistics for the regionally administered museums is based on cumulative ticket sales, which yield incomplete data. However, from the available data we may extrapolate some important visitor trends in a diachronic perspective. The numbers show that Ethiopian nationals<sup>64</sup> account for about half of the visitors to the Harar National Museum (HNM). Furthermore, according to interviews with staff of Ada Gar and the Rimbaud Culture Center, also here, about half of the

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<sup>63</sup> Source: Harari People National Regional State, Office of the Bureau of Culture, August 2006.

<sup>64</sup> Ethiopian expatriates are counted as "Ethiopian Visitors" by museum staff.

visitors are Ethiopian, while visitors to Sherif's Private Museum, according to Sherif himself, are predominantly Ethiopian.

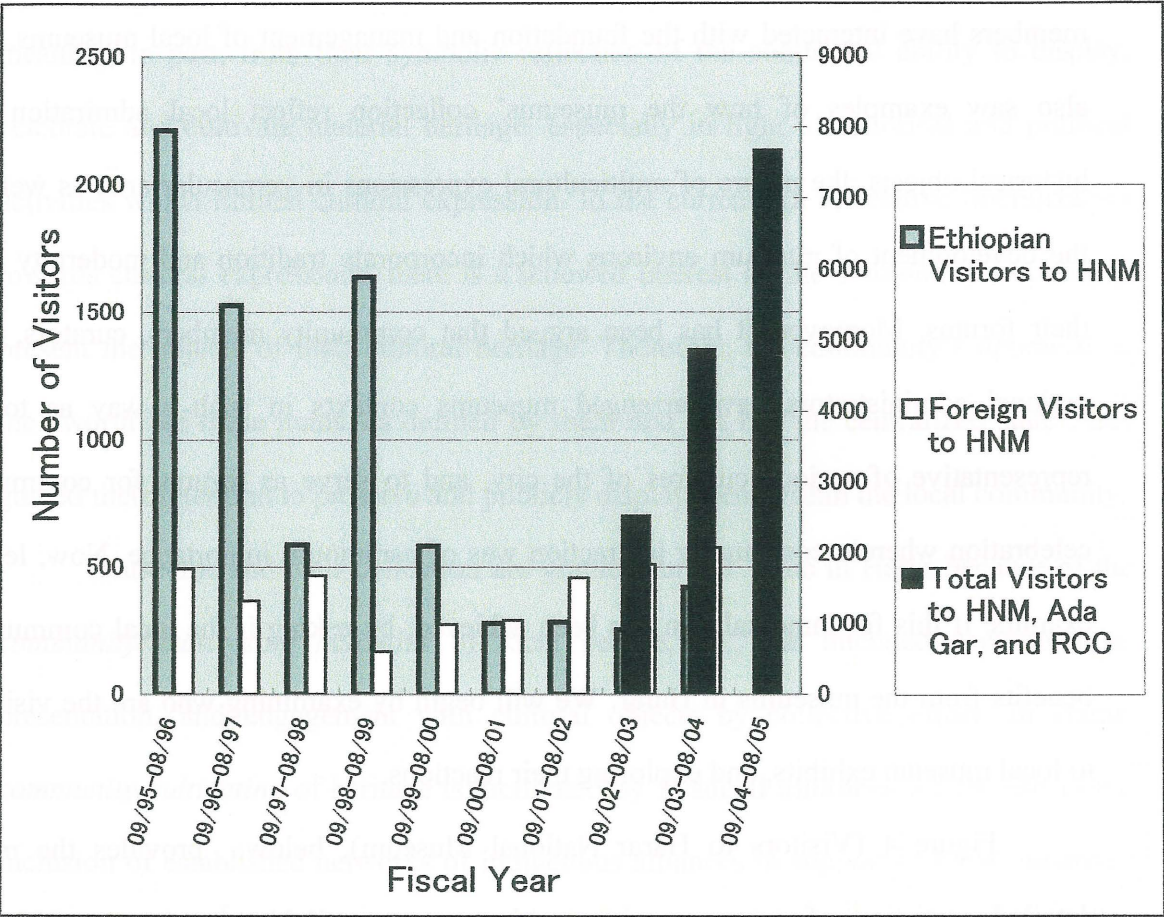


Figure 4. Visitors to Harar National Museum (HNM)\*

\* Visitor statistics were not available for March, April and May of 1998, or for August of 1999.

In order to supplement the formal data available on visitor statistics, further insights were gained from the guestbook entries, which were available for every museum in Harar<sup>65</sup>. Table 6 (Guestbook entries from the museums of Harar), below, lends support in favor of the predominance of Ethiopian visitors to local museums. Furthermore, the content of the entries themselves reveal that a significant portion of foreign language entries are written by Ethiopian expatriates.

<sup>65</sup> Zekaria (n.d.) noted that the first guestbook of the *Ada Gar* museum contained more than one thousand entries, all accumulated in less than two years. Guestbooks prior to 1998 could not be located.

**Table 6. Guestbook Entries from the Museums of Harar**

	Range of dates	Ethiopian language	Foreign language
Ada Gar	1998-2006	174	79
Harar National Museum	1991-2006	283	124
Sherif Private Museum	1997-2006	1,736	455
Rimbaud Culture Center	2000-2006	752	1,045

But the guestbook entries reveal much more than *who is visiting*; they reveal their *reactions* and help us to understand if these museums are relevant to the local community. In more than 4,000 guestbook entries there is minimal criticism: negative comments are usually limited to calls for more systematic explanations, and for the establishment of better organized displays. However, the recurrent themes throughout all of the entries include reflections on how objects relate to the diversity of Ethiopia's ethnic groups; and similarities with a variety of international cultures. Without doubt, the most predominant theme in guestbook entries is an overwhelming emotional response to objects and historical/ contemporary significance the cultural objects that make up the museum collections themselves. As shown previously in Table 5, the bulk of items in the local museum are the result of folk craft activity. These craft objects, while often antique examples, usually remain representative – perhaps only more refined – illustrations of everyday household objects. Furthermore, traditional and contemporary household objects, while isolated (sometimes for reverence's sake) in the museum context, nonetheless serve to actively engage the viewer in the cultural ideations associated with the objects.

Perhaps unexpectedly, the relationship between viewer, object and environment is further sentimentalized in the local museum of this research because three of the four museums of this chapter are actually contained within the physical setting of a house. The significance of this association of Harari museums with a “home” whose residents are a “community” may be made clear in the following quote from Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton:

The home is an empirical and normative entity, constituted through time by the objective patterns of psychic activity that people invest in different activities.<sup>66</sup> This home is a goal or intention that becomes realized through the attention the inhabitants give to it. In other words, the home is a craft cultivated by all of its members (Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981:138).

It is possible that an subconscious emotional response to the local museums is prompted by the combination of many factors which merge object, environ, historical meaning, and group aspirations. Certainly the guestbook entries give evidence of the potential ways in which material heritage – when made easily accessible in local museums – can prompt positive emotive responses from the intended audience. Even more, the exhibition of these folk arts actively engages and stimulates the community in their quest to (re)define/refine themselves as the following examples illustrate:

I, myself, am a Harari. My knowledge, however, of my own community is very shallow. Today is a day which has great significance in my whole life. All the things that I have seen are arresting, dramatic, and incredible...This museum shall be given all possible attention by the region and by the people themselves...

– M.Z.Y. (11 May 2002)

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<sup>66</sup> Related discussion on the investment of psychic energy in the performance of an activity may be found in Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. 1990. *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. New York: Harper and Row.



I have seen a lot [of] places and some historic places in my country, but today holds the greatest value. My visit with my [family to this museum] has the greatest value of all. Words could not express how much we are happy to come back here and [are] proud of being Ethiopian...What I have seen should be preserved with the highest prestige...

– F.N.M., Bahir Dar (30 July 2005)

Heritages that [are] collected and transferred to generations like Harari will be exemplary for Siltie people. [This is] not only history about Hararis, it is really a history of Islam in Ethiopia and a lesson which teaches [us] the resemblance of [our] ancestors.

– A.K., Siltie Zone (January 2006)

The above examples and the plethora of others demonstrate that objects in Harar's collections are not static artifacts; they are a catalyst through which people define/redefine themselves. As suggested previously, the significance (value) is partially derived from the item's symbolic reflection of the communal and individual's right to celebrate, preserve and cultivate their heritage. Especially in light of the complex history of infringements on cultural expression, Ethiopians are generally much more likely to articulate their affinity to cultural objects. In the current era of relative liberalization, there is an unprecedented opportunity for researchers to explore the meanings behind such expressions by developing methodology to evaluate visitors' feedback, which has not previously been considered in cultural development practices in Ethiopia. Such feedback certainly needs to be recognized in a separate study in order to adapt conservation programs which combine heritage and living cultural practices in sustainable and engaging locally-based museums.

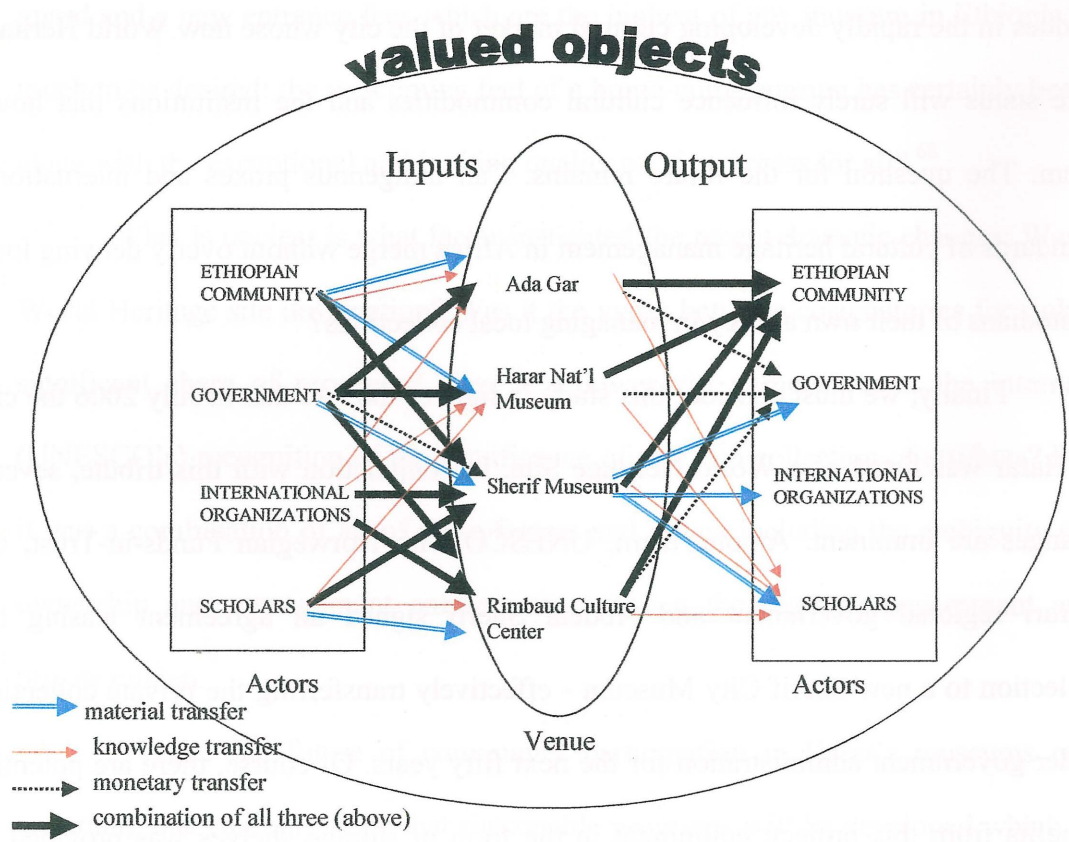
## 4.6 Conclusion

The case studies of museums have shown that a variety of actors are involved in heritage conservation and management in Harar. Indeed, the dynamics among these actors, and between museums (objects and personnel) and visitors has been central to the totality this study. The goal of this investigation was to approach cultural heritage conservation as a necessarily social practice. Likewise, the research aimed to show that, historically, the efforts of local-level conservation of cultural heritage initially resulted from indigenous initiatives at accessing their social networks, followed by effective joint management of heritage by a multi-ethnic community working in consort with regional government administrators and others.

In Harar, effective traditional and innovative modes of management by local social units have shown that, even with limited access to resources and personnel, self-initiative at commendable resource management can be achieved. Thus far, the capacity of Harari regional government administrators (who have ancestral and other cultural links with the city) to actively seek alliances with these local organizations has been an important factor in heritage management and revival. Moreover, the inclusion of contemporarily relevant cultural programming in these cultural centers represents an flexible and fresh approach to bridging the gap between old and new, rarely seen in the museums in the national capital. In essence, the institutional housing of material heritage in Harar has been commendable not due to any singular actor (or group thereof), but because of successful alliances and innovative actions of pertinent parties.

Figure 5 represents a schematic model of activities surrounding material heritage preservation in the museums of Harar. These activities are based on different types of community cultivating activities “INPUTS” and revolve around a multiethnic core of

valued material objects. The INPUTS include donations of objects, money, skills from citizens, regional administration and foreign interests. The direct and indirect “OUTPUTS” are the outcomes that have been garnered by different parties and may be viewed as the positive results of heritage management in Harar, although some uncertainty remains as to the long-term impacts related to, for instance, the increase in tourism that can be anticipated in the near future.



**Figure 5. Flow of relationships and activities pertaining to heritage preservation in Harar’s museums**

In conclusion, local level museums presented in this chapter illustrate the way by which those cultural objects which represent valued possessions at the communal level, when made easily accessible in the context of local African museums, *do* actively engage, and stimulate the community in their quest to (re-)define/refine themselves in an increasingly globalized environment. While the commendable efforts of the community have been recorded herein, there remains an imminent challenge to the community, administrators, and donor organizations to collectively manage these venues in the rapidly developing cultural market of the city whose new World Heritage Site status will surely influence cultural commodities and the institutions that house them. The question for the future remains: Can indigenous praxes and international standards of cultural heritage management in Africa merge without overly denying local custodians of their own agency in managing local collections?

Finally, we must consider this study in light of the fact that in July 2006 the city of Harar was listed as a World Heritage Site. In conjunction with this tribute, several changes are imminent. Among them, UNESCO with Norwegian Funds-in-Trust, the Harari regional government and Abdela Sherif signed an agreement leasing his collection to a new Sherif City Museum - effectively transferring the private collection under government administration for the next fifty years. Of course, there are potential benefits from this project; equipment in the form of storage shelves was provided as part of this project, the Centre for Heritage Development in Africa (CHDA) has provided training in inventory and documentation to local curators, including Sherif, and plans to produce catalogues of the collection have begun<sup>67</sup>. Certainly, these are all important steps towards raising the standards for local museums.

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<sup>67</sup> Source: [http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL\\_ID=32729&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php-URL_ID=32729&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html) , accessed on 10 March 2008.

However, some recent developments put a cautionary addendum to the present study. In July 2007, the Sherif City Museum was officially opened in the former home of Ras Tafari (Haile Selassie) in the center of the walled city. Although construction of another building had already begun, which was to house the new “city museum”, the celebration of the Harar Millennium in July 2007 taxed the Bureau of Culture to find another accommodation quickly. At present, the Tafari house offers a spacious alternative to Sherif’s own private home. On the other hand, the addition of an armed guard and a new entrance fees which are the highest of any museum in Ethiopia leaves much to be desired: the welcoming feel of a home-cum-museum has certainly been lost, along with the exceptional and inviting quality of “free access for all”.<sup>68</sup>

What is unclear is what factor instigated the recent dramatic changes: Was it the World Heritage site designation? Was it the vying between cosignatories for rights to a significant share of proceeds? Was it a power-trip garnered from the international (UNESCO’s) recognition of the significance of this rich collection of artifacts? Perhaps it was a combination of all of these factors and others including the ambiguity of both ownership and management entitlements between the regional government and the private citizen.

While the future of community participation in Harar’s museums remains uncertain, one can only hope that sustainable programs will be developed which do not undermine some of the indigenous systems of alliances which have been integral to the development of these institutions. For example, previously, as much as forty percent of Sherif’s collection was given to him in-trust. Certainly that “trust” was a special

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<sup>68</sup> Since 2005, the Harar National Museum, Rimbaud Culture Center, and Ada Gar have charged 1 to 3 birr for Ethiopians, and 3 to 10 birr for foreigners. With the opening of Sherif City Museum, access to Sherif’s collection, which was previously free, costs 5 to 10 birr for Ethiopians, 30 birr for foreigners, with an additional 10 birr fee for photo or video use. Even the well-known IES Museum in Addis Ababa charges a relatively more modest rate of 3 birr for Ethiopian adults and 20 birr for foreign adults.

accolade to the integrity of the dedication of esteemed private citizens in the maintenance of the objects. In some cases, like that of precious manuscripts or music recordings, the items were not “given” to Sherif, but “loaned” with the resultant expectation that they would remain de facto property of the donor. This special relationship that Sherif built up with his community is what helped his museum collection grow when other collections like that of Ada Gar suffered from stagnation after the initial large donations of *afõça* groups. There is no certainty that such a trust remain after the official merging of management of these local collections. Equally important, the future autonomy of private custodians of material heritage may now be compromised, leaving many questions to be answered in the near future: Is it impossible for international donors and regional officials to give significant incentives to private collectors without the conditional wholesale transfer of collections from the private domain? Can the vulnerability of indigenous agency in heritage management enterprises be mediated successfully, and by whom?

## **Chapter 5. Conclusion and recommendations**

*“The transmission of a heritage and the process of cultivation, which are at the heart of cultural life, are dependent on some enduring continuity to the meanings that are to be conveyed, which in turn involves an internalization of the moral standards and norms of the community and a continual refinement of these standards”*

*-Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton 1981:239*

### **5.0 Comparisons of national and local level museums in Ethiopia**

A variety of Ethiopian museum practices and levels of community engagement thereupon were presented in the case studies of Chapters 3 and Chapter 4, but explicit comparisons between the national and local level museums in Ethiopia were delayed for the present section in order to prelude a conclusion which reflects not only upon the differences but also the numerous similar circumstances facing all of Ethiopia’s museums. The comparisons of national and local level museums presented below also serve as summary precursors to recommendations, which shall be based on strengths and weaknesses of existing circumstances.

#### **5.0.1 Differences in historical foundation and administration**

To begin with, some interesting comparisons can be drawn from the historical foundation of the national level vs. local level case studies. Both the Ethiopian National Museum and IES Museum are more than fifty years old and were founded under the reign and organizational prerogatives of Haile Selassie. The objects in these early collections in Addis Ababa were based upon donations from the royal family, and items collected by college affiliates who gathered the items for the purpose of archaeological and anthropological researches. At the time of their establishment the museums were

administrated both by appointed Ethiopians (many of whom had training abroad) and foreign experts.

Contrastingly, the museums of Harar are relatively new, having been officially established between the early 1980s and 2000. While some objects belonging to both national and local rulers and elites can be found in all of Harar's museums (See Appendix B), the majority of items were donated by or purchased from non-elite community members for the purpose of safekeeping and public display, but not for research. The first of Harar's museums, *Ada Gar* was established during the Derg regime but management of the facility was independent of government interference, while the city's subsequent museums were established after the fall of the Derg and all have been administered by or – as in the Sherif City Museum case – became latterly aligned with the regional bureau of culture under the relatively relaxed umbrella of the FDRE cultural policy. It is only since 1999, with the renovation of Rimbaud Culture Center, that Harar's museums sought foreign assistance, primarily in the form of expert consultants. Then, beginning in 2002 and 2006 respectively, the World Bank's Ethiopian Cultural Heritage Project and UNESCO (with Norway Funds-in-Trust) began offering infrastructural support and skills training to local museum staff. Thus, despite the recent increase in foreign assistance, the administration of Harar's museums has always been achieved with Ethiopian managers, many of whom are native to Harar.

#### 5.0.2 *Differences in museums objectives*

There are also differences in the expressed missions of national and local museums of this study. The Ethiopian National Museum is a department of ARCCH and its missions therefore fall within the objectives of that authority and are thus



concerned with conservation, documentation, and research.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, IES Museum's mission, has been clearly expressed: "The Museum of the IES operates with the main objectives of preserving cultural and historical objects for the present and future generations, and providing continuous assistance to researchers."<sup>70</sup> Because both of these national level museums have similar emphasis on research, the visitors to the museum tend to be affiliated with universities and colleges (educated elites), or are comprised of visiting expatriates and foreigners. Furthermore, it is clear that the national level museums above do not have mission statements that support programming or activities that engage non-academic community members. As such, only a limited, often elite group of persons are engaged in the current activities of these institutes. Indeed, the mission statements even belie the degree of access actually granted to scholars for research. The average Ethiopian university student must pull strings to access items in the museum collections for investigative study. Likewise, despite the absurd yearly fee of US\$250 required for affiliation with IES, even the most seasoned foreign researchers are rarely allowed access to collections for measuring, making digital photos, or even viewing items (especially items from the manuscript collection). This is certainly a lamentable situation, especially because the limited research that has been carried out by curators and researchers from Ethiopia and abroad has proven that museum collections provide a wealth of resources whose study can further advance the field of Ethiopian studies.

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<sup>69</sup> According to "A proclamation to provide for research and conservation of cultural heritage" (Negarit Gazeta 209/2000), ARCCH has the following objectives: (1) carry out a scientific registration and supervision of Cultural Heritage so that, Cultural Heritage, as bearing witnesses to history, may be handed down from generation to generation; (2) protect Cultural Heritage against man-made and natural disasters; (3) enable the benefits of Cultural Heritage assist in the economic and social development of the country; and (4) discover and study Cultural Heritage.

<sup>70</sup> Source: <http://www.aau.edu.et/research/ies/museum/index.htm>

As far as the local museum examples are concerned, no written missions exist. However, the founding and contemporary curators and various heads of the bureau of culture that the author interviewed between 2003 and 2007 have expressed general objectives. Oral interviews revealed that the missions of Harar's museums are twofold: 1) the increased illicit export of cultural property and the limited current production of many historically significant objects types necessitates efforts to conserve a sampling of cultural items so that future generations may have access to the material history of the city's various ethnic groups; and 2) in light of previous prohibitions on cultural expressions, museums function as a method of redress – providing public venues where the local community (Harari and Ethiopian) are encouraged to take pride in their patrimonies.

Interestingly, administrators in Harar made no express mention of the role that museums play in formal academic pursuits (scholastic investigation or publications, etc.). Nevertheless, when detailing the variety of Ethiopian school groups that visit the sites, and the number of domestic and foreign researchers engaging themselves in the museum's resources, administrators referred simply to the fact that edification (formal and informal) is encouraged in local museums. Certainly, this is a modest portrayal of the access afforded to scholars in Harar. With presentation of credentials or even strong displays of interest, the author observed that all Ethiopian and foreign researchers could have supervised access to all objects in every museum of Harar. In view of this dissertation's interest in community engagement in museums, this *right of contact* puts local museums in an exceptionally advantageous position.

### 5.0.3 Differences in funding

Another difference between the museums can be found in their sources of funding. The central government funds the national level case study museums: IES is a research institute of AAU and is thus funded through the Ministry of Education, while the Ethiopian National Museum – under the authority of ARCCH –is accountable to the Ministry of Tourism and Culture for funding. On the other hand, local museums in Harar have a mixed history of government-sponsored alliances. Harar National Museum and Rimbaud Culture Center have relied on regional government funds since their founding, with Rimbaud Culture Center receiving additional sponsorship from international affiliates. Contrastingly, although *Ada Gar* has been administered by the regional bureau of culture for several years, the culture house has maintained a degree of financial autonomy – a legacy of the original non-governmental administration of the museum; entrance fee proceeds are kept in *Ada Gar*'s separate bank account whose funds are only used for renovation work at *Ada Gar*, and not combined with the general funds of the regional bureau of culture.

Similarly, until 2007, Mr. Sherif only received what he considered a “token” salary from the regional bureau of culture, in payment for his “voluntary” services of museum management. Mr. Sherif therefore relied on monetary donations of visitors to provide the income needed to support his family and increase the collection of his museum. Interestingly, though hard to quantify, it is not unreasonable to assume that Sherif Private Museum – that began as the only free- entrance museum of this study – previously garnered significant financial support from visitors. However, now that the new Sherif City Museum has become the museum with the highest entry fee in Ethiopia,

significant proceeds are at stake and it is uncertain whether Mr. Sherif or the regional government is entitled to these.

Of course, as explained in Chapter 3, culture has traditionally been an underfunded sector of social services in Ethiopia. Therefore, the central and regional governments must rely on both international assistance and entrance fees to accommodate cultural programming. However, if one considers that entrance fee affects the accessibility of cultural centers to local audiences, especially in Least Developed Countries, then it becomes obvious that high ticket prices only constrain the ability of local communities to engage in museums. In this respect, except for the new Sherif City Museum, all of the case studies presented herein offer extremely reasonable rates of local access to heritage collections as shown in Table 7.

**Table 7. Entrance Fees for Museums in 2007 (prices in birr)**

	National Museum	IES Museum	Ada Gar	Harar Nat'l Museum	Sherif City Museum	Rimbaud Culture Ctr.
Foreign Adult	10	20	10	5	30	10
Ethiopian Adult	2	3	2	1	10	2
Foreign Student	10	10	10	3	30	10
Ethiopian Student	0.5	1	2	1	10	2
All residents of Harar					5	
Video recording charge			10		10	
Notes			All prices doubled in 2005	Foreigner's fee raised from 3 birr in 2007	Free entrance to all before 07/2007	All prices doubled in 2005

#### 5.0.4 *Difference in accessibility and engagement with the wider community*

Finally, there are significant differences in visitor interactions with museum conditions, which influences the degree to which the audience can become physically and mentally engaged in the public presentation of heritage. In terms of the structures themselves, the buildings of the national case studies are surrounded by the Addis Ababa University campus and are accessible only after gaining security clearance at the gates: a task which often involves a full body pat-down and surrendering of identification. In contrast, guards are at the entrance of each museum in Harar, but they were never observed making security checks of visitors. Instead, local guards facilitated entrance by collecting posted visitor fees and dissuading the occasional vagrant from disturbing visitors inside the museum compounds.<sup>71</sup>

Once the visitor has gained access inside the various museums, they are also met with different styles of presentation. Recalling Chapter 3, there are a wealth of artifacts that celebrate the “birth of humanity” and the opulence of Ethiopian regalia in the Ethiopian National Museum, while the collection of artifacts in the IES Museum is heavily celebratory of the Aksum Empire, Christian heritage, and the Imperial legacy. But there are also diversified collections of other ethnic and religious heritages present in Addis Ababa (especially at the IES Museum), and contemporary artwork is on display in the form of solo exhibitions at the National Museum and group exhibits at IES. However, the fact that the majority of objects are encased in glass or cordoned off likely gives the audience an overall impression that these national collections represent objects that *intended to be protected from the public*.

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<sup>71</sup> Beginning in July 2007, the Harari regional government stationed an armed policeman inside the compound of Sherif City Museum. This marks a departure from the *laissez faire* attitude previously noted by museum guards.

On the other hand, aside from the many rare manuscripts, the heritage collections in Harar's museums mainly consist of everyday cultural items from the various ethnic groups of the region. Even if contemporary paintings and elements of elite regalia can be found in Harar's collections, vernacular arts are the main components of local exhibitions. Furthermore these items are rarely encased; instead, they are displayed upon tables and shelves, or hung on the walls, as perhaps they would have been *in situ*. Undoubtedly, the simple display methods of Harar's museums are a conservator's nightmare in terms of temperature, lighting and moisture requirements, and security. However, the display techniques – combined with the unobtrusive entrance procedure to access the museum compounds – likely encourage the visitors to consider that the local collections represent objects that are *intended to be accessed by the public*. Moreover, the inclusion of contemporarily relevant activities (on-site craft production, open-to-the-public lectures, group celebrations of festivals and weddings, computer centers on-site, etc.) in Harar's museum spaces represents flexible and fresh approaches to bridging the gap between old and new that allows for a more “approachable” community engagement with the collections; similar activities which are accessible to non-university affiliates are rarely seen in the national level museums of this study.

#### 5.0.5 Summary of similarities

The sections above reviewed the many ways in which the national and local museums of this study differ. Certainly these two types of museums seem more dissimilar than alike. However, national and local case studies do share important similarities, the most significant of which is that the visitors to all of the museums are predominantly Ethiopians citizens (and persons of Ethiopian descent). So while the author emphasized

from the outset the need to evaluate the relevance of museums to the native community, the findings have shown that the patron statistics (which can certainly be increased in the future with some effort) reflect that the Ethiopian community is partaking of their cultural heritage in museums and therefore, these institutions do have a pertinent niche in contemporary Ethiopian society.

Other analogous factors among national and local level museums in Ethiopia are much less encouraging as they lie in the constraints faced in cultural heritage management. For example, the sometimes arbitrary and/or political postings of administrators in the culture sector can lead to problems in management of bureaucracy and the biased implementation of cultural policy. This becomes even more problematic with the frequent re-organization of executive organs of the federal government, which leads to the constant reshuffling of limited staff, thereby diminishing the opportunities for the development of proficiency through familiarity with procedures. Such problems are not limited to the central government; although regional autonomy allows for the Harari regional administrators to implement alternative practices in the culture sector (as in others sectors), local bureaucratic divisions still usually follow the trend of the federal ministries. Likewise, when the culture sector was aligned with sports in the national ministry, so it was at the regional level; when the culture and tourism sector were merged nationally, the regional organization changed similarly. Furthermore, within the ministries and bureaus there tends to be a lack of information sharing and expertise sharing within sub-branches. A lack of systematic standardized documentation, inventory and statistics gathering methodologies between departments, and even within an individual department is an unfortunately common circumstance that constrains the efficiency of government administrators and the museums in their domain.

Moreover, with only a few Ethiopians formally qualified in heritage management, there simply has not been enough trained staff for museum work. Surely if the museums in the nation's capital city must rely on relatively few expert workers, one can imagine how the situation in Harar is more inadequate in this respect. It must be noted, however, that Ethiopia's cultural administrators are not blind to these inadequacies, which is why IES now offers a graduate program in Ethiopian Studies that includes training in museology and ethnomusicology. This represents an important first step in boosting the number of Ethiopia's trained experts in heritage management.

Similarly national and regional museum staff have recently engaged in skills training following the General Conference of UNESCO held October 2005, in which UNESCO and ICOM proposed offering courses in basic museology for African professionals in order to promote capacity building. Ethiopia took the initiative and was the first country to respond to this proposal. Subsequently, a *Training Workshop in Museum Basics for Ethiopian Museum Professionals* was held in Addis Ababa for fifteen Ethiopian museum professionals on 13-24 March 2006 (ICOM 2006).<sup>72</sup> This workshop was aimed at addressing many of the concerns mentioned as constraints earlier in this section, and is an initiative that begins to mediate some difficulties mentioned throughout this study. Moreover, an important facet of this pilot workshop was that it included visits to ten of Ethiopia's museums by the Ethiopian delegation of museum professionals, UNESCO and ICOM representatives. All four of the museums in Harar were included in the itinerary of the workshop visits, allowing preliminary firsthand assessments by pertinent parties with an interest at considering future options

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<sup>72</sup> An Introduction to Museology course was held in Addis Ababa during this same period: 13-24 March 2006.



in museum development.<sup>73</sup> By requesting to be the first recipient of this UNESCO training workshop, Ethiopia is at the forefront of the trend to systematically train African museum professionals at the national and (importantly) local levels through domestic activities that attempt to address the concerns that may be particular to the given locales. Thus, despite the fact that Ethiopian's museums and cultural administrators are faced with limitations that are the outcome of a long history of sociopolitical tensions and narrow economic margins, there have been important recent advances to improve capacity building.

## **5.1 Conclusion**

The objectives of this research were set forth in Chapter 1 and reflect the author's aim to contextualize the management and conservation of vernacular arts in Ethiopian museums from a historical sociopolitical perspective, while introducing the historical limitations to/contemporary forms of community engagement in the custodianship of cultural objects in museums. With these objectives in mind, examples of heritage management practices in Addis Ababa were provided, especially in order to highlight national trends and to draw comparisons with historical practices elsewhere in Africa. Nevertheless, the primary aim of this research was to offer a rare view of material heritage management by an African community in institutions that lie outside of national capitals: the focus being on community initiatives and community integration in museum activities. To this end, particular attention was given to illustrating the

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<sup>73</sup> Also, a mixture of national, private, open-air, religious and secular museums was incorporated into the workshop.

cooperation between regional, community and individual actors in heritage management at the local level in the publicly accessible museums of Harar.

The particular interest in vernacular arts in this research stems from the significant presence of such historically informative objects in several of the case study museums, and also from the important contemporary relationships between such folk arts and the activities of Ethiopian peoples. Without doubt, the degree of appreciation of museums among visitors is affected by their ability to relate the collections to their own lives (past, present, aspired). Vernacular arts provide a relevant means of engagement to Ethiopian citizenry and therefore are indispensable elements in this study.

The dynamics among the pertinent actors (citizens, administrators), as well as the dynamics between museums (objects and personnel) and visitors has been central to this study. Certainly, Ethiopian museums as public institutions, could not be effectively researched without consideration of social contexts, cultural policy, the collections themselves, and visitor response – for each of these elements are crucial and inter-related fundamentals in the public presentation of cultural heritage in the nation. Furthermore, since this investigation tried to approach cultural heritage conservation as a necessarily social practice, a multidisciplinary survey was warranted, which hopefully will allow for a diverse range of applications of the findings. Specifically, as the first in-depth research documenting national and regional museum practices in Ethiopia, the present research was carried out with the hopes of advancing future comparative studies that link cultural policy and administrative praxes to community-based heritage management, and to African museology, in general. Moreover, having been informed on the nature of the various constraints encountered in community custodianship of material heritage, future cultural development projects have an opportunity (and

obligation) to better evaluate the means by which local actors can establish efficient alliances, which may lead to sustainable development programmes reflecting the interests and goals of local community members.

As pointed out in Chapter 2, recently the concept of what qualifies as a “museum” is no longer obligatorily circumscribed by the conservative historical framework of institutions holding this label. Especially with the rise of a plethora of non-Western, non-traditional institutions claiming this label, there is increased awareness that the “museums” of the today (be they cultural centers, memorials, galleries, or others) are institutions *in the service of the public*; as such, greater resource allocation should be made to increasing *community engagement*. Perhaps this “community engagement” came as an afterthought to colonial era museums in Africa and also the older museums in Addis Ababa, but in Harar it was a fundamental strategy in the development of museums from the outset. Of course, the significance of community participation in heritage management and decision-making at the local level in Africa, as in the world at-large, cannot be underestimated. It is quite important then, that the case studies of Harar’s museums have shown just how the awareness of the importance of community engagement in such enterprises as local museum projects, has not been an imported strategy, but an indigenous methodology which can serve as a prototype of future similar enterprises in Ethiopia and beyond.

Finally, it has been shown that Ethiopia’s museum administrators, especially in Addis Ababa, remain challenged in many respects to promote research into national customs and cultures, particularly by Ethiopian researchers. They also must continue making efforts to address the issue of elitism in access to cultural heritage. Nevertheless, one cannot deny that given the past dearth of financial and expertise

resources, the nation has come far, especially under the present government. The FDRE's provisions for a relative decentralization of regional bureaus of culture has allowed for local autonomy (financial and ideological) in cultural heritage management; autonomy not known under previous governments.

The emergence of federal support for cultural programming like the Ethiopian Cultural Heritage Project, the Ethiopian Millennium Secretariat projects of 2007-2008, and the like, marks innovative attempts to sustain and promote, on an unprecedented scale, vernacular arts and community participation in cultural heritage ventures. Essentially, as regards cultural programming, the government seems to be moving towards the support of more local, multiethnic cultural initiatives to which an unparalleled public audience may participate. A rise in the number of *community museums*, or *city museums* (as seen in Table 4 of Chapter 3) reflects, to varying degrees of intensity, the increased access of local communities to the public presentation of heritage. The development of local museums is among the latest focus of regional culture bureaus efforts, perhaps predicting the future trend of community management of cultural heritage in Ethiopia.

In summation, this dissertation has attempted to *understand* the roles and functions of Ethiopian museums in present-day communities and to answer the questions posed early on: what *is* and what *should be* the role of the museum in the community? In line with the trend of today's African museum specialists who are shunning colonial models and aiming for community-relevant displays, this study has tried to put Ethiopia on the map of African museums by looking not only at the institutions themselves and their collections, but also by attempting to quantify and qualify the degree to which the native communities are interacting the museum

environment. In short, this dissertation has tried to elucidate the social relevance of museums in the Ethiopian context. By examining cultural management as a social practice, this research found that owing to successful alliances between community groups, dedicated individual citizens, and regional administrators, the museums in Harar have emerged as community-pertinent venues which join together past and present cultural expressions. The Harar case exemplifies that regional autonomy in implementing Ethiopia's national cultural policy can be effective in supporting local initiatives intended to establish creative methods of community engagement in heritage preservation and heritage education.

## **5.2 Recommendations**

This research has presented details of an indigenous community's attempts at conservation of tangible culture heritage and innovative museum activities in an African city outside of a national capital. The case of local initiatives in Harar demonstrates that there need not be a delineated choice between static conservation and perpetuation of archetypes, and clear abandonment of past ideals for the promotion of novel trends. In fact, what the examples from Harar makes clear is that activities initiated by artists, the community, and small museums in the local context may be exceptionally efficient at approaching a compromise between "preserving the old" and "expanding the possibilities" in an Afrocentric perspective.

The wealth of objects in both the national and local collections, combined with the developments made by Ethiopian administrators (despite significant constraints) has brought unprecedented attention to the nation's museums. Specifically, attention by donor organizations in cooperation with the Ethiopian government has translated into a

series of project proposals, which may affect the concerns of the present study. Thus, as long-term fieldwork into folk crafts, community organizations and museums in Ethiopia have informed the researcher of the complexities facing development programmes in the culture sector, the author offers the following recommendations intended to advise future initiatives.

*1. National and international proposals for museum expansion (or modification) should take a cautious approach to introducing new schemes so that the authentic non-western elements that have been incorporated in the Ethiopian museum experience are not completely displaced in the name of modernization.*

Standardized systems of inventory and documentation, as well as the inclusion of display cases that aid in preservation and security of artifacts are, of course, necessary to the sustainability of museum collections, and it is commendable that government administrators and development agencies are taking an interest in training local museum staff. However, certain features of community museums that Western museum specialist might consider “limitations” – such as venue size and exhibition styles of the local Ethiopian museum – have actually contributed to local interest in the venue. Certainly, the visitor’s ability to interact with the museum collections in a psychologically engaging manner may have been strongly influenced by the apparent absence of physical barriers to the collections.

In fact, I would argue that the particular social context of the city of Harar and her residents have not been fully considered in recent museum development plans. For example, what was previously the most accessible collection in the city has perhaps become the least accessible with the emergence of the new Sherif City Museum in 2007.

Visitors who were previously drawn to the museum because it was barrier-free and they were allowed to physically interact with some of the objects, are now finding that objects are being locked in glass cases. Also, the free entrance that allowed great accessibility to the home collection has been replaced by the highest entrance fee of any museum in the country. Moreover, with armed security guards now inside the compound of this towering renovated structure, the new City Museum has taken on an austere and “official” appearance that many may find daunting.

By all means, steps should be taken to survey the visitor’s expectations of the community or “city” museum so that both accessibility to collections, and community engagement with museum venues are enhanced in ways that benefit the interests of native audiences.

*2. It is imperative to survey and identify influential indigenous persons/groups who are locally regarded as informed custodians of culture heritage and to integrate such persons/groups into all stages of cultural development projects.*

Pertinent local actors can help arbitrate between the needs of the community and project goals, they can contribute to the validation of impact assessments, and eventually minimize misunderstandings between administrators and the public. When local informed parties are willing and capable of joining development projects, their participation should be encouraged and maintained from early in the planning stages. If community appointed consultants (vs. government appointed representatives from a community) are not integrated into planning and implementation activities, then resentment can ensue which can undermine the sustainability of a project in the community, and also make local persons wary of future projects.

Importantly, it is imperative that women are recognized as equal stakeholders in cultural heritage and are therefore given greater roles in its centralized management. For example, in Harar the activities of women's craft guilds and *afōča* are undoubtedly the two most essential organizational systems that relate to the knowledge base of ceremonial use of vernacular arts in the walled city. These organizations have historically been instrumental in the management and promotion of vernacular arts in Harar's museums. Unfortunately, however, these women's groups have not been directly consulted in the recent restructuring plans of Harar's museums. Although, Ethiopian women are only occasionally appointed as administrators in the culture sector, it must be acknowledged that they are more than creators, patrons, and donors of the arts housed in Ethiopian museums. In fact, their familiarity with the intangible heritage associated with cultural objects necessitates their formal and sustained inclusion in project plans.

*3. Ethiopian museum specialists should work to establish an Ethiopian Museum Association and an East African Museum Association to work in support of museum initiatives, programming and promotion in the Horn of Africa.*

Regional networks exist in other areas of Africa, but not in Ethiopia, nor greater East Africa. Nevertheless, workshops with other museum specialists can help promote discussion of regional interest and encourage the transfer of knowledge based on regional experiences. Also, these associations can be a useful vehicle of combined efforts when lobbying for changes in policy and praxis.



Although Ethiopian's have served on regional committees of international museum associates<sup>74</sup>, as an independent national interest group, Ethiopia is not among the 113 National Committees of ICOM. In 2002 and 2003, ICOM offered subsidized membership fees of less than half price for individuals from poorer countries, including Ethiopia. But unfortunately, as of 2006, the former Ethiopian National Committee in ICOM was not yet reorganized.<sup>75</sup> It is uncertain whether ideological or simply geographical distances have precluded the activities of Ethiopian specialists on ICOM committees, but the development of a regional network (an Ethiopia or an East African Museum Association) could follow in the example of WAMP and SAMA in contributing to regional dialogues in the culture sector.

*4. The cultural policy of Ethiopia should be amended to provide greater allowances for the protection of the rights of individual in heritage management and make concessions for communal possession of artifacts in certain exceptional cases.*

In theory, ARCCH is responsible for licensing individuals who wish to keep items in a museum (Negarit Gazeta 2000: Part 1, 6.6; Part 2, 15). However, in practice the bureaucracy involved in this process is daunting, not in least part because even the paperwork required for such authorization may not even exist. As a result, the regional bureaus have to work to "creatively" extend permission on a periodic basis for citizens to maintain private museum collections. Furthermore, although permission may be granted for such a venture, the federal government has the right of expropriation for items deemed important to national heritage (Negarit Gazeta 2000: Part 2, 25.1-25.2).

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<sup>74</sup> Some Ethiopian museum professionals are individual members of AFRICOM. Dr. Kessaye Begashaw and Mr. Ahmed Zekaria, both from Ethiopia, have served as the East Africa Regional Representative (Board of Directors) of AFRICOM in 1999-2003 and 2003-2006, respectively.

<sup>75</sup> Ethiopia's National Committee to ICOM was reported as "under reorganization" in the 1998-2001 period in the ICOM Activity Report 1998-2001:55ff.

This policy – which also states that persons in possession of important heritages must prove (in written form) the route of inheritance of such objects – should only work to discourage citizens from sharing the object in a public forum.

Also, increased financial, infrastructural, and technical support of local initiatives should be made available beyond the World Heritage Sites of the country. Whereas ARCCH with its financial and expertise resources has an obligation to manage these important sites, smaller urban and rural areas also have cultural projects, which should be encouraged and supported from the central government. In fact, as the case of the walled city of Harar has shown, currently there are a growing number of Ethiopian's who want to get involved in heritage management. The actions of Abdela Sherif have certainly contributed to the rise in local interest in museums. In a 2005 interview, Mr. Sherif noted how young people often inquire about starting their own collections.

Seeing me [my efforts], something happened in Harar. They care for the books which they used to throw in the storage places. [Now] they ask me to renew them for preservation. They learnt that heritage is valuable and [locals] who can't keep [their items] well, began to bring them to me, by selling or by [donation]. Some young people now also began to collect songs, coins, stamps and books. Still none of them is organized. But I tell them: you need 10 or 20 years to get organized. Don't hesitate! Go forward! One day you will be more than me.

With the interest in collecting and creating museums growing in the country, greater allowances should be made whereby the federal government gives recognition – in policy and its true implementation – of the right of local actors to register and receive permission in these respects.

*5. Further research should be done on the collections in local museums, with priority to be given to manuscript collections.*

Timely action is needed for manuscript preservation and training of curators in manuscript conservation in Ethiopia. Manuscripts of paper and parchment which are susceptible to humidity, dryness, and pests, are currently over exposed to such conditions due to the lack of suitable housing required for long term conservation of the items. A lack of training in international standards have led local curators to use creative, but perhaps irrevocably damaging methods of emergency conservation, leading to the need for immediate intervention with these precious items of heritage.

Furthermore, it has been suggested that the digitization of antique or rare Ethiopian manuscripts – both within the country and in collections abroad – be systematically completed (Pankhurst 2005). Certainly digitization and the establishment of databases would allow for public access by Ethiopian's to their literary and linguistic legacies, and such work would also assist indigenous and foreign researchers in evaluating and translating these manuscripts. However, Pankhurst's (2005) recommendation that digital copies be kept in Addis Ababa at the Institute of Ethiopian Studies is too modest of a vision. IES does not afford free or readily approachable access to its collections (excepting those glass encased items which are on display in the galleries at any given time). This author believes that once CD-ROMs are available, as many Ethiopian's as feasible should have a chance to access these works. Likewise, a selection of digital copies of important manuscripts could be distributed to all Ethiopian secondary schools and cultural centers, including museums, that have access to computers so that students and the wider community can interactively discover this aspect of their history through expanded multimedia educational programming.

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## **Appendix A: Selected list of resources relating to African museums and collections of African art**

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*Kinshasa Declaration*

ICOM workshop held in Kinshasa, Zaire, 26-28 June 1996.

*Constitution of the International Council of African Museums*

AFRICOM established in Lusaka, Zambia in October 1999.



## **Online resources**

Africa 2009 Programme: <http://www.africa2009.net/>

AfricanColours: <http://www.africancolours.net/>

African-Swedish Museum Network (SAMP): <http://www.samp.org/>

Center for Heritage Development in Africa (CHDA): <http://www.heritageinafrica.org/>

Commonwealth Association of Museums (CAM):  
<http://www.maltwood.uvic.ca/cam/index.html>

Ecole du Patrimoine Africain (EPA): <http://www.epa-prema.net/english/index.asp>

Ethiopian National Museum: <http://www.ethionationalmuseum.com/>

International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM): <http://www.iccrom.org/index.shtml>

Institute of Ethiopian Studies Museum (IES):  
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International Council of African Museums (AFRICOM):  
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Museum of the African Diaspora: <http://www.moadsf.org/index.html>

National Museum of African Art (NMAfA): <http://africanart.si.edu/voice.html>

National Museums of Kenya: <http://www.museums.or.ke/>

Observatory of Cultural Policies in Africa (OCPA):  
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South African Museum Association (SAMA): <http://www.samaweb.org.za/>

West African Museum Programme (WAMP): <http://www.wamponline.org/>

## **Appendix B: Exemplary photographs from Ethiopian museum collections**

### **Museums in Addis Ababa**

The National Museum of Ethiopia and the museum of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies enjoy the privilege of being the Ethiopian museums with highest domestic and international reputes, both for the grandness of their edifices and the collections which they house. The collections of both museums are heavily comprised of ancient and antique items, objects of royal memento, and the work of modern artists.<sup>76</sup> Certainly ethnographic art from the various ethnic groups of Ethiopia have their place in the collections of these two museums, nevertheless status symbol objects<sup>77</sup> are equally distributed in the permanent exhibition of the IES museum, while they are perhaps more prominently displayed in the National Museum.

### **National Museum of Ethiopia**

There is an important amalgamation of artifacts that celebrate paleontological finds in the National Museum's collection; these fossils and other objects are complimented by a large-screen video presentation, and extensive text panels in Amharic, English, and occasionally French. Regalia, royal relics, religious artifacts, archaeological finds, vernacular arts, and the work of notable formally-trained Ethiopian artists<sup>78</sup> are also on exhibited, although usually with only cursory captions in English and Amharic.

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<sup>76</sup> Modern artists refers to Ethiopian artists of recent and present times. Therefore, modern or contemporary Ethiopian artists are not necessarily modernists or practitioners of "modern art". In fact, although socio-political agendas may be seen in the work of many contemporary Ethiopian artist, many of them still do not reject "the past" or "traditional" forms of Ethiopian art.

<sup>77</sup> As pointed out by Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton (1981) objects may become status symbols if they are rare, expensive, antique, associated with persons of high status, or representative of popular new (often imported) commodities.

<sup>78</sup> The National Museum occasionally hosts solo exhibitions of contemporary Ethiopian artists, like the mid 2007 show of Kidist Berhane, one of Ethiopia's few professional women artist.

Examples of the building and its collections prior to its current renovation are presented below.



Photo 1. Façade of the National Museum in 2006.

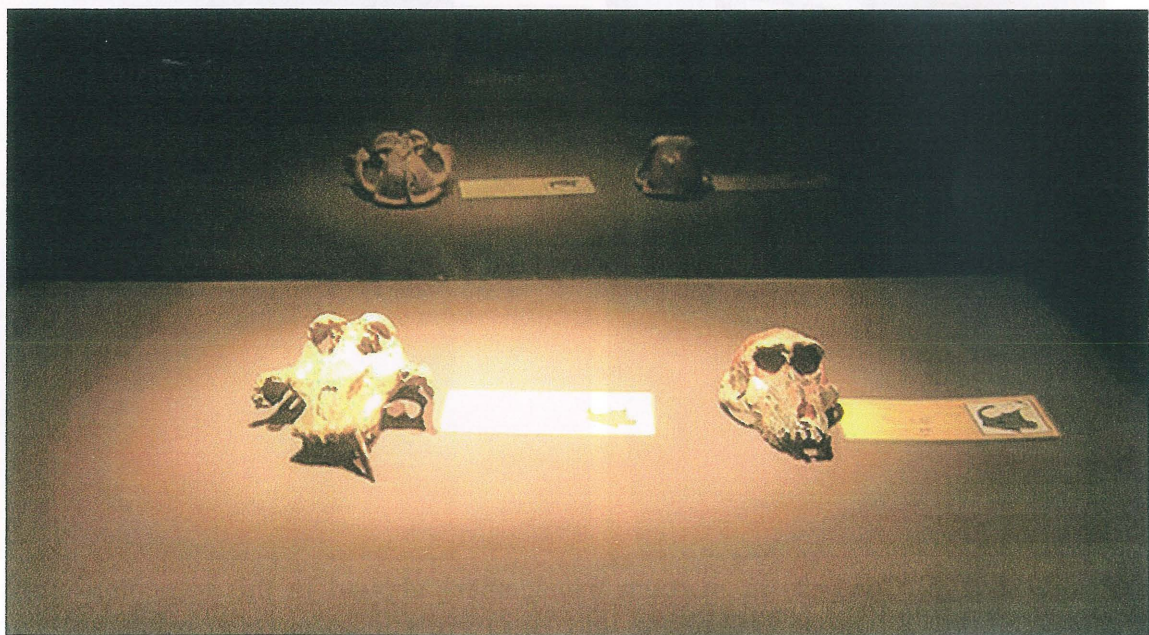


Photo 2. Fossils are displayed in glass cases in dimly lit basement alcoves.



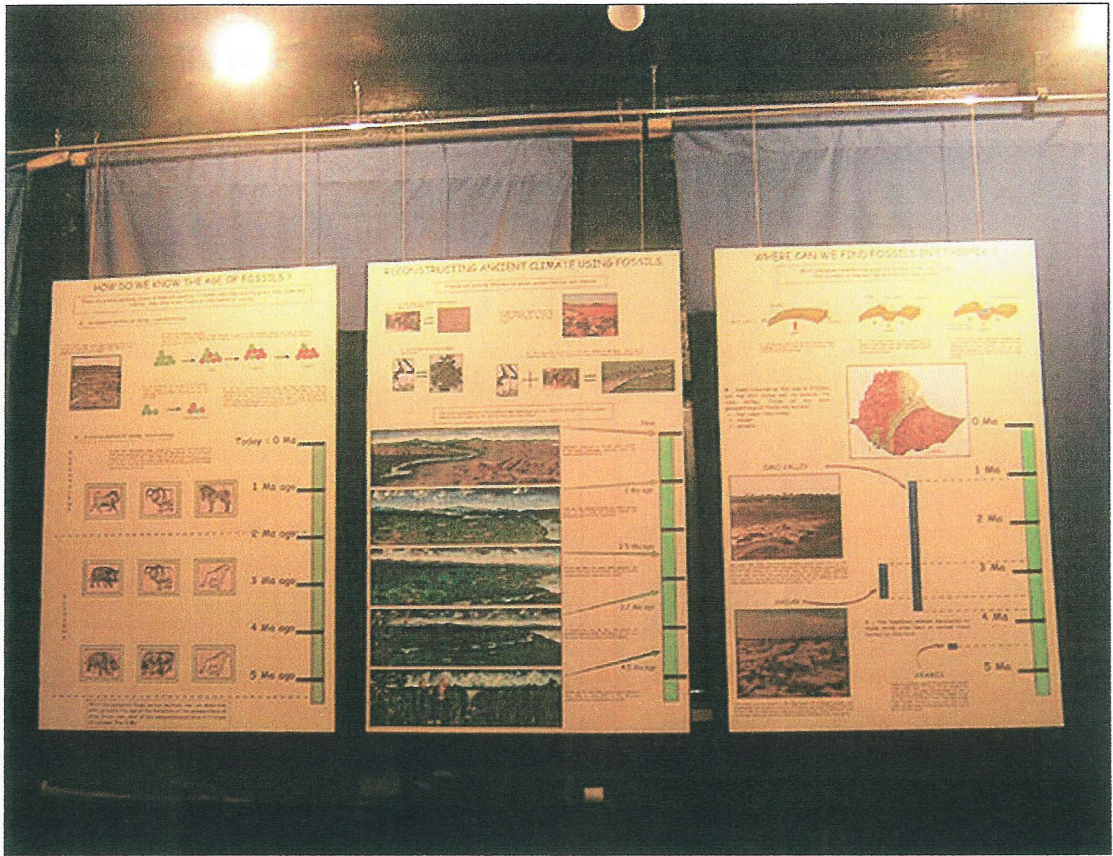


Photo 3. The paleontological exhibit is explained throughout the basement level in a series of panels like the ones above.

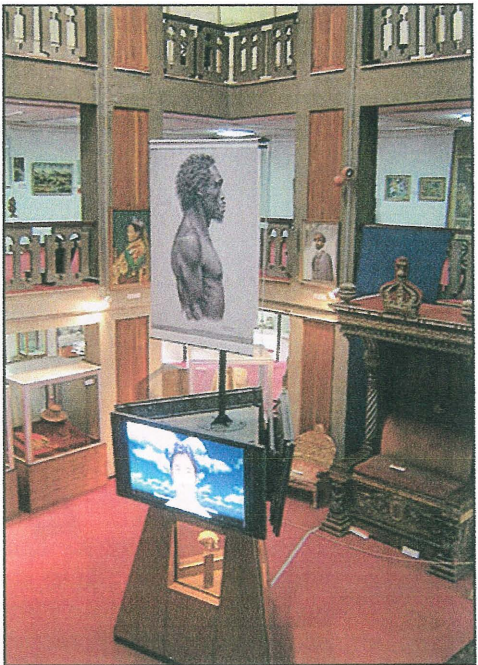
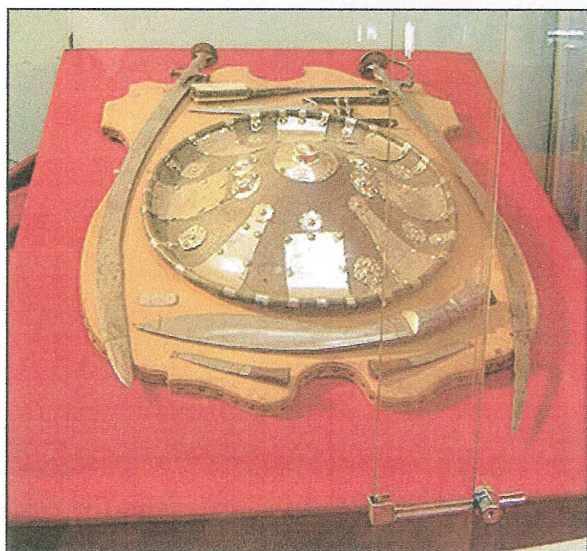


Photo 4 & 5. Contrasts in museum management abound in this museum: debris is scattered in an hallway adjoining the basement’s paleontology exhibition, while advanced multimedia presentations play on TV screens a few meters away.





Photo 6. A section of the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor is dedicated to “handicrafts” which are grouped together under titles such as “weaving” (above), “jewelry”, “baskets”, and the like. Handicrafts are not divided by ethnic group or region, but may be encased together as representative of “Muslim artifacts” or “Christian artifacts”.



**Weapons of Emperor Tewodros II /1855 - 1868/**  
This shield was taken by Captain E. Roberts at the fall of Maqdella in 1868 and was given to the National Museum of Kenya by the captain's family, which later the Kenyan National Museum presented to the Ethiopian government, in Feb. 1985.

- shield - Elephant skin decorated with Silver
- Two Swords
- Four knives - different sizes
- A bayonet

Photo 7 & 8. Royal relics fill a large section of the ground floor and are sometimes accompanied by explanatory texts, most often in English.



## IES Museum

At the Museum of the Institute of Ethiopian Studies the Aksum Empire, Christian heritage, and imperial legacy is heavily celebrated in its exhibits, probably owing to its presence in the former imperial palace, and donations from Haile Selassie (many of which were donations from foreign representatives). Similarly, a large amount of floor space has been dedicated to a growing and diversified collection of other ethnic and religious heritages from all over the country; these heritages include musical instruments, everyday and ceremonial vernacular art, and contemporary artwork that is presented with explanatory text in English and Amharic. Moreover, although international programming in the museum has been limited, temporary exhibitions, like the “AAU Sport: Yesterday and Today” exhibit of 2005, and past manuscript demonstrations by scribes, are recent examples of programming aimed at engaging the audience in a museum environment. Examples of the building and its collections are presented below.



Photo 9. IES, located in the former imperial palace, is directly across from the eastern entrance gate of Addis Ababa University. The building is perhaps the most well known and most photographed building on campus. While the exterior of the building is frequently photographed, photography is prohibited inside the museum.





Photo 10. In the entrance hall of IES, across from the library, photo panels offer the visitor an explanation of the history of the building.

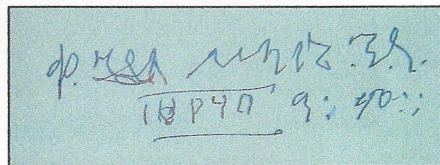
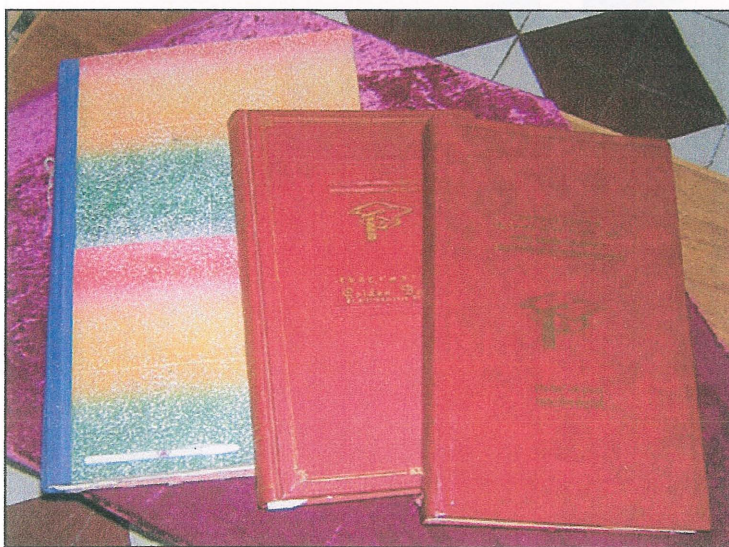


Photo 11 & 12. The guestbooks of the IES Museum generally contain only brief entries, however some important insights into the visitors' perspective, their interests, and background can be gathered from the books. So called "golden" guestbooks are reserved for special guests to the museum, such as Haile Selassie who gave the first signature in the museum's golden guestbook.





Photo 13 & 14. Ornate processional crosses (left), and Christian icons are prized elements in the IES collection: each is labeled and protected behind glass cabinets. Smaller commemorative monuments, such as the Stele from Silte (right), and funerary architecture also has place within the exhibition space.



Photo 15. Painting on canvas is a common medium in contemporary Ethiopian art. In this painting, which the museum purchased from Kese Tesfa, teams of men are playing a game (*genna*).



## Museums in Harar

The museums collections in Harar represent regional foci where there is little or no reference to particular civilizations outside of the regional state of Harar, let alone outside of greater Ethiopia.<sup>79</sup> Instead, the focus is on the interactions, those of accord (borrowed/shared vernacular art traditions) and conflict (weaponry, for instance) between multifarious peoples whose mercantile activity and/or religion brought them to the environs of the walled city. The Harar's museums have a secular presentation of artifacts: even those obviously connected Islamic or Christian religious traditions are afforded no more prominent placement within the museums exhibition space than objects of everyday utility.<sup>80</sup> Most objects in the city's museums are either without labels, or are accompanied with only name labels in Amharic or Harari (and only occasionally English or French). Most objects are not sealed in display cases, as in the museums of Addis Ababa. Examples of museum buildings and their collections are presented below.

### **Ada Gar**



Photo 16 & 17. Garden and façade of Ada Gar in 2006 (left). Renovated garden and façade of the meeting hall annex (right).

<sup>79</sup> Of course, owing to its association to Arthur Rimbaud and the sister city relationship between Charleville-Mezieres, France and the city of Harar, the Rimbaud Culture Center does employ an abundance of text panels referring to the poet's life outside of Harar.

<sup>80</sup> In the case of the most diverse museum collection of the city (Sherif City Museum), the curator is conscious of the need to have a collection that is inclusive of both Christian and Muslim traditions of material heritage. Likewise, the variety of religious objects and symbols of both traditions are afforded display cases, even if Mr. Sherif is a Muslim himself and until 2007 his museum was in his own home.





Photo 18. The walls of Ada Gar museum are covered in a variety of traditional Harari basketry styles and wooden bowls. The *gidir gar* (big room) pictured here has its niches and wardrobes filled with manuscripts, pottery, and embroidered clothing.

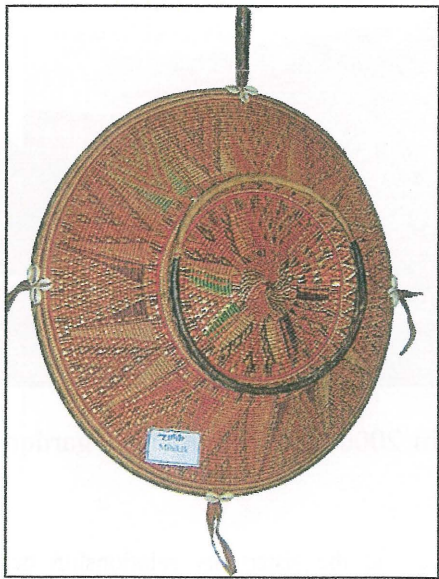


Photo 19. Some items, like the *mihikak* basket (above), have white labels indicating the local name in both Ethiopic script and the roman alphabet.



Photo 20. A 2007 renovation of the Ada Gar yielded a sign hinting at future development plans for a café and on-site handicraft center.



## Harar National Museum



Photo 21. The Harar National Museum (façade, left) hosts the offices of the regional Bureau of Culture and Tourism, among others, a public library, and a museum.



Photo 22. Until 2006, the museum was located on the first floor of the building and objects were exposed to direct sunlight, open windows and doors (photo, right). These negative environmental conditions exacerbate the deterioration of the many baskets, costumes, and manuscripts present.





Photo 23. In 2007, the Harar National Museum was moved in the basement, in part, because environmental controls could be better managed: natural lighting was reduced and florescent bulbs were minimized. Unfortunately, the location hides the museum from public view and, in the absence of a sign outside the building giving notice to the presence of a museum, it is likely that the number of museum visitors will decline in the near future.

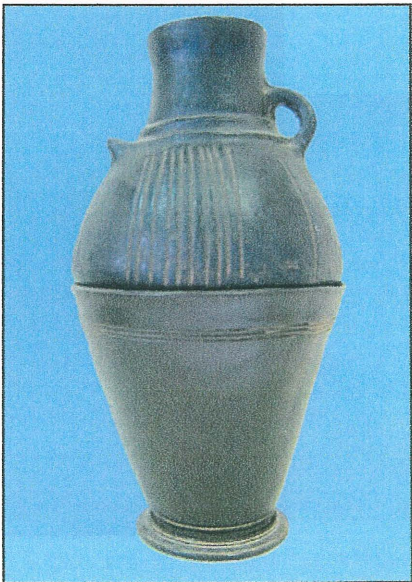


Photo 24 & 25. A leather and brass shield (left), and a vase with stand (right) are examples of the ceremonial and everyday variety of vernacular arts in the collection.



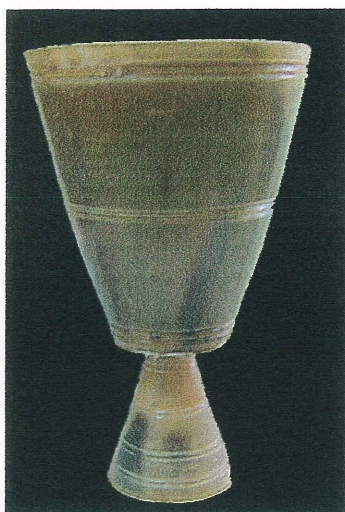


Photo 26 & 27. The vernacular arts of the region include some rarer items that are only used in ceremonial or performance contexts. *Andhaal*, a cup made of horn (left) and a wooden spoon with beaded handle (right) are examples of ceremonial objects.

### Sherif Private Museum (Sherif City Museum)



Photo 28. From 1998 through mid 2007, the Sherif Private Museum was integrated into the home of Abdela Sherif's family. Due to space limitations, many items were stored in the homes of Mr. Sherif's extended family. The scene above is exemplary of one of the daily encounters that Mr. Sherif has with visitors, drinking tea and discussing (in this case) the contents of some of his manuscript collection.





Photo 29 & 30. Examples of the variety of objects in Sherif's museum are above. Although Mr. Sherif is a devout Muslim, relics from the Christian residents of the Harari region can also be found in his museum (photo, left). An exhibit of tools used in bookbinding includes a book press, leather stamps (sealed in plastic), writing instruments, and paper that can be touched by visitors. Mr. Sherif occasionally gives bookbinding demonstrations on site.



Photo 31. The (Ras) Tefari House was partially renovated in 2007 in order to move Mr. Sherif's collection into a larger space for the Harar Millennium celebration of July 2007. The large two story main building (pictured) houses the renamed "Sherif City Museum". The new venue lacks a display system than might deter theft of many of the smaller items on exhibit, but administrators are planning to move large storage cabinets from the Bureau of Culture's offices to the museum premises.





Photo 32. Examples of embroidered Harari, Amhara, and Oromo ceremonial clothing are hung in the main building of the Sherif City Museum.



Photo 33. Pottery, baskets, drums, spoons and hair combs are examples of items donated to or purchased by Mr. Sherif. The medallions, military insignia, and (slave or prisoner) shackles mounted on wooden boards were found by Sherif and his family members during amateur archaeology missions. The more abundant domestic medallions come from former battlefields and can still be found in the outskirts of the town after heavy rains, while other medallions represent domestic awards for achievements in sports, or are relics of former international military presence in the city.





Photo 34. Perhaps the most historically and monetarily valuable items in the museum can be found in the manuscript collection. Manuscripts are susceptible to humidity, dryness, and pests are currently over exposed to such conditions due to the lack of suitable housing required for long term conservation of the items.

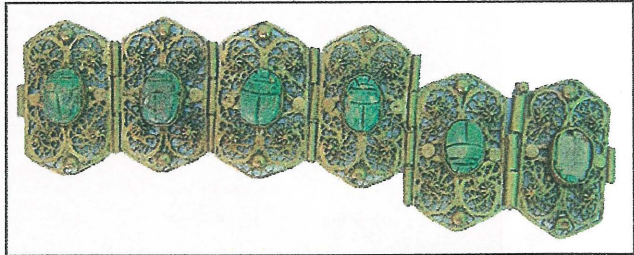


Photo 35 & 36. According to Eshete, “One major result of contact between Ethiopia and the...imperialist powers was the introduction of commercial capitalism in Ethiopia and the gradual transformation from a feudal subsistence economy to a monetized transaction system” (1982:14). Coinage of local and foreign production that was circulated in Harar and surrounding countryside was transformed into jewelry (photo, left) which allowed the owners to carry the new standards of wealth upon their persons. Examples of a variety of jewelry styles and mediums can be found in the museum collections of Harar – a legacy of the wide scope of trade connections and cultural influences coming from all regions of the Ethiopian domain. Some stylistically exceptional jewelry originates from further a field in places like Arab Peninsula and North Africa. A bracelet adorned with scarabs, most likely of Egyptian origin (photo, right) is an examples of foreign influence on regional jewelry designs.



## Rimbaud Culture Center



Photo 37. The façade of the main building of the Rimbaud Culture Center reveals Indian architectural influences in its gables and woodwork. On the ground floor there is a computer center, curator's office, small library, and a small collection of vernacular arts. In the upper floors one finds photos and text panels relating to Arthur Rimbaud, contemporary artwork and photographic exhibitions.

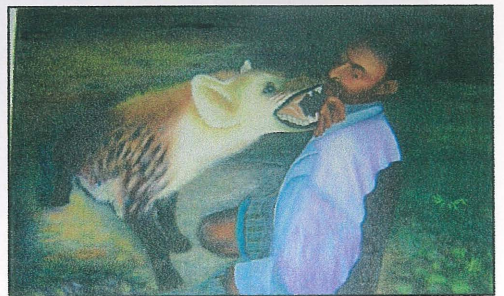


Photo 38 & 39. The brightly painted upper rotunda (left) is surrounded by paintings reflecting the culture of the city of Harar. The view past the balcony to the floor below reveals a room with 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century photos of the city, while contemporary artwork, like the Hyena Man by Mesfin Tadesse (right), is scattered throughout the first floor.





Photo 40 & 41. Silver bracelets (left) and a wooden headrest (right) are examples of vernacular arts on display at the Rimbaud Culture Center.



Photo 42. The first floor includes an exhibition of photos celebrating culture from around the world.