

Research article

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

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Abstract: The main purpose of this study is to analyze the representation of Ethiopian history in secondary school history textbooks from 1979, with a focus on the Derg regime (1974–1991) and the early years of the EPRDF until 2000. Using qualitative content analysis of textbooks, curricula, and educational policy documents, the study reveals a history education shaped to align with socialist ideology, emphasizing class struggle while vilifying the pre-revolutionary periods of Ethiopia. Significant historical achievements, such as the Victory of Adwa, were undermined, promoting discord among people instead of fostering unity. The textbooks prioritized global socialist narratives over Ethiopian history, distorting events, excluding significant periods, and disregarding contributions of modern Ethiopian

leaders such as Emperor Menelik II and Haile Selassie I. Moreover, the Marxist history curriculum relegated its role of fostering national cohesion and critical thinking by neglecting Ethiopian history and its unifying power.

Keywords: Community cohesion, History education, Marxist historiography, Objectivity, State ideology

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the study

The history of Ethiopian education dates back to the 4th century A.D. with the introduction of Christianity, when the Ethiopian Orthodox Church established traditional education to train clergy and government officials (Paulos, 1976). The church education focused on religious teachings and historical texts such as *Tarique-Negest*, *Kibre-Negest*, and *Fetha-Negest*, along with world history topics like the ancient world and the histories of the Jews and Arabs (Messay, 2006).

Modern education began in the early 20th century when Emperor Menelik II opened the first school in Addis Ababa in 1908. However, the education system lacked a formal curriculum and was heavily influenced by the French system, placing greater emphasis on foreign languages than history. The Italian occupation (1935–1941) disrupted Ethiopian education, as the Fascist

regime attempted to reshape it for ideological control, prioritizing Italian history and culture. Following Haile Selassie's restoration in 1941, Ethiopia saw major reforms, including the introduction of the first school curriculum in 1947 (Abebe, 1992) and the establishment of the history department in the 1960s in the former Haile-Selassie I University (Bahru, 2000). The education system, however, was criticized for being largely Western-oriented, influenced by British and American models rather than Ethiopian historical and cultural contexts (Alebachew, 2009 and Woube, 2005).

The 1974 Ethiopian Revolution marked a transformative period in the country's political and social history, culminating in the overthrow of Emperor Haile Selassie I and the establishment of a military government under the Derg. The ensuing regime governed Ethiopia for 17 years (1974–1991), in turbulence, during which Marxism-Leninism became the state's guiding ideology. This ideological shift brought about significant socio-economic and political changes, profoundly impacting various sectors, including the educational system (Tekeste, 1990). The military government denounced the feudal past, outlawing the pre-1974 policies, including educational curricula, and instituted a revolutionary educational framework. The declared purpose of education under this regime was to serve socio-economic development, promote class struggle, and support the broader revolutionary goals of anti-feudal, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist agendas (Clapham, 1989; Bahru, 2002; Toggia, 2008; Tekeste, 2006).

The educational structure was 6-2-4. The first level which covered from grades 1 to 6 was primary, the middle level was junior secondary (7-8), and the last was senior secondary education which covered grades from 9 to 12. Amharic was used as a medium of instruction for the elementary level schools (1-6) while English was used for the secondary school subjects. However, the case was different for history. It was given as a school subject starting from grade 7. Amharic was the medium of instruction at the junior secondary level (7-8). English was used to teach history in the senior secondary education (9-12). One period per a week was allotted to teach history in junior secondary schools (7-8). Two periods per week were allotted to teach history for grades 9 and 10; and three periods for grades 11 and 12 (Tekeste, 1990, p. 48; Girma, 2022, p. 101).

History education is widely recognized for its role in developing critical thinking, understanding historical change and continuity, and analyzing cause-and-effect relationships (Yilmaz, 2009; Wilschut, 2010; Seixas & Morton, 2013; Zajda, 2015; Thorp, 2016). Tekeste (1990) and Girma (2022) also argued that history education should promote community cohesion, nation-building, and unity. However, during the Derg regime, the history curriculum was primarily designed to advance ideological goals rather than achieve these academic objectives (MoE, 1985; Bahru, 2000; Tekeste, 2006).

Ironically, while the Derg regime propagated the slogan *Ityopiya Tikdem* (“Ethiopia First”) to emphasize social cohesion and national unity, its history curriculum largely banished Ethiopian history from the secondary school curriculum. Instead, the curricula prioritized world history topics, largely irrelevant to Ethiopian students' cultural and historical realities. This paradox reflects the incongruity between the ideological ambitions of the Derg and the broader educational purposes of history, resulting in a curriculum that neither served academic goals nor effectively strengthened national cohesion.

1.2 Statement of the problem

History education is one of the most overlooked themes in Ethiopian historiography, as much of the scholarly focus has centered on military and political histories. In particular, the historiography of history education in Ethiopia has received insufficient attention, with only a limited number of works address the broader history of Ethiopian education and even fewer (Tekeste, 1990 and Girma, 2022) focusing on the teaching of history in secondary schools. Unlike in many developed countries where history education has been extensively studied, the Ethiopian context remains largely unexplored. Although a handful of studies exist, they are hampered by significant limitations, such as inadequate information, lack of in-depth analysis, and failure to critically examine history curricula through the lens of professional historiography. This study analyzes Ethiopian secondary school history textbooks implemented between 1979 and 2000, with the aim of examining the alignment between the academic objectives of history education and the representation of Ethiopian history within these texts. Specifically, it addresses the following research questions:

1. To what extent did the 1979-2000 secondary school history textbooks align with the purposes of academic history?
2. How did Marxist history teaching contribute to nation-building and national unity in Ethiopia?
3. How much coverage was given to Ethiopian history in the textbooks?

1.3 Research objectives

The main objective of this study is to analyze the representation of Ethiopian history in the 1979-2000 Ethiopian secondary school history textbooks through the lens of professional historiography, with the following specific aims:

1. To evaluate the extent to which the textbooks align with the purposes of academic history.
2. To examine how Marxist historical narratives were used to promote nation-building and national unity in Ethiopia.
3. To assess the coverage and emphasis given to Ethiopian history in the textbooks.

1.4 Data sources and the research approach

This research employed a historical methodology, integrating archival research and qualitative content analysis. Primary data was collected from two main archival centers: the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) and the Ministry of Education (MoE). These sources include educational policy records from the Derg regime, as well as secondary school history curricula and textbooks for Grades 9 to 12. All textbooks were obtained from IES, while additional documents, such as reports from educational institutions, educational plans, and policy records, were gathered from the MoE archive.

Secondary data complemented these primary sources, incorporating a wide range of scholarly materials such as peer-reviewed journal articles, dissertations, theses, and published books. These sources provided a broader scholarly perspective on the historical period under investigation. Additionally, oral accounts served as a crucial component of the secondary resources. These were collected from professional historians, many of whom had direct experience teaching during the Derg regime. The insights of these experts, often shared through interviews and discussions available on platforms like YouTube, offered invaluable perspectives.

They shed light on the practical implementation of the curriculum, the challenges faced by educators, and the broader educational context of the period.

To ensure the reliability of data, the study applied rigorous source validation techniques. Each archival document was evaluated for authenticity and objectivity, with its factual accuracy cross-checked against oral accounts gathered from professional historians. This process of triangulation allowed the researchers to assess the worth and reliability of each piece of evidence. Eventually, the findings were systematically analyzed and presented using a narrative discussion approach.

2. Literature Review

2.1 History education

Carr (1987), Bendix (1945), Tosh (2010), Slekar (2001), and Bahru (2012) have emphasized that professional historiography must uphold two core values: *scientificity* and *objectivity*. The scientific aspect involves evaluating multiple pieces of evidence through source validation, triangulation, and careful documentation (Bahru, 2010, pp. 28-9). History, as an academic discipline, seeks to derive truth through the careful investigation of reliable sources. The objective dimension requires historians to "understand before judging" (Ibid.), though this is often contested. Carr (1987), for instance, contended that "objective historical truth" does not exist, emphasizing the interpretive role of historians (pp. 2; 14). Tosh (2010), on his part, added that objectivity in history is hindered by factors like source distortion and the historian's cultural values, which inevitably influence research outcomes (pp. 188-9).

History has been a part of school curricula worldwide since the late 19th century (Seixas & Morton, 2013), but its introduction in Ethiopia occurred only in the 1940s. The purpose of teaching history has varied, with debates focusing on what content should be taught, the type of historical knowledge to impart, and the principal objectives of history education. These questions remain contentious, particularly between political activists and history educators, making history education an epistemological battleground.

Historians and history educators have largely agreed that school history should align with the principles of disciplinary history, focusing on fostering disciplinary historical knowledge. This

includes understanding concepts such as change and continuity, time and space, cause and effect, comparison, problem solving, critical thinking, along with skills in historical inquiry, analysis, and critical evaluation of sources (Yilmaz, 2009; Wilschut, 2010; Seixas & Morton, 2013; Zajda, 2015; Thorp, 2016; Boxtel & Drie, 2018). A significant global trend reveals that history education is also used to instill values like patriotism, national identity, and cultural heritage (Zajda, 2015; Girma, 2022; Tekeste, 1990).

The relationship between history education and political ideology is contentious. Some scholars, particularly in the field of education, argue that education, including history, cannot be ideology-free. Apple (2019), for instance, advocates that education is inherently shaped by the states' dominant ideologies, aligning with the ancient maxim "As is the state, so is the school" (Siraw, 2016, pp. 94-5). Proponents of this view assert that the states' ideological needs ultimately shape educational content. In contrast, academic historians reject ideological imposition on historical teaching, maintaining that history education should remain objective and detached from political agendas. According to professional historians, any history curriculum or approach to teaching history that is intended to advance the interests of a specific group, ideology, or political agenda does not constitute true history. As John Tosh (2010) stated, such an approach is better described as "propaganda" or political activism (p. 191).

2.2 History education in Ethiopia during the imperial period (1941-74)

The post-liberation period witnessed significant reforms in Ethiopia's educational system. The first secondary school history curriculum was introduced in 1947 (Abebe, 1992; Maaza, 1996). In 1950, Haile Selassie I University (HSIU), now Addis Ababa University, was established. In the early 1960s, the Department of History and the Institute of Ethiopian Studies (IES) were founded within HSIU, playing critical roles in the development of historical studies and teaching (Bahru, 2000; 2012).

Messay (2006) and Tekeste (1990) have critically examined history education during the Imperial period. They argue that Emperor Haile Selassie's educational policies, heavily influenced by Western ideologies, failed to account for Ethiopia's unique socio-cultural and historical context. The curricula, largely developed by foreign experts mainly from England and the United States, focused on Western history at the expense of African and Ethiopian history.

This trend resulted in a generation of Ethiopian students who, while gaining knowledge of Western history and culture, were largely unaware of their own national history (Messay, 2006).

Additionally, Messay and Tekeste exposed that Ethiopian history, as presented in high school textbooks, suffered from distortions. For instance, the textbooks inaccurately referred to the Italian occupation from 1936 to 1941 as a “colonial period,” despite the fact that Italian control was largely confined to urban areas and had little influence over most rural regions (Messay, 2006). Additionally, the term “Abyssinia” was frequently used in place of “Ethiopia,” a practice carrying a colonial connotation. “Abyssinia” originates from “Habashat,” an ancient tribe in the Ethiopian region, but it was often employed by Western scholars to diminish Ethiopia's indigenous identity and sovereignty (Bahru, 2002, p. 1). This misnaming, coupled with the representation of Ethiopian history through a Western-centric perspective, formed part of a larger effort to exert intellectual dominance over Ethiopia's historical narrative and cultural identity.

The influence of Western scholars in the study of Ethiopian history also extended to academic research. Messay (2003) criticizes the reliance on foreign sources, such as travel accounts from European missionaries and explorers, in shaping the narrative of Ethiopian history. According to Messay, this reliance resulted in a lopsided representation of Ethiopian history, often portraying it from a Western perspective rather than from local sources. Despite these negative impacts, Westernization did bring some positive contributions to Ethiopian historiography. The establishment of institutions like the Institute of Ethiopian Studies and the Department of History at Haile Selassie I University in the 1960s by Western scholars played a crucial role in the development of professional historiography in Ethiopia (Bahru, 2000). Notable Ethiopian historians were educated through these institutions and Western universities and contributed significantly to the study of Ethiopian history.

In sum, the Westernization of Ethiopia's education system during the Imperial period had both positive and negative effects on history education. While it facilitated the establishment of important academic institutions and the development of professional historiography, it also led to a history curriculum that was often disconnected from Ethiopia's socio-cultural realities. This

gap resulted in a generation of students who, while educated in Western thought, lacked a deep understanding of their own history and culture.

2.3 History education in Ethiopian secondary schools during the Derg Regime (1974-91)

The 1974 Ethiopian Revolution, which overthrew Emperor Haile Selassie I, marked a significant shift in Ethiopia's political and educational landscape. The military government, known as the Derg, embraced Marxism-Leninism as its guiding ideology, aligning itself with Eastern socialist powers, notably the USSR, while severing ties with Western imperialist influences. This ideological shift profoundly impacted the country's education system, particularly the teaching of history (MoE, 1986; Bahru, 2000; Tekeste, 2006).

In 1975, the Derg adopted a new educational policy that emphasized the socio-economic development of the masses and aimed to foster anti-feudal, anti-bureaucratic, anti-capitalist, and anti-imperialist sentiments (MoE, 1986; Tekeste, 2006). The Ministry of Education established 14 curriculum divisions, including the Social Science Panel, which was responsible for producing educational materials for history, geography, and political education for secondary education. The Panel published history texts for grades 11 and 12 in 1979. The 9th and 10th grades history texts were published in the following year, 1980. The grade 9 and grade 10 textbooks were reprinted in 1981, 1982, and 1983, while no reprinting was made for the grades 11 and 12 texts (Girma, 2022; MoE, 1980, 1986).

The teaching of history under the Derg was heavily influenced by Marxist-Leninist ideology, which dominated the curriculum. The primary goal was to use history as a tool for creating class consciousness and to further the government's revolutionary agenda. The curriculum portrayed feudalism, imperialism, and bureaucratic capitalism as the ardent enemies of the people. The narratives emphasized the role of the working class as the true makers of history, a concept that was alien to Ethiopian societal structures prior to the 1974 revolution (Clapham, 1989; Bahru, 2002; Toggia, 2008). Consequently, the curriculum sought to indoctrinate students with Marxist-Leninist principles and delegitimize Ethiopia's feudal past (Tekeste, 1990).

A significant critique of the Derg's history curriculum comes from Tekeste (1990), who argues that, like the pre-revolutionary curriculum, the history textbooks were heavily influenced by foreign ideologies. While the pre-1974 curriculum was Western-oriented, the post-revolutionary curriculum was aligned with Eastern socialist ideals. Tekeste notes that the history textbooks placed disproportionate emphasis on world history, particularly Eastern European history, while Ethiopian and African history received negligible attention. The history contents for grades 9-12 were largely taken from a Russian book titled *A Short History of the World* (Manfred, 1974), with little regard for Ethiopian history (Tekeste, 1990, p. 67).

Tekeste (1990) and Girma (2022) argue that the teaching of history should aim to promote social cohesion, nation-building, and national unity. However, the Derg's Marxist approach to history education failed to achieve these objectives. By disregarding the unifying elements of Ethiopia's history, such as the rallies against common enemies and focusing instead on ideological indoctrination, the regime missed a great opportunity to use history as a means of solidifying national identity and unison.

2.4 Conceptual framework

The issue of teaching and learning history has always remained a center for intellectual debate and contention. What history should be taught in schools? What kind of historical knowledge should be gained? What should be the main purpose of teaching history? Which contents should be included or excluded from the history curriculum? There is a great disparity in answering such questions, particularly between political activists and professional historians. This makes history education an epistemological battlefield between the academic discipline of history and state policies and ideologies.

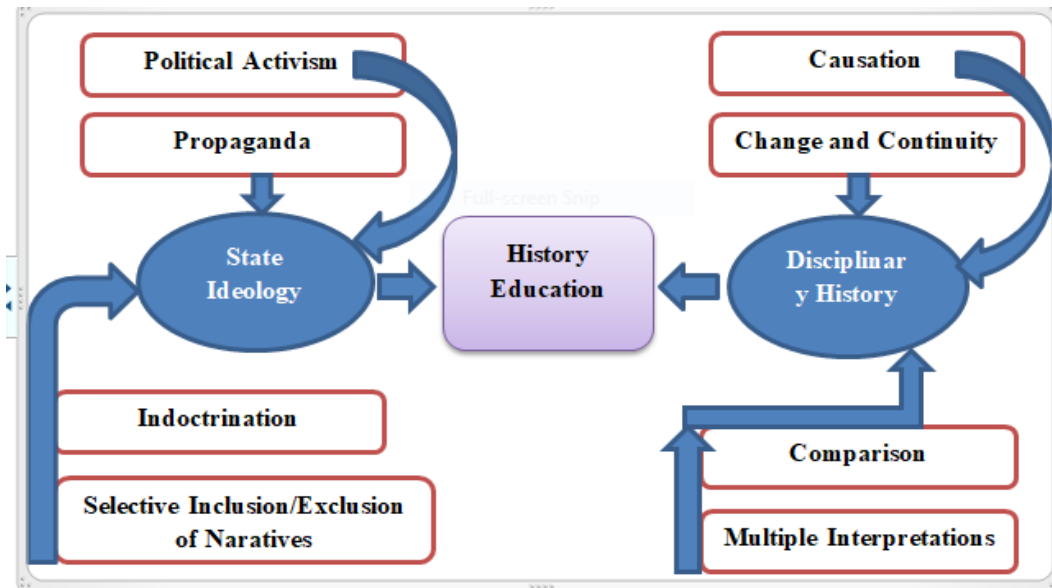


Figure 1: School history in a tension between state ideology and disciplinary history.

The study used the main tenets of the academic discipline of history as a conceptual framework in order to analyze the representation of Ethiopian history in secondary school history texts of the Derg era. This is because the largest portion of the research findings, as shown above in the literature review, revealed that the main purpose of history education should be (is) the attainment of “disciplinary historical knowledge” (Slekar, 2001; Bendix, 1945; Seixas and Morton 2013:579; Thorp & Persson, 2020: 896).

3. Findings and Discussion

Based on a thorough investigation of the aforementioned data sources, the research findings are discussed below. The analysis reveals that the presentation of Ethiopian history, contrary to the demands of academic history, suffered from ideological imposition, neglect, contemptuous explanations, selective exclusion of facts, and deliberate distortions.

3.1. Ideological imposition

The Derg’s National Democratic Revolution Program of 1976 outlined the main educational goals as a tool for fostering production, scientific inquiry, and socialist consciousness (MOE, 1977; 1986). Hence, the government prepared the history curriculum in a way that could fulfill its ideological objectives, embedding Marxist-Leninist principles. History teaching emphasized Marxist historiography, portraying “working forces” as true makers of history while depicting

imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism as adversaries of the people. The curriculum also promoted class consciousness by reinterpreting Ethiopian history through the lens of class struggle, a concept previously unfamiliar in Ethiopia before the 1974 Revolution (Clapham, 1989).

Historical narratives in grades 9 and 10 textbooks criticized Ethiopia's pre-1974 era, blaming the feudal past solely for the country's poverty and backwardness. Actually, the feudal system might be one of the factors but other factors might contribute to Ethiopia's poverty and backwardness. Tekeste (1990) argues that the feudal society played a significant role in maintaining Ethiopia's independence and unity. Despite this, the curriculum heavily politicized Ethiopian history, paying great attention to the 1974 Revolution while neglecting other vital historical topics. Shortly, the revolutionary government used history to meet its ideological goals by glorifying socialism and vilifying the pre-revolutionary elite and activities.

The textbooks for grades 11 and 12 also extended this ideological bias to world history, promoting socialism as an ideal force for peace and progress while criticizing capitalism as oppressive and reactionary. In addition, the textbooks, often direct copies of Russian sources, were criticized for their complexity and irrelevance to the Ethiopian students' socio-cultural context (Tekeste, 1990). Overall, the secondary school history textbooks were prepared to serve as a tool for political indoctrination and propaganda, sacrificing educational relevance and objectivity that the disciplinary history claims, for the dissemination of state ideology.

3.2.The neglect of Ethiopian History and its unifying elements: An ideological absurdity

3.1.1 Minimal attention to Ethiopian History

Ethiopian history received limited attention in the high school curriculum, dominated by a greater focus on world history across all grade levels. Ethiopian history was taught only in grades 9 and 10. For instance, the grade 9 textbook allocated just 38 out of 184 pages to Ethiopian history, covering the period from the Muslim-Christian conflicts of the 16th century to Emperor Tewodros II's rise in 1855. Similarly, the grade 10 textbook devoted only two of its ten chapters to Ethiopian history, 117 out of 322 pages (36.3%), focusing on the period from 1850 to 1974, with 60 pages (50%) centered on the Ethiopian Revolution and its aftermath. After grade 10, Ethiopian history was entirely excluded from the succeeding grade levels.

Table 1: Distribution of Thematic Areas across Grades by Pages and Percentages

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

Source: History textbooks from grades 9-10 (1980) and grades 11 and 12 (1979)

As noted above, the history textbooks were dominated by world history topics, particularly focusing on socialist revolutions and national liberation movements in foreign countries. These topics, however, held little relevance to the socio-cultural and historical realities of Ethiopian students. While the Derg government promoted the idea of a unified and strong Ethiopia, along with fostering Ethiopian nationalism, its actions in shaping the history curriculum contradicted its grand rhetoric. By neglecting Ethiopian history, the regime undermined its own proclaimed commitment to the slogan “Ethiopia First!” This contradiction showed the significant gap between the government’s rhetorical emphasis on national pride and its actual approach to educating the youth about their country’s rich historical legacy.

3.2.1. Failure to use the country’s glorious past as a means for national cohesion: “A missed opportunity”

Alemseged (1998) asserts that “history plays the chief symbolic role in identity formation and it has been the main forger of cohesion during the political struggles” (p. 206). Ethiopia, with its magnificent history, offers an ideal foundation for teaching patriotism, unity, and togetherness. Unfortunately, the military government failed to grab this opportunity. The curriculum did not capitalize on unifying elements of Ethiopian history, such as its magnificent victories, to promote social cohesion. For instance, the monumental civilizations of Axum and Zagwe periods were omitted from history lessons at all secondary school levels.

Similarly, Ethiopia's glorious victories were underutilized as tools to solidify Ethiopian nationalism. The Adwa Victory, for example, was presented in a manner that diminished Emperor Menelik's effective leadership and the far-reaching impacts of the battle. The tenth-grade history textbook criticized the Emperor and Ethiopian patriots for "not dislodging" the Italian army from territories north of the Mereb River (pp. 240-41). Instead of appreciating Emperor Menelik's leadership ability and heroic stature as a source of pride and inspiration, the writers of the textbooks chose to vilify him and the patriots with foolish words.

The criticism that the textbook writers presented against Menelik has no support from the historical scholarship. Scholars have identified several reasons behind the decision of the Ethiopian ruling class to halt military action further north. Alemseged (1998) explains that prominent Eritrean leaders, such as Dejazmach Debeb Ararya and Bahta Hagos "collaborated with the Italians for their selfish interests without any demur" (pp. 22-23). Additionally, Ethiopia was recovering from the great famine (1888-92), which caused severe shortages in supplies, making it impractical to pursue further military campaigns (Bahru, 1991, pp. 71-72).

Menelik concluded the war with a peace treaty signed in Addis Ababa in October 1896, securing Ethiopia's independence while acknowledging the Italian presence in Eritrea (Bahru, pp. 83-84). Shumet (2014) described this decision as follows:

አጼ ምኒልክ የኢጣሊያንን ወደ ደጋው ማምጣት የተቀበለች ሁኔታው ሊሞገስ
ከማይችልበት ደረጃ ካለፈ በኋላ ነበር፡፡
Emperor Menelik accepted the Italians' advance toward the
highlands after the situation had reached a point of no return.

The Victory of Adwa carried profound implications both nationally and internationally (Bahru, 1991, pp. 83-84). Domestically, Adwa instilled a sense of independence and self-confidence among Ethiopians. Internationally, it challenged Eurocentric narratives and demonstrated that Africa has a history and capable leaders. Adwa became a symbol of Pan-Africanism and black dignity, inspiring many African nations to adopt Ethiopia's tricolor flag (Bahru, 2021; Teshale, 2019; Shumet, 2013).

Ethiopians from diverse backgrounds united at Adwa, transcending parochial divisions for a shared cause. Alemseged (1998) noted that "wars can serve as crucibles for a collective sense of

[national] identity” (p. 189). Thus, Adwa’s legacy offers a powerful tool for fostering unity and Ethiopian nationalism (Girma, 2022, p. 115). However, instead of using this true historical achievement effective for nation-building, the tenth-grade (1980) history textbook narratives fostered strife, discord and contempt, as Tekeste (1990) observed:

The view of the authors on Ethiopian history and society is that of shame, contempt and disgust. Even the battles of Dogali and Adwa are presented in a manner that tended to blame Ethiopian ruling classes for the continued presence of the Italians in Eritrea (pp. 63–64).

Ethiopian history offers numerous figures deserving of heroic recognition. Teaching about these heroes could cultivate mutual respect and nationalism. Yet, Marxist historians avoided celebrating figures from the feudal past, impeding social cohesion and nation-building. Emperor Menelik II, a military genius of the 19th century, is a prime example. Textbooks unjustly depicted him as sluggish, ignoring his crucial role in Adwa’s victory. Nevertheless, balanced historical accounts acknowledge Menelik’s extraordinary leadership and the people’s determination as key factors to Adwa’s success. Bahru (1991, 2020), Shumet (1996), and Beauregard (1976) praise Menelik’s extraordinary achievements in military, political, and diplomatic domains. The Victory of Adwa, inseparable from Menelik’s pinnacle leadership, remains a testament to Ethiopia’s stamina and unity.

3.3. Contemptuous explanations

The textbooks were filled with a series of slanders and contemptuous explanations. Especially, the last two chapters of the grade 10 history textbook were rife with insults and disrespectful words. The main targets of such verbal assaults were the feudal system, Emperor Haile-Selassie, and the elite and rival political organizations. Let us quote a few sentences from the 1980 grade 10 history textbook. Please note that the emphases are ours.

- "Haile Selassie was *a feudal Mussolini, aspiring to be a demigod*." (p. 251)
- "The members of the ruling feudal aristocracy were a collection of *lazy, ignorant and arrogant* lot." (pp. 263-4)
- "The Ethiopian teachers rose up against the *rotten* feudo-bourgeois system." (p. 282)
- "Haile Selassie was made to be seen not in his angelic garb but for what he really was: *a common thief and a common criminal*." (p. 286)

- "Elements of the bourgeoisie, the petty-bourgeoisie, the working class and *lumpen* proletariat emerged as a result of the coming of imperialism to Ethiopia." (p. 272)
- "The struggle of the oppressed masses waged after the war persisted against black oppressors and exploiters who were equally *diabolic* in their unmitigated subjugation of the exploited peasantry" (p. 259)
- "The *anti-people and fascist organization*, EDU, began attacking the Ethiopian revolution in the areas of Mettema, Abderaffi and Humera from the Sudan." (p. 311)

As noted earlier, the textbook writers vilified the feudal elite in general and Emperor Haile Selassie I in particular, through a series of defamatory statements. They portrayed the Emperor as if he had no positive achievement. All the paragraphs dedicated to him were filled with slanderous accusations and biased interpretations. Like any individual, the Emperor had both strengths and weaknesses. It is the historian's responsibility to present these facts objectively to students, allowing them to form reasoned judgments after engaging with multiple historical sources. This is what the academic discipline of history requires. As Carr (1980) asserted "historians are not judges" (p. 126). It is unreasonable to evaluate past societies and individuals using contemporary moral standards. Similarly, Von Ranke stated that:

The main task of the historian became to find out why people acted as they did by stepping into their shoes, by seeing the world through their eyes and as far as possible by judging it by their standards. (Tosh, 2010, p. 8)

In historical narratives, in fact, Emperor Haile Selassie's image has been portrayed in contending representations. Perceptions about his personality and political life vary widely. Some regarded him as a caring and loving father, a transformative leader, a modernizer of Ethiopia, and the father of African unity. Others, in contrast, viewed him as a tyrant, a selfish ruler, or even a thief. The task of history educators is, therefore, a valid and objective representation of the period and the Emperor using authentic historical accounts. As Bahru (2020) observes:

በአጠቃላይነት ደረጃ አዲስ ታሪካዊ ለአንዳንዶች ጭቅጅ፤ ለአንዳንዶች ደግሞ ማህበራዊ ናቸው፡ ግን ሰውየው ጭቅም ማህበራዊ አልነበሩም፡ ሰው ናቸው፡ እንደ ሰው ነው በሚሰሩት ማንኛውም ያለባቸው፡ በታሪክ አጻጻፍ ሂደት ውስጥ ሚናቸውን በጥም አስፈላጊ ነው፡ ዳኛ ግራና ቀኙን አይቶ እንደሚረድ ሁሉ የታሪክ ጸኃፊም እንደዚህ ሚናዊ መሆን አለበት፡

Perceptually, Emperor Haile Selassie is viewed by some as a demon and by others as an angel. Yet, he was neither; he was a human being who must be assessed objectively. In interpreting history, impartiality is vital. Just as a judge evaluates both sides before making a decision, a historian must also strive for objectivity.

Emperor Haile Selassie rose to power in the early 1930s during a period of significant internal and external challenges. The Emperor introduced reforms aimed at modernizing the country. His contributions to expanding and improving modern education are indisputable. He established and strengthened government institutions such as the police, army, civil aviation, telecommunications, and ministerial offices to enhance the governance system (Bahru, 1991). He also played a pivotal role in promoting Pan-Africanism, working towards the unification of the African continent. He condemned apartheid and supported the anti-apartheid movement in South Africa, while also actively contributing to the formation of the Organization of African Unity (OAU) in 1963 (Teshale, 2019). As his age deteriorated in the 1970s, his reign faced challenges, culminating in his overthrow during the 1974 popular revolution. These contributions of the Emperor to Ethiopia and the African continent cannot be disregarded.

In general, history textbooks should not serve as tools for spreading insults, hatred, or negative sentiments. Any kind of filthy communication has a negative consequence. Students can learn nothing from hatred but develop negative attitude toward others. Needless to say, cursing the past and developing negative attitudes are not the purposes of history teaching. They have no relevance to the real goal of education too. But, the textbooks under discussion, contrary to the purpose of education and the values of disciplinary historical knowledge, reflected a series of vilifications and contemptuous explanations against the historical figures and institutions, which have no significance to the development of students' personality and national unity.

3.4. Selective exclusion of facts

One of the primary limitations of the textbooks is the selective inclusion and exclusion of narratives. The authors incorporated narratives that aligned with the government's political ideology while selectively ignoring significant narratives and facts of Ethiopian history that were perceived to support the feudal society. The positive achievements of the pre-1974 Ethiopian governments were either overlooked or deliberately ignored. This included the progressive

reforms and modernization efforts initiated by Ethiopian rulers since the 1850s. The authors failed to recognize or acknowledge the modernization projects undertaken by Emperor Tewodros II and Emperor Menelik II. They also disregarded the socio-economic developments made during the post-liberation period under Emperor Haile Selassie, depicting these periods negatively due to their feudo-phobia, an extreme and irrational fear and hatred of the feudal system.

For instance, in the grade 10 history textbook, the writers dismissed all positive achievements, depicting the Ethiopian ruling class as having “an absolute contempt and hatred for knowledge and technical skills” (p. 246), and condemning them for ostracizing and oppressing artisans and craftsmen. However, this description contradicts the historical reality. Feudal rulers such as Emperor Tewodros II, Menelik II, and Haile Selassie were known for their commitment to the expansion of knowledge and modernization. These leaders proved their dedication through tangible actions.

The primary cause of the Ethio-British war of 1868 was Emperor Tewodros’s request for the introduction of European knowledge, particularly technical skills and crafts, to manufacture modern arms. Tewodros succeeded in producing weapons at Gafat with the assistance of European prisoners. He also established a training center at Gafat, near Debre Tabor, to provide Ethiopians with literary and technical skills (Bahru, 2002, p. 34). However, the textbook authors abandoned these crucial facts. The historical factors leading to the Battle of Maqdala were excluded, with the narration jumping directly to the event itself, despite cause-and-effect analysis being fundamental to professional historiography.

Similarly, Emperor Menelik II made remarkable efforts to modernize Ethiopia by introducing modern technologies, ideas, and practices from abroad. Yet, the textbook writers failed to acknowledge these contributions. They tried to appeal that modernization efforts such as the establishment of modern education, healthcare systems, transportation infrastructure, the issuance and minting of currency, and the banking system were solely aimed at consolidating absolutism and the feudal system in Ethiopia (p. 243).

The tenth grade textbook also excluded the post-liberation period of Ethiopian history (1941–1974), a time of significant socio-economic and political developments. This era witnessed key events, such as the restoration of Ogaden, the federation and subsequent union of Eritrea with Ethiopia, and peasant uprisings in various regions. These events have profoundly shaped the character of contemporary Ethiopian society and state. However, the textbook ignored these developments for obvious reasons. Consequently, Ethiopian students were denied the opportunity to learn these critical aspects of their history, since grade 10 marked the end of Ethiopian history courses at the secondary school level.

3.5. Deliberate distortions

One of the most misrepresented events in the tenth-grade history textbook is the Second Italo-Ethiopian War (1936–1941). This conflict had both international and national significance. Internationally, it played a crucial role in world history, with some historians linking its outbreak to the origins of the Second World War. For example, Asante (1974) and Henig (2005) argue that the international community's failure to deter the Italian aggression contributed to the escalation of global conflict leading to World War II. Ethiopia, therefore, became a central symbol of the global anti-fascist struggle, being the first country to wage this fight. Nationally, the war carried diverse meanings for Ethiopians. The Ethiopian patriots fought a challenging war against the enemy with outdated weapons. The fascist Italian army, seeking to avenge its defeat at Adwa, invaded Ethiopia with well-prepared military forces. Moreover, Ethiopia faced leadership challenges, as the patriots fought without centralized military command after the Emperor had left the country with his family and close companions. Despite these adversities, including brutal assaults by the enemy and the Emperor's exile, Ethiopian patriots endured in their resistance.

Similar to the Victory of Adwa, the five-year resistance is a significant historical theme for history educators, emphasizing a shared history. During these years, the patriots demonstrated resilience and unity, enduring collective hardships such as afflictions, imprisonment, and mass killings. They shared the burden of suffering regardless of cultural differences and ultimately triumphed over a common enemy. Bahru (2021) argued that the history of the five-year anti-

fascist struggle could serve as a powerful tool for teaching Ethiopian youth the values of togetherness and national integrity.

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

The textbooks divided Ethiopians into three groups during the resistance: the peasant masses, the feudal ruling class who organized guerrilla movements, and the exiles. The peasant masses, central to Marxist historical narratives, received extensive recognition in the textbooks for their fierce and patriotic efforts against the enemy (p. 258). However, the elite forces, who organized guerilla movements and made significant sacrifices, were not given due consideration in the textbooks. Many from this group organized guerrilla units and resisted the enemy for five years, yet the textbooks authors minimized their contributions, depicting them as they were fighting motivated by "personal profits and material gains" rather than true patriotism (pp. 257–258).

The efforts of the third group, the exiles, including the Emperor, were also denigrated to a greater degree. The textbook referred to them as "traitors" (p. 257) and "absconders" (p. 258). Yet, the fact is that their diplomatic efforts, particularly the Emperor's, were crucial. The Emperor's speech at the League of Nations, his interviews with the BBC, and successful diplomatic campaigns resulted in the British military support, which was indispensable in Ethiopia's triumph in 1941. The Emperor's return to Addis Ababa on May 5, 1941 (Miazia 27, 1933 E.C.), alongside the British forces and Ethiopian patriots, marked a historic triumph. Although Miazia 27 was celebrated as Victory Day during the Imperial period, it was replaced by Megabit 28 (April 6) during the Derg era, reflecting clear political biases.

Furthermore, the presentation of the 1974 Ethiopian Revolution and its aftermath in the textbook suffered from significant distortions. The textbook portrayed political organizations such as EPRP, EDU, TPLF, and EPLF subjectively, labeling them as "counter-revolutionaries" (pp. 262–322). It condemned key figures like Aman Andom, Atinifu Abate, and Sisay Habte as "enemies

of the revolution," reflecting political rather than historical narratives (ibid.). Aman, for instance, an Eritrean-born general, was notable for his attempts at peaceful reconciliation in Eritrea. Scholars including Bahru (1991), Okbazghi (1987), Markakis (1988), Mesfin (1990), Keller (1992), and Henze (1985) have emphasized Aman's pivotal role in advocating administrative reforms and political solutions, in contrast to Mengistu's focus on pursuing military action. Historical accounts testified that Aman's assassination marked the end of peaceful negotiations, intensifying the Eritrean insurgency and solidifying irreconcilable positions on the Eritrean question.

Many nations honor their historical figures, patriots, and national icons. Unfortunately, Ethiopia is perhaps the only country that has undermined and humiliated its own patriots. We failed to provide the respect and recognition that these patriots deserved, particularly in our educational materials. The treatment of the Second Italo-Ethiopian War (1936–41) and the 1974 Revolution in textbooks prioritized political agendas over objective historical analysis, disregarding the nuanced contributions and sacrifices of Ethiopian patriotic leaders. As Tekeste (1990) noted, the tenth grade history textbook aligned more with political education than historical reality (p. 66).

4. Conclusion

History is a vital tool for fostering critical thinking, national unity, and collective identity. However, the analysis of Ethiopian secondary school history textbooks (1979-2000) reveals that these goals were undermined by ideological bias. Instead of fostering a balanced understanding of Ethiopia's rich historical heritage, the curriculum prioritized political indoctrination, embedding Marxist-Leninist principles and reducing Ethiopian history to narratives of class struggle. Critical historical achievements, such as Emperor Menelik II's pinnacle leadership and the Victory of Adwa, were neglected or misrepresented, depriving students of opportunities to cultivate national pride and shared identity.

The textbooks not only distorted Ethiopia's historical narrative but also propagated divisive and contemptuous perspectives. They vilified pre-1974 rulers, emphasized resentment, denigration, and neglected the unifying elements of Ethiopian history, such as its cultural heritage and resilience against colonization. This approach hindered history education's potential to build social cohesion and foster a sense of shared heritage among Ethiopian youth.

The failure to prioritize an inclusive and objective presentation of Ethiopian history has had lasting consequences. Today, divisions seemingly rooted in these educational shortcomings persist, undermining national cohesion. Obviously, one cannot gather grapes from thorns. The seeds of discord sown through a politicized history curriculum have yielded a fractured society grappling with ideological and historical conflicts. To move forward, Ethiopian history education must be reformed to prioritize academic rigor, inclusivity, and historical accuracy. A curriculum that celebrates Ethiopia's multifaceted legacy and emphasizes shared achievements like the Victory of Adwa can inspire students to embrace their collective past and work toward a harmonious future. By teaching history as a tool for unity rather than division, Ethiopia can cultivate a generation capable of bridging divides and contributing to nation-building.

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