

Specifically, it is a system of news exchanges among the people. The word Dagu itself may be translated as “news.” Dagu operates within a set of unwritten but defined regulations and expectations. The law of Dagu stipulates that whenever you meet a traveler on the road, you are required to sit down and engage in a news exchange session. The session typically begins by asking one another ‘Iytii maha tobie?’ and ‘Intii maha tubilie?’ meaning “What have your ears heard?” and “What have your eyes witnessed?” The dagu has to do with anything of public interest, such as weddings, funerals, missing cattle, battles, or the safety of the road ahead.¹

Failure to pass on relevant information is not only an offence to the conversation partner, but a harm to the community. To this end, anyone who passes unchecked or fabricated information is subject to punishment within the customary law known as *Mada'a*.²

Although news through the Dagu system may not reach a large population simultaneously, it does spread to a considerable segment of the society within a short period of time. The Afar claim that a piece of news through the Dagu system may reach a distance of 300 to 700 kilometers within two or three days.³

In March 2007 when five Europeans and eight Ethiopians were taken hostage by separatists in the Afar region, it was *dagu* which brought the news of their fate to the international community. They were taken to a settlement on the Eritrean border by the kidnappers, but were unharmed, according to a report that trickled through the Dagu system, which eventually reached the authorities in Addis Ababa.⁴

These days, social agencies use the Dagu information exchange system to educate the Afar people about the harmful practices of female genital mutilation and child labor as well as promote other development programs.

STATE USE OF TRADITIONAL MASS COMMUNICATION

At the state level, a couple of indigenous forms of mass communication existed in Ethiopia. The first one is the *awaj negari* or “official herald.” Whenever the king issues a decree or wishes to share some important news to his people, a team of messengers from the royal court is dispatched with the *negarit*, which one might call the megadrum. The *negarit* does not only have a booming, resonant sound but also can be heard loud and clear far and wide. The herald team beats the *negarit* as they march through the town. One of them steps out on a tower and cries out “awaj, awaj, awaj,” which may be translated as “Hear ye, Hear ye, Hear ye!” The crowd gathers around the

tower to listen to the decree or news from the royal court. The crowd is instructed to pass the message onto those who have not heard it.

The message is carried by others in each town and village throughout the empire who replicate the same heralding process. Gradually, all the people throughout the empire receive the message from the king. Obviously, this would take weeks and even months. But this was the way that the nation's rulers or their government communicated with the ordinary people for centuries. This system was used until the days of Emperor Menelik II in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In fact, even in the early years of the reign of Emperor Haile Selassie I, it served for some time as a supplement to the growing modern mass media. Thus, at the state level, the *awaj negari*, or herald in the tower, may be taken as the earliest medium of mass communication in Ethiopia.

Similar systems of mass communication were employed by other societies across the nation. For instance, when traditional Oromo rulers wished to communicate to their people about events or issues of significance, someone would beat a booming drum. This is a drum made of a hollow tree, parched with leather all over its body. It is called *negerit*, apparently adopted from the Amharic word *negarit*. This ceremony of beating the drum to communicate a message from the ruler is called *Iya Gafo*. This may be accompanied by the bugle. This is usually done from a hilltop so that the sound could be heard far and wide throughout the chief's dominion. People gather to the village square which is usually under the Oda tree of the village to hear the message from the ruler or his palace. The same process is repeated from village to village across the land. Horsemen may also be sent to faraway places with the same message, so that others may take from them and spread it to their communities.

The Oromo also use the bugle and drum in announcing funerals to members of their community.⁵ Again the purpose is to invite everyone to come and participate in the ritual performed for the deceased.

Based on the foregoing accounts, one may make a couple of important observations: first, traditional forms of mass communication took a top-down approach—the emperor, king, provincial governor, or tribal chief to his people. Secondly, the communication was not day to day; it was occasional, employed only when there was a very important matter to share with their subjects—a new law that they should abide by, an event they must attend, etc. So, clearly, the *negarit* was not an effective means of disseminating everyday information about the activities of the monarch or his top officials. In a way, this lack of everyday means of communication was a blessing in disguise to the rulers; it kept them distant from the masses, hence revered by them, sometimes to the point of divinity. /

On the other hand, the social function of mass communication is more of informing and inviting rather than ordering. Regardless of their purpose and function, traditional forms of mass communication have not been an effective means of exchange of information among ordinary people or between rulers and their subjects. Even today, traditional forms of mass communication exist side by side with modern forms of mass communication. The town crier still wakes up residents in the heart of the nation's capital with a call for a meeting of the funeral association known as Iddir,⁶ just as the government radio wakes them up with the news of the day. At the national level, the rulers may use the modern form of mass communication, but at the Qebelé level, which is the smallest administrative unit in the country, authorities still use the traditional form of crying out announcements to their residents, be it a political meeting or a fundraising event.

The difference with the funeral association crier may be that the former is likely to use the megaphone (a modern instrument) whereas the latter would have to shout at the top of his lungs accompanied by the bugle.⁷ In a country where community radio and community newspapers are virtually absent (and the government shares part of the blame for the slow growth of this sector), millions of Ethiopians still have to grapple with the shortcomings of traditional forms of mass communication in their everyday lives.

THE ADVENT OF THE PRINTING PRESS

Although books were around for centuries in Ethiopia, they were confined to the use and possession of the clergy, and to a lesser degree, the nobility. Mass communication requires two essential elements: wide circulation and an audience that has reached a critical mass. Since these books were written by hand and took years to make even a second copy, they lacked the potential to be widely circulated. Worse, since the vast majority was not literate, they lacked a mass audience, too. Therefore, despite the existence of an indigenous writing system for thousands of years and the existence of books produced manually by scribes, we can not say that there was print-based mass communication in Ethiopia until the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

Press products were seen in the country as early as the 1600s. These were religious books printed in the Ethiopian liturgical language of Geez⁸ and sent from Europe to Ethiopia. Most of these publications were distributed in the northern province of Tigray.⁹

According to some accounts, modern press work inside Ethiopia was started in 1863 by Swedish evangelists who had set up a mission in the northern province of Eritrea. They were concerned with printing religious news-

letters and books.¹⁰ According to other accounts, that same year, an Italian Lazarist missionary named Lorenzo Biancheri installed a small printing press in the Eritrean port city of Massawa. He published the catechism in Amharic in 1864.¹¹ Then in 1879 another Lazarist missionary set up a small press in Eritrea and published a book entitled *Amharic and Geez Grammar*.¹² Still other accounts witness that the Swedish evangelists set up their small printing press in the Eritrean town of Monculle in 1885.¹³

Based on the foregoing accounts, what can be said with certainty is that press work in Ethiopia was started by European missionaries and that virtually all the products were religious books and newsletters.

Newspapers did not appear in Ethiopia until the mid-1880s or later. The Italians, who had set foot in Massawa in 1885 at the beginning of their colonial rule in Eritrea, set up a press to print propaganda materials, including newspapers.¹⁴ Indeed, in 1890 after they formally set up a printing press, they began to publish a weekly propaganda newspaper in Italian called *El Eritreero* ("Eritrea"). The following year, a publishing company named Corriere Eritreio launched another Italian-language newspaper bearing its own name.¹⁵

Although these were political and thus had no religious content, they were still in a foreign language and therefore can not be considered indigenous to Ethiopia.

In 1905 a French Franciscan missionary and dermatologist named Father Marie-Bernard launched a newspaper in the eastern city of Harar. This was a twin-language newspaper in Amharic and French titled *Le Semeur d'Ethiopie* ("The Sower of Ethiopia").¹⁶ It was predominantly in French, but occasionally included items in Amharic. This weekly paper was said to have been published to generate funds for the Lazarist mission's program to fight leprosy that was spreading in the city of Harar at the time. The paper continued to be published until the outbreak of World War I.¹⁷

In 1912 the Swedish Evangelical Mission in Eritrea published a religious newspaper in Tigrinya entitled *Melikte Selam* ("Herald of Peace"). However, it folded three years later.¹⁸

It is hard to say that all these newspapers were read by any of the ordinary people, given the massive illiteracy in the society. Most likely, it would have been the elite few within the missionary and colonial camps that read the newspapers, and perhaps summarized them for the ordinary people. It does not appear that the government recognized these newspapers or paid attention to their circulation, either.

In summary, in Ethiopia printing presses were first set up by European missionaries who produced religious materials such as books and newsletters in Amharic and other local languages. When it comes to newspapers on the other hand, it was the colonialists who introduced them. They produced them



Emperor Menelik II.

peasantry with an iron hand. The vast majority of the people were illiterate, including quite a few among the nobility. The church had a great influence on the daily life of the people. The clergy were as much, if not more, revered than government officials. The prevailing psyche of the public was submission and praise to authority.

THE EXALTATION SHEETS AS FORERUNNERS OF GOVERNMENT MEDIA

Before the introduction of the modern printing press into the government system, Emperor Menelik had a penman named Desta Mitiké. Each month, Journalist Desta, as he was then addressed by the public, wrote by hand articles of exaltation in Amharic about Emperor Menelik and Empress Taitu, and made carbon copies to be distributed among the nobility.² A few copies of these exaltation sheets were circulated in and around the palace as of 1896 under the title *YeBeir Dimts* ("The Voice of Pen"). These sheets were referred to as newspapers just because they were written on a newspaper-size sheet.³

Similarly, just before 1900 Blatta⁴ Gebre Egziabher Gila Mariam, an Eritrean who joined Menelik's court after the Battle of Adwa, prepared a

Emery and his associates speak of three qualifications that newspapers must have to meet twentieth-century standards: “it must be published regularly on a daily or weekly basis; it must appeal to a general-interest audience rather than a specialized one, and it must offer timely news.”¹¹ //

While the two sheets shared the written element of modern mass media, their potential for mass circulation was very limited due to an archaic method of duplication. Besides, unlike the Negarit heralding system which reached the ordinary people, these sheets were circulated among members of the nobility only. Moreover, they were not serving as a medium of news, let alone presenting it in a timely manner. Therefore, they did not meet the criteria of newspaper. Such sheets were at best newsletters rather than newspapers. Yet, the producers of such sheets were thought of as journalists and bestowed high esteem by the nobility and the society at large.

Desta Mitiké’s exaltation sheets are in certain ways reminiscent of the political newsletters that used to be distributed in 15th and 16th-century Europe, handwritten or printed, some of which were in ballad form.¹² In the 1500s and 1600s, newsletters containing reports of important events were disseminated among the general public in countries like Germany, Spain, and England. Later, similar publications appeared in the American colonies.¹³ Thus newspapers in a number of Western European countries and the American colonies started out as newssheets.¹⁴

Similarly, the weekly sheets produced in the Ethiopian royal courts were forerunners of the modern newspapers, thereby repeating the history of the development of journalism in other nations.

THE BEGINNING OF GOVERNMENT NEWSPAPERS

Aimro (“Intellect”)¹⁵ was the first government newspaper in Ethiopia. This Amharic publication was issued on Saturdays in Addis Ababa. Emperor Menelik himself named the newspaper. (The paper carried these facts in its masthead throughout its existence.) *Aimro* was edited by a Greek businessman living in Addis Ababa named Andreas E. Kavadia. Kavadia spoke, read, and wrote Amharic quite fluently, and was very close to the emperor.

There are different accounts regarding the starting date of *Aimro*. Ministry of Information’s 1966 publication on the history of Ethiopia’s mass communication system states that *Aimro* was launched in 1892 E.C.; that is, in 1900 European calendar.^{16 17}

Richard Pankhurst for his part writes that it was in 1902.¹⁸ Kaplan and his associates even recount that *Aimro* started publication in 1907 using press equipment.¹⁹ However, the most likely date for the launching of *Aimro* comes

from Mogus Wolde Medhin who interviewed the editor's own son. Andreas Kavadia's son, after checking the notes of his father which he had written in Greek, told Mogus Wolde Medhin that Kavadia circulated the first handwritten issue of *Aimro* to the emperor and the nobility on January 17, 1901.²⁰

One reason for these different dates could be the fact that the Ethiopian calendar is more than seven and a half years behind the European calendar. There is often confusion as to which calendar was used by scholars. Another reason may be that different scholars were referring to the different development stages of *Aimro*. In the case of Kaplan and his associates, for instance, the date they gave was the one in which the newspaper began to be published with press equipment. This does not necessarily discount the fact that at first Kavadia wrote the newspaper by hand. In fact, scholars generally agree that the issues of the newspaper in the first few years were handwritten (see Pankhurst, 262; Mogus Wolde Medhin, 1963, p. 1; Ministry of Information: *Mass Communications in Ethiopia*, 1966, p. 6).

Kavadia's son says the following about how his father was inspired to launch the Amharic newspaper: "Kavadia was translating some news items from Greek and English newspapers and was reading them to Emperor Menelik. Seeing that Menelik was fascinated by this, he [Kavadia] was motivated to start an Amharic newspaper. Kavadia took his initiative to Menelik, and Menelik liked it. Menelik told Kavadia to start the work immediately and name the newspaper *Aimro*."²¹ Others however recount that Menelik himself ordered Kavadia to launch an Amharic newspaper, fascinated by the news items Kavadia read to him from foreign newspapers. The latter account sounds more plausible since Menelik often took the initiative of introducing modernization in Ethiopia from Europe.

Whatever the case, Kavadia started publishing *Aimro* first as a handwritten four-page newsheet. It was issued every Saturday, and its circulation of 24 copies was confined to the nobility.²² A little later, its circulation size rose to 200 copies after Menelik imported a printing machine through a Syrian businessman named Edilbee.²³

Emperor Menelik himself was keen on reading the newspaper. Ato²⁴ Haile Mariam Serabiyon Pasha read it to him every Saturday.²⁵ (It is important to understand here the etiquette of the Ethiopian royal court: although Emperor Menelik was literate, it was customary that his private secretary or one of the close courtiers would be assigned to read or write for him in honor of his status.) At least initially, *Aimro* largely contained news stories translated from French newspapers.²⁶

The emperor, very pleased with the publication, promised to order a printing machine from Europe. But *Aimro's* publication was suspended in 1903, and it did not resume until the promised equipment arrived in 1906. With the

arrival of the machine then, the first government printing press in Ethiopia was established. It was called Ethiopian Government Printing Press.²⁷

The press was housed in Menelik's palace.²⁸ ²⁹ Kavadia presented the first issue of *Aimro* printed by the newly-acquired machine to Crown Prince Eyasu as a gift.³⁰

Blatta MerséHazen Wolde Qirqos for his part recounts that Emperor Menelik had the small printing machine brought from Europe in 1897 E.C. (1905) through Monsieur Chefneux and set it up by Tsehafé Taezaz³¹ Gebre Selassie's office. Ato Dehné Wolde Mariam, an official in the royal secretariat, was put in charge of the machine, and it was used to print certain government documents in Amharic.³² It was also used to print the newspaper, *Aimro*, which came out irregularly. MerséHazen notes that Ato Desta Mitike³³ worked with Andreas Kavadia in the preparation of the newspaper. He also confirms that it was Menelik who named the printing press Merha Tibeb³⁴ and the newspaper *Aimro*.³⁵

Aimro again suspended publication a few years later, apparently due to Emperor Menelik's illness and subsequent death in 1913.³⁶ Nevertheless, it resumed operation in the latter part of 1914. The newspaper resumed publication at a time when Addis Ababa Municipality was established and the city administration bought a printing machine from a group of European businessmen who had established the Commercial Printing Press a couple of years earlier.³⁷ ³⁸ In addition to *Aimro*, which was issued irregularly, the municipality used the machine to print public announcements and government receipts. This was at the time Blatten Geta³⁹ Heruy Wolde Selassie was director of the municipality. This went on for two years.⁴⁰ Then in December 1916 Crown Prince Tafari Makonnen ordered that the printing press under the Ministry of Pen (or Royal Secretariat) and the one under the municipality merge into one establishment under the Ministry of Pen bearing the name Ethiopian Government Printing Press. Ato Zewdneh Aboyé was appointed manager of the enlarged printing facility. It published various government documents as well as *Aimro*. In 1925 Empress Zewditu, Menelik's daughter, renamed it Merha Tibeb Printing Press of the Ethiopian Government⁴¹ *Aimro* assumed regularity in 1924.

Aimro was rudimentary both in form and content by today's standards. It used an elaborate narrative style of reporting both domestic and foreign news. Domestic news largely focused on the daily activities of Emperor Menelik and his efforts to modernize the country. The paper also carried government decrees, public announcements, as well as articles and poems exalting the emperor.

On its front page *Aimro* contained these words: "Emperor Menelik II gave the name *Aimro* to this first newspaper in Ethiopia." It reported on the

two decades of the twentieth century. Instead, they were owned and operated by either the government (or more accurately, under the patronage of the emperor) and royal courtiers, or by European colonialists and missionaries.

One big difference between the experience in Europe and Ethiopia was that the newspaper printers in Europe (and American colonies, too) benefited from a critical mass of literate ordinary people—thanks to the eras of Reformation and Renaissance, whereas in the Ethiopian context the literacy rate was very low, limited to the nobility and the clergy. Even then, a good many among the nobility did not know how to read and write at the time.⁴⁴

Thus in the former the printers and postmasters started the business to meet a demand,⁴⁵ whereas in the latter there was no such demand due to the virtual illiteracy among the general public. Instead, the demand or expectation came from the rulers. Basically, the emperor wanted his courtiers to know what he was doing. When these well-connected “journalists” saw that exalting the emperor’s deeds would please him, they filled the sheets with lofty praises. And when they started it, the emperor approved it and even took interest in it.

Perhaps the common thread between the Ethiopian and European/American newsheets was the fact that both operated under authoritarian rule. However, while European political sheets were often critical of their rulers, the Ethiopian media showered praises on them.

To show the distinction in concrete terms, one might be able to draw a parallel between Desta Mitiké’s and Blatta Gebre Egziabher’s handwritten sheets and the *corantos*—the crude newsheets that appeared in London during the 1620s. Emery and his associates call the *corantos* the “rudimentary prototypes of the modern newspaper.”⁴⁶

Desta Mitiké’s and Blatta Gebre Egziabher’s newsletters, unlike the *corantos*, were regular. However, like them, they were specialized in content in the sense that Desta Mitiké’s were one of lavish praise to the emperor and Blatta Gebre Egziabher’s were didactic and critical of the views and manners of the nobility. The *corantos* for their part were very political; for instance, they criticized the foreign policy of James I of England. In retaliation, the king cracked down on the editors and issued proclamations against “the great liberty of discourse concerning matters of state.”⁴⁷

Thus, in the Ethiopian context, a law of seditious libel was irrelevant at the time. In fact, it was virtually unknown, even unthinkable, and so did not have the ground for it to take place, whereas in 17th- and 18th-century Europe and colonial America it was enforced from the beginning.

Furthermore, in European countries like England, there were opposing political groups as far back as the early 1600s. For example, the King and the Parliament were in opposition to one another, and the battle lines were drawn. Therefore the printers would see the interest of the public in political news—

a demand which they would meet for profit. In Ethiopia, on the other hand, there was no parliament in this period to begin with. Besides, the nobility and the emperor were of one accord.

In short, in Europe and colonial America the press was born into an adversarial political culture, whereas in Ethiopia it emerged within a culture of total harmony.

This was also a period in Ethiopia when publication of books was rare. Most of those produced at that time were religious books, written by hand by monks in monasteries. Since they were not copied, it was hard to circulate them widely. Since they were both religious and not copied, they did not pose any threat to the government.

Thus, there was no need to legislate the publication of books, newspapers, and magazines at the time. Consequently, there was no censorship as such in any official form.

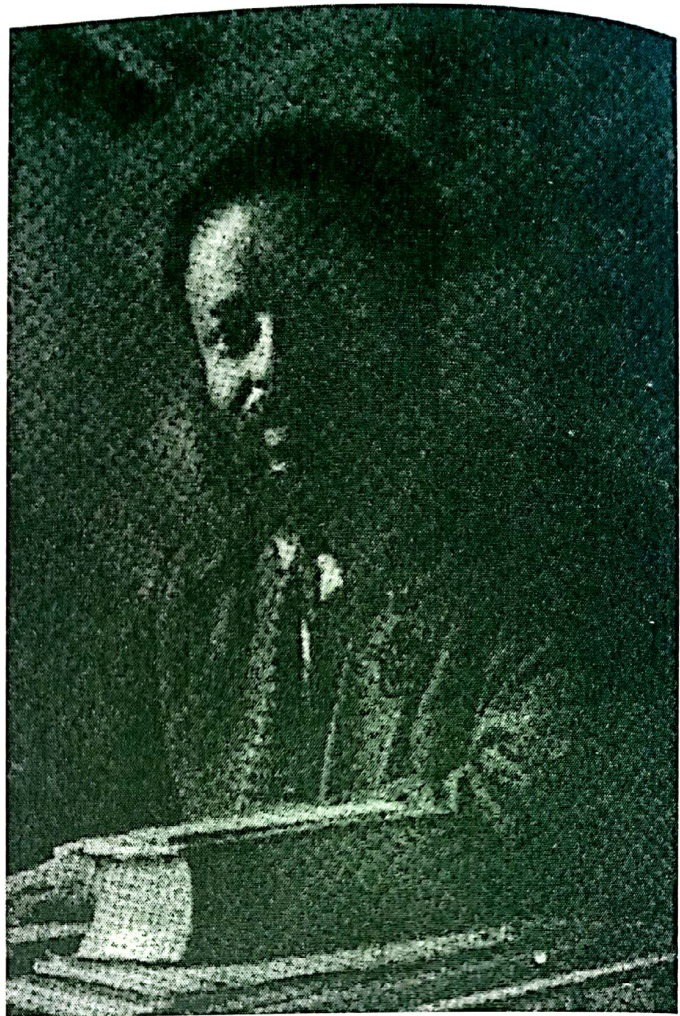
Whatever censorship was experienced, it was post-publication. For example, in the early 1900s, AfeWerq Gebre Yesus was sent to Europe for education by way of punishment for drawing Empress Taitu, his own cousin and benefactor, half-faced—just one ear and one eye. He also drew her long, bracketed teeth which showed past her lips. People in the royal court interpreted this negatively and explained the meaning to the empress. The empress was very angry with her cousin's act, and so ordered his "exile" to Italy.⁴⁸

The grounds for censorship during this period were blasphemy and religious teachings contrary to church doctrine, dishonoring the royalty, incitement of the public or nobility against the emperor. Whatever censorship there was then, it was that of speech. Indeed, this was a time when the person in authority was the law itself. In the absence of a written law, authorities passed decisions based on their own instincts.

In those days, a formal press law specifying what citizens could and could not publish was unnecessary for three more reasons: first, circulation was small as the duplication capacity of the press equipment was limited. Since circulation was limited, the concern of officials over the possible damage that a publication could pose was minimal.

Second, the readership in those days was the nobility who were staunch supporters of the emperor. If a newspaper was critical or incited rebellion against the monarchy, the readers themselves would quash it. They had vested interest in the regime, and so they would protect it. In the event of any damage, the damage control would be far easier since circulation was limited and the subscribers were all known. For example, at that time, the highest circulation of *Aimro* was 200 copies, and all the subscribers were known to the editorship.

Third, as noted earlier, the editor himself published the newspaper in order to gain favor with the emperor. He was the supporter of the regime, and



Gebre Kristos Tekle Haimanot.

to work in the press. Most of the publications were religious books, including the chronicle of Yohannes AfeWerq, the Four Gospels, and Proverbs of Solomon. One of Blatten Geta Heruy Wolde Selassie's literary works was also published at this press.¹⁵¹⁶ The first manager of the printing press was an Italian, but was soon replaced by a man from Hamassien, Eritrea, named Gebre Kristos Tekle Haimanot,¹⁷ whom Blatta MerséHazen commends for his exceptional diligence.

Tafari's interest in newspaper publishing became apparent for the first time after his return from an official visit to Western Europe in 1924. He was fascinated by the role of newspapers in that part of the world. There, he observed the wide coverage accorded to him by the newspapers, emphasizing the great impression he left with the people and leaders of Europe. *Aimro* in its issue of Sené 7, 1916/June 14, 1924 summarizes the French newspapers' impression of the crown prince during the said trip as follows: One newspaper wrote that Crown Prince Tafari was a great leader, another that he was a very intelligent man; still another that he was someone who examined matters carefully; and a fourth one, that he was farsighted and someone interested in military affairs, too.¹⁸

This personal experience in Europe convinced him that he could use newspapers to build public support to the attainment of his political goals.

Therefore, immediately after returning home, he expanded the printing press to realize his dream of starting his own newspaper. Then on January 1, 1925 the printing press launched a weekly newspaper called *Berhanena Selam*, meaning “Light and Peace.” (Its French title, *Lumière et Paix*, was also printed on every issue of the newspaper.) A board composed of distinguished church scholars such as Blatten Geta Heruy was said to have helped establish the newspaper.

Berhanena Selam’s nameplate carried a picture of two wings of an angel, signifying light and peace. The crown prince himself gave this name to the newspaper to express his desire for “light and peace” in his country. The light was a reference to modernization. The nameplate of the paper always carried this statement along with the angel’s two wings. Indeed, the newspaper aimed at reflecting the new generation’s vision and broadening the outlook of the public.

Somewhat contrary to this commonly held view, Blatta MerséHazen Wolde Qirqos credits Ato Gebre Kristos for initiating the idea of publishing a newspaper at the printing press to which he was appointed as director. According to him, Gebre Kristos was urging the crown prince to launch a newspaper; the crown prince granted him the permission three years later, and he started publishing the newspaper named *Berhanena Selam* under the penmanship of MerséHazen Wolde Qirqos.¹⁹



MerséHazen Wolde Qirqos.

Blatta MerséHazen's account also puts into question another commonly held view that the newspaper was named after the printing press. It indicates that the naming of the newspaper as *Berhanena Selam* preceded the renaming of the printing press and the emperor actually renamed the printing press after the newspaper.²⁰ This part of Blatta MerséHazen's account is confirmed by a magazine published on the occasion of the 58th birthday of Emperor Haile Selassie. This special publication, *YeAddis Ababa Mestawit* ("Mirror of Addis Ababa"), indicates that the general public began to call the printing press *Berhanena Selam* in reference to the popular newspaper it published under that name.²¹ This order of naming sounds plausible, especially when we examine the words of the emperor at the inauguration of the newspaper, appearing on the front page of its first issue. We read that the emperor named the newspaper *Berhanena Selam* ("Light and Peace") out of a desire of modernization and peace for his country. On the other hand, it is not clear from available documents what year the printing press adopted this name of the newspaper.²² But some documents indicate that for a number of years the printing press had kept this popular name along with its official name which changed from time to time: "Ethiopian Government Crown Prince Plenipotentiary Tafari Makonnen Printing Press" (from its opening in 1914 to Meskerem 27, 1921 E.C.). Sometimes this would be shortened to "Tafari Makonnen Printing Press"; e.g. *Berhanena Selam*, Megabit 16, 1918/March 25, 1926. [When cited within the text, the newspaper *Berhanena Selam* will henceforth be referred to as *BS*.] Other official names used were: "His Majesty King Tafari Makonnen Printing Press" (BS Meskerem 27, 1921 to Megabit 24, 1922/October 7, 1928–April 2, 1930); and after that, "Emperor Haile Selassie I Printing Press" (BS Tirr 4, 1925/January 12, 1933).²³

Blatta MerséHazen's account further confirms that the publishers were at times using the old name of the printing press even after formally adopting the name *Berhanena Selam*. In the post-Occupation days, however, the printing press made *Berhanena Selam* its only and official name.

To complicate matters further, the author has come across a statement that *Berhanena Selam* Press was opened in 1914 E.C. (i.e. 1921), without referring to its old name.²⁴ But this is more likely to indicate the original date of its establishment than to suggest that it was named *Berhanena Selam* from the very beginning.²⁵

Finally, to add to the above confusion, some writers state that *Berhanena Selam* Printing Press had three branches: in Addis Ababa, Jimma, and Harar.²⁶ However, a Ministry of Information account clarifies that these three branches were known by the name *Kesaté Berhan*.²⁷ Further research by the author shows that the latter version is the correct one. The Addis branch was opened in 1933 in the premises of Bete Saida Hospital. It was named in mem-

ory of Emperor Haile Selassie's father, and was thus known as Prince Ras Makonnen Kesaté Berhan Printing Press (see BS Meskerem 4, 1926/September 14, 1933). The one in Harar became operational eight months later (BS Ginbot 23, 1926/May 31, 1934). Finally, the one in Jimma was opened some ten months after the second facility (BS Miyaziya 17, 1927/April 25, 1935).


Further, we learn that the Addis Ababa branch of Kesaté Berhan merged with Berhanena Selam Press when the latter relocated to the premises of Bete Saida Hospital in early 1934. The joint facility took the name Bete Saida Printing Press, once again showing the relationship between name and place of operation (BS Yekatit 1, 1926/February 8, 1934; issues of Hamlé 5–26, 1926/July 12–August 2, 1934; TIRR 23, 1927/January 31, 1935). In fact, we see this name stamped on some of the back pages of *Berhanena Selam* Newspaper itself.

BERHANENA SELAM—FORM, CONTENT, AND CIRCULATION

Berhanena Selam started out as a four-page weekly, issued on Thursdays. Ten months later, it increased to eight pages. It was usually written in two columns; and, like *Aimro*, its pages were consecutive from issue to issue. Its annual subscription rate for domestic readers was 5 birr, and for those living abroad 7 birr. By contrast, *Aimro*'s annual subscription rate was 10 birr for domestic readers, and 13 birr for subscribers in foreign countries.²⁸ It is not clear why there was such a significant difference in rates between the two papers. This may have possibly contributed to the wide gap in circulation size. In 1929, for example, *Berhanena Selam*'s weekly circulation was 500 copies, while *Aimro*'s was limited to 200.²⁹

Gebre Kristos Tekle Haimanot, manager of the printing press, was also the first director of the newspaper, a reference to the editor-in-chief in those days. It required quite a big effort to win readership for the newspaper. One way to attract customers was free distribution. Barely a month into its launch, *Berhanena Selam* carried in its issue of TIRR 21, 1917/January 29, 1925 a detailed account of the funeral service of Woizero Tewabech Mikael, who had passed away a few days earlier. She was the daughter of King Mikael of Wollo and granddaughter of Emperor Menelik. The director allowed that particular issue of the paper to be freely distributed among the dignitaries who attended the funeral. The nobility was happy about the newspaper's account of the event as well as the lady's good deeds in her lifetime. After that, the paper gained wider acceptance among the people.³⁰

In those days newspapers were not distributed through news boys. The press itself distributed copies of the newspaper on two horses. The newspaper



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LUMIERE et PAIX

የኢትዮጵያ መንግሥት አላጋ ወራሽ ልዑል ተረፈ መኩንን በገረገፀው ብርሃንና በላላም እንዲሆን የሚፈልጉ ዕለ ሆነ
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 Son Altesse Impériale Teferi Makonnen, Héritier du trône d'Ethiopie, profondément désireux de voir
 regner dans son pays la lumière et la paix, a voulu que ce journal soit intitulé "Lumière et paix"

በአዲስ አበባ ሐሙስ ዕለት በየሳምንቱ ይታተማል
 Hebdomadaire paraissant tous les jeudis

Direction et Rédaction
 Addis-Abeba (Ethiopie)

የጋዜጣው ደብዳቤ ለሰር ገብረ ነገሥት ተዘላ ሃይማኖት የጋዜጣው ገዢ ገብረ ነገሥት ተዘላ ሃይማኖት Gabré Christos Taklé Haymanot Directeur	የጋዜጣው ገንዘብ ለብርሃንና በላላም በሙሉ እገር ስሙት ጌ ብርሃን ገብረ ነገሥት በየሳምንቱ ለ.ገ.፲ ሰፊን ስጪ መሰልቶ ይገባል	Abonnements Ethiopie Etranger Un an 5 Thealers Un an 5 Thealers le numero 2 piastres
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First issue of *Berhanena Selam*: Thursday, Tahisas 23, 1917/January 1, 1925 [It provides a rationale for naming the newspaper *Berhanena Selam* (“Light and Peace”) by offering a thoughtful reflection on the importance of light and peace to humankind.]

carried a notice saying that all those who wished to receive the newspaper may contact the director, again a reference to the editor.³¹ Therefore, it appears that the press distributed the paper to registered subscribers only. In fact, it was delivered to their homes. At the same time we learn that a significant number of readers were behind in their subscription payments and were therefore urged by the newspaper from time to time to pay their dues.³² Given the poor communication network in the country, just a handful of provincial officials were lucky enough to receive the newspaper outside Addis Ababa.³³

Berhanena Selam was also circulated outside Ethiopia, though to a limited degree, where it enjoyed immense popularity. For instance, in 1925 Ethiopian

students in France sent a letter to the editor expressing how precious the paper was for them in a foreign country.³⁴

For the most part, *Berhanena Selam*'s articles centered around the monarch and the nobility. More specifically, it reported on the modernization efforts of Crown Prince Tafari (later Emperor Haile Selassie) in education, health, road construction, telecommunication, commerce, etc., his skillful relations with foreign powers, as well as his farsightedness and benevolence for his people. It also reported on events such as weddings and funerals within the aristocratic circle.

Berhanena Selam became popular for focusing on the modernization of the country. At times it entertained divergent views on certain issues; e.g. pros and cons of Western education to the country.³⁵ The newspaper became even more popular for its patriotic zeal. For instance, in March 1927 it republished an article warning of Italian ambitions on Ethiopia; it had first appeared in a French anti-fascist publication.³⁶ The French article which had been brought from Europe by an Ethiopian scholar named Abba Jerome was translated into Amharic by Professor Tamrat Amanuel. The Italian Legation in Addis Ababa immediately protested the publication of the article. By way of appeasing the Italians, Tafari removed Gebre Kristos from his editorship but in name. Although his name was taken off the front page of the paper starting March 24, 1927, Gebre Kristos continued to act in his old capacity behind the scenes.³⁷



Crown Prince Tafari Makonnen.

practiced in Ethiopia to this day, was frowned upon by the paper on health grounds.⁵² At times, *Berhanena Selam* exposed corruption in government, as in the case of Customs officials who were caught embezzling public funds (*BS Miyaziya* 26, 1925/May 4, 1933).

Other critical articles were on ideas and opinions expressed by readers. The editor published other readers' reactions to such ideas, thus providing a forum for marketplace of ideas in a small way (see *BS TIRR* 19, 1919–Yekatit 10, 1919/January 27, 1927/February 17, 1927). To one's surprise, there was even a time when the newspaper published a reader's article on freedom of speech (*BS Nehasé* 9, 1927/August 15, 1935).

On the whole, though, the critical articles were sporadic and were either in the publisher's own interest, or those that would harshly criticize backward practices and at the same time show Tafari as a progressive leader, or simply those generated by contributors criticizing each other on personal opinions. Aside from these occasional critical pieces, *Berhanena Selam* was filled with lavish praises for the monarch and the nobility, frequent references to church teachings and practices, as well as emphasis on patriotism, education, and modernization.

COMPARISON BETWEEN *BERHANENA SELAM* AND *AIMRO*

In those days in Ethiopia, newspapers were run just by an editor (or director, as it was normally called); at best they had a deputy editor, too. In other words, such operations had no large staff with elaborate division of labor—reporters, desk editor, graphics editor, advertising editor, etc. In both papers, news as we know it, constituted a small section. Worse, domestic news was a mixture of fact and opinion. The largest portion of those eight pages contained opinion pieces. Thus the papers were more of opinion journals than newspapers. Like *Aimro*, *Berhanena Selam*'s readers were largely members of the nobility, therefore its news and articles revolved around the ruling class.

Many of the articles were contributed by readers. In fact, the newspapers themselves encouraged readers to send articles for publication.⁵³ The majority of these contributors were either from the nobility, the clergy, or private citizens with a good standing in society. In short, they were staunch supporters of the monarchy. Their articles dwelt on patriotism, modernization of the country, praise to the monarch, etc. They were presented in the form of opinion, advice, or *Meweddis* (poems of praise). Most of them were didactic or moralistic filled with religious references, as in the case of *Aimro*. The reason for this was that most of the contributors and newspaper staff were schooled

in the Ethiopian church tradition. Regardless of their perspective, such an active engagement of citizens set a trend of civic journalism in the newspapers.

Sometimes, the newspapers served as a medium by which readers wrote to government officials about matters of national significance. For example, Kentiba⁵⁴ Gebru wrote to Bejrond Zeleqe Agidew, then minister of finance, offering suggestions of ways to increase government revenue.⁵⁵ The same gentleman also wrote to Kentiba Nesibu ZeAmanuel, then mayor of Addis Ababa, on ways of tackling the growing rate of crime in the city. The mayor graciously accepted the recommendations.⁵⁶

Clearly, Kentiba Gebru, by virtue of his high status, could have written to such government officials directly. But, apparently, he did it in order to show that the newspapers could and should serve as a forum for the exchange of ideas for the benefit of the public.

While most contributors signed their names at the end of their articles, others did not. Some simply signed off with such generic pen names as “Ye’Berhanena Selam Wedaj” (“Friend of *Berhanena Selam*”).

The name of the editors always appeared in the masthead, and deputy editors like Wolde Giorgis Wolde Yohannes often signed their names at the bottom of their articles or Meweddis.

The newspaper had correspondents in the provinces, too, but it is difficult to know whether these were regular staff or just assigned to cover a given event. In any case, such news dispatchers signed off indicating their role. For instance, we find the reference “Ye’Berhanena Selam Telalaki” (“Correspondent of *Berhanena Selam*”) at the bottom of a story reporting the celebration of Emperor Haile Selassie’s birthday in Gojjam Province (*BS* Nehasé 17, 1926/August 23, 1934; Hamlé 19, 1926/July 26, 1934).

Again like *Aimro*, *Berhanena Selam* carried domestic and foreign news mainly to do with politics and business. In fact, in the first few years it even published commodity prices of the week in Addis Ababa’s market as well as currency exchange rates. News from the provinces was also covered, though less frequently due to poor communication.

For many years, the two papers obtained foreign news through the legations and consulates of different countries stationed in the nation’s capital. Most of these legations and consulates were opened by European countries, and therefore most of the foreign news published by these papers centered on events in Europe. But since 1934 the Ethiopian government established its own wireless telegraph lines, and therefore *Berhanena Selam* and *Aimro* began receiving some of the foreign news through this communication channel. (For details on this communication system, see the last section of this chapter.)

The installation of telegraph lines in different parts of the country facilitated news reporting from the provinces, too. For example, in 1935 *Berhan-*

the two newspapers from time to time. Despite such unprecedented articles, *Berhanena Selam*, like *Aimro*, mostly served to build the image of Tafari as crown prince, king, and finally emperor.

OTHER PUBLICATIONS

There were several other newspapers and magazines published in the pre-Occupation period. During World War I, an Amharic newspaper entitled *Ye-Tor Woré* ("War News") was being circulated in Addis Ababa by the Allied Powers from 1916 to 1918.⁶⁰

During the same period, Blatten Geta Heruy Wolde Selassie published a literary journal titled *Goha Tsebah* [Dawn].⁶¹ And later in 1935, while serving as foreign minister under Haile Selassie's government, Heruy launched a newspaper entitled *YeAtbiya Kokeb* [Morning Star].⁶² It was an eight-page weekly divided equally between Amharic and French. It was published by Heruy's own printing press named *Goha Tsebah*.⁶³ Its manager was Kavadia, longtime editor of *Aimro*.⁶⁴ *YeAtbiya Kokeb*, popularly known as Heruy's newspaper, was meant to educate the public and, unlike other periodicals, was distributed freely.⁶⁵

Molvaer's account of this paper, provided later in this chapter, acknowledges that it was published under Heruy's leadership (or more accurately, patronage), while he was minister of foreign affairs. However, it hints that it was a government newspaper launched to counter anti-Ethiopian propaganda from European newspapers following a diplomatic row between Italy and Ethiopia.⁶⁶

In addition, a monthly magazine, entitled *Kesaté Berhan* [The Illuminator], was launched in Tahisas 1927 E.C., more likely in early January of 1935.⁶⁷ It was a digest of various scholarly writings translated into Amharic from different languages such as French, English, and Arabic.⁶⁸ It was designed to acquaint the Ethiopian public with the modern thinking of scholars in different parts of the world. It particularly dealt with the sciences and the arts. Its full title was *Kesaté Berhan Lelibbe Tebiban* [The Illuminator for the Wise in Heart], and it was published by Bete Saida Printing Press, housed in the hospital bearing the same name. Its annual subscription rate was 3 birr or 25 cents per copy.⁶⁹ Ato Wolde Giorgis Wolde Yohannes, who was at the time a staff member of *Berhanena Selam* Newspaper, also wrote articles in the magazine.⁷⁰ It is not clear whether he did this solely as a contributor or in some higher capacity.

Despite its popularity, *Kesaté Berhan* was irregular, sometimes issued once in three months. Like all other publications, both *Kesaté Berhan* and *YeAtbiya Kokeb* were discontinued upon Italy's occupation of the nation's capital in May 1936.

publication to the Ministry of Interior directly or through the local administrator of the area in which the press was located. Further, it stipulated that the owner of the press give his full name, date of birth and current address of residence, as well as submit details of his printing equipment such as type of engine, type of letterpress, and type of lithography.

By the same token, the law required information on the manner of publication of the newspaper or other periodicals. These included location of publication, name of publisher or printer, name of owner of newspaper, owner's date of birth, and residence address. It further stipulated that every issue of newspaper should carry the names of author(s), editor, publisher, and printer.

The law also authorized the Ministry of Interior to ban publication or distribution of press products produced locally or imported from abroad as long as it deemed them harmful to the public or the government. Authors, printers, distributors, vendors, and collectors of such publications were to have their products confiscated and their presses closed down.

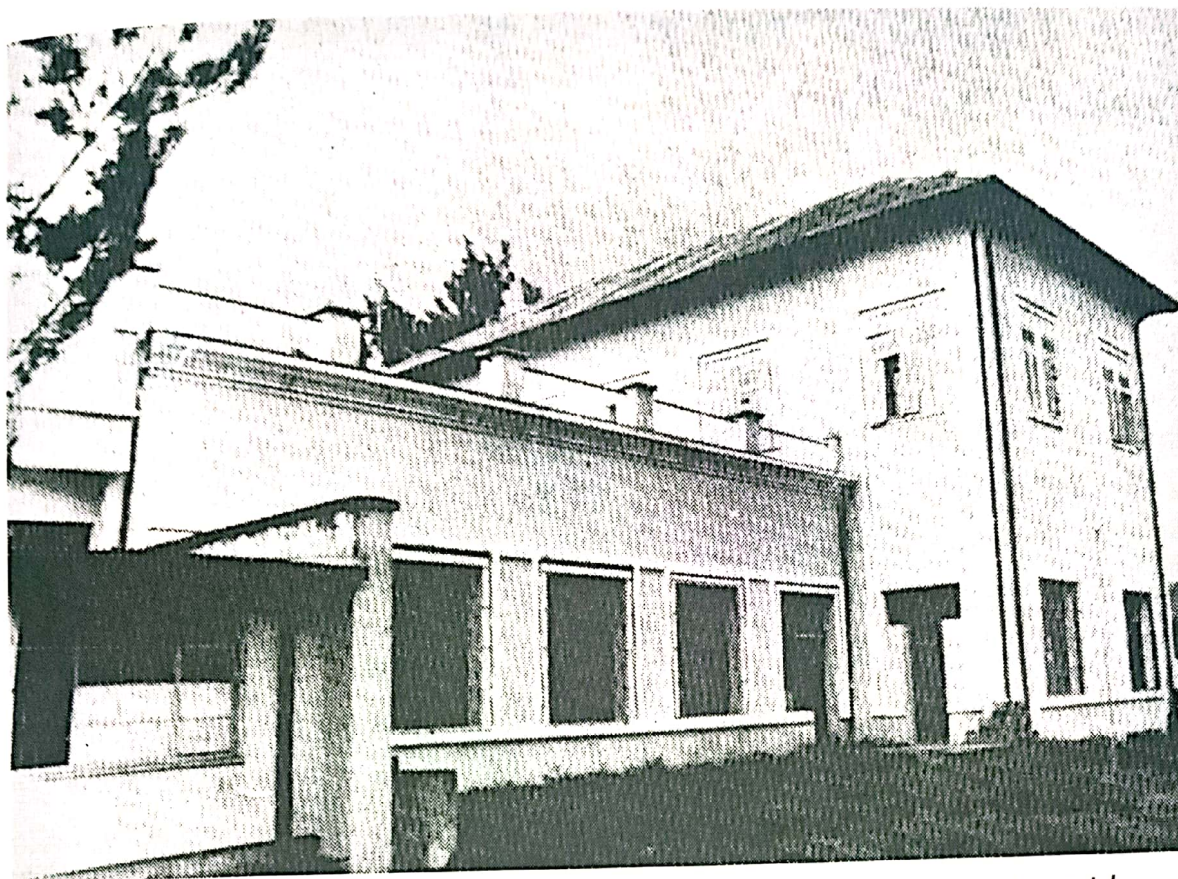
The law devoted two articles to the issue of defamation. Both the press manager and publisher of the newspaper or periodical were equally accountable for any defamatory article. It specified that the person who was defamed may be given the opportunity to publish free of charge a reply of equal length on the same page and spot where the defamatory article appeared. Even the font size and type of the letters had to be the same as those of the defamatory article. The reply had to be published in the next issue. Upon failure to do this, both the press manager and publisher of newspaper would be required to individually pay the defamed person between 10 and 100 birr in addition to the penalties specified in the law.⁸¹

One can say that this is the first formal press law in Ethiopia. Its detail and rigour are striking in the light of the fact that it was enacted in a country where little media activity existed. Nevertheless, it was barely put into effect before Italy occupied Addis Ababa in May 1936 and the Ethiopian government ceased to function.

THE BEGINNING OF RADIO

The development of radio in Ethiopia is unique in Africa in that it was not established by a colonial power. Organizations and individuals from different countries had a hand in its development, but it cannot be said to represent the media philosophy or broadcast system of any one foreign country.⁸²

The first radio station was built in the early 1930s in an agreement signed between the Ethiopian government and an Italian engineering company called Ansaldo. The radio station built at Qaliti (also referred to as Aqaqi) on the

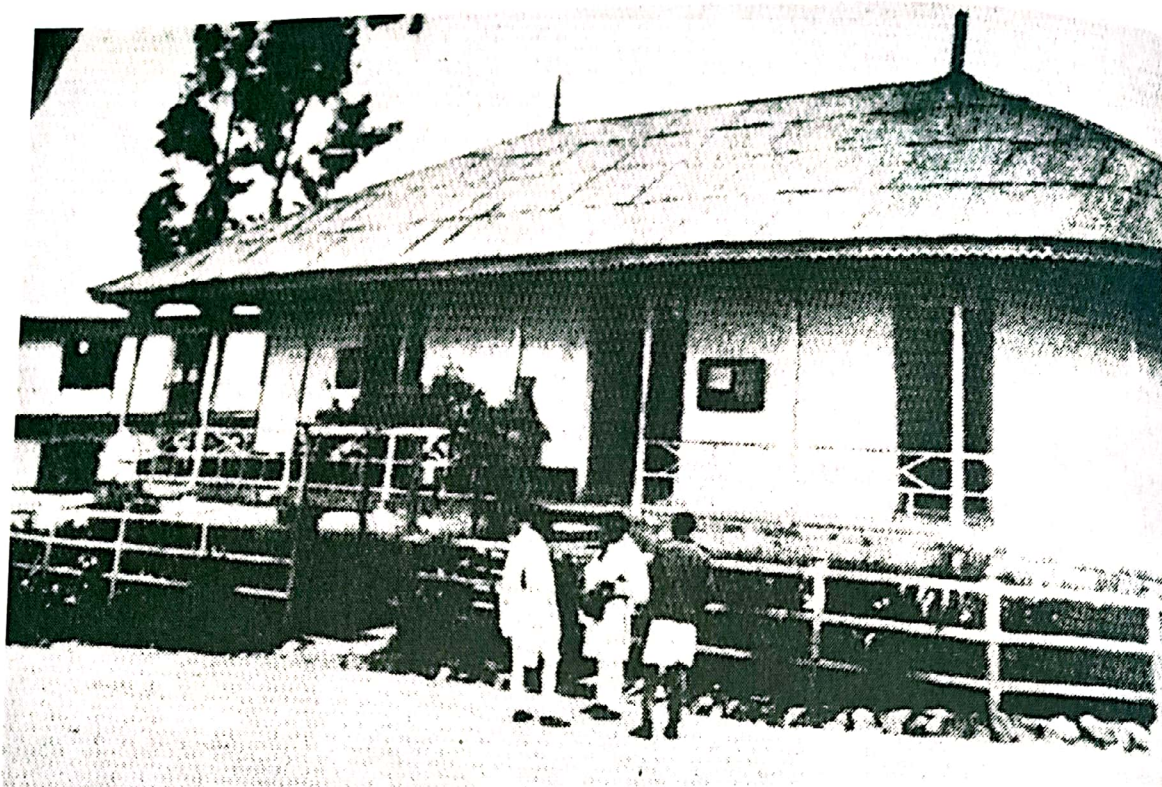


Radio station built by Ansaldo Company. Photo from *Yeltyopya Radio Ketinant Iskazare*, p. 5.

southern outskirts of Addis Ababa had both wireless telegraphic and broadcast installations.

According to Betru Admase, former general manager of Ethiopian Telecommunication, while Ansaldo should have completed the work of building the station in 1933 (1925 E.C.), it did not. As a result, another temporary radio station was built in the center of Addis Ababa, opposite Empress Taitu Hotel. This one was built with the help of a Swedish engineer named Hammar.⁸³ It must be made clear here that this second facility was a wireless telegraphic station with no broadcast capability. When it was inaugurated on January 2, 1934, it had already opened communication lines with the Middle East and Europe. It also had a training center for radio operators. The three instructors were Hammar, a Frenchman by the name of Nisky, and an Ethiopian named Ato Gebre Mesqel.⁸⁴

Meanwhile, Ansaldo pleaded that the Ethiopian government take over its project at Aqaqi. The government did, considering its utility to communicate with foreign countries.⁸⁵ Thus the Ethiopian government took formal possession of the radio station started by Ansaldo on January 31, 1935.⁸⁶ Actually, this was the date when it was inaugurated upon completion of the work by the Ethiopian government.⁸⁷



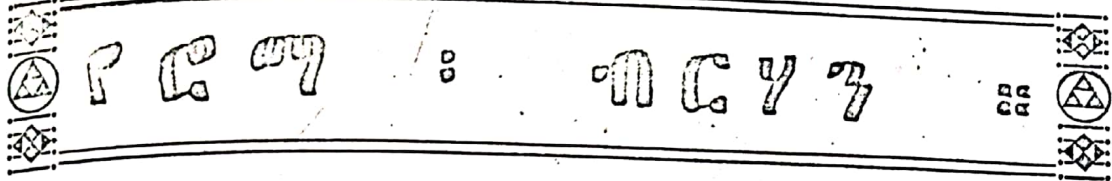
Radio communication center at Arada in downtown Addis Ababa (1930s). Photo from *Yeltyopya Radio Ketinant Iskezare*, p. 5.

At any rate, radio in Ethiopia started operation as a one-to-one communication system between high government officials as well as between military commanders. In other words, it was introduced as a telecommunication system. Broadcasting followed soon afterwards.

The first round of training on radio was given in 1933 to a group of 30 Ethiopians.⁸⁸ Among them were Merid Mengesha and Asegahegn Aráya, both of whom later held prominent positions in Haile Selassie's government.⁸⁹ These two people used Morse Code as a system of communication at the Battle of Maychew against the Italians in 1935.⁹⁰ Other groups of trainees followed in 1934 and 1935. The 1935 group largely consisted of military personnel.⁹¹

The first radio regulation in Ethiopia took effect on August 9, 1933.⁹² The law stipulated that the handful of owners of radio sets had to obtain licenses from the Minister of Post, Telegraph and Telephone. Among other things, it prohibited the use of licensed stations for communications having a personal, private or official character, not even in the private interests of the concessionaire, and that the operation of licensed sets must not impede government functions. The government had a right to suspend or revoke licenses, and even confiscate sets as necessary. The annual fee for such license was \$10 U.S.⁹³ At that time, only a handful of highly-placed Ethiopians and expatriates residing in the country owned radio sets. (The term "radio set" is meant here to refer to one-to-one radio communication equipment.)

ዲ.ሪ.ሲ.ዮ.ኔ ፣ ሱ.ፔ.ሪ.ዮ.ሬ ፣ ኢ.ፋ.ሪ ፣ ፖ.ሊ.ቲ.ቺ ።



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Excerpt from Yeroma Berhan: May 10, 1939. It states that this magazine, Yeroma Berhan ("Light of Rome"), was launched to inform the Ethiopian clergy, nobility, and the public at large about the benevolent measures the Italian government has taken and will take toward the development of the country. It adds that just as Rome has shined its light of civilization in Europe, Asia and Africa, it is now time to do the same in Ethiopia.



Ca. 1936, Sylvia Pankhurst dictates an anti-Fascist *New Times* and *Ethiopia News* article to her secretary in the study at 'West Dene', Woodford Green. Photo from David J. Mitchell, *The Fighting Pankhursts*.

A talented writer, she published in 1911 a book on the history of women's suffrage movement. This was a movement that got its energy from the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), an organization that her mother and sister founded at the turn of the century and which she also joined. In 1913, however, Pankhurst left WSPU over disagreements with her mother and sister on the direction of the organization. The following year she established the East London Federation of the Suffragettes. This was an organization that combined socialism with a demand for women's voting rights, and therefore it worked closely with the Independent Labor Party. Soon she began publishing a weekly newspaper called *Woman's Dreadnought*. Consistent with the mission of her organization, the newspaper championed the cause of working-class women. At the height of the Russian revolution, however, which Pankhurst supported, the newspaper was renamed *Workers' Dreadnought* to reflect the broader vision of her organization.

At the same time, Pankhurst was a pacifist. As such, she stood against the war in Europe from 1914 to 1918, and she expressed her anti-war position through this paper.

Pankhurst was arguably one of the very few on the left in Britain who foresaw the dangers of fascism as early as the 1920s. She was convinced that

unless Fascism was resisted, it would spread throughout the world. Thus she founded three anti-Fascist organizations. Upon Italy's invasion of Ethiopia in 1935, she began writing and speaking in support of Ethiopia, a land she had never set foot on, but whose long history of independence appealed to her anti-colonialist sentiments. She wrote letters to the press, held public meetings and demonstrations in Britain in support of Ethiopia. Then on May 5, 1936 she launched *New Times and Ethiopia News*, a weekly newspaper denouncing Mussolini's occupation of Ethiopia. She ran the paper from her home near London. Pankhurst also lobbied members of the League of Nations Assembly in Geneva on behalf of Ethiopia. Further, she made indirect contacts with the Ethiopian patriots fighting the Italians from inside the country.

After the restoration of independence, Pankhurst continued to devote her life for the cause of Ethiopia. She visited Ethiopia for the first time in 1944, during which a street was named after her in the capital.

Upon her return to London, she established a memorial committee in honor of the late Princess Tsehai, daughter of Emperor Haile Selassie, who was a nurse and had a dream of building the first teaching hospital in her country. Thanks largely to Pankhurst's efforts, the committee raised the necessary funds and Princess Tsehai Hospital was opened in 1950. Its inauguration on November 2 was not only attended by her, but also coincided with the emperor's 20th Coronation anniversary. During this second visit to Ethiopia which lasted several months, Pankhurst was awarded the Queen of Sheba Medal, created to honor women, as well as the Ethiopian Patriots medal. Her Patriots medal was noteworthy in that it embodied five palms—one for each of the five years of her struggle during the Fascist occupation.

Pankhurst finally moved to Addis Ababa in 1956, the year she ended her newspaper after 20 years of circulation. In her new home, Pankhurst wrote books and pamphlets as well as published a monthly magazine entitled *Ethiopia Observer*.

Sylvia Pankhurst died in Addis Ababa in September 1960 after suffering illness for a few weeks. She was buried in the presence of the emperor and the Patriarch at Holy Trinity Cemetery, especially designated for Ethiopian war patriots—the only foreigner so honoured. Her son, Richard,¹⁴ took on the editorship of the magazine until its folding in the 1970s.¹⁵

Voice of Ethiopia carried such regular columns as news reports on the resistance war from the battlefields in Ethiopia, articles introducing readers with Ethiopia, as well as reports on the activities of Ethiopian World Federation (EWF), the organization founded by Dr. Melaku in the United States. Actually, the newspaper was the official organ of EWF. As such, it supported the activities of EWF which, among other things, ran Amharic language classes. According to the newspaper's report in August 1941, as many as 27 branches of EWF were formed in the United States and seven other countries.

As shown in the sample excerpt, sometimes Amharic news was inserted in the English version as was the case in the issue of January 22, 1938.

1952 that Radio Addis Ababa had its own teleprinter service that would enable it to receive news from international news agencies directly.

In those days, everything broadcast was live. In fact, during Amharic broadcasts, even music was performed live. In 1954 (1947 E.C.), for example, the Imperial Guard Band began its live performance from the studios of Radio Addis Ababa. The same was true for the Patriotic Association Cultural Troupe.

During the Haile Selassie Era, the state-run radio was broadcasting in four local languages—Amharic, Tigrinya, Afar, and Somali—as well as English. In the earlier days Afar and Somali did not have alphabets. Therefore the Afar and Somali news reporters would go into the studio with the teleprinter copy sent by Reuters or AFP in English or French, and broadcast in their language simultaneously as they read from the original copy. After a number of years, these reporters adopted the Amharic alphabet to write the news.¹⁵¹⁶ Also, like the Amharic service, Somali, Afar and Arabic services were headed by a director. This showed the level of importance given to them by the Ethiopian government.¹⁷

In the 1960s the government launched a subsidiary station in Asmara, capital of Eritrea. It was broadcasting in Tigrinya and Tigre, local languages of Eritrea, as well as Amharic. Similarly, a relay station at Harar was opened to boost the Somali and Amharic services transmitted from Addis Ababa.

USES OF RADIO BY THE GOVERNMENT

During the first few years of operation, the royal family made direct use of radio. The emperor made numerous announcements and speeches to his people over the radio, particularly right after liberation. He also used it to strengthen his relations with world powers such as the United States. A good example is the message he broadcast to the American people on Monday, September 27, 1943. He spoke from the studios of Radio Addis Ababa, and his speech was transmitted to Nairobi and relayed to New York via London.¹⁸

Similarly, in May 1944, Crown Prince Asfaw Wossen conducted a fund-raising campaign over the radio for the purchase of fighter planes for British Royal Airforce (RAF). This he did as part of the third anniversary celebrations marking the emperor's return to Addis Ababa from exile.¹⁹ In those days, the British Royal Airforce gave protection to newly-liberated Ethiopia.

Radio Addis Ababa was also used to create a spirit of national unity among Eritreans. As early as 1948 time was allotted on Tuesday nights for a regular broadcast of the Eritrean Unionist Association.²⁰

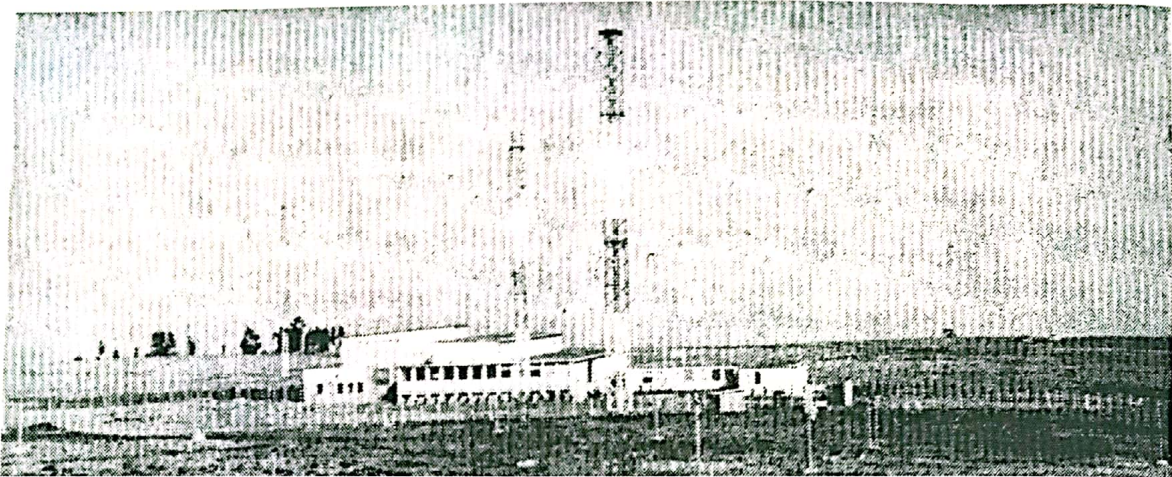
In 1956 (1949 E.C.) the station was renamed Radio Ethiopia, but its policy remained the same. The objectives of radio, both at the national and regional levels, were no different from those of the print media. In the first few years, radio was used to win the people's loyalty to the emperor by reiterating his international diplomatic efforts on behalf of his country. It was also used to instill a sense of patriotism by magnifying the preciousness of independence and of the flag, reciting the sacrifices of the freedom fighters, and setting up modern institutions for the country. Later, the focus was on building the image of the emperor. This meant reporting on his daily activities and the advancement of the country under his leadership in the areas of economy, education, health, etc. Like the other media, radio educated the public on matters of farming, environmental sanitation, and women's issues—to name a few. It also emphasized the importance of education and a strong work ethic for the development of the nation.

A COMPETITOR?

In the 1950s, Radio Ethiopia had a competitor—a one-kilowatt radio station named Teqil Station, operated from Addis Ababa by the Imperial Guard, which was the emperor's special force.²¹ Being a 1KW station, its reception was limited to the nation's capital. It was launched with a request made to the emperor by the commander of the Imperial Guard, General Mulugeta Buli.²² Captain AfeWerq Yohannes, better known for his literary talent, was said to have hosted a patriotic program on the station.²³ But Teqil Radio did not last long; it went off the air following the 1960 abortive coup²⁴ orchestrated by the senior officers of the Imperial Guard itself. It was closed down together with the newspaper of the Imperial Guard entitled *Wetaderna Gizew*²⁵ ("The Army Times").²⁶

INTERNATIONAL SERVICE

On May 5, 1962, the 21st anniversary of Liberation Day, Radio Ethiopia launched an ambitious international service. It began broadcasting in English and French to West Africa and Western Europe, in Arabic to North Africa and the Middle East, as well as in Swahili to Eastern and Central Africa. Ironically, this took effect at a time when Radio Ethiopia was barely heard in many parts of the country. It appears that the government launched such a large-scale international service to boost the status of Ethiopia as the seat of the OAU, which was to become a reality the following year. However,



The transmitter of Radio Ethiopia at Geja Dera, on the western outskirts of Addis Ababa. country. Therefore a compromise plan was adopted, involving high-powered transmitters only at two locations outside the capital.³⁰

Based on the plan, in 1964 a transmitting station at Geja Dera, 30 kilometers west of the capital, began operation with a 100KW short-wave band, a 100KW medium-wave band, and other less powerful transmitters consisting of 10, 5, and 15 kilowatts. These were intended to meet domestic needs as well as strengthen broadcast services to neighboring countries. The last two transmitters served as a backup in case of technical failure. In 1965 the effort to reach the vast nation with strong signals showed more progress. On the occasion of the 35th anniversary of his coronation, the emperor inaugurated medium-wave services. Thus the regional station at Asmara was equipped with a 50KW medium-wave transmitter and the one at Harar operated on a 100KW medium-wave transmitter.³¹³² With these new facilities, Radio Ethiopia was also able to reach neighboring countries such as Djibouti and Somalia.

While IBTE handled the technical operation, programming remained in the hands of Radio Ethiopia which later became under the Ministry of Information. This division of operational responsibility between two organizations with different structural setup affected the development of broadcasting in the country. First, it was an expensive venture since the Telecommunications Board had to make profit from it. For example, payment to the Board for technical services by the Ministry of Information during the 1971–72 budget year amounted to \$600,000, well over half the government's budget to the broadcasting service. (This included both radio and television.)³³ Secondly, the Ministry of Information did not pay its dues to IBTE in time, and that created conflict between the two agencies. This in turn affected the efficiency of operations.

Thirdly, according to Sidney Head, another problem stemmed from the fact that IBTE's common carrier orientation, which placed emphasis on message transmission rather than on messages themselves, was out of touch with the



Leul-Seghed Kumsa, first Ethiopian announcer of the English service of Radio Ethiopia. Leul-Seghed was also a newscaster on Ethiopian television during the Derg regime. A man of great knowledge and attractive voice, he was a very popular and respected journalist. He died in the early 1990s unrewarded for his excellent service of some forty years.

by the program director who reviewed them before being aired. Sometimes, even when they passed the censorship, the news reports or programs would be interpreted negatively by the people at the Palace or some other higher office. This, coupled with limited facilities, frustrated the journalists. As in other media organizations, Radio Ethiopia suffered shortage of not only studio facilities, but also field equipment and transport vehicles. Here, too, the journalists were poorly paid. All this created a disconnect between the journalists and the management.³⁷

PRIVATE BROADCASTING

During this era, there was only one private radio station operating in the country. In 1963 Radio Voice of the Gospel (RVOG), run by Lutheran World Federation, launched broadcasting in Amharic and a number of foreign languages including English, French, and Arabic. It was an international broadcast operation whose main objective was to spread the Christian faith. Legally, the station was under the jurisdiction of the Ethiopian Ministry of Information. Thus the Ethiopian Broadcasting Service, which itself

was accountable to the Ministry of Information, maintained a liaison officer to keep the station informed of government policies concerning coverage of current events by broadcasters.³⁸

RVOG in its domestic Amharic broadcast covered news as well as social and cultural affairs in addition to its religious programming. Its news coverage was predominantly international. That way, it spared itself from any potential conflict with the government. Nonetheless, RVOG attracted a huge audience locally, thanks to its high-quality programming. Indeed, it served as a good alternative to the archaic programming of Radio Ethiopia.

RVOG also demonstrated that it was possible to run a very efficient private broadcast operation under an authoritarian system that did not tolerate political dissent.

RADIO IN PERSPECTIVE

As shown earlier, Radio Ethiopia stood out unique among other African broadcast systems in that it was not the making of colonial powers. More than any other type of media, it was a unifying force among a population of diverse ethnic and linguistic groups, many of whom were also separated by the rugged mountainous terrain and an extensive rift valley system traversing the country. Equally important, in a country where oral communication was the most practical, considering the very low literacy rate, radio was the most important of all modern media in Ethiopia during the post-Occupation period. In this respect, it was no different from other African countries.

Nevertheless, the progress of radio during this period, while encouraging, was sluggish. This slow pace was not only seen in programming quality and signal strength, but also in the percentage of the population the station was able to reach. In early 1970, for example, government estimates of the station's audience reach was a mere 5 million out of a population of 25 million; i.e. just 20 percent of the total population. The number of radio receivers in people's hands at the time was estimated at 500,000;³⁹ that is, one radio set for every ten actual listeners, or worse, one radio set for every 50 citizens of the nation.

Some try to justify this slow progress by pointing out that the country was largely in a formative period. They reason that the nation had to rebuild itself in the wake of the destructive five-year Italian occupation and that the slow pace in the development of radio was a result of the economic backwardness of the country. Besides, since the station was state-owned and operated, it was totally dependent on a dismally small government budget. Most people did not have money to buy radio sets, which is another indicator of economic backwardness. Indeed, owning a radio set was a luxury for quite some time.

Part of the problem was lack of competition between stations. The only other competing station—if at all, and even that was short-lived—was the Imperial Guard station. Radio Voice of the Gospel, for its part, operated on a religious mission. Besides, its Amharic programs were mostly transmitted during hours that Radio Ethiopia was broadcasting in other languages. Therefore it was hardly competing for the same audience. Radio Ethiopia also lacked efficient management of its airtime. A program that needed only 30 minutes was allotted a full hour; therefore the station had to fill in the rest of the airtime with music. In short, one can say the fact that the media system was state-owned and operated rather than market-based was a key factor for the slow development of radio in the country.

During this period, the government was more interested in building its image in the outside world when we look at the ambitious international service it attempted in the early 1960s. This was when the local radio service was far from adequately reaching most Ethiopians who lived in the rural areas.

Even the two regional stations in Asmara and Harar were launched for political reasons, namely, to counterbalance the secessionist propaganda disseminated among the Eritrean people and the ethnic Somalis in the Ogaden respectively. Otherwise, the government did not want the idea of installing medium-wave transmitters all across the country. This would mean building regional stations, and that could create more division rather than unity in a nation where more than seventy different languages are spoken by as many ethnic groups. Thus the government chose a centralized approach to the development of radio broadcasting in Ethiopia.

Many see this as coming at the expense of the freedom of nationalities. In reality, however, without a strong economic and political system that would make such different ethnic groups interdependent, a venture of broadcasting in different languages in different regions would be a recipe for dismemberment of the country.

Nationality and linguistic questions are very explosive, as can be learned from the Canadian experience. Even in such a democratic and wealthy country with a large educated population, who recognize the benefit of unity, separatism among the French-speaking citizens is still alive and well.

Like other media, radio was a tool of building the monarchy's image as well as an instrument of national development. Thus it was not a means by which to exercise the right to freedom of expression ambiguously stated in the 1955 Revised Constitution. It was not only the infrastructural development of radio that was restricted by the government, but also its constitutional right to freedom of the press. For the first 20 to 25 years of its existence (that is, until the 1960 abortive coup d'état), there was little consciousness on the part of the journalists themselves about using radio for exercising freedom of speech. This was mainly because most of the broadcasters had no professional training, if only

times and his popular shows were taken off the air. He was also transferred to other media organizations by way of avoiding him, and even in the best of circumstances, he was denied promotion. Worse, he was said to have been closely monitored by security forces out of fear that he might have been allying with anti-government groups. His close friends say that his bitterness with the social system stemmed from the brutality of the landlords against their tenants that he witnessed as a child in his home province, notwithstanding his well-to-do family background. Asamnew was known for his golden voice and unique style of reading the news. He was very popular among his audience.

Asamnew died unexpectedly in September 1973, the cause of which is still unclear and remains to be controversial. At any rate, Asamnew certainly died an untimely death.⁴³

II. TELEVISION

THE BEGINNING

Television was first introduced to the Ethiopian people in 1955 by the BBC on the occasion of the silver jubilee anniversary of the Coronation of Emperor Haile Selassie. BBC Television conducted an experiment by setting up a temporary studio and broadcasting on a closed circuit with the use of two cameras and four television monitors as part of an exhibition at the airport (now known as Old Airport).⁴⁴

Similarly, in May 1963 on the occasion of the founding of the Organization of African Unity, the summit was broadcast on a closed-circuit television to the inhabitants of Addis Ababa. The television sets were installed at the public square across the conference hall.⁴⁵ This spurred the setup of a television station in Ethiopia the following year.

Earlier in 1960, Dejazmatch Daniel Abebe, a prominent aristocrat, had attempted to launch a commercial television station, but it did not go far enough. The Ethiopian Telecommunications Board, too, had drawn up a similar plan, but that did not materialize, either. Radio Voice of the Gospel for its part had applied to set up a television station, but it was not approved by the government.

Finally, the Ministry of Information drew up a plan to set up a television service. This was approved by the Council of Ministers as well as the emperor. With the aid of Thompson Television International, a British company, Ethiopian Television started service on the top floor of Addis Ababa City Hall on November 2, 1964.⁴⁶

According to other accounts, the emperor was said to have ordered the startup of a television service in his country following his visit to some de-

veloping countries where he saw such operations. Then the installation was rushed without a good feasibility study, to coincide with the 34th anniversary of the emperor's coronation.⁴⁷ Its area coverage was limited to Addis Ababa and its immediate environs like Debre Zeit and Sebeta.⁴⁸

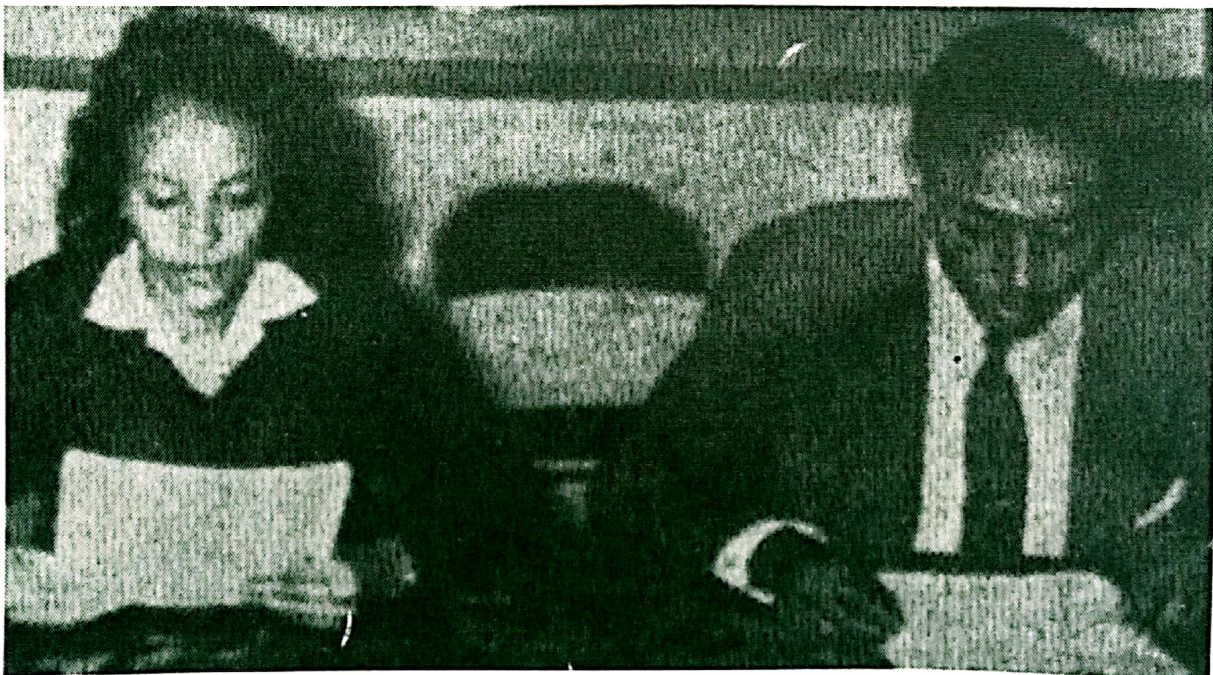
EARLY YEARS OF OPERATION

The service started with low-grade equipment and low-level local professionals. There were a few expatriate professionals, too, mainly from Britain, who were working there in the areas of studio management, film production, programming, as well as advertising and engineering. The city hall was not designed to house such a station, either. Therefore, part of the deficiency of the service was attributed to the facility.

Videotaping was not available until 1967; therefore artists had to perform live in the studio. The problem with such live transmissions was that it was impossible to correct mistakes, should they occur.⁴⁹

Ethiopian Television did not undergo any major change of format or content of its programs following the merger with radio in 1968. It continued broadcasting news and topical programs in Amharic and English as well as running foreign films mainly from the U.S. and Britain. It had a daily service of six hours limited to the evenings. This continued until the late 1990s.

Gradually, the operation of the station was taken over by Ethiopians. In 1964 at the launch of service, there were five expatriates; that figure was



Elleni Mekuria, first female television journalist in Ethiopia, along with Samuel Ferenji, also a well-known journalist. Elleni, however, spent most of her lifetime career in the English service of Radio Ethiopia.

down to 1 by 1974.⁵⁰ Some of the Ethiopians working there received training abroad. Others were given on-the-job training by their peers.

III. REORGANIZATION

In 1968 Radio Ethiopia and Ethiopian Television by law merged into one corporate body under the name Ethiopian Broadcasting Service. A similar structure was introduced to the Ethiopian News Agency (see chapter 8).⁵¹ As can be inferred from the preamble of the proclamation, the objective of such restructuring was to allow a rapid growth of the media in the country. The government claimed that the media, particularly radio and television, were precious tools of education and enlightenment besides serving as informational channels.⁵² In short, they were designed to serve as instruments of national development.

Despite such good intentions, the broadcasting service did not achieve its share of the national goal. This was mainly because the new body was not given meaningful authority. Although declared autonomous, it was still under the direction and control of the government; namely, the Ministry of Information. The best one could think of its authority was at a semi-autonomous level. Even then, it was limited to management affairs, such as selling airtime, day-to-day operation of the facilities as well as maintenance and expansion of radio and television services. One may also argue here that the new body could not achieve its goal because six years after this proclamation, the monarchy was ousted and a centralized media system was introduced under the military regime. But it can easily be counter argued that even in those six years there was not a significant effort made to expand media services nor was the financing aspect liberalized enough to enable such a move. Interestingly enough, while the new law assured that the new structure was a government entity, it was authorized to engage in commercial broadcasting. In the same document, it said that the new entity shall operate under the "direction, control, and supervision" of the Minister of Information. It gave full authority to the minister over radio and television broadcasting. Therefore the general manager carried out his functions under the minister (see articles 1-5). Indeed, it was an attempt to merge two incompatible systems into one.

Under the new system, the two stations were allowed to use revenues from such activities as airtime lease and advertising for covering operating expenses other than salary, major programming and other essential costs.⁵³ This was supposed to stop such earnings from going to the Central Treasury of the government. However, even such restructuring did not allow Radio Ethiopia or the television station to go far enough to develop their manpower as well